PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
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11 February 2002

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 380**

ELEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 11 February 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker: The House will have heard with deep sadness of the death on Saturday of Her Royal Highness the Princess Margaret. I have written to Her Majesty the Queen to convey the House's sense of sympathy and loss on this sad occasion. I now invite the House to rise and observe a minute's silence in memory of Her Royal Highness.

2.35 pm

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

EU Defence Capability

1. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): If he will make a statement on progress towards the headline goal on European defence. [31891]

6. **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): If he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU capability improvement conference of 19 to 20 November 2001. [31897]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): First, I should like to convey a message of sympathy from Her Majesty's armed forces to Her Majesty the Queen, the Queen Mother and other members of the royal family on the death of Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret. Her Royal Highness took a close interest in the armed forces and had links with a number of units from all three services. She launched, and continued to take a close interest in, HMS Illustrious and HMS Norfolk. She was Colonel-in-Chief of the Light Dragoons, the Royal Highland Fusiliers and Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps, and royal honorary Air Commodore of Royal Air Force Coningsby. She will be greatly missed.

EU member states have identified 144 specific targets for improving military capabilities to meet the Helsinki headline goal. At last November's capabilities improvement conference, European nations revised and improved their earlier offers of military forces. As a result, we have now met 104 of the specific capability targets. Member states also agreed to continue working to improve their military capabilities. This work is now being pursued through the European capabilities action plan, which addresses the remaining 40 capability targets that have yet to be met.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. Does he agree that in the current international climate it is even more important to have a strong common European foreign policy, underpinned by strong common European defence structures? Does he agree, in particular, that in the light of President Bush's recent decision concerning $38 billion of additional defence expenditure, it is even more important to have effective co-operation on military spending among European countries?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is important that we carry through the EU states' commitment to making capability improvements. Progress and effective co-ordination are needed to meet those commitments, not only by spending more money but by spending that money more wisely. Flexible and rapidly deployable troops are needed, whether for deployment by individual nations, by a NATO force or indeed by a European force. That is why identifying the shortfalls in Europe's military capabilities and addressing them on a collective basis mean that we will get more, collectively, for our defence spending.

Mr. Brazier: May I associate myself and my hon. Friends with the Secretary of State's condolences on the loss of Princess Margaret?

On a separate note, does the Secretary of State agree that the acid test of any European moves must be a real increase in capability rather than a growth in bureaucracy? When America has decided to give an extra $40 billion to its armed forces and security apparatus, is it not rather sad that so many of our European partners continue to cut their defence budgets, and even in this country the Secretary of State has explicitly acknowledged that the budget is simply too tight for the commitments arising?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is right to the extent that the test of improvements must be improvements in military capability. That is why this Government have set so much store by the Helsinki headline goal process, and the test of its success will be whether it produces real improvements in military capabilities that can then be made available to NATO, to individual nations and to any collective European operation.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): How do today's regiments of main battle tanks fit within the strategic concept that requires ease of transport, speed and flexibility?

Mr. Hoon: Each country, individually and as part of its contribution to international forces, requires a range of military capabilities. My hon. Friend mentions one of those capabilities. It does not necessarily fit with the sort of rapid deployment exercise that has recently been conducted, but it certainly fitted entirely with the sort of conflict in which this country, with others, engaged at the time of the Gulf war. What is important when considering our range of military capabilities is that we do not simply respond to the lessons of the last conflict; we need to recognise that there may be circumstances in which we are faced with a different sort of conflict, and that we will need appropriate military capabilities to deal with that.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): The armed forces will be grateful to the Secretary of State for conveying their sympathy on the death of Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret.

As the right hon. Gentleman calls on our EU partners to improve their defence capabilities, how is he really getting on at home? On the BBC's "On the Record" programme yesterday, he said, "We're certainly stretched" but insisted:

> "I would not actually use the word overstretch at the present time."

Will he explain to our armed forces the precise difference?

Mr. Hoon: We are using available resources to their maximum capability. We are using them extremely effectively, as the armed forces' record demonstrates, and we shall continue to do so. However, I made it clear that if the United Kingdom entered into significant new commitments, that would have implications for our operations elsewhere. I have consistently set that out to the House and to the hon. Gentleman. If he believes that we are overstretched already, he must say from which of the various commitments into which the UK Government have entered we should withdraw.

Mr. Jenkin: It was this Government who, in the strategic defence review, forced through cuts to the Territorial Army, for example. Now we hear that they are to reverse those cuts. Will the Secretary of State try to deny that Labour got it wrong in the SDR?

Mr. Hoon: My recollection is that the hon. Gentleman welcomed the conclusions of the SDR and the way in which it set out Britain's military contribution to reflect our foreign policy commitments. He cannot have it both ways. He has to decide whether he believes that Britain should play its part in the world, and where, or whether we should have some curious defence and foreign policy that he has yet to articulate.

As for the TA, there will be an opportunity for the House to debate that on Thursday. I have stated clearly that the events of 11 September have created new conditions in which we have to pay much greater regard to the defence of our homeland than was the case on 10 September. That goes without saying.

Mr. Jenkin: But we were already doing more than the SDR set out before 11 September. When the right hon. Gentleman took over as Defence Secretary in 1999, he said that overstretch

> "essentially means asking our armed forces to do more than we originally contemplated at the time of the Strategic Defence Review."

He continued:

> "we have . . . to get back to the levels of service that we anticipated at the time of the SDR."

I put it to the Secretary of State that he has failed in that respect. With the Army undermanned, a chronic shortage of combat pilots, an overall outflow of trained personnel, training constantly sacrificed to maintain operations, and inadequate investment in forces' accommodation, is it not now time that he persuaded either the Foreign Secretary to reduce the number of military commitments, or the Chancellor of the Exchequer to increase the amount we spend on defence? He cannot go on having it both ways.

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman repeats the point he has already made, and I again challenge him to respond as I invited him to. If he believes that Britain's armed forces are involved in too many commitments around the world, he must articulate from which commitments he would withdraw.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): With the growing capability gap between the United States of

America and Europe, which will almost certainly worsen given last week's budget announcements, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be a big mistake for Europe just to develop a peacekeeping capability and not be able to maintain a high-intensity warfare capability?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with my hon. Friend. The United Kingdom will be at the forefront of that ability. We will not abandon our very considerable high-intensity warfare assets, and we will continue to develop and sustain them. Equally, the size of the United States' military budget and defence spending and the range of equipment that it has available demonstrate the importance of acting collectively. It is vital that Europe contribute to international missions and that that means working together to provide some of the capabilities that the United States already has.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Secretary of State will of course have noticed that I am wearing the tie of the Light Dragoons. I thank him for and concur with his remarks on the Colonel-in-Chief of the Light Dragoons.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the forthcoming disappearance of the multinational division from our allied rapid reaction corps indicates a serious lack of contribution by our European allies to the future defence of Europe through NATO?

Mr. Hoon: No, it does not. That decision is based not on any lack of commitment by our European partners, but on a sensible rationalisation of the arrangements that we have available to us in that international context.

A400M

2. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): Which European Governments are fully committed to building the A400M. [31892]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The commitment of the eight participating nations to the programme was demonstrated by the signature of the necessary intergovernmental agreements on 18 December 2001. However, those documents will not become effective until the German commitment has received Bundestag approval. As that approval process is not yet complete, partner nations are considering options for taking the programme forward, which include allowing Germany more time to secure its approvals.

Mr. Jack: I thank the Minister for that answer. Those of us who have a keen interest in the aerospace industry in the north-west were concerned about announcements that Germany was considering in some way pulling out of the project, and that even our own Government were looking elsewhere. To that end, will the Minister assure the House today that the industrial launch of that project will take place on or around 31 March? Also, what steps will he be taking to ensure that all partners continue to honour their obligations to the project? As he will appreciate, it would be foolish to use moneys that could be allocated to buying aircraft to pay penalty clauses.

Dr. Moonie: That is a very good point. The programme is proceeding and we still expect it to be signed and delivered on time. Having said that, it is clear that it must await the approval of the Bundestag. We are working with our other partners in the scheme to ensure that.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I understand that we are committed to taking seven of these planes by 2010 and the full complement of 25 by 2014, which is half a generation away. Is there no way that we can bring forward the date of procurement of this military version of the airbus—that is what we are talking about—to fill the gap in the north-west and elsewhere, where orders for commercial aeroplanes have nosedived?

Dr. Moonie: I am very well aware of the problems that we face, but one must be realistic. This is a major procurement project, and we have to be sure that we get it right. Much as I would like to bring the in-service date forward, I do not know that that would be achievable.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): The A400M clearly underpins the deployability of any European force or, indeed, any NATO force. Will the Minister comment on the fact that it now seems likely that the NATO deployment in Macedonia will end following the elections and that a Euro-led commitment will take its place? Which headquarters will lead that, which nation will lead that, and which part of Britain's overstretched forces are likely to be involved?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would say to the hon. Gentleman that his question is far too wide.

Pensions

3. **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If he will make a statement on the impact of the pensions trough on former armed forces personnel; and what measures he proposes to remedy anomalies. [31893]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I hope that I have better luck with this one.

In the past, periods of public sector pay restraint, coupled with high inflation, have meant that public servants, including members of the armed forces, retiring at that time received pensions lower than the value of those in previous and subsequent years.

It has been the policy of successive Governments not to make retrospective changes to public sector pensions to address such anomalies, as to do so would be prohibitively expensive. However, as part of the review of the armed forces pension scheme, the Ministry of Defence is giving consideration to introducing mechanisms that might prevent similar occurrences in future.

Andrew Mackinlay: Will the Minister forgive me for asking a disobliging question on a day when other aspects of armed forces' pensions are in the news? I hope that he will agree to meet me and the Forces Pension Society so that we can make him focus on a tremendous anomaly and unfairness. Two people can join the armed forces on the same day and achieve the same rank in the same time scale, but one can leave one week and get a higher pension than the other who stays on a little longer, sometimes at the request of the armed forces. We cannot put a high enough price on fairness; the arrangement is as demonstrably unfair as it is perverse, and I hope that the Minister will agree to my pinning him down on the table with the Forces Pension Society so that he can focus on that wrong that needs to be remedied.

Dr. Moonie: My hon. Friend is rarely disobliging. I am due to meet the officers of the Forces Pension Society in the next week or two.

Andrew Mackinlay: Not with me.

Dr. Moonie: Should another meeting be necessary, I am of course happy to meet the society along with my hon. Friend. Again, while the arrangement may well be perceived as unfair by those in receipt of smaller pensions than they might have had, I can only reiterate that the policy of successive Governments is that we cannot revisit the issue.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): May I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends with the remarks of the Secretary of State about Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret?

The Minister will recall his statement in the House on 23 January 2002 about Army invalid pensions, in which he said that perhaps £30 million needs to be repaid because of previous blunders. The following day, he wrote to me and other Members saying that that figure may have been too high. Today, we have heard that the blunder may have gone back not to 1952, but to 1919. Will the Minister tell us whether that is the case? How many people were involved in the blunder?

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Liberal party should pay; send the bill to Cowley street.

Mr. Keetch: Indeed, if the blunder was a result of action by the Liberal Government, when refunds are paid, will they come from the Treasury, not Ministry of Defence coffers? Finally, if there has been a blunder, the only way in which people will know that the pensions of their fathers and grandfathers were correct will be for a full independent inquiry to be conducted. Will the Minister initiate such an inquiry today?

Dr. Moonie: I suppose that this is the only opportunity that I shall have in my life to blame a Liberal Government for something.

The hon. Gentleman would be better off not trying to get his facts from the pages of *The Daily Telegraph*; despite accurate briefing, it still managed to get things wrong. The problem may date back to 1919, but as those in receipt of pensions and the officials involved are unlikely to be alive now, I can scarcely see that there is any coherent rationale for a public inquiry. We have conducted exhaustive inquiries into what went on in Army pension schemes before they were unified under central management. So far, we have been unable to establish the exact facts. Let us not forget that only a small percentage of all those who receive service pensions are affected and not, as was suggested in *The Daily Telegraph* today, all those in receipt of a war pension—their pensions, of course, have never been taxed. A small number of people are therefore affected. We shall certainly try to establish who is involved, and if we can find any of them or their relatives, they will be repaid.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): While my hon. Friend is pinned to the table, will he listen to the representations of those who have served a decade or more in the armed forces and are in receipt of no pension whatever? Will he bear it in mind that that can hardly be a just way for our wider society to repay those who risked their lives for its defence?

Dr. Moonie: As is the case with other public sector pensions prior to 1975, those who served for less than the prescribed time are not entitled to a pension. There is nothing new in that. There is no way that this Government—or, I suspect, any Government of any political hue—would be prepared to revisit that at this stage.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): When we last discussed pensions in the House, the Minister kindly said that he would look again at the question of post-retirement marriages, where the officer concerned may have died after having married after the end of his period of service—often because the nature of his service encouraged that postponement—and the widow is not entitled to any pension at all. Has the hon. Gentleman had a chance to look into the matter, as he said he would, and if so, what are his initial thoughts on the subject?

Dr. Moonie: The matter is still under discussion with my officials in the light of the pensions review that is taking place. However, it is most unlikely that any change that was brought in would be retrospective. That is not to say that some changes in the margins may not be made with regard to future holders of a pension.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): On the substantive question before us, may I draw the Minister's attention to the answer given to me on 29 January by the Minister of State for Defence, his right hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), who stated that

> "for the information of veterans organisations, we are looking to see whether it would be practical to give a broad estimate of the costs that might be involved for the major periods at issue"?—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 216W.]

That is not just for the interest of veterans organisations. It is of interest to all hon. Members, so that, as a new generation of Members of Parliament, we can re-evaluate what it is possible to do for those people. As the Minister said in a generous answer to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), these matters should be kept under continuous review.

Will the hon. Gentleman also consider whether there has been a substantial enough investigation of the taxation of invalidity pensions, given that he told us on 23 January that that went back to 1952, but his answer to me on 5 February makes it clear that he has no idea when the problem dates back to? That requires an inquiry, at least.

Dr. Moonie: It would appear that we have a problem. I believe that it is of no interest to those who are in receipt of a pension whether the mistake took place in 1952 or 1919. I do not believe that that is relevant, other than to the individual holders. We have given a guarantee that we will find all of them and pay them the money that they are due. The total sum that has been expended up till now is about £6.5 million, so clearly my estimate of £30 million was a generous one. I do not anticipate that it will take as much as that to cover the matter, but all those who are due the money will get it.

Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty

4. **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): What discussions he has had with his *(a)* Russian and *(b)* European counterparts since the US Administration decision to withdraw from the ABMT; and if he will make a statement. [31894]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I last discussed missile defence with my European counterparts at the NATO Defence Ministers meetings on 18 December, and with the Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, during his visit to London on 20 December. The future of the anti-ballistic missile treaty is essentially a bilateral issue for the United States and Russia. We welcome the fact that they are continuing to work together to establish a new strategic framework based on openness and mutual trust.

Mr. Clapham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the difference in view between Europe and America comes about because American military strategists have placed too great an emphasis on the capabilities of their perceived enemies, and have not considered intentions or the fact that diplomacy can reduce the risk, whereas the Europeans look towards a more constructive engagement? When he next meets his American counterparts, will my right hon. Friend convey to them the European view and make it clear that although there is a place for smart bombs, smart diplomacy is much more important in creating world peace?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept my hon. Friend's over-neat division between a so-called European view and an American view, not least because President Bush has made it clear, for example, that he wants the United States' friends and allies to be protected against the ballistic missile threat. That implies that the distinction between Europe and the United States is not as my hon. Friend might suggest. Clearly, differences of emphasis exist, as they do between all members of NATO. Each country looks at these questions in the light of its national interest, as it should. Equally, I find that there is a remarkable unanimity of purpose among NATO allies when these issues are discussed.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Secretary of State will recall that, 18 months ago, in response to a Foreign Affairs Committee report on weapons of mass destruction, the Government said that they believed in preserving the anti-ballistic missile treaty. Since then, the United States President has said officially that he will withdraw from that treaty. What is the Government's position now?

Mr. Hoon: I have set out the Government's position, which is that this is essentially a matter for the United States and Russia. At the time of the Select Committee's report, the United Kingdom's position was that we saw some value in continuing the treaty. However, we recognise that it is up to the parties to the treaty to determine whether it has a role. What they have decided, which we very much welcome, is that there needs to be a new strategic framework, which the United States and Russia continue to discuss. We greatly welcomed and supported those discussions.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): In October 2000, the Government said that they

> "value the stability which the ABM treaty provides and wish to see it preserved".

Last week, the Foreign Secretary dismissed the treaty as a 30-year-old "product of its time." Have the Government officially published their reasons for that complete reversal of policy, or, to use the Minister for Europe's phrase, is this a case of us being "a patsy" for the United States?

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry that my hon. Friend sees the world in such stark terms. Clearly, the world moves on and events require us to think through the policy implications of those changes. That is precisely what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary set out in his speech at King's college last week. He said that

> "we have to be open to new thinking. And this spirit informs our approach to Missile Defence . . . This treaty was a product of its time . . . But the world has changed."

I am sorry that my hon. Friend does not appear to recognise that.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Secretary of State says at one moment that the anti-ballistic missile treaty is purely a matter for the two Governments concerned. The next minute, when reminded by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge), he suddenly says, "Oh no. That is quite incorrect. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary changed that policy last week in his speech at King's college." However, the United States Defence Secretary, Mr. Rumsfeld, was asked at his daily press briefing on Friday:

> "Do you have any reaction to the comments of Jack Straw?"

Mr. Rumsfeld replied:

> "Oh, I know who he is."

At which point, his staff said, "Time to go, sir." Clearly, the Foreign Secretary's speech had little effect in America and, apparently, little effect here.

Will the Secretary of State not accept that, in addition to the Foreign Secretary saying that the anti-ballistic missile treaty had had its day, he went on to say that he thought there was room, without question, for ballistic missile defence? Does that not constitute a fundamental change of policy by the Labour Government? Is it not proof that they are moving increasingly to what my right hon. Friend Iain Duncan Smith—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry. Are they not moving to what my right hon. Friend the leader of the Conservative party said some time ago? Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to tell the House, in words of one syllable, whether he supports the United States development of ballistic missile defence?

Mr. Hoon: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman appears to know the name of his leader.

What my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said is something that I have said at the Dispatch Box at every Defence Question Time that I have done: missile defence could have a role to play as part of a comprehensive strategy to tackle the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. The Government have said that consistently, and will continue to do so.

Procurement (Jobs)

5. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): If he will make a statement on the number of UK jobs sustained through MOD procurement. [31896]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The number of UK jobs sustained through Ministry of Defence procurement for equipment and services has been estimated at 255,000. That includes the numbers employed directly in UK industry on MOD contracts and those employed indirectly through the supply chain—that is, subcontractors and others who supply the main contractor.

Mr. Hoyle: I recognise how important UK manufacturing is to defence, but can we ensure that contracts are sustained and that UK contractors have easy access to them? I am thinking of the truck industry in central Lancashire, which is dependent on such contracts, as well as Royal Ordnance at Chorley, which has security of supply, and many others in the aerospace industry.

Dr. Moonie: It is our duty to obtain value for money from procurement spending. As the biggest single customer of the UK industry, the MOD has a continuing interest in ensuring that its supplier base, which includes specialist defence companies and general companies in most industrial sectors, is efficient and competitive and enables the achievement of maximum value for money in defence procurement. However, value for money is never just about price; other considerations are taken into account.

Angus Robertson (Moray): May I begin by associating my party with the Secretary of State's comments on the death of Princess Margaret?

Will the Minister of State explain how many of the 255,000 defence-related jobs in the United Kingdom to which he referred are in Scotland? Will he also comment on his written answer of 1 February to my question about procurement expenditure? He said that in Scotland such expenditure is only 4.3 per cent. of the UK total—half our population share. Does he believe that that expenditure is too much, too little or about right?

Dr. Moonie: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who speaks for the Scottish National party, for unintentionally promoting me, but alas, I am still an Under-Secretary, not a Minister of State.

I have no doubt that we would spend more on procurement in Scotland if there were more companies there producing goods that we could buy. If the hon. Gentleman considers shipbuilding—the major Scottish industry that supplies us—he will notice that we have been generous in our spending on the Clyde. Of course, defence spending is not just about procurement; in Scotland, a substantial proportion of such money is spent on Faslane, Lossiemouth in his constituency and Leuchars, which is near my own.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): As my hon. Friend has said, work has been brought to the Clyde through the type 45. Will he join me in congratulating the taskforce on its efforts to secure employment for those on the Clyde who unfortunately became unemployed? Can he also explain why the contracts for the type 45 have yet to be signed?

Dr. Moonie: I can certainly say that the Clyde shipyard's taskforce has made a useful contribution to the debate on the Clyde's future. I can assure my hon. Friend that the contracts for the first six type 45 destroyers are still being negotiated. Placements are due shortly and the programme is on time.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Minister is aware from his recent and welcome visits to my constituency that it has a large military involvement. On procurement issues, he is also aware that there is considerable concern about the demolition of previous Army barracks. Will he meet me and a delegation of my constituents, who are worried about certain procurement decisions relating to the choice of demolition contractors for some of those projects?

Dr. Moonie: I am certainly prepared to take an interest in that matter. If the hon. Gentleman writes to me with the details, I shall be happy to contact him.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): Is the Minister aware that the average age of a skilled worker on the Tyne is 50? If we are to save the shipyards as a strategic asset for the UK, we need to put MOD orders in UK yards. Will he confirm that that will be the policy, and assure us that he will not revert to the stupid policy that put £400 million of taxpayers' money and hundreds of shipyard workers' jobs into Germany?

Dr. Moonie: I can assure my hon. Friend that I am well aware of the problems regarding skilled labour. In common with long-standing defence policy, all warships will be constructed in this country.

Missile Defence

7. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What recent discussions he has had with his US counterpart on the likely timing of a request to use UK facilities in respect of national missile defence. [31898]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I regularly discuss missile defence with my United States counterpart. The US Administration have not yet decided what type of missile defence system they will seek to deploy, or when. We have received no request from the US for the use of sites in the United Kingdom for missile defence purposes, nor any indication of when any such request might be made.

Mr. Chaytor: Does my right hon. Friend think that the decision to abrogate the ABM treaty is likely to increase or decrease the likelihood of other countries adhering to their international agreements? Does he have any evidence that China has already adjusted its defence policy in response to the national missile defence programme?

Mr. Hoon: There is a proper procedure within the terms of the ABM treaty for either party to withdraw. The United States has invoked that procedure and has therefore remained within the terms of the treaty in that respect. It follows that, by consistently observing the terms of the international treaty, no particular message should be sent to any other country as to its action in respect of existing treaties.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first supplementary question, it would seem that the formal withdrawal or notice of withdrawal from the terms of the treaty should not have any impact on any other international agreement. I have no evidence of any reaction by China to that decision, nor do I consider that there should be any reaction.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Have the discussions that the Secretary of State has had with our American partners extended to improvements to the facilities at Fylingdales? In what circumstances was the extensive new work started without planning permission, and who was responsible?

Mr. Hoon: Given the events of 11 September, I judged it important that there should be an improvement in the level of security at the sensitive facilities at Fylingdales. I regret that the urgency of the work meant that formal planning permission was not sought. That matter has been put in hand and we are in discussion with the appropriate planning authorities. I hope that the House will recognise that in the light of events on 11 September, it was right that we should take urgent action to ensure that there was proper security at the base.

The only circumstances in which that issue has been discussed with the United States is in the context of discussions with US officials based at Fylingdales. There has been contact with them about the need for improvements in security.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Did my right hon. Friend's discussions include consideration of the danger posed for nuclear proliferation by the 60,000 scientists from the former Soviet Union who have expert knowledge of weapons of mass destruction? Is he aware that many of those scientists are being approached by countries such as Iran and Iraq, which wish to develop their own nuclear arsenals?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend raises a real concern and a real means by which nuclear weapons could proliferate throughout the world. Much concern has been expressed by several countries about the problem. It is something that we shall continue to highlight.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Does the Secretary of State agree with the American President, who said in his state of the union address that missile defences were an essential protection against an axis of evil, or does he agree with the 218 Labour Members who signed a motion against missile defence?

Mr. Hoon: We certainly understand why the United States is concerned about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and why the US should wish to take effective action to deal with that. As I indicated to the House earlier, the Government's view is that missile defence may have a significant role to play in the context of preventing and dealing with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As it would seem that my right hon. Friend's American counterpart cannot give him any direct information on whether there will be a national missile defence system or whether it will work, how can President Bush's promise to defend this country and Europe by means of NMD be brought into play? A sizeable body of scientific opinion and many military strategists believe—unlike the chocolate soldiers sitting on the Conservative Benches—that no such scheme could ever work and that, far from defending this country, it would place us in the front line of terrorist action.

Mr. Hoon: All I can say to my hon. Friend is that there is a significant and very well-funded programme in the United States for developing missile defence. That programme is at an early stage in its development, and I will not make any comments on its technical success at this stage, except to say that I am confident that the United States will deliver the system when it is ready to do so.

Overseas Deployment

8. **Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): If he will make a statement on the resources available to meet the commitments of the UK armed forces on active deployment overseas. [31899]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The net additional costs of meeting the UK armed forces' commitments on active deployment overseas are met either from the Ministry of Defence's share of the Government's conflict prevention budget or through a claim on the reserve. The costs of most of these operations are reported to Parliament in the normal way, and we hope to be in a position to announce shortly the total estimated costs this financial year for the operations in Afghanistan.

Mr. Bacon: What is the current total trained strength of the armed forces? Will that increase or decrease this year?

Mr. Ingram: I will provide the hon. Gentleman with the full figure in writing—

Mr. Bacon: That is what I am asking for now.

Mr. Ingram: I appreciate that. I will provide the details in writing, because the figures are very precise and I do not carry those three sets of precise figures in my head. The figure for the Army is more than 100,000, which we hope to raise to 103,000 or 104,000 by 2005. Similar projections are being made for the Navy and for the Royal

Air Force, based on the type of recruitment and retention programmes that are being put in place, with which I hope that the hon. Gentleman would agree.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What are the latest trends in retention?

Mr. Ingram: Upwards.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Further to the comments by the Secretary of State over the weekend about UK armed forces being stretched to the limit, will the Minister tell us by when his Department's bid to the Treasury for the next round of the comprehensive spending review will have to be submitted? Will he assure us, in the light of the Secretary of State's comments, that the bid will be for a significant real increase in UK defence resources?

Mr. Ingram: With reference to earlier questions, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it is a long time since the Liberals have been in power. I am sure that he will understand that these issues are a matter for negotiation between Departments, and that the allocation of resources has to be made across the whole of the Government's spending profile. Those discussions are proceeding, and when a decision is taken, it will be announced.

Sierra Leone

9. **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): If he will make a statement on troop deployments in Sierra Leone. [31900]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): As reported to the House on 18 December 2001, we are maintaining our current military presence in Sierra Leone of some 360 shore-based personnel over the period of the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2002. We are making good progress towards our goal of helping to develop professional, accountable and effective Republic of Sierra Leone armed forces, which will be able to protect the security and integrity of Sierra Leone on their own. The international military advisory and training team will continue the task of developing the capacity of the Sierra Leone armed forces over the longer term.

Hugh Robertson: Bearing in mind that answer, what assessment has the Minister made of the likelihood of the Sierra Leone Army regaining control of the diamond mines, which are crucial to the security of Sierra Leone and of the neighbouring countries?

Mr. Ingram: Clearly, we want to ensure that there are perfectly capable Sierra Leone armed forces through presidential and parliamentary elections, which, as I said, are scheduled for May 2002. A sizeable international force of 17,500 troops in UNAMSIL remains in Sierra Leone. Gaining control of the territory in Sierra Leone remains the objective.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): Will the Minister acknowledge the important and impressive role that the Chinook fleet, based in Odiham in my constituency, played last year in extraction from Sierra Leone? Does he accept that it is not good for the morale of such a fine fighting force to accuse pilots who die in the service of their country of gross negligence when no evidence exists to support that accusation?

Mr. Ingram: I understand that the right hon. Gentleman has changed his position on that. If my memory serves me correctly, he was a Defence Minister who authorised and approved the earlier examination. Perhaps he was not in office at that precise time, but he would have examined all the material that related to the incident to which he refers. As he knows, the other place has provided a detailed and comprehensive report, which we are currently examining. Of course, the Chinook fleet is carrying out an important and extensive role on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Skyguard

11. **Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater): What was the outcome of the Skyguard test at Minehead last year. [31902]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): A Skyguard mobile tracking unit was deployed to a location at Dunster beach near Minehead, Somerset from 4 to 7 December to undertake covert monitoring of military low-flying aircraft, recording their heights and speeds. During the observation period, a total of 43 military aircraft were monitored; none was found to be in breach of regulations.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I thank the Minister for that reply. Will he cast his mind back a little further, before Skyguard came to Dunster beach? There was low flying over the nuclear power station at Hinckley Point, which, as the hon. Gentleman can imagine, caused enormous consternation in my constituency. Although the aircraft was just above the legal height, the Skyguard did much to reassure people that the Ministry of Defence was taking low-flying aircraft seriously. There is a large military installation in my constituency that shares the worries. In the height of a crisis, could Skyguard be used not only to reassure people, but to give warning of low-flying aircraft over important installations in the United Kingdom?

Dr. Moonie: I am well aware of people's anxieties when aircraft approach sensitive installations. Clear rules govern that. I found the Skyguard system useful. It is done covertly; no one is told of it in advance apart from local Members of Parliament who always ensure that the matter is kept out of the public eye. I have been struck by how seldom infringements of the rules occur. Our pilots act responsibly. Although I appreciate that low flying is a great burden, we do what we can to spread it and minimise the load. However, the current system ensures that we carefully monitor what happens and that rules are kept and not broken.

Pakistan

12. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What plans he has to visit Pakistan to discuss regional security; and if he will make a statement. [31903]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I visited Pakistan on 5 and 6 February. During my visit I had meetings with President Musharraf and senior figures in the Ministry of Defence.

I took the opportunity to thank President Musharraf for Pakistan's support for the coalition against international terrorism and for the international security assistance force in Kabul, as well as his public commitment to restoring democracy in Pakistan. I made the point that those positive developments have helped to strengthen the relations between our two countries and that, as part of that, we were taking appropriate steps to restore our defence relationship. I also underlined our anxieties over the current tensions between Pakistan and India. We are urging both sides to exercise restraint and to engage in dialogue.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful for that reply. A significant number of my constituents have family and friends in Pakistan and India. They are deeply concerned about the rise in tension between those two states, and they look to Britain to continue to help and for measures to reduce the tension. Did my right hon. Friend receive specific assurances on his visit to Pakistan that there would be an attempt to resolve the differences between India and Pakistan by negotiation rather than by other means? Will he also tell hon. Members whether he envisages a bilateral defence arrangement, which would help to reduce tensions between the two nations?

Mr. Hoon: I was left in no doubt of Pakistan's recognition of the need to take action against terrorist organisations operating from its territory. We welcome President Musharraf's speech of 12 January, and the action that he has taken since. We have long called for an end to externally supported terrorism in Kashmir, and we are doing all we can to see the job completed. Meanwhile, we have urged both countries to continue to give time for the diplomatic route to work. As friends of both India and Pakistan, we will continue to urge them to persevere with dialogue and address all issues outstanding between them. It is clear that violence and terrorism will not bring a solution in Kashmir, but I am grateful for my hon. Friend's recognition that defence relations may help to do so.

There will be a meeting of the defence co-operation forum in London on 5 and 6 March. That high-level meeting of officials is co-chaired by the Ministry of Defence's permanent secretary, and his equivalent from Pakistan. It reflects a similar defence consultative group in India that is chaired by the Ministry of Defence's permanent secretary and his Indian equivalent, which will meet in New Delhi on 25 and 26 February.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): There used to be close links between the British and the Pakistani armed forces, including exchanges between staff colleges. I understand that those links were stopped after the Pakistani nuclear tests. Have those links been reinstated, or are there plans to do so? What further assistance can British troops and training teams give to the Pakistanis in their fight against international terrorism?

Mr. Hoon: I anticipate that the meeting of the defence co-operation forum will lead to a framework for co-operation and contacts involving all three armed services. In addition, further contacts will include ships and other military visits, Pakistani access to United Kingdom military training opportunities, participation in bilateral exercises and visits by senior military and civilian defence officials.

Kosovo

13. **Mr. David Crausby** (Bolton, North-East): If he will make a statement on the recent activities of UK forces in Kosovo. [31904]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The United Kingdom currently contributes some 3,000 personnel to KFOR operations in Kosovo as framework nation of the multinational brigade centre. UK forces take part in the full range of tasks carried out by KFOR. KFOR's main focus is the provision of a safe and secure environment in Kosovo, including the protection of minority communities and the countering of threats from extremist groups.

Mr. Crausby: Attention is rightly focused on Afghanistan, but will the Minister congratulate our troops serving with KFOR? Will he ensure that the prospect of a spell in Kosovo does not become detrimental to the retention of the young men and women serving in our forces?

Mr. Ingram: I would be only too happy to associate myself with my hon. Friend's views, and congratulate our forces on their very important work not just in Kosovo, but in all the other areas in which they are deployed internationally. I assure him that the expertise and knowledge gained on those deployments usually stand members of the armed forces in good stead for their future prospects in the service.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Which other countries are likely to be heavily involved in the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo? We hear much about the UK's involvement, but I would be interested to know which of our European partners are playing an equal role.

Mr. Ingram: To give due justice to that question, it is better that I set out in detail all the individual nations that participate and all the contributions they make. The international effort in Kosovo is considerable: there are in the region of 42,000 troops in KFOR, 37,000 of whom are based in Kosovo. I shall provide the hon. Gentleman with a detailed breakdown of those deployments, which I shall place in the Library of the House.

Army Recruitment and Retention

15. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): What action he is taking to recruit and retain soldiers to ensure that the Army is at its full complement. [31906]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The problem of recruitment and retention across the services is being tackled as a matter of the highest priority. Our aim is to maintain high levels of recruitment and retention through policies that meet our requirements and genuinely reflect the priorities of our people and their families.

Bob Russell: Will the Minister confirm that on 1 May 1997 the shortfall in the British Army was 4,933, and that the latest figures published on 1 December 2001 show that the shortfall is now 6,169? By any stretch of the imagination, that is an increase in the shortfall. Does he accept that the Government's policies on retention in and recruitment to the British Army have failed, and that that is adding to the problem of overstretch of our troops? I draw attention in particular to the troops based in my Colchester constituency.

Mr. Ingram: It would be wrong to deny that we face difficulties. That is why we have introduced an extensive welfare package which is constantly reviewed, and which is intended to deal with retention in the best possible way. As for recruitment, I could spend the next hour describing in detail all the ways in which we have tried to tackle it. If the hon. Gentleman is truly concerned, however, I suggest he should begin to appreciate the complexities and difficulties, and support the Government's initiatives rather than trying to talk down the armed forces.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short statement about the business for Wednesday 13 February. The first item of business will now be a motion to approve the fifth report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. It will be followed by a debate on the appointment of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, and by the remaining stages of the British Overseas Territories Bill [*Lords.*]

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I thank the Leader of the House for his announcement. I am sure that the House is pleased that the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges is being dealt with promptly: that must be in the interests of all concerned. I also think it appropriate for us to deal with the question of the new Commissioner for Standards as promptly and expeditiously as possible.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's support. My statement has been issued on the first sitting day after the report's publication, and I think it is in everyone's interest for us to move promptly and to be seen to do so.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): May I add the support of the Liberal Democrats? We think it right for progress to be made quickly, and we welcome the statement.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I welcome the opportunity to debate these matters on Wednesday. Will the Leader of the House confirm that we shall also have an opportunity, when debating the behaviour of the former Minister for Europe, to discuss his dealings with the Romanian-British action group, the result of which so far appears to be the loss of 6,000 jobs in this country's steel industry and the donation of £125,000 to the Labour party?

Mr. Cook: I cannot see any possible connection between the purchase of a steel company in Romania and the loss of jobs in the steel industry in Wales.

I appointed the ambassador who drafted that letter. He is an excellent diplomat, and it was entirely right and proper of him to invite the Prime Minister of Britain to congratulate the Romanian Government on their decision. We should understand that, for the Romanian Government, that step towards breaking up a centrally planned economy was major and historic, and very important if Romania is to succeed as a member of the European Union.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Given the Prime Minister's statements of unswerving support before the general election last year, will the Leader of the House arrange for him to be present at the debate on the report of the Standards and Privileges Committee so that he too can judge whether his actions and statements were wise?

Mr. Cook: I am sure that that point will be made ad tedium during Wednesday's debate, and that plenty of my colleagues will be here to defend the Prime Minister.

Orders of the Day

Land Registration Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

ELECTRONIC SETTLEMENT

'The registrar may take such steps as he thinks fit for the purpose of securing the provision of a system of electronic settlement in relation to transactions involving registration.'.—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 2—*Incidental powers: companies.*

Government amendments Nos. 1 to 6.

3.33 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Law Society and others have considered the new clauses and amendments. We understand why it is proposed that the registrar be given these powers. We have no objection to the Government's proposals.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): The Liberal Democrats have no objection to the new clause either.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 2

INCIDENTAL POWERS: COMPANIES

(1) If the registrar considers it expedient to do so in connection with his functions under section 69(3)(a), 92(1), *[Electronic settlement]* or 104(1) or paragraph 10 of Schedule 5, he may—

(a) form, or participate in the formation of, a company, or

(b) purchase, or invest in, a company.

(2) In this section—

"company" means a company within the meaning of the Companies Act 1985;

"invest" means invest in any way (whether by acquiring assets, securities or rights or otherwise).

(3) This section is without prejudice to any powers of the registrar exercisable otherwise than by virtue of this section.'.—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 69

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Amendment made: No. 1, in page 25, line 10, at end insert—

'(3) The registrar may—

(a) arrange for the provision of information about the history of registered titles, and

(b) authorise anyone who has the function of providing information under paragraph (a) to have access on such terms as the registrar thinks fit to any relevant information kept by him.'.—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Clause 91

ELECTRONIC DISPOSITIONS: FORMALITIES

Mr. Cash: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 33, line 5, after "certified", insert—

'(ca) each electronic signature was made by, or with the authority of, the person whose signature it purports to be,'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 12, line 13, leave out subsection (6) and insert—

'(6) A document to which this section applies is to be regarded for the purposes of any enactment as authenticated only if it was sent by the purported originator or with the authority of the purported originator.'.

Mr. Cash: We examined the clause's provisions in Committee, but the Law Society remains concerned that the Government have not yet given the right assurances.

A number of assurances have been given that as a matter of what is described as "practice" the Government would not pursue solicitors if matters went wrong—if an electronic signature was not made by or with the authority of the person whose signature it purported to be and the issue became highly contentious, which could easily happen. The Law Society would be extremely glad to hear an acknowledgment on the Floor of the House that, as a matter of law, the Government do not intend to create new rights of subrogation against solicitors and that they will not pursue them under existing arrangements.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cash: I am glad that the Minister nods. I am sure that he appreciates that this is an important question. We support the new arrangements because they will modernise the process of land registration, but the fact remains that we must ensure not only that the public have the advantages, but that unnecessary difficulties are not caused for the profession—solicitors and others in the conveyancing sector. They should not be unfairly and unreasonably pursued where the circumstances covered by my amendment arise.

Users of the conveyancing system—not only members of the public buying a home but commercial enterprises and inward investors buying factories and offices in England and Wales and the conveyancers acting for them—should not be left in any doubt about whether a forged or impersonated signature may be held to be binding. The law should make it clear that with electronic documents, as with paper ones, individuals, firms and companies are not liable where they have neither made nor authorised a signature.

The Law Society has made it clear that it would be unacceptable if solicitors had to carry the risk of their electronic signature keys being obtained and misused by third parties. The use of presumptions and statutory terms, and their contractual equivalents, should be ruled out by clear statutory language. The relying party should have to prove that a disputed signature was made by or with the authority of the purported signatory. The amendment would bring the law on paper documents into line with Australian legislation.

The provision should apply generally to conveyancing documents, whether or not they purport to be executed by solicitors acting as agents. If technology is developed to eliminate the risk of a user being impersonated, relying parties will find their burden of proof easier to discharge, but currently available technology, including smart cards or biometric identifiers, is far from being able to achieve that objective. Relying parties therefore face real risks in accepting electronic signatures, which might be undetectable forgeries, but it would be wrong to allow them to solve the problem by transferring the risk to purported signatories.

Relying parties that are major institutions—for example, the Land Registry, other Government agencies or financial institutions—are far better placed than firms of solicitors to promote the development of technology to eliminate the risks. That is a further reason for ensuring that they continue to carry those risks. I hope that the Minister will be able to give me an assurance on the proposals.

Our system must be secure if we are to retain the confidence not only of the public in their house-buying processes but of commercial enterprises and inward investors buying factories and offices in England and Wales. Individuals, firms and companies should not be liable where authority was not given. The wording used in amendment No.12 is adapted from an Australian statute—section 15 of the Electronic Transactions Act 1999, entitled "Attribution of electronic communications".

For the purposes of electronic conveyancing, the process envisages that conveyancers will execute documents on behalf of their clients as agents. There is an absolute warranty of authority by the solicitor as agent. With a paper-based system, if the solicitor has doubts about the identity of his client or is unwilling to sign on his behalf, the solicitor simply ensures that the client signs the relevant documents himself. If there were to be a compulsory electronic system, the solicitor would not have that choice.

It would not necessarily be a problem if at the beginning of a transaction solicitors were able to identify clients on whose behalf they were not prepared to sign as agents, but if matters occurred pre-exchange that made the solicitor concerned or uneasy about signing on behalf of a client, that would cause problems for all the parties to an entire chain of transactions in domestic conveyancing and, where applicable, the commercial business of the commercial tenant.

The Minister has acknowledged that conveyancers must be able to work with the system or systems that are introduced. If a solicitor is not willing to execute on behalf of his client because he or she perceives the risk to be too great, the system simply will not operate as envisaged, or at all.

3.45 pm

The Government have said that if a solicitor executed on behalf of a client who was not who he purported to be, the instrument should not have been registered because it was a mistake, and that Her Majesty's Land Registry would indemnify those who suffered loss by relying on the register, but would not exercise its rights to claim its loss against solicitors—in other words, the whole thing would be dealt with by the Land Registry. The fact that the Land Registry has rights of subrogation, which it says it will not exercise unless conveyancers are fraudulent or negligent, does not, I am afraid, satisfy me or give comfort to conveyancing professionals.

In the other place, it was made clear that the Land Registry believes that it is the arbiter of whether it should seek recourse against conveyancing professionals. To say the least, that is not conducive to ensuring that conveyancers are able to accept the risks of operating the Government's new system. Having the Land Registry put on record that it will decide whether to seek recovery of moneys paid out on the basis of bad cases, such as fraud or negligence, does not meet the concerns of those in the profession, particularly the Law Society, for two reasons.

The first is that the policy of the Government or the Land Registry could change, perhaps after conveyancers have committed substantial resources to the adoption of electronic conveyancing. The profession would be much better protected by the need for such a change to be reflected in primary legislation. Secondly, the provisions that would be affected by the amendment would apply not only to documents to which the Land Registry would be required to give effect, such as the transfers of registered land, but to documents that operate between private parties, such as contracts relating to land. Conveyancers need a provision binding not only on the Land Registry, for which the Government can speak, but on private parties to land transactions, for whom they cannot. I hope that the Minister will give me the assurances that I seek, and I shall be glad to hear what he has to say.

Mr. Wills: In speaking to amendment No. 9, I shall also speak to amendment 12. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) for his explanation of amendment No. 9. We discussed the issue at some length in Committee, and I understand the concerns that have given rise to the amendment, so I hope that I will not try the patience of the House by covering familiar ground in an effort to provide genuine reassurance on this matter.

I wish to deal with one thing straight away: the hon. Gentleman referred to the Australian Electronic Transactions Act 1999, which expressly restates the Australian common law in relation to the attribution of communications. It is a general statute that relates to e-commerce; it provides a default position from which the parties may derogate, but it does not provide a compelling precedent in this case.

The purpose of the amendment is ostensibly to add an additional paragraph to clause 91(3). That subsection specifies the conditions that an electronic document must satisfy to be as effective as its paper counterpart. The proposed new subsection would require each electronic signature to be made by, or with the authority of, the person whose signature it purports to be. In other words, a person should only be bound if he or she intended to be bound. That may sound reasonable enough, but it is not the way to achieve a fair result.

As has been said on several occasions during the passage of the Bill, the Bill amends the general law only where necessary. In respect of forged or fraudulent electronic documents, the same general law will apply as applies to their paper equivalents. The same remedies of rectification and indemnity under the land registration system will also be available. The circumstances in which the register will be rectified are designed to ensure the protection of innocent purchasers who take possession of

[Mr. Wills]

registered land under a disposition that happens to be a forgery—for example, where the electronic instrument that transfers the title is electronically signed without the authority of the landowner. The landowner whose land has been transferred under the forged transfer will, in those circumstances, recover indemnity from the registry for his or her loss.

It seems more likely that the amendment would change the current position. Arguably, it would distort the operation of the principles of fairness that underpin the law to give greater protection to the person whose electronic signature is abused, most likely a conveyancer, at the expense of the innocent buyer, probably an individual home buyer. I am not sure that that change can be justified. It is fundamental to the protection of consumers and businesses that the established principles of law that apply to transactions in paper form should apply to electronic documents.

Underlying the amendment is the concern—I hope I do not caricature it—that solicitors and other practitioners will not be able to administer their affairs in such a way that the perceived risk of using an electronic signature can be properly managed. I am happy to repeat the assurance that I gave in Committee that, as a matter of practice, the Land Registry will exercise its right of recourse only against negligent or fraudulent parties. Innocent, competent practitioners have nothing to fear. If they have acted in accordance with the terms of their network access agreement and have taken the sensible steps needed to preserve a system's security, they should not bear the liability for harm caused by careless, malicious or criminal action taken by others. That is an important point.

Mr. Cash: The Minister will recollect that I dealt with what he said about a matter of practice. My purpose is to nudge him towards acknowledging on the Floor of the House that the Government do not intend to create new rights of subrogation against solicitors and would not pursue them under existing law. It is not simply a case of having something that is a matter of practice. What I am driving at is confirmation by the Government that they do not want to create a new right of subrogation against solicitors.

A huge number of people are involved in this important arena. We often discuss general principles when we legislate, but we then have the problem of how something will work in practice. In this case, we have to consider what concerns the individual practitioner who wants to give a good service to his client. We have new and ingenuous methods of achieving efficient land registration and, in such circumstances, it is difficult for the professionals not to be worried that they might be put in an invidious position. Just as there are benefits to the clients of lawyers who engage in conveyancing, so there is a reasonable footing on which practitioners themselves can be reassured.

Mr. Wills: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman and can reassure him that there is no intention to create new rights against conveyancers. However, I must make it clear that there is no justification for giving conveyancers blanket protection from the consequences of their actions if they have not complied with access agreements or have failed to take the sensible precautions of information technology security that clients would expect in other areas of business. That is what the amendment would achieve at the taxpayers' expense.

I am happy to confirm that the principles that have guided the Land Registry in relation to the paper system will continue to operate in the new world of electronic conveyancing. In particular, the Land Registry accepts that the burden lies with it to satisfy itself that there has been a bad case of fraud or negligence before seeking recourse against a conveyancer.

The use of electronic signatures will not be confined to electronic conveyancing, nor will the signature of electronic documents by agents occur only in the context of electronic conveyancing. Electronic signatures are a developing product, and no one knows what form they will take in five, 10 or 20 years' time. What is clear now is that the challenge of creating a secure and trusted way of conducting electronic business is a huge prize to be won, and in developing the new electronic conveyancing system, the Land Registry will, as has been said many times in this House and in another place, work with the professions and the industry to develop a system that is robust and secure. The rules governing the terms of use of that system under network access agreements will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure and will be built on consultation with practitioners and others.

Some practitioners may be reluctant to enter the electronic age. It is for them to decide on the benefits and burdens, but the Government are determined to develop electronic conveyancing as a means to a better conveyancing system and we are confident that we will find partners willing to work with us in achieving that end. I hope that in light of my comments the hon. Gentleman will feel able to withdraw amendment No. 9.

Amendment No. 12 covers much the same ground as amendment No. 9, and takes a similar form, although it is restricted to authentication by agents. It was discussed as amendment No. 66 in Committee. It seeks to replace clause 91(6) with a provision specifying that electronic documents that comply with clause 91 are to be regarded as authenticated only if sent by, or with the authority of, the purported originator. "Authenticated" in this context refers to the method of indicating that the electronic message really came from the stated source.

In the paper world, the process of authentication is often almost subliminal. In many cases, a handwritten signature of a firm's business name on a piece of printed stationery is taken as sufficient, whether or not the signature is recognised from previous exchanges or indeed is legible. The electronic world may be more secure but the advantages of electronic commerce are not without cost. Part of the price of preserving the integrity of any computer system is continual vigilance. Electronic identities will have to be carefully guarded and internal management systems made as robust as possible and enforced as rigorously as possible.

There will always be a risk of successful attack, but let us remember two things. First, there is at least as great a risk in the paper world, where forgery is more readily accomplished and standards of checking many times less absolute. Secondly, there is every incentive for the Land Registry, conveyancers and their clients to make the system as secure as possible.

In tabling the amendment, the hon. Gentleman raises the spectre of the unauthorised electronic document. The amendment is intended to limit clause 91 by introducing a condition that a document that would otherwise be effective under the clause will be effective only if was sent by the purported originator or with the authority of the purported originator. The result would be to complicate the conveyancing process by encouraging conveyancers to require proof of where a communication was sent from and with whose authority.

My other objections to the amendment are basically the same as my objections to amendment No. 9. It would create an unnecessary difference between the paper and the electronic systems of dealing in conveyancing. Even worse, it would introduce an undesirable distinction between the rules applying to conveyancing and those to be found in the general law. It would distort the operation of the principles of indemnity and rectification in land registration law.

I also suggest to the House that the amendment represents an undesirably absolutist approach to the use of electronic systems. In effect, it suggests that they should not be used unless they can be absolutely guaranteed to be secure for all eternity. That is simply not realistic, even in the hon. Gentleman's world. What we have to look for instead, as in all other areas of electronic commerce, is a sensible and balanced approach to the management of risk, with a regulatory framework that is proportionate to the actual dangers.

The Land Registry will of course seek to strike such a balance in devising arrangements for ensuring proper authorisation by clients where conveyancers are to sign electronically on their behalf. Those arrangements will be the subject of detailed consultation on the basis of actual and practical proposals, and they will be piloted. That is the way, I suggest, in which we should seek to meet the legitimate concerns that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

I would add that the loss of subsection (6) would be unacceptable, since it will fulfil a small but useful technical purpose in the facilitation of electronic conveyancing. I hope that in light of those extensive comments the hon. Gentleman will not press amendment No. 12.

4 pm

Mr. Sanders: I am glad that the Minister has already answered some of the questions that I was going to ask—he must have a crystal ball. The way in which the technology is advancing and some of the assurances given in Committee make it clear that an electronic system is as secure as a paper-based system, if not more so. I think that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) is getting at what lies behind any system—public confidence. The public recognise the paper-based system and the security within that, and it will be some time before they accept that electronic security systems protect their interests perhaps even better than a paper-based system. Confidence is therefore everything.

Who will determine who is guilty of negligence or fraudulent behaviour within the system? I understand from the Minister's comments that that will take place within the Land Registry, but at what point does the law take over? Who investigates? Who determines? Is it a matter for the police? Is evidence gathered by the Land Registry, or is the whole matter passed over to the constabulary?

I have a great deal of sympathy with both amendments, but I think on balance that we will have to wait and see. The Minister mentioned further technological advances: they will come and they will build confidence in the system. The Government must avoid a dual system of both paper-based and electronic conveyancing, as that would cause confusion. At some point the electronic system will take over from the paper-based system, but building in an inhibitor to electronic conveyancing, which I think would be the effect of the amendments, will not allow the idea to fly, confidence to be built, and the public to be won over. I hope that the Minister can answer my questions.

Mr. Cash: I am grateful to the Minister for his assurance on amendment No. 9. We have on a mutually satisfactory basis edged the issue along a little bit. The assurance he has given—

Mr. Wills *rose*—

Mr. Cash: I gather he has yet another assurance to give. Let us hope for the best.

Mr. Wills: Before the hon. Member for Stone concludes that he feels able to withdraw the amendments, as I hope he will, I should like to answer the questions asked by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) about the determination of guilt of fraudulence. He is right that it will be, in the first instance, for the Land Registry to determine what it thinks—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The best way to proceed would be to allow the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) to finish his comments.

Mr. Cash: That is very kind of you, Mr. Speaker. It is always an enormous satisfaction to anyone standing at the Dispatch Box to know that he will be allowed to complete his speech.

I thank the Minister for edging the matter a little further forward. I hear what he says about amendment No. 12, but would like to add that we are dealing with a new technology. The profession as a whole—and its clients—are faced with a new system that, for obvious reasons, has not been tested. No one is sure how it will all pan out. I have no doubt that we shall all be extremely grateful to the experts, whom we heaped with praise in Committee. None the less, only time will tell.

It would be a pity if the Minister created a blot on his own landscape—if our concerns about the way in which the system will operate in practice were borne out.

Given the unbelievable and extraordinary number of Members attending the debate, it would be invidious of me to seek to divide the House. However, I have made my point, and the Minister has responded. He has given me half a cake, which I am glad of. On the principle that Marie Antoinette got it wrong when she said, "Let them eat cake", I shall have to settle for that.

Without prejudice to what I have said and what the future may hold, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Wills *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Because of the procedures of the House, and as the hon. Member for Stone has sought to

[Mr. Speaker]

withdraw his amendment, I cannot say that it would be best if the Minister did not speak, but I think that he knows what I mean.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 101

FEE ORDERS

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 36, line 27, after "section" insert "69(3)(b) or".—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Clause 104

CONSULTANCY AND ADVISORY SERVICES

Amendments made: No. 3, in page 37, line 2, after "provide" insert—

> ', or arrange for the provision of,'.

No. 4, in page 37, line 4, after "section" insert "by the registrar".

No. 5, in page 37, line 5, leave out "the registrar" and insert "he".—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Clause 126

RULES, REGULATIONS AND ORDERS

Mr. Cash: I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 42, line 39, at end insert—

> '(4A) Before making any order under any provision of this Act, the Lord Chancellor shall consult the Rule Committee.'.

Among other things, the clause prescribes certain powers that are conferred on the Lord Chancellor to make not only rules and regulations but

> "different provision for different cases."

Furthermore, any such power is to be exercisable by statutory instrument. The clause then explains the procedure to be followed, where the statutory instrument is laid before Parliament.

Subsection (4) states that a statutory instrument concerning land registration rules, certain rules under part II or section 119, regulations under paragraph 5 of schedule 9 or certain orders

> "is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament."

However—the Minister has heard me express a view on this before—there is no explicit provision that, when any such order is made, the Lord Chancellor is under an obligation to consult the rule committee.

Significant practical implications arise in respect of a number of the important changes that are being made, such as extending compulsory registration of title or varying the length of time required for upgrading a possessory title by order. The principle on which consultation operates as a matter of law is no doubt well known to the Minister and, for that matter, most emphatically to the Lord Chancellor, who is required to consult all and sundry, much as Gilbert and Sullivan have required him to sing many a song for his sins since the composition of "Iolanthe" or any other great opera. The lord high executioner in this case, the Lord Chancellor, has that facility. He should be required, in my judgment and that of professionals, to consult the rule committee. It would be astonishing if the Government wanted to resist any such provision. I am interested to learn whether the Minister has an ingenious way of satisfying me that the lack of consultation in the Bill is compensated for by the fact that the consultation will take place in practice. He knows that consultation means no more than "I hear what you say." There is substantial case law on the subject; one does not have to comply with the arguments made during consultation, but one is required to listen.

I know that the Government are a listening Government; at least, I am told that they are. I believe that the Minister is a listening Minister; it would be progress if he assured us that the Lord Chancellor will consult the rule committee, even if he is not prepared to accept my simple amendment. If he is not prepared to give that assurance, it follows that, astonishingly, the Government have no intention of consulting the rule committee. I am engaging in this didactic exchange entirely on my own and am waiting for him to respond. I am sure that he understands that this is an important matter, and will want to consult the rule committee.

Mr. Wills *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cash: I am glad that the Minister has just indicated that he will do so. However, if he does not wish to entrench my proposal in legislation, I trust that he can give me an assurance that the rule committee will be consulted as a matter of course. I should be delighted if he would do so, and shall not to try to pre-empt or anticipate what he has to say. It is not only members of the rule committee who expect an assurance, but everyone in the professions, as well as the many millions of people concerned about the way in which the rules, regulations and orders will operate. If the Minister can give that assurance in the best spirit of transparency, to which, I know, he is patriotically committed, that will guarantee that the measure can go ahead as smoothly as possible.

Mr. Wills: I know that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) takes these matters extremely seriously, so I shall try, at some length, to reassure him.

There are two types of order-making power in the Bill. I will deal first with the administrative orders for running the land registration system, of which there are three: a power under clause 99, as the hon. Gentleman will recall, to designate a particular land registry office as the proper office for certain applications; a power under clause 101 to make fees orders for dealings with the registry; and a power under clause 111 to make fees orders for dealings with the adjudicator.

The power to designate where particular applications are handled is an internal matter for the Land Registry, allowing the registrar to even out the levels of work, and therefore processing times, at different offices. It also allows him to set up specialist teams to deal with complex or rare types of applications. Those orders are often made at relatively short notice to address difficulties as they arise. As now, it is intended that they should be made swiftly, and merely laid before Parliament afterwards. There is no need to create any greater scrutiny or delay in their implementation by involving the rule committee; the Bill as drafted reflects that.

The second power is to make a fees order for dealing with the registry itself. Fees orders are currently made by the Lord Chancellor with the advice and assistance of the rule committee; I am pleased to be able to confirm to the hon. Gentleman that that situation will continue under clause 101.

4.15 pm

The other rule-making power that I mentioned is that relating to the fees of the adjudicator. As I explained in the Second Reading Committee on 29 November 2001 at column 9 of *Hansard*, the adjudicator provisions are designed to establish a new and independent judicial officer to determine registration disputes between individuals. Responsibility for the administrative arrangements for the new office will lie with the Lord Chancellor's Department, not the Land Registry. It is not appropriate to jeopardise that independence by subjecting the adjudicator rules or the fees order to the scrutiny of the Land Registry's own rule committee.

Of the three administrative order-making powers under the Bill, only one should fall within the scrutiny of the rule committee, and the Bill as drafted achieves that already.

I turn to the second category of order-making powers, which cover a number of rather disparate areas. First, there will be orders to extend beyond the changes introduced by the Bill the triggers for compulsory registration of land in general, and for demesne land. Then there are orders to adjust the period after which upgrading of title can occur. Finally, there will be orders to extend the system to cover submarine land, and to adjust the qualifying term of leases for compulsory registration of title. All these order-making powers are subject to the negative resolution procedure.

As the powers involve not the running of the land registration system, but adjustments to the statutory framework under which it operates, it is Parliament rather than the rule committee that should direct the order-making process.

The changes that will be brought about by orders made to extend triggers for compulsory registration of title and to reduce the length of leases requiring registration will have a particular impact on the operation of the property market. The relevant clauses therefore impose duties on the Lord Chancellor to consult before exercising those powers.

The Government made a commitment in another place to consult the rule committee during the consultation process under those clauses, a commitment which I was happy to repeat during Committee debates. The rule committee members will, however, be consulted as individuals who have useful background knowledge and expertise to add value to the discussion, but the responsibility for the scrutiny of the orders remains with Parliament.

With regard to these more fundamental order-making powers, the Government believe that the involvement of the rule committee members is already ensured when and where it is of value, and in a way befitting their role in that order-making process.

Given my explanation and the importance which I know the hon. Gentleman attaches to scrutiny by Parliament, I invite him to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Cash: As usual, the Minister has gone to some length to explain the Government's arguments, and I am grateful to him for his competent explanation of their approach. I believe that it is still desirable for the provision to be included in the Bill, but I gather—I would be grateful if the Minister could at least nod, if he thinks that I have got the message right—that for practical purposes, the rule committee will be engaged in a proper consultative process, notwithstanding the fact that he does not want that to be set out in the Bill.

Mr. Wills *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cash: I was a little concerned when I heard the Minister say—I do not want to misquote him—that perhaps it would be more appropriate for the matter to be left to Parliament than to dealings with the rule committee. Enthusiastic as I am about the democracy that lies at the heart of our system and on the Floor of the House, having served for some years on the Statutory Instruments Committee—a burden that I was invited to sustain by the Whips of the time, which gave me an opportunity to see the workings of that Committee, and the manner in which statutory instruments then move inexorably to the Floor of the House and receive such detailed examination, as we all know—I would have much more faith in the Minister's assurance that the rule committee would be involved in the consultative process, in the knowledge that its members have their feet on the ground and would deal with these matters in a practical manner.

The issues will indeed crop up and will be far better dealt with by those who are engaged in professional practice and who have hands-on dealings with the consequences of the matters covered by orders and regulations. I would not mind betting that I will turn out to be right, and that a good deal more consideration will be given to these matters by the rule committee than would ever be contemplated by the great authority of the Statutory Instruments Committee or by Members of Parliament. Without wishing to be cynical, I would qualify what the Minister said. In practice, these matters will be sorted out on the ground with the rule committee. I am glad that he has indicated that that is how he thinks it will work in practice, and I hope that he is right.

On the basis that the Minister and I have arrived at something of a mutual understanding, and that there will be a degree of consultation in practice, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 5

LAND REGISTRY NETWORK

Amendment made: No. 6, in page 55, line 9, after "provide" insert—

', or arrange for the provision of,'.—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Schedule 8

INDEMNITIES

Mr. Cash: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 61, line 23, at end insert—

'(i) the exercise by the court of its powers under section 46.'.

The amendment relates to schedule 8, which deals with indemnities and the entitlement to them. In turn, the schedule is connected with clause 102. The reason for the

[Mr. Cash]

amendment boils down to the fact that there appears to be an omission in respect of those circumstances in which a person should reasonably be entitled to be indemnified by the registrar if he suffers loss. Under the schedule, those circumstances include

> "rectification of the register . . . a mistake whose correction would involve rectification of the register . . . a mistake in an official search."

Those things really happen. We may not be overwhelmed by the attention of many hon. Members this afternoon, but they would be deeply concerned if they found that a mistake in an official document affected their home, and they might all come flooding back into the House.

Mr. Wills: I wish that they would all turn up.

Mr. Cash: So do I.

Other circumstances include

> "a mistake in a document kept by the registrar which is not an original and is referred to in the register".

Alternatively, there might be

> "the loss or destruction of a document lodged at the registry for inspection or safe custody",

or

> "a mistake in the cautions register".

Let us imagine that happening in the Whips Office. There might also be a

> "failure by the registrar to perform his duty under section 50."

We propose that there should be a further category of entitlement to indemnity in circumstances in which the power of the court to order entry was involved. To the provisions whereby a person would be entitled to be indemnified by the registrar if he suffered loss because of the other matters to which I have referred, the amendment would add:

> "the exercise by the court of its powers under section 46."

As I said, that refers to the power of the court to order entry. Under clause 46, that could arise

> "If it appears to the court that it is necessary or desirable to do so for the purpose of protecting a right or claim in relation to a registered estate or charge".

The court could then

> "make an order requiring the registrar to enter a restriction in the register."

Such circumstances could give rise to a mistake or something similar.

Clause 46(2) adds:

> "No order . . . may be made for the purpose of protecting the priority of an interest which is, or could be, the subject of a notice."

Although the court may exercise its power subject to such terms and conditions as it thinks fit, that power would not extend—I do not think that the Minister would argue that it would—to a person having the entitlement to being indemnified by the registrar if that person suffered as a result of the court exercising its powers under clause 46.

The object of the amendment is to ensure that priority of interest is maintained in all but the most extreme circumstances. In circumstances in which priority is lost, the person involved should be entitled to indemnity. At present, the Bill contains insufficient safeguards for the public, but the amendment would help to rectify that problem. At present, there is an absolute right for a person whose position has been prejudiced to receive an indemnity, but citizens will be powerless unless that point is clearly spelled out.

If the Bill is enacted in its current form, will the position of a totally innocent person be prejudiced? Will the person who has priority on the search have locus standi in the subsequent proceedings? That is the key question, because that person must be heard. If he is not, that would be against the rules of natural justice and human rights.

Just in case the Minister wants further reassurance from those who may be able to amplify the points that he wishes to make, I repeat my questions. Is it intended that the person who has priority on the search will have locus standi in the subsequent proceedings? Is it not right that that person be heard? If he is not, is that not against the rules of natural justice and human rights?

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I am interested in the amendment because I am interested in cases in which courts make decisions that adversely affect those who believe that their rights were established by Land Registry entries that were correct. In some cases, however, the decisions of a court are perverse. Such decisions may require a land registrar to alter the recorded material and that may not be in the interests of the purchaser of the property. That is because courts sometimes make decisions in which they say what is being purchased is not what is described in the deeds, but what was seen by the purchaser. There may be a distinction between the two.

I cited such a case in Committee, but I appreciate that there is much in the Bill to ensure that the evidence provided by the Land Registry will usually hold sway with the courts. The law will be tightened up by the Bill. Its provision for indemnity for errors committed by the Land Registry are important, but knock-on consequences may arise as a result of decisions made by the courts. The Bill might reduce the effect of those consequences, and I am interested in any provision that means that someone adversely affected by a court decision receives indemnity. I am not sure that the amendment would deal with the cases that interest me, but I wish to flag up my concerns.

4.30 pm

Mr. Wills: The amendment would impose on the registrar a liability to pay indemnity when the court exercised its powers under clause 46 and the person in question suffered loss as a result. I understand the concerns voiced by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) and my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), who want to ensure effective protection for those whose interests might, through no fault of their own, be adversely affected by use of the powers in clause 46. However, as I explained in Committee, there is a way to achieve that other than through invoking the registrar's indemnity powers. The litigation in question would be beyond the registrar's jurisdiction, so another, more appropriate method would be available.

Of course, as I said in Committee, if a person suffers loss outside of litigation through a mistake that falls within the scope of schedule 8—for example, if a restriction is mistakenly entered against the wrong title—indemnity will be payable. In the first circumstance to which the hon. Member for Stone referred, indemnity would be payable. The registry, not the courts, is involved in such matters, for which it should make payments and for which, in some cases at least, it may be responsible. However, the amendment deals with a completely different issue—when there is no mistake on the register and litigation is instigated by one of the parties.

Clause 46 empowers the court to require the registrar to enter a restriction. It is likely that that power will be used where an inhibition is currently entered in the register—for example, where the court grants a freezing injunction. The power to require a restriction to be entered may be exercised, even where an intending purchaser has protected himself or herself by making a priority search under clause 72. Under clause 46(3), the court may direct that an entry made under clause 46 shall have overriding priority. Under subsection (5), the court may make the exercise of its powers under subsection (3) subject to such terms and conditions as it thinks fit.

One of the most likely uses of that power is made clear in paragraph 6533 of the joint Law Commission and Land Registry report, "Land Registration for the 21st Century: A Conveyancing Revolution". Paragraph 6533 explains that the court would probably make an order under subsection (3) only if the applicant undertook to indemnify any person who suffered loss in consequence.

We consider subsection (5) sufficiently wide to enable the court to require such an undertaking, but discussion of the issue in Committee caused the Government to register the fact that the Civil Procedures Rules Committee would be invited to consider drawing the matter to the court's attention if there were doubt about the court's considering use of subsection (5).

In reality, the matter is akin to cases in which the court grants an interim injunction. In such cases, the court will invariably require the applicant to give an undertaking in damages, should he or she lose when the case comes to trial. In other words, it will be for the applicant for an order under clause 46(3) to provide the necessary indemnity, not the registrar. The Government consider that the preferable course, because the registrar has no interest in the matter. It is difficult to see why the taxpayer should pick up the tab for litigation over which the registrar has absolutely no control and from which the public derive no benefit.

In the light of my comments, I hope that the hon. Member for Stone will withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Cash: I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I may.

I listened with care to the Minister and I am extremely interested in his concluding remarks, which seem to acknowledge that the issue is not all that simple and that the circumstances to which I referred could arise. I am happy to withdraw the amendment, with this qualification: if things go wrong—we cannot read a crystal ball or be certain of how the provision will work in practice—and matters do not proceed quite as the Minister and his advisers hope, the problem will be rectified.

With respect to the question of indemnities in general and the remarks of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), I simply say that what he referred to is not directly relevant to clause 46, but he is right to be concerned that titles and matters that go on the register lead to serious problems from time to time. Courts are not infallible, nor is the Land Registry. The greatest possible care must be taken to ensure that the most important aspect—not the creation of the law, but the right solutions for the public at large—is delivered in respect of contention over, for example, a boundary dispute or a title's validity.

Bearing in mind all those matters, it is right to withdraw the amendment in the light of what the Minister said, but subject to the reservations that I expressed as to the manner in which the Bill may apply. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, and Prince of Wales's Consent, on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall, signified.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

4.36 pm

Mr. Wills: I, too, welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank the members of the two Committees who examined the Bill, which is unusual in a number of ways. First, it is the product of an extensive programme of work undertaken jointly by the Law Commission and Her Majesty's Land Registry. Both here and in another place, the result has been widely welcomed as an admirable balance between looking back and looking forward. Secondly, it provides a re-examination of the legislation from first principles—a task for which the Law Commission is particularly suited and one that the draft Bill achieved with particular distinction. I have already paid tribute to the achievement of Charles Harpum, the former law commissioner responsible for the report, and to the distinguished parliamentary counsel who worked with him, and I happily do so again. We are extremely grateful for their work on the Bill.

It is unusual, if not unprecedented, for a Department to collaborate with the Law Commission on a report, but the way in which the Bill benefits from the Land Registry's unparalleled knowledge of the operation of land registration and its aim of improving the registry's service to its customers shows how successful such collaboration can be. Much credit for that must go to the solicitor to Her Majesty's Land Registry, Chris West. Mr. West is shortly to retire and his work on the Bill represents the crowning of a long and distinguished career of public service. I want to put on record the Government's appreciation of that.

The Law Commission believes that the Bill represents its single largest law reform achievement since its establishment in 1965. It follows, therefore, that the Bill is the most substantial to be considered on Second Reading by a Committee. I certainly felt that the debate in Committee was particularly helpful and constructive, and it showed the effectiveness of the special procedure for such Bills.

The Bill represents a thorough spring cleaning of the existing legislation, almost all of which dates from 1925 or half a century before. We examined in Committee how necessary simplification and clarification has been achieved and tested the scope for further change. We also spent much time looking into the future.

[Mr. Wills]

Above all, the Bill is radical and forward thinking. It sets out a framework for electronic conveyancing and so opens the way for the benefits that that will bring to the still excessively protracted and painful business of buying and selling property.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) asked a question about which I shall now reassure him. In the first instance, the Land Registry will assess what has happened, but substantial disputes will be decided by the civil or criminal courts.

A great deal remains to be done to put flesh on the skeleton. In addressing concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), I make it absolutely clear that the Land Registry will seek to strike a balance in devising arrangements for ensuring proper authorisation by clients where conveyancers are to sign electronically on their behalf. I understand the concerns that have been raised on many occasions during the Bill's passage through the House. The arrangements will be the subject of detailed consultation on the basis of practical proposals, and they will be piloted. We shall thus seek to meet the real concerns that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and I believe that we shall do so.

The helpful and constructive approach taken in the debate highlighted some of the areas where the profession and customers have concerns. Above all, there is a need for a system that can be short yet meet high requirements for reliability and security. The Land Registry is well aware that in planning the next stages it must work with everyone involved in the property market. That will be essential if the ultimate solution is to meet all the needs of the various groups that will benefit. The task will be a considerable challenge to the Land Registry, and the Government will do all we can to help meet it fully.

4.41 pm

Mr. Cash: We embarked on this odyssey on Second Reading, and moved on to consideration in Committee. The Minister was right to contend that the procedure was justified for a Bill such as this. The procedure provides us with an opportunity to consider the consequences of proceedings both in Committee and subsequently on Report. We can now wrap up, as it were, the arguments on Third Reading.

The Bill is monumental. It is not a vast Bill by current standards, but it contains a huge amount of complexity. As I said on Second Reading, during the heady days when I was sitting my conveyancing examinations—too long ago for me to care to remember—the law was complicated and made no better by the fact that the Acts, which have now been axed by the Bill, were deficient. I am sure that that is something that my tutors would have told me, rather than something that would have I observed for myself at the time. However, difficulties and complications arose, and the Bill goes a long way to solving them.

I pay tribute vicariously to the Minister's advisers and to the Law Commission. The Minister has been ably assisted throughout on the various points that I have had the temerity to raise from time to time. Consideration of the Bill in Committee was conducted in a good spirit. Mr. Charles Harpum's time at the Law Commission has only recently concluded. He worked throughout with the parliamentary counsel who was seconded to the commission; they both deserve tribute.

I do not want to test your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we shall shortly consider the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill on Report. I hope that the criteria that led the Law Commission to be so effective in relation to this Bill will be borne in mind when we discuss the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill, in which a number of unresolved issues remain. I hope that we can arrive at some satisfactory conclusions before our consideration is concluded.

This Bill lays the foundations for a system of electronic conveyancing that will bring the whole system up to date, providing a faster and more open mechanism for the buying and selling of homes, which will benefit consumers. Indeed, it will affect many millions of people. I notice that the Minister looked up when I mentioned millions of people. That is a lot of people, and we want to be sure that they are all satisfied by the way in which the Bill is enacted.

The Land Registration Act 1925 had to be disposed of, and the Government are engaging in a sensible pace of reform here. To begin with, the new system will apply only to certain simple registered transactions; other transactions will be drawn into it as time goes by. The system will, in the end, have to be compulsory if the full benefits are to be enjoyed, but as clause 5(4) makes clear, that will be feasible only when electronic conveyancing has by common consent become the most effective way of dealing with transactions.

There was considerable argument in Committee about the provisions on the length of leases. Our difficulty with clause 91 has been addressed again today, and we have dealt with a significant number of the points made not only here but in the other place. I pay tribute to those in the other place who took the initial phases of the Bill through in such a competent fashion.

I also want to put on record, however, the fact that the Bill contains a vast number of rule-making powers. I have already expressed concern about the extent to which such powers are becoming the norm. I looked the other day at the array of statutory instruments that have been introduced in any given year. If we aggregate them with European directives, the burdens that over-regulation can impose and the lack of scrutiny given to all such matters, we realise that the appearance that, because the procedures are followed, these matters are given sufficient consideration is not really justified. I do not mean that the consideration is not justified. I mean that it would be an exaggeration to believe that, when statutory instruments and rules are made, they are given the kind of consideration that the Minister was suggesting they are given. I do not believe that that is the case. The way in which we deal with subordinate legislation needs to be much tighter; far too much goes through on the nod.

On the compulsory registration of leases in excess of seven years, the profession—by which I mean, broadly speaking, the Law Society—generally believes that such compulsory registration is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage. I said in Committee:

> "The Law Society and other bodies have made it clear that they would prefer a system of compulsory registration of leases with terms of 14 years or more. In the event that that were successful, the term of registrable leases could be reduced and the Bill contains the power to do that."—[*Official Report, Second Reading Committee*, 29 November 2001; c. 12.]

Concerns have been expressed about whether there will be a vast increase in applications for registration. We discussed that in Committee and it was also considered in the House of Lords. My noble Friend Baroness Buscombe tabled an amendment that would have reduced the length of leases that must be registered from 21 to 14 years, instead of to seven years. She was strongly supported in the background by the Country Landowners Association, among others. As the Member of Parliament for Stone, which is a rural constituency, I can confirm that people are worried about the complexity of the system. I hope that that will be borne in mind.

It is important to ensure that client confidentiality is sustained, especially between solicitors and their clients; we raised that in Committee and we remain concerned about it.

Having reached the dying days of the Bill, we have, after some argument, obtained assurances from the Minister about the way in which it should operate in practice. The Government have tabled amendments to the Bill, and by and large it has been improved, both in Committee and in the other place, so as to benefit the public as a whole.

We support the Bill and we are glad that the Law Commission and the Land Registry played such a distinguished part in helping it to reach the statute book. If and when any glitches occur in practice, I hope that the Government will enthusiastically ensure that they are rectified as soon as possible.

4.52 pm

Mr. Sanders: I promise not to take up much of the House's time. I shall not go on until 10 o'clock tonight or drag out the debate. I want merely to note a concern that we raised in Committee. We accept that the Bill is the first step towards achieving a comprehensive Land Registry, but it could have been introduced more quickly. That is a lost opportunity.

The debates on Second Reading, in Committee and today on Report and Third Reading have been good natured and they have clarified the provisions. We hope that the Bill will succeed in speeding up conveyancing, which is important to any prospective house buyer or vendor. We also hope that it will encourage people who might not otherwise have registered their land to do so. Perhaps one day there will be proposals to speed up the system even further; we shall have to wait and see.

I thank hon. Members for the way in which business has been conducted. It has been civilised, enjoyable and educational. We have all learned something from the process.

4.53 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I rise to speak in support of the Bill, although I was not a member of the Committee that scrutinised it. I should have preferred it to include tougher remedies against squatters and the creation of a more effective land register for empty public sector property. As with most Bills, the devil is in the detail.

I want to draw hon. Members' attention to clause 115, which is entitled "Reduction in unregistered interests with automatic protection", in relation to manorial rights. Essentially, it means that owners of manors will have 10 years from the appointed day to register any interests in the land that they hold as lords of the manor. If registration is contemplated after the 10-year period, it will be too late, and any rights or potential rights in the land will be lost. Any unregistered rights will not be capable of registration, and therefore incapable of enforcement.

Although it may seem that 10 years is a long enough period for everyone to register, that presupposes that everyone knows of the change in the law. Experience of the Commons Registration Act 1965, under which a period of seven years was allowed for registration of an interest, showed that after 1972 many people had not registered because they did not know that they had to. In fact, discretion was granted to the Commons Commissioners to register after the final date, but there is no discretion contemplated in the Bill, as one of my constituents thinks there should be.

My constituent, Mr. John Hornchurch, purchased the lordship of the local manor of Hornchurch hall some years ago, and gave it to his family's charitable trust, the Hornchurch hall trust, as a foundation asset. He writes on behalf of the trust: his only personal interest is that he is the trustee whom the other trustees have nominated to use the title "lord of the manor" for life.

Only a small part of the Bill affects manorial rights, but unfortunately the manorial provisions seem to be adverse and unfair. Under one provision, where a title is registered, it will be possible to have it deregistered, so that future proof of title will depend on title deeds rather than on a register. Mr. Hornchurch believes that that provision is an unfair step. At considerable personal time and expense, he registered the Hornchurch hall trust as the proprietors of the title of lord of the manor of Hornchurch hall. His aim was to obtain benefits of registration, and to make the title and its ownership certain. Clearly, he does not want the trust's position to be arbitrarily weakened.

Another provision will require unregistered manorial rights to be registered within 10 years of the Bill coming into force, or the rights will be lost. Many rights are uncertain, and become evident only when particular circumstances arise. It seems unfair that the time limit should be imposed, and Mr. Hornchurch feels that it should at least be longer or that there should be provisions for exceptions.

In the case of the lordship of Hornchurch hall, there is a degree of uncertainty about rights, which Mr. Hornchurch doubts could be removed without considerable further expense. Neither the trust nor the trustees of Hornchurch hall, who provide all the income of the trust, have ever benefited financially from those rights. They make financial gifts to deserving causes. They have wide discretionary powers, and conform to the Charity Commissioners' rules. The trust is entirely philanthropic.

The Bill will revise and bring up to date much of the law on the way in which the ownership of land is recorded. However, there is an incidental consequence for lords of the manor, which may not have been intended. Land registration works through a register, which now exists in computerised form and records many details of the land. It also includes rights belonging to lords of the manor. The general rule is that, if anyone is registered as the owner of land, that is free of any third-party rights

[Angela Watkinson]

unless a note is made on the register of title that it is subject to such rights. That rule is subject to certain exceptions.

One of the important exceptions relates to overriding rights, which are rights that affect the land even if they are not noted on the register. As the law stands, if someone owns land that is subject to the rights of the lord of the manor in relation to these matters, the rights of the lord will continue whether or not the matter is mentioned on the register. Under the Bill, if rights are not registered within 10 years from the date of the legislation coming into force, they will cease to bind the land. If the law comes into force in the way suggested, lords of the manor will have to register their rights within 10 years or, for practical purposes, they will lose them. That may be fair if the lord of the manor knows what his or her rights are, but the rights may often be difficult to ascertain. Anyone who knows about their rights will need legal advice on protecting them.

The Bill also contains other provisions on manors. One is that when the title to the manor itself is registered, as distinct from the land over which the manorial rights can be exercised, it will be possible to have the title deregistered so that from then on proof of title will depend on the title deeds rather than on a register.

Another factor that will affect owners of roadside verges or similar areas is that after the Bill comes into force it will no longer be possible to lodge a caution at the Land Registry. A lord of the manor may register a caution when he or she is unable to provide evidence of ownership of the verge to the satisfaction of the Land Registry, but still claims ownership. If someone else, such as the owner of an adjoining field, applies to be registered as owner, the Land Register will tell the person who has lodged a caution, and the matter can then be resolved. It will not be possible to lodge such cautions in the future, however.

It seems that there is a fundamental principle of human rights here. Under the European convention on human rights, now incorporated in United Kingdom law, it is unlawful for citizens to be deprived of their property without due process. The Bill will deprive some citizens of their property simply because they will be unaware of the relevant provision. They will lose their property by default, which cannot be right.

5.1 pm

Mr. Wills: With the leave of the House, I shall reply briefly. I echo the thanks others have expressed to all who have been involved with the Bill.

The hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) raised the complex and technical issue of manorial rights. I will write to her in detail in response to the concerns raised by her constituent, but I can say now that there is an effective network for the spreading of information about new developments among lords of the manor and their professional advisers.

There is another side of this coin. Members have complained to me about the many anxieties, and the costs, that can arise from uncertain rights held by lords against them. We must strike a balance, and 10 years seems about right to us; but as I have said, I will write to the hon. Member for Upminster with a detailed response to the complex and technical issue that she raised.

The task of the Land Registry remains to ensure that the legislation is implemented effectively. I repeat my assurance that the Government will do all we can to help it to rise to the challenge.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONTRACTING OUT

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions in relation to Apsley House) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 23rd January, be approved.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With permission, I shall put together the remaining motions.

Ordered,

That the Non-Domestic Rating (Designation of Rural Areas) (England) Order 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3916), dated 7th December 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th December, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Non-Domestic Rating Contributions (England) (Amendment) (Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3944), dated 10th December 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th December, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

PETITION

Fireworks

5.3 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I wish to present a petition about the use and abuse of fireworks.

There are problems in north-east Derbyshire and surrounding areas that affect vulnerable people such as children and the elderly, and also affect animals. The petition is particularly concerned with the impact on animals, but there is much concern in my constituency about wider issues.

The person who organised the petition expected to receive support only from friends, local vets and animal organisations, but because she had written two letters to the *Derbyshire Times* she secured 1,866 signatures rather than the 500 or so that she had anticipated. I only wish that I could receive a similar response when the *Derbyshire Times* contains material from me.

The petition reads:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of Brenda Elvidge and Others

Declares that the exploding of fireworks to celebrate the demise of Guy Fawkes and other national celebrations such as New Year's Eve now extend by several days and even weeks both before and after the named event and that the fireworks sold for household use (which are also illegally exploded in the streets) are now louder, last longer and have a greater aerial range than previously, thus causing great distress and trauma to a multitude of domestic, wild and farm animals over a prolonged period, resulting in the need for veterinary care and the administration of tranquillisers.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons shall urge the Home Office that the welfare and safety of all animals be considered whenever and wherever fireworks are exploded and to achieve this the House of Commons shall legislate for the period when fireworks are to be sold and to rework The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997 No 2294) and legislate for the type of firework available to unlicensed individuals and to limit the number of days that these fireworks may be exploded to two named days per national celebration and that the length of each display not exceed 2 hours.

And the petitioners remain etc.

The petition is in the name of Brenda Elridge of Nethermoor road, Tupton, Chesterfield and the other petitioners.

To lie upon the Table.

James Ashley

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

5.6 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): The fatal shooting of the sleeping, naked and unarmed James Ashley at around 4.20 am on 15 January 1998, when five of a group of 25 heavily armed police burst into his Hastings flat, demonstrates the failings of Sussex police, the inadequacy of police accountability and a lack of concern for the bereaved.

A single bullet fired at point blank range by Police Constable Chris Sherwood killed James Ashley, aged 39, as he stumbled out of bed dazed by the light of the torch shone by the raiding police. No arms or drugs were found on the premises, contrary to the information on which authorisation for the raid rested.

Jimmy Ashley's family are my constituents. I have witnessed their deep grief at their loss but that grief has been followed by anger and incredulity that no one has been brought to account for that needless death. Indeed, in the four years since, little has been revealed in the public sphere, little action has been taken, no one has been brought to account for what happened and it looks as if few lessons have been learned.

The Ashleys first heard of Jimmy's killing through chance television and teletext viewing. Indeed, at one stage a neighbour who had been listening to the radio approached them. They heard that someone who answered the description of their son had been shot dead by police in an area of Hastings where they knew their son lived. No name was given at that stage but they suspected that something was wrong.

The family made a series of telephone calls to Sussex police, to coroners and to a range of other individuals and organisations. They were given little information and even less help. They were never officially informed that James Ashley had died and they have never been officially told what happened. It was only after their numerous telephone calls, each striving to access the information that they needed, that they finally established that the dead man was their son and brother.

To make a tragic situation even worse, a few hours after stumbling on the news of Jimmy's death, the family were to hear on television Chief Constable Paul Whitehouse publicly casting false aspersions on Jimmy's character and insisting that his officers had acted properly.

The family made a referral to the Police Complaints Authority. It was after that complaint was made that the PCA commissioned reports into what had happened. Barbara Wilding, then assistant chief constable of Kent constabulary, was asked to investigate, and the late Sir John Hoddinott, then the chief constable of Hampshire police, was asked to produce a report into the chief constable's involvement in what happened. Those reports were produced and delivered to the PCA, which, following its normal procedures, issued letters accepting the adequacy of the reports. Yet neither report has ever been published and neither report has ever been exposed to public scrutiny.

The information in the reports has become known only because there were leaks to the press, specifically to *The Guardian*, which published a detailed article in 2001. I draw on much of the information in the leaked articles for my comments.

[Mrs. Louise Ellman]

It is a matter of importance, for the record, that, to the best of my knowledge, nothing in the reports has been denied. The Wilding report found a complete failure of corporate duty by Sussex police. The Hampshire inquiry concluded that three police officers lied about their intelligence in order to persuade Deputy Chief Constable Mark Jordan to authorise the raid. The report found that the raid was

> "authorised on intelligence that was not merely exaggerated, it was determinably false . . . there was a plan to deceive and the evidence concocted."

That is absolutely damning.

The report also showed that the guidelines on firearms put together by the Association of Chief Police Officers was breached. Experts on firearms and the law told Kent police that even if the intelligence had been correct, the firearms should not have been authorised.

The chief constable was castigated. Sir John Hoddinott concluded that Paul Whitehouse, the then chief constable,

> "wilfully failed to tell the truth as he knew it, he did so without reasonable excuse or justification and what he published and said was misleading."

Sir John found evidence against Deputy Chief Constable Mark Jordan. That included criminal misfeasance and neglect of duty, discreditable conduct and aiding and abetting the chief constable's false statements. There was suggested evidence of collusion between some or all of the chief officers and an arguable case of attempting to pervert the course of justice.

These statements were contained in those investigation reports. The reports have been kept secret—apart from the leaks made to the press—and have never been available for public scrutiny. After four years, it is reasonable to ask what action has been taken in the face of such gross abuses.

I note that there are a number of players in the complaints system for the police, which has relevance when we consider that four years have passed. Those players are the Police Complaints Authority, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Sussex police authority and others. In considering the comments that I am about to make, I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to consider what the role of those key players should have been and where the dereliction of duty lay.

The CPS refused to prosecute senior officers. In May 2001, the presiding judge halted the Old Bailey trial of the police officer who shot James Ashley dead. At a separate trial in Wolverhampton the same month, the officers who planned the raid were acquitted when the CPS offered no evidence, alleging that the depth of corporate failure was too great to make any individual responsible. Two of the officers involved were promoted with backdated pay increases—an insult to the memory of James Ashley and an absolute affront to his bereaved family.

Deputy Chief Constable Mark Jordan was suspended on full pay for nearly three years before being retired permanently on ill-health grounds with a full retirement pension at the age of 43. That enabled him to escape disciplinary procedures, yet, on 21 March 1998, during the debate on the Home Affairs Committee inquiry into police complaints in the aftermath of anger about the consequences of the Hillsborough tragedy, the House was promised that the police would no longer be able to evade disciplinary action in that way. That promise was given to the House in March 1998, yet four years afterwards apparently nothing has happened.

Indeed, the only definitive action has been the resignation of Chief Constable Paul Whitehouse in June 2001. That followed an intervention by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I praise the Home Secretary for his resolute action. His was the first clear action from the Home Office that led to the police having to face up to the consequences of what they had done. In the days that followed the Home Secretary's statement, Paul Whitehouse started to criticise the Home Secretary and queried the legitimacy of his statement, but the result was obtained, and Paul Whitehouse, the chief constable at the time of the shooting, resigned.

During the past two months disciplinary charges have been filed against three police officers. I presume that the hearings that relate to the disciplinary charges will be internal, not a matter for public scrutiny.

What should happen now? It is self-evident that the criminal justice system has failed the Ashleys. I call for the immediate publication of the Hoddinott and Wilding reports and for a full public inquiry into the events that led up to the shooting of James Ashley and in its aftermath, including the handling of the complaints.

Today, by a great coincidence, I have seen a report submitted by Sussex police authority that says that the police inspectorate has carried out an investigation, that 26 recommendations about changes in the way that the Sussex police operate have been made and that many of them have been implemented. However, having read that report, I still find it impossible to ascertain whether all those recommendations have been implemented. Indeed, none of them refer to the need for public scrutiny of what happened on the early morning when James Ashley was shot dead. Nothing in that report tells us how we should overhaul the police complaints system.

In a letter to me dated 27 June 2001, Sir Alistair Graham, the chairman of the Police Complaints Authority, stated:

> "it is not possible to let you have a copy of Barbara Wilding's and John Hoddinott's reports as section 80 of the Police Act 1996 specifically debars us from doing this except in special circumstances".

After four years of non-action, I plead those special circumstances. I specifically reject the explanation passed to me by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 8 January 2002, when I was informed that the reports could not be made public because the Sussex police authority would not agree to it. It cannot be acceptable for a police authority that is in the dock itself to veto action of such great public importance. I do not intend to shoot the messenger, but I castigate the ruling of the police authority.

It is clear from the experience of the shooting of James Ashley and subsequent events that the whole system of police accountability must be overhauled. Scrutiny of that issue and use of police firearms must be improved. The needs of bereaved families must be paramount. No other family must be treated in the uncaring and cavalier fashion suffered by the Ashleys. No police officer should be able to evade disciplinary action by taking early retirement. The promises made to the House in 1998 must be fulfilled.

I applaud the steps taken by my right hon. Friend in responding to my questions and representations in recent months. He was willing to listen to those representations and I was present when he met the Ashley family. I have been impressed by the way in which he listened carefully to the information on the train of events, which beggars belief. I commend him for initiating two new inquiries about which he informed me in responses to written questions. I should be grateful if he could indicate the scope of those inquiries and confirm that all the reports emanating from them will be published and subject to open scrutiny.

Public disclosure of James Ashley's killing will bring some comfort to the Ashleys, whose indefatigable and determined efforts have kept the issue in the public eye. I applaud them. It will also serve a wider public interest. In the past decade, the number of times when police officers have been armed has trebled, from 3,722 to 10,928. Some 57 people have been shot, 24 of whom have died. I am concerned in this debate about the shooting of James Ashley, but questions could equally be asked about Harry Stanley, who was shot in September 1999 when the table leg that he was carrying was mistaken for a sawn-off shotgun, or Andrew Kernan, a mentally ill schizophrenic who was shot dead by police in Liverpool on 13 July 2001. Many others have been shot dead without explanation.

The Ashley case exposes a culture of secrecy and cover-up. The means of investigation have shown themselves to be powerless and ineffective. I made a number of representations to the PCA on behalf of the Ashley family. Although I received sympathetic hearings, I did not feel that my representations were treated with the seriousness and urgency that they deserved. The Police Complaints Authority acted slowly. It may well explain that slowness by reference to the nature of the proceedings in which it is trapped, but I complained more than once that I was not being kept informed about how the inquiries were progressing. When the Police Complaints Authority referred me to other police authorities or to the Crown Prosecution Service, I felt that it was abdicating its responsibility.

It is extremely important that organisations that exist to deal with matters of public interest recognise the important role played by Members of Parliament as public representatives. Members pursue matters of public interest and matters that relate to their constituents. When a Member of Parliament is determined to get to the truth and to secure a satisfactory answer, he or she will not be deterred by a failure to communicate.

Major reform of police accountability is urgently required to ensure that there is justice in the many outstanding cases in which it is believed that there has been wrongdoing by the police, whether that is the ultimate wrongdoing—shooting dead innocent people—or any other kind. That is important also if the public consent that is essential for good policing is to be retained. I call on my right hon. Friend to complete the positive and welcome approach that he has demonstrated in his dealings with me in recent months by acceding to the renewed requests that I have made in this debate.

5.26 pm

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) on obtaining this debate and pay tribute to her continuing interest in the case and her diligence on behalf of the Ashley family. I am grateful for her remarks about my involvement in the case.

I begin by expressing my sympathy to the Ashley family for their loss, as I did when I met them with my hon. Friend last July. The shooting of James Ashley was a tragic mistake. It should not have happened. I sympathise with my hon. Friend in her frustration in trying to understand the circumstances that led to the shooting, why it happened and what has happened since to reduce the chances of such tragic incidents occurring in future. The case has held real frustrations for me as a Minister, particularly as it has not yet been possible to resolve all the understandable concerns of the public and the Ashley family.

It is four years since the shooting of James Ashley by Sussex police officers took place in Hastings. It has taken far longer than is desirable to deal with all the issues arising from that incident. Some are still unresolved, and it has not been possible for the full circumstances to become public knowledge. In responding to my hon. Friend's concerns, I want to refer briefly to the history of the tragic case, to explain what we are doing to improve the way in which such cases will be handled in future, to set out what has been done to restore confidence in the policing of Sussex and to respond to my hon. Friend's request for the establishment of an inquiry.

As my hon. Friend has set out, James Ashley was shot by Sussex police officers in Hastings on 15 January 1998. An investigation was immediately established under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority, and the main investigation into the shooting was carried out by Barbara Wilding, then assistant chief constable of Kent police. Another investigation, into the conduct of senior officers, was led by the late Sir John Hoddinott, then chief constable of Hampshire. It was 12 months before those investigations were completed.

In 1999, four officers were charged with criminal offences. Disciplinary action was taken against the then chief constable, Paul Whitehouse, and other disciplinary charges were brought against the deputy chief constable, who was suspended. Two years later, in April 2001, the officer who fired the fatal shot was acquitted of murder on the direction of the judge.

The senior officers in charge of the operation faced charges of misfeasance in public office, but they were acquitted when the Crown Prosecution Service offered no evidence in light of the acquittal of the police constable. Those three officers currently face disciplinary charges.

After the collapse of the criminal trials, the coroner concluded that he should not hold an inquest, as his findings could not be inconsistent with the outcome of the relevant criminal proceedings. In July 2001, Chief Constable Paul Whitehouse stepped down from operational command of the force; he formally retired in September. A new chief constable has since been appointed. In December 2001, the police authority considered a medical assessment in relation to the deputy chief constable, and resolved that he should be retired on medical grounds.

That sequence of events has created a possibly unique situation. The criminal proceedings were curtailed, but because there is to be no inquest there has been no alternative opportunity for full public scrutiny of the facts of the case. I had therefore hoped that the investigation

[Mr. John Denham]

reports might be disclosed to the Ashley family, but as my hon. Friend says, those reports are the property of the chief constable of Sussex and of the Sussex police authority, and they have concluded after taking legal advice that those reports may not be disclosed.

The case shows serious flaws in the current arrangements for investigation of complaints against the police. Investigations of serious incidents are often complex and difficult, but they take too long. The respective responsibilities of the chief constable, the police authority, the Police Complaints Authority and the investigating officer mean that there is no effective accountability for the conduct of such investigations. The present system leads to excessive secrecy and a lack of involvement by complainants and bereaved families. It is also ineffective in terms of providing a means for lessons to be learned from such cases.

I hope and believe that we are tackling all those problems in the new police complaints system. The Police Reform Bill, which received its Second Reading in another place on 5 February, will establish a much more effective system. That system will be led by the new Independent Police Complaints Commission, which will have a far more powerful roll than the existing PCA.

Any death or serious injury involving the conduct of police officers, and other serious incidents of possible misconduct, will be referred to the IPCC to determine how the case should be investigated. A case of the gravity of the Ashley case would lead to an independent investigation undertaken by the IPCC itself. In such cases it will no longer be the responsibility of the police to investigate themselves. The IPCC will have clear control of and responsibility for the conduct of such investigations, and it will be clearly accountable to Parliament and the public for its work.

The Bill will ensure far more openness in the system. There will be a statutory duty on the IPCC and on the police to keep complainants informed throughout the investigation, and to ensure that they receive a full account of the outcome. That will include allowing the investigation report to be disclosed to the complainant, subject to a sensitivity test.

The IPCC will be able to participate effectively in disciplinary hearings, either presenting the case against an officer or instructing legal representatives to do so. In serious cases, that will ensure that the evidence is presented robustly. The IPCC will also have a statutory responsibility to ensure that the lessons to be learned from the investigation of complaints are disseminated.

The new complaints system will be more independent, more open and transparent, and more effective in ensuring that cases are dealt with speedily. All those improvements are essential to achieve public confidence in the handling of complaints against the police.

Although those future changes do not directly address my hon. Friend's frustration and dissatisfaction with her experience in the Ashley case, I hope that I have been able to reassure her that we are working to reflect the lessons of that case and other unsatisfactory cases in drawing up proposals for the IPCC. By emphasising disclosure, the involvement of complainants and the independence of the process, I hope to construct a system that will not give rise to the same problems as have arisen in the past.

The Police Reform Bill also makes changes to the powers to remove senior officers in appropriate cases. The changes will allow action to be taken much more effectively when the interests of efficiency and effectiveness make it necessary for a chief officer to step down. The circumstances in which such powers might be used will of course be rare, but we need to ensure that effective powers are available where necessary, including powers to require the suspension of a chief officer where that is necessary in the interests of maintaining public confidence.

My hon. Friend will understand that it would not be right for me to comment on the merits of individual cases. In the case of the former deputy chief constable of Sussex, I should put it on record that I have not seen the medical assessment that led the police authority to its decision, and nor would it be right for me to do so. It is worth saying, however, that our general approach to such issues was set out in paragraph 6.46 of the White Paper on police reform. The Government believe that it is unacceptable for sickness or medical retirement to be used as a means of avoiding discipline.

Regulations already allow for disciplinary hearings to go ahead in the absence of the accused. That was the change promised four years ago. However, I have to admit that the power is not used very frequently. So we will provide strong support from the centre for firm management action to proceed with hearings in all but the most exceptional cases.

The problem is not so much with the way the law is constructed, but with the way it is applied in practice. Guidance contains a presumption that completion of disciplinary proceedings should not generally be a reason to delay medical retirement. We intend to change that and will be bringing forward amendments to the central guidance next month. Where medical retirement is at issue, the police authority should consider whether to exercise its discretion not to retire the officer where public interest in completing the proceedings in a misconduct case outweighs the medical condition.

Understandably, the shooting of James Ashley and the subsequent events were damaging to public confidence in the policing of Sussex. The public rightly want reassurance that everything possible is being done to ensure effective policing in the area. That is one reason why I asked the Sussex police authority under section 43 of the Police Act 1996 to produce a formal report. I know that my hon. Friend thinks it a matter of coincidence, but I received that report within the past few days. Indeed, I believe that I read it on Thursday. Despite having received it close to this Adjournment debate, it seemed much better to put it in the public domain before the debate rather than to publish it a few days afterwards. So it has been placed in the House of Commons Library and is in the public domain.

The report sets out the detailed programme of action taken in the force to ensure that its firearms capability meets national standards. Last summer, the firearms capability of the force was subject to detailed scrutiny by a specialist team from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. The inspectorate produced a report that made 26 recommendations. All have been accepted and taken forward, and the force is now in compliance with national policy on the operational use of firearms.

The force was subject to a wider inspection of its performance, beginning in September 2000 and continuing through much of 2001. Her Majesty's inspector has completed his report on the performance of the force, which will be published next month. I anticipate that the report will identify candidly the damage to the operational effectiveness of the force which followed the shooting of James Ashley and the consequent intensive investigations. I can add that Her Majesty's inspector will conclude that the recovery process is now well under way. The report will state:

> "Much remains to be done, but clear progress is discernable, and Sussex Police emerges today as a force that is increasingly both effective and efficient—a more secure conclusion that might have been reached only two years ago."

On the basis of that independent, professional assessment, Sussex police, under its new leadership, is well on the road to recovery. I hope that, despite the fact that, for reasons that are understood, the police authority report has on legal advice omitted certain material that might have been prejudicial to disciplinary hearings, its report, together with the inspector's report, will provide public reassurance, and that the people of Sussex can have confidence in their police service.

Following the investigation report arising from the case, the Association of Chief Police Officers undertook a major revision of the national manual on police operational use of firearms. As my hon. Friend has recognised, I wanted to go further to ensure an independent examination of a number of incidents. That is why I asked the Police Complaints Authority to produce a special report on the lessons to be learned from all recent firearms incidents.

The review will consider the lessons to be learned from investigations supervised by the PCA since January 1998. The PCA will examine all incidents in which shootings by the police resulted in death or injury, with particular regard to the planning, control and conduct of those operations; the way in which the concerns of the bereaved families were addressed, and how they were kept informed of the progress of the investigations—a matter to which my hon. Friend rightly drew attention; and the training and skills needs of police officers involved in such operations, particularly at command level.

The Sussex report to which I referred earlier has already been published. The PCA is due to report in May; its report will be laid before the House and published. As my hon. Friend will recognise from the time scale, it will cover the two further incidents involving two other individuals to which she referred. My other concern is to provide reassurance to members of the Ashley family about why the shooting occurred; I appreciate that so far it has not been possible to meet all their concerns. I shall now set out the position that we have reached and some of the dilemmas.

Disciplinary proceedings are still pending, which makes it impossible for me to comment at this stage on the details of the case. Because the incident occurred such a long time ago, those proceedings will be conducted under the old police discipline regulations, under which the Secretary of State is the appellate authority. I should not express any view on matters which are still to be considered through the disciplinary process. I understand too that the Ashley family are bringing civil proceedings against the force. We are caught in a dilemma; I recognise that it will not be possible fully to satisfy the concerns of the Ashley family without providing them with further information, but disclosure of such information at this stage might make it impossible to proceed with disciplinary action. Against that, I recognise that it will be a considerable time before the disciplinary process is completed.

Similar considerations apply to the question of establishing an inquiry. I would be reluctant to take any action which might make it impossible to conclude the disciplinary process. I must also consider whether an inquiry would help to promote effective policing in Sussex and the restoration of public confidence. A great deal has been, and is being, done to tackle the problems in Sussex; to improve the current system for investigating police complaints; and to ensure that police use of firearms complies with the highest professional standards. I may therefore have reason to doubt whether an inquiry would add anything to that process. But my mind is not closed and, in conclusion, I will reflect carefully on what my hon. Friend has said.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Six o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 12 February 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 26 February.

PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES: OPTIONS FOR REGULATION

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of a Paper, entitled Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Dalmuir Credit Union

1. **Tony Worthington** (Clydebank and Milngavie): If she will make a statement about her visit to Clydebank to open the new premises of Dalmuir credit union. [32332]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): Dalmuir credit union is an excellent example of the success of the credit union movement. Everyone has a right to financial services, which are a key tool in the fight against poverty. At Dalmuir, the Scottish principles of self-help and thrift are plainly to the fore in one of the most successful community credit unions ever.

Tony Worthington: We were grateful to the Secretary of State for coming to open the credit union, which marks the arrival of the credit union movement in a very different way. Since she came, 85 extra members a month have been added to the credit union's membership, which now totals 5,500, and it has share capital of £3.7 million. It is easily the largest community-based credit union in the United Kingdom. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, alongside the universal bank in the Post Office and other Government measures, the credit union is a powerful means of tackling poverty and increasing social cohesion?

Mrs. Liddell: I agree wholeheartedly. Of my many engagements, that visit was probably one of the more successful. I was able to meet people whom I had not seen for quite some time, and the warmth of the response was outstanding. With my hon. Friend, I pay tribute to Rose Dorman, the doyenne of the UK credit union movement. To a large extent, it is her vision that has made that credit union so successful.

The fight against financial exclusion is important. Most Members of Parliament can pay their utility bills by direct debit, thereby reducing their bills, but people who are very poor often do not have bank accounts, so access to financial services is often a guarantee of lower bills. Conservative Members may mock, but they have never had to deal with poverty to the extent that the Government have.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The Secretary of State is right to say that credit unions play a valuable role in protecting ordinary people who are financially disadvantaged from the likes of loan sharks. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) is right to say that Dalmuir credit union is a model. As one of the biggest credit unions in the country, it should be used as an example for others.

The Financial Services Authority has done a lot to protect members, which should encourage people, but although the Scottish Executive have made some quite encouraging statements about developing and supporting credit unions in future, we have not yet seen much of substance. The people of Clydebank would probably benefit from the right hon. Lady's working with her partners in Edinburgh to get further action as soon as possible.

Mrs. Liddell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's general sentiments about the value of credit unions, but it was only a few months ago that, with Jackie Baillie, then the Scottish Minister for Social Justice, I opened another credit union in Edinburgh's Leith area. It is important to recognise that the Scottish Executive and the Government work hand in hand.

The FSA has now taken over responsibility for the regulation of credit unions, and a new wave of regulation comes in from 1 July 2002 to ensure that credit unions have the base of protection that other financial services sector companies have. In addition, the Treasury has just finished a consultation exercise on ways in which the credit union movement can be given further assistance; an announcement will be made shortly.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Scotland's banking sector, which has worked closely with the Government to ensure that we increase banking opportunities for all. The banks have been instrumental in giving a great deal of support to the credit union movement, despite the fact that some in their number regard credit unions as competitors.

BP Grangemouth

2. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): What discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive's Minister for Enterprise regarding the future of BP at Grangemouth. [32333]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): I have regular discussions with all the Executive Ministers on a range of issues, although not all of them appear in my diary. My hon. Friend will be aware that I met BP shortly after its announcement in November to discuss the future.

Mr. Connarty: I am sure that my hon. Friend shares with the people of Grangemouth and the communities of central Scotland the anguish that they felt as 1,000 people were called into the offices of BP's management to be told that, despite the service that they had given, they were now on the scrap heap. I seek an assurance that the ministerial taskforce, which I have been invited to join, and the partnership action for continuing employment group, which has set up an office in my constituency, will focus on making sure that those people are not put on the scrap heap.

When this is all over, will my hon. Friend ensure that that pain and anguish was not for nothing? There is a rumour going around of the impending closure of one UK refinery, which would make the UK a net importer of petrol. Will he fight to ensure that it is not Grangemouth?

Mr. Foulkes: I commend my hon. Friend and his colleague, the Member of the Scottish Parliament for the area, Cathy Peattie, on their assiduous work in defending the interests of their constituents who are working at BP, and all the families involved. I am pleased that my hon. Friend has been able to join the taskforce. I talked to Wendy Alexander about that and other aspects of BP at Grangemouth, and I shall continue to have discussions with her. I have also discussed with the Health and Safety Executive its concerns about Grangemouth, and I am willing to talk to it further if my hon. Friend would find that helpful.

I am surprised by what my hon. Friend says. He will recall from our meeting with BP that the purpose of the downsizing at Grangemouth was to safeguard the remaining jobs in the long term. In the light of what my hon. Friend says, I shall seek a further meeting with BP to discuss the matter.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Given the potential of BP axing 40 per cent. of the work force at Grangemouth and given the problems of job losses in key areas of the Scottish economy, such as Grangemouth, does the Minister share the Secretary of State's complacent view that the Scottish economy is performing well? Will he now take seriously the problems of Scottish industry?

Mr. Foulkes: The House should compare the positive and constructive attitude of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) with that of the Scottish National party. SNP Members remind me of carrion crows. They hover, waiting for a corpse, so that they can pick up some political advantage from it. They will not be able to do that. The latest polls show that Scotland continues to reject the narrow nationalism of the SNP.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): One of the problems that is faced by BP and others is a lack of tradesmen, especially pipe fitters. What representations has my hon. Friend made to the Scottish Executive about the training programme for tradesmen in Scotland?

Mr. Foulkes: That is not a planted question. Heaven forfend. By a strange coincidence, not only did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discuss this issue with Transco, but I discussed it with Wendy Alexander when we met and launched the Clyde taskforce report. We are actively looking into the matter. I shall talk to my hon. Friend about it immediately after questions.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): In these and other discussions, has the Minister made any assessment of what effect Labour's policies of more regulations, higher taxes, excessive fuel duties and oppressive congestion charging will have on the long-term future of BP and the oil industry generally? Is it not crystal clear that the continuation of those policies will lead to ever more job losses in Scotland?

Mr. Foulkes: I invite the hon. Gentleman to come to Scotland. I will take him round and show him some things. He might like to know that there have been substantial new announcements in the oil industry in Scotland. In November, the Department of Trade and Industry gave approval for phase 2 of the Juno field, with 1,200 jobs underpinned, and for the first phase of the Clare field. In January, three new oilfields—Madoes, Mirren and Maclure—were approved. Those are all BP fields. I thought that the SNP Members were bad enough, but the Tories seem to want to trump the SNP in talking down Scotland. We will not let them do that.

Friends of Scotland Initiative

3. **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): How she estimates Scottish tourism will benefit from her recent friends of Scotland visit to the far east. [32334]

7. **Mr. Eric Joyce** (Falkirk, West): What benefits for Scotland's oil and gas industries she expects to derive from her recent visit to the far east. [32338]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): My recent trip to south-east Asia was primarily trade related, but I had a useful meeting with the British Tourist Authority in Hong Kong to discuss how best to market Scotland. I also had many meetings with expatriate Scots and others who are enthusiastic supporters of the friends of Scotland initiative.

While in China I also met senior executives of oil and gas companies in south-east Asia to promote the skills of Scottish-based companies acquired through North sea development. I am confident that there are many opportunities for Scottish companies in south-east Asia.

Mr. Luke: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, and I compliment her on her persistent and persuasive advocacy of Scotland's cause overseas. Does she agree that a vital element in bringing more tourists in from the far east and elsewhere is the creation and establishment of more direct international flights, both long and medium haul, into Scotland's airports. I hope that that will include Dundee airport, once the new departure lounges are completed.

Mrs. Liddell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As he knows, I take a considerable interest in the issue of direct flights, and there has recently been a good response from Scottish airports. At Prestwick, for example, flight numbers are up by 18.6 per cent.; at Glasgow, they are up by 4.3 per cent.; and at Edinburgh, they are up by 10.2 per cent. Much of that is due to the expansion of direct flights by no-frills carriers. My hon. Friend is a persuasive advocate of more direct flights from Dundee airport, and secured an Adjournment debate on the subject. The refurbishment of the airport is important; I hope that with the expansion of the Ryanair fleet by up to 150 new aircraft, and the easyJet fleet by up to 75 new aircraft, there may be more flights from Dundee airport to international destinations.

Mr. Joyce: My right hon. Friend will be aware that BP is a large employer in my constituency. What benefits can her recent visit to the far east bring to companies such as BP, which seek to exploit rising sun opportunities?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The oil and gas industry has many international opportunities, not least BP, which is the biggest British investor in mainland China. Whenever I look at the oil and gas industry, I am always conscious of the skills in the supply chain. I was impressed by a seminar that I addressed in mainland China which was attended by representatives of Scottish companies anxious to access the Chinese gas market. The Chinese Government wish to get more than 2.1 per cent. of their energy mix from natural gas; indeed, they want to get up to 10 per cent. We have the talents, skills and expertise; Scottish companies can benefit from that.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Doubtless, the Secretary of State's efforts in the far east were well supported by the British Tourist Authority. Is she aware that the BTA's recent lead promotional document for overseas tourists, "Hidden Britain", fails to mention or refer to more than 50 per cent. of the land mass of Scotland? Does she concur with the chairman of VisitScotland, who suggested that the BTA be abolished and replaced with a tourism structure more responsive to the needs of devolution? Will she make representations in that regard to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport?

Mrs. Liddell: The BTA has an important job marketing all the United Kingdom. Many people who come here do not come exclusively to visit one particular part of the UK. However, we must maximise our efforts to market Scotland, not just through the BTA, but in many other directions, not least joint corporate activity. It is important to recognise that the "Hidden Britain" map includes a number of Scottish sites. This morning, I learned of the preparation of a new initiative by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for the golden jubilee which will enhance the role that Scotland has played in the history of Her Majesty's 50-year reign and will be an important tool for marketing Scotland in 2002.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the Secretary of State realise how impressed we all were to read that no sooner had she got off the plane from the far east than she was busy hosting Burns suppers before going off to Wales to boost Scottish tourism? Does she accept that the 2.5 per cent. decline in visitor numbers to Scotland last year, compared with a 10 per cent. rise in Ireland, is the result of serious issues such as the high pound, high petrol prices and under-resourced visitor agencies? Will the Government tackle those significant issues affecting Scotland's major industry, or is it just a case of "c'est la vie"?

Mrs. Liddell: There the hon. Gentleman goes again, talking Scotland down. No Government Member takes any lessons about work load from him; he voted in 12 per cent. of Divisions in the last Parliament, and only managed to pass the 50 per cent. mark in this Parliament. I have outvoted every member of the Scottish National party in this Parliament, and shall continue to argue for Scotland in every part of the country and in every part of the world. I shall do so taking pride in Scotland, not talking it down.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Scotland's tourist links with the far east are important, but perhaps even more important are her links with the far west. Recently, Glasgow airport suffered a number of blows, with the withdrawal of many services to and from Canada. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that she will do all that she can to ensure that those direct daily services are resumed as soon as possible?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend has considerable experience of transport matters. There has been a downturn in activity from the United States as a direct consequence of 11 September. It requires much greater involvement on the part of all of us to ensure that direct flights are maintained. In December I hosted a summit of the airline industry in Edinburgh to talk about the future of daily direct flights. There has been some encouraging news since then, but it is essential that both the Government and the Scottish Executive continue to work with the airline industry to improve the number of flights, and in particular that we take every opportunity to market the positive story of Scotland. Only the Government will do that; the Opposition are united in talking Scotland down.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I am glad to see that BAA and Six Continents hotels were represented in the group that travelled with the right hon. Lady to the far east, and I hope that there will be a consequent increase in the number of people visiting Scotland. However, from her busy diary and in an attempt to talk Scotland up, will she give us some idea what engagements she is expecting to attend to boost tourism? Will she confirm that she is no longer seeking to attract inward investment to Scotland, in line with Wendy Alexander's new policy of supporting only indigenous Scottish businesses?

Mrs. Liddell: Once the hon. Lady has rather more experience of Scotland, she may discover that that is not the position of the Scottish Executive. She mentions my diary. I am happy to speak about my diary and the fact that I met a number of businesses in Hong Kong that are anxious to develop in Britain. I was fortunate enough to meet Mr. Li Ka-shing, who has already brought 600 new jobs to Glasgow. I learned this morning that already £1.5 million of new orders have been placed with one Scottish company as a consequence of that visit.

As a Minister, I have found it a great benefit to take time for preparation. Preparation is extremely important. Notwithstanding that preparation, I have managed to vote in 71 per cent. of all Divisions in the House. The hon. Lady has managed only 54 per cent. of Divisions. What has she been doing with her time? Her constituents deserve to know.

Biotechnology Companies

4. **Dr. Ian Gibson** (Norwich, North): What progress has been made in the development of biotechnology companies in Scotland. [32335]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): In biotechnology, Scotland is a world leader. It is a clear success story—the sector is well on track to double in size during the period 1999 to 2003.

Dr. Gibson: My hon. Friend will be aware that the biotechnology industry is notorious for overhyping its achievements. Is not the real picture in Scotland one of small companies, few nominations on the stock exchange, few spin-outs from universities and a lack of Government investment in research and development? The biotechnology industry needs much more investment to reach the standards that we see around one city in England, called Cambridge, or am I wrong?

Mr. Foulkes: I hesitate to call such a distinguished doctor of philosophy wrong, but I think I will. Two of the top three recent biotech private financings in Europe were for Scottish companies: Cyclacel, which is run by a Nobel laureate and is doing fantastic work on cancer, raised £35 million, and Strakan raised £30.5 million. The 30 per cent. growth per annum is almost twice the European average. There are 420 organisations involved in biotechnology in Scotland, 24,400 people are employed by the industry, and there are 37 university departments and research institutes. However, as I am willing to listen and to learn, a week on Friday I have arranged to meet 12 of the leading representatives of the biotechnology industry in Scotland, and I will discuss with them the point raised by my hon. Friend.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): What is the Minister's view of the impact on biotechnology companies and business development in Scotland generally of the massive increase in the burden of regulation that the Government have imposed on business in Scotland? Does he think that that is positive, and that I, like the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), am wrong?

Mr. Foulkes: I have many meetings day after day, week after week, and that is not the first matter that is raised with me by people in Scotland. There are several other important issues. Scotland would not have twice the European average growth in biotechnology if it was over-regulated compared with other countries. If the picture that the hon. Gentleman paints were accurate, we would not have such development in Scotland. Once again, he is trying to pretend something that is not true. Like his Front-Bench colleagues and the Scottish nationalists, he is joining in the chorus of talking Scotland down.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Devolution Issues

26. **Mr. George Galloway** (Glasgow, Kelvin): What devolution issues have been raised in the last month under the Scotland Act 1998. [32357]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): Since 1 January 2002, 19 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me. They all raised points under article 6 of the European convention on human rights, which protects the right to a fair trial.

Mr. Galloway: But has not the Advocate-General considered the extraordinary story of the Scottish police showering Anthony Gauci, the key prosecution witness in the Lockerbie trial, with hunting, shooting and fishing holidays, five-star holidays—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must stop the hon. Gentleman. That matter is sub judice. Under the sub judice rules, the Advocate-General should not respond to that question.

European Court of Justice Cases

27. **Mr. Bill Tynan** (Hamilton, South): If she will make a statement about recent European Court of Justice cases which have had an impact upon Scots law. [32359]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): The European Court of Justice hears a large number of cases every year raising issues of Community law. Because Community law has a binding effect on the laws of member states, depending on the particular facts and circumstances of the case, any such judgments can have an impact on Scots law.

Mr. Tynan: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that comprehensive answer. She will be aware that in Hamilton, South the European Court of Justice is an important and topical subject. How many cases have emanated from Scotland and how many times has she appeared in the European Court of Justice?

The Advocate-General: Very few cases from Scotland have gone to the European Court of Justice. The most recent such case is that of Booker Aquaculture, which concerned a reference from the Court of Session that asked the ECJ for a preliminary ruling on whether the right of property, as recognised by Community law, required that compensation be paid to farmers whose fish had to be destroyed under measures imposed by a Council directive for the control of diseases. Although some of those cases and rulings are highly technical, my hon. Friend is right to think that they are important for his constituents.

I have not yet had the opportunity to appear in the ECJ. I have rights of audience and I hope that a suitable case will arise.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): What criteria does the Advocate-General use for intervention in the Court of Session? She will be aware that in a recent case, the court was moved to criticise the fact that she had neither appeared nor been represented, although she had said that the case involved a matter of some importance in the context of her responsibilities. Precisely what criteria does she use in determining whether she should intervene?

The Advocate-General: In the case to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman refers, one of the judges took a view with which I would beg to differ. The case concerned an interpretation of a United Kingdom statute. The law in Scotland was perfectly plain according to three judges, and the law in England and Wales was perfectly plain according to the House of Lords.

In every case, I have to make a decision on what added value I can give as Advocate-General. I also have to decide whether it would be useful to use public money to extend a case as a result of my intervention. Every case turns on its own merits. I can advise the right hon. and learned Gentleman that I gave detailed consideration to this case before making a decision on intervention. As it happens, I intimated that I wished to consider intervention when I still had time to consider the case. *[Interruption.]* Such matters are complex—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Sometimes complex matters can be brief.

Drugs Misuse

28. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): Pursuant to her oral statement of 15 January, *Official Report*, column 143, by what means she has sought to clarify the position on the laws on the misuse of drugs in England and Wales. [32360]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): In my reply to the hon. Lady last month, I was referring to the devolution issue case of Robert McIntosh, in which I appeared personally before the Privy Council last year. Brief it was not; it took a couple of days at least. The case concerned statutory assumptions as to the source of property, and the compatibility of those assumptions with human rights. The case was relevant to the law of England and Wales, because their legislation makes similar assumptions, which, at the same time, was subject to legal proceedings domestically—the Rezvi and Benjafield cases—and, in the European Court of Human Rights, the Phillips case. I am pleased to report that the Privy Council agreed that the Scottish legislation was compatible with human rights. That was a case in which I determined that it would be helpful to intervene.

Miss McIntosh: As far as I know, Robert McIntosh is no relation of mine. To what extent can the Advocate-General assure the House that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 will continue to be interpreted in the way that it should be in England, Wales and Scotland? What discussions has she had with her opposite number who represents England and Wales in that regard? What added value does she believe that she brings to this process?

The Advocate-General: The McIntosh case helped to clarify the law, particularly when the Privy Council overruled the decision of the Appeal Court in Scotland, which reached a different decision from that in the Benjafield case, for example. I am aware and concerned when similar cases to those in Scotland arise in England and Wales, and I shall take a great interest in Scottish cases to ensure that we reach a satisfactory end result.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Monmouth County Court

33. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If he will make a statement on the proposed closure of Monmouth county court. [32365]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): The Lord Chancellor has authorised the closure of Monmouth county court with effect from 1 April 2002. His decision followed a public consultation process and a detailed evaluation by the court service of the work load, facilities and services provided by courts in that area. Arrangements have been made for weekly hearings to take place in High Trees, a building in Chepstow owned by Monmouthshire county council, which is also used by the magistrates court.

Mr. Edwards: There is great disappointment at the decision to close Monmouth county court, but there is also an acknowledgement that the current facilities in the shire hall are inadequate, and that there is no access for people with disabilities. Given that it is hoped that the shire hall will have a major refurbishment, will my hon. Friend consider returning the county court to that site, if it is in a decent state of repair, so that we can return the administration of justice to Monmouth after centuries of the fine administration of justice there?

Mr. Wills: I can certainly give my hon. Friend some reassurance on that matter. I understand his intense concern, and that of his constituents, and I pay tribute to his campaigning on the matter. Unfortunately, we have not been able to arrange for hearings to be held in Monmouth in the same way that they have been arranged for Chepstow, because, at the moment, we cannot find a suitable venue in Monmouth that fulfils the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—which comes into force in 2004—and that meets the security needs of the judges. Should that situation change and a suitable venue be found, of course we shall review the situation.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): With regard to the closure of Monmouth county court and the Government's policy on court closure across the land, will the Minister bear it in mind that these decisions are sometimes based on figures that suggest a saving, whereas the outcome turns out to be far more expensive, as was the case in Derbyshire, where the Lord Chancellor closed a number of magistrates courts and the cost is now substantially greater?

Mr. Wills: I should be happy to see any detailed figures that the hon. Gentleman would care to provide me with. He is well aware, however, that the closure of magistrates courts is a matter for the magistrates courts committees, which make such decisions in accordance with the needs of their local area, but if he would like to write to me and provide me with more details, I should be happy to consider anything he sends me.

Family Visitor Visas

34. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): If she will make a statement on appeals against refusals of visit visas to family members of UK residents. [32366]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): This Government reinstated the right of appeal against refusals of visitor visas to family members of UK residents on 2 October 2000. In the 14 months since the introduction of the appeal right, the Immigration Appellate Authority received 4,975 appeals, 53 per cent. of which were successful at the adjudicator stage. The review report on the operation of the family visitor appeals scheme will be published shortly.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank the Minister for that reply. The high success rate for appellants in oral hearings—more than 70 per cent. in certain months—suggests that bad initial decisions were taken. What plans does she have to involve adjudicators in preparing information for entry clearance officers to improve the quality of first-stage decisions, so that families need not suffer the distress and expense of appealing against such decisions?

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The review process will examine how the system works from start to finish, and I can assure her that we are working with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to establish the role that entry clearance officers should play and whether improvements can be made. We should also examine the information provided to applicants on first going to entry clearance posts and the advice to them on what information they should provide for those initial decisions.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the Minister take account of the fact that figures published last October, when the Government last made an announcement on the matter, showed a variation in successful appeals? In November 2000, 18 per cent. were successful, but 45 per cent. were successful in July 2001. Will she be good enough to explain how that can happen, and does not such variation demonstrate the need for greater coherence in the way that such decisions are taken and the criteria given to courts to enable them to reach sensible decisions?

Ms Winterton: The whole point of what we are doing is to review the system and all such factors will be taken into account. For example, we are examining the differing success rates of paper and oral appeals. We are looking at the process from start to finish, and as the Home Secretary said last week, the results will be announced shortly. They will take into account the various factors that I have outlined and the issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): In constituencies such as Aberdeen, the full range of family members visit surgeries to discuss such matters, and in that respect I have noticed a difference. A relative who is affluent and owns property in their own country will probably be granted a visa first time, but it is very difficult for someone from an impoverished background to secure a visa, even on appeal. My experience therefore suggests a problem. It is far harder for those from poorer backgrounds to visit this country—they are often automatically rejected because they have no home to return to. Are the Government looking into that issue, and can such discrimination be eliminated from the visa system and the appeals system?

Ms Winterton: The review will examine the way in which the system works and all aspects of it. Of course, legal help is available for people from poorer backgrounds to enable them to challenge initial decisions. None the less, I take on board my hon. Friend's point and I shall liaise with colleagues in other Departments to see whether anything can be done, perhaps through further research into the matter.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the Minister agree that legal help is not always applicable, because the folk concerned cannot get in touch with a particular legal adviser and must chase around from one adviser to another? There is also the reverse problem, which affects people in this country who require visas to visit relatives in other countries. A constituent of mine has a scholarship to go to Africa in March, but is still waiting for a visa. Every time we contacted the authorities, we were told, "We will sort it out as soon as we can and when everything is complete." However, they told us as long ago as last November that everything was indeed complete. Nevertheless, there is still no visa.

Ms Winterton: If the hon. Gentleman writes to me about the case he has raised, I will certainly look into it.

Legal assistance can be channelled through the applicant's sponsor, which should make it easier for the applicant to gain access to such assistance. The sponsor's circumstances as well as those of the applicant will be taken into account.

Magistrates (Warrington)

36. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What progress has been made in appointing more people from the Warrington, North constituency to the magistracy in Warrington. [32370]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): There is no shortage of magistrates on the Warrington Bench; neither is there a shortage of magistrates from the Warrington, North constituency. However, there has been a slight decline in the number of magistrates from Warrington, North, from 59 per cent. of the total in 1997 to 57 per cent. now.

The local advisory committee is finding it harder to encourage people to put themselves forward to be magistrates in the Warrington area than in other areas of Cheshire. It has been working closely with the council and the press in an effort to encourage more people in the area to put themselves forward. Any help my hon. Friend can give will be warmly welcomed.

Helen Jones: The problem in my constituency is recruitment from the poorer areas, which suffer the most crime. Is it not vital to the administration of justice for such areas to have representation on the Bench? Will the Minister consider running pilot projects to encourage people from those areas to apply, and also to help them with the interviewing process—or to establish why they do not get through the process when they do apply?

Mr. Wills: The Department is deeply sensitive to those important points. We will shortly launch a national recruitment strategy that will take them all into account. I look forward to working with colleagues on these matters, and to making progress.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I note that it is as difficult to find people with low incomes who are prepared to serve as magistrates in Warrington as it is to find such people elsewhere. It is very important for us to have a representative lay magistracy. Is the Department considering paying magistrates a reasonable sum, in Warrington and elsewhere, and appointing them for a period of, say, 10 years, which would not be renewable?

Mr. Wills: Of course we must take account of financial loss when recruiting magistrates, and we do take it seriously, but there is no pressing evidence that potential magistrates are being deterred by financial hardship. There is nevertheless a great deal of concern about the issue, and we are looking into it. If it became apparent that there was a real, widespread problem, we would of course consider what research was needed to get to the bottom of it and what action should subsequently be taken.

Obviously we shall look at all possible options for increasing diversity on the bench, in the context of our national recruitment strategy; but I fear that the hon. Gentleman's proposed option of fixed terms may not be our first port of call.

Courthouse, Colchester

37. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): When he expects work to start on building the new courthouse at Colchester. [32371]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): It is planned that the work should start in early to mid-2004.

Bob Russell: There is grave concern about the possibility that the introduction of the private finance initiative will cause the company involved to be more interested in profit than in the prestige of the building. Can the Minister assure us that the PFI courthouse will be a building of which we can be proud, rather than just a profit generator for the company running it?

Mr. Wills: As the hon. Gentleman's rhetoric suggests, he is well aware of the truth. The idea is to produce a new courthouse for Colchester, and a number of new courthouses throughout the country. No new courthouses have been built since 1992. The Department is currently supporting the building of 12 new courthouses, and I think that that is something of which we can all be proud.

As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, the start of work on his courthouse will depend on the completion of the outline business case and, critically in the context of his question, on a demonstration on the basis of the public sector comparator that the project represents value for money. That is the key: value for money.

Criminal Courts (Reorganisation)

38. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): What estimates his Department has made of the costs of the proposals by Lord Justice Auld for reorganisation of the criminal courts in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [32373]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): Estimates of costs will be made in the light of decisions that will be taken following the consultation on the report of Lord Justice Auld, which ended on 31 January. As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, these decisions have not yet been taken and the Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the patent confusion that exists, as we know from information found in a pub off St. James's park, what is driving the Government's response to the Auld report? Is it cost savings or the interests of justice?

Mr. Wills: As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, our response to the Auld review is driven by our manifesto commitments and the results of the very wide consultation that we have just finished.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

The President of the Council was asked—

Royal Prerogative

43. **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): What consideration he is giving to bringing the operation of the royal prerogative under parliamentary scrutiny. [32380]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The royal prerogative is usually exercised by Ministers or on their advice. Ministers are accountable to Parliament for their decisions, but I am always open to constructive ideas on strengthening scrutiny.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am rather disappointed with my right hon. Friend's reply. Given his reforming zeal to make the Executive accountable to Parliament, I had hoped that, at the very least, the absolute power of kings, transferred to the absolute power of Ministers, would finally be brought to public account. Will my right hon. Friend bring forward proposals to ensure that every decision taken under the royal prerogative by the Prime Minister or any other Minister is openly and immediately reported to the House, open to debate and open to a vote before it can be taken to its completion? That would be a start in ensuring that democracy in Britain really works and that the Executive are accountable to the elected representatives of the people.

Mr. Cook: I am sorry that my hon. Friend is disappointed. I thought that I had crafted an open and welcoming answer on which my hon. Friend could build. I repeat that Ministers are accountable to this place. There can be no question of the Prime Minister or any other Minister of the Crown acting under the royal prerogative in a way that is unacceptable to the House of Commons. They would be very quickly brought to book by the House, and rightly so.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Is the Leader of the House aware of the growing concern about the use of the royal prerogative by Ministers, particularly the Prime Minister? In view of almost daily revelations about lobbying, favours and cash for coronets, will the Leader of the House consider the introduction of an ethical Question Time so that we can look at the moral ethics of Ministers when they use the royal prerogative?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure quite how that supplementary arises from the matter in hand. We had extended discussions on party funding in the last Parliament. It was, after all, this Government who introduced legislation to make sure that party funding is transparent, open and accountable and can be received only by those in Britain. We are pleased with what we have done to clean up the act of party funding. It is a matter of great regret that Conservative Members did nothing about it in their 18 years of power.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The Prime Minister's considerable powers rest largely on the royal prerogative. Why does he refuse to appear before the Select Committee on Public Administration to account for the decisions that he takes under those prerogative powers? I ask my right hon. Friend to intercede with the Prime Minister, ask him to break with precedent and come before the Public Administration Committee, where we will give him a gentle ride.

Mr. Cook: I am greatly encouraged by my hon. Friend's reference to a gentle ride. [illegible] sure that we can build on that for the future in his relations with the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet.

As my hon. Friend rightly says, there is a clearly established precedent. No Prime Minister has ever appeared before any Select Committee, and it is difficult to see where it would stop once the Prime Minister had appeared before any one Select Committee. However, I remind my hon. Friend that the Prime Minister comes here every week for Question Time. Indeed, he has a better record of attendance at Question Time than either of his two predecessors.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Leader of the House was asked—

Westminster Hall

44. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): If he will encourage the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to review the layout of the Chamber in Westminster Hall. [32381]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): The Modernisation Committee has to consider the Westminster Hall experiment in the course of this Session, and will gladly consider any representations that hon. Members wish to make about the layout of the Chamber, or any other matter.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, but I wish to encourage the Committee to consult more widely among Members. Other people may have shared my sense of surprise when, following an intervention from a Member—admittedly, a very senior one—the layout of Westminster Hall was suddenly changed. Many of us felt that the original layout was greatly preferable, and I want to ensure that there is proper consultation before we get stuck with the present arrangements.

Mr. Twigg: I understand that many Members preferred the original arrangement, on the grounds that it provided for a more consensual approach to debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Many other Members clearly prefer the current arrangements. Both the original and the present arrangements were part of an experiment and, through the Modernisation Committee, we shall have the opportunity to review both parts of that experiment before deciding how to take things forward.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the Minister accept that, partly because of its layout, Westminster Hall has been a triumphant success? *[Interruption.]* That is true despite the misgivings of a tiny minority of Conservatives—in fact I think that it is now a minority of one. The success is largely due to the more consensual atmosphere that has developed, and the fact that all Members can hold Ministers to account in Westminster Hall. Does the Minister think that there may be some lesson to be learned about the layout of this Chamber, which is clearly out of date and presents the entirely anachronistic fiction of a two-party confrontational conflict, which is no longer the case in the 21st century?

Mr. Twigg: I shall tread carefully in answering that question; I do not know whether the Liberal Democrats are offering to sit in the Gallery, but we do not have a great deal of spare space in this Chamber at the moment. I welcome the fact that the Conservative party appears to have changed its mind about Westminster Hall; I understand from press reports today that it now accepts the idea. When Westminster Hall was first proposed, the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), described it as a godforsaken sideshow.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Twigg: The right hon. Gentleman is nodding. He appears not to have changed his mind, but I understand that many other Conservative Members have changed theirs.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): As the number of requests from Back-Bench Members for Adjournment debates in Westminster Hall is now much larger than the number of available slots, will my hon. Friend also consider the possibility of recommending an increase in the time available there, to reflect the clear popularity of the innovation among Members?

Mr. Twigg: In the memorandum that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House submitted to the Modernisation Committee shortly before Christmas, he set out plans for providing more opportunities for shorter debates, both on the Floor of the House and elsewhere. I am sure that the Select Committee will bear my hon. Friend's representations in mind as its work proceeds.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): It is extremely dangerous to disagree with the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), but may I do so? As one of those who has the duty of chairing sittings in Westminster Hall, I believe that the current layout is extremely satisfactory, not only for Members but also for the many visitors, the staff and the Government advisers who serve Ministers. Will the Minister accept it from me that with the current layout it is much easier to identify Members, which is important to ensure that Members of all parties have the opportunity to participate in the excellent debates in Westminster Hall, which has been a great success?

Mr. Twigg: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his work in chairing debates in Westminster Hall. Certainly the intervention that he has made today, drawing on his experience, will be taken into account, along with what my hon. Friends have said.

Information and Communications Technology

45. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): What plans he has for a fuller utilisation of information and communications technology in processes of the House of Commons. [32382]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I hope that the House will make full use of ICT in its work. I understand that the Information Committee is to undertake an inquiry into the use of ICT, and I hope that we can draw upon its work.

David Taylor: Does the Minister agree that the wholesale abstention by younger voters in June 2001 was at least partly rooted in their sense of detachment from an institution widely seen as mired in an era of quill pens and hansom cabs? Does he believe that there is potential for e-democracy to reconnect this place with the electorate, by promoting and improving the consultation with them on the matters that we debate?

Mr. Twigg: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, although I suspect that he has not yet persuaded the shadow Leader of the House. Clearly, we face a serious challenge in reconnecting young people with politics. As my hon. Friend may be aware, there is now a Cabinet committee on e-democracy. It will address many of the issues that have been raised. I am delighted to say that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House chairs that committee.

Electronic Voting

46. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What proposals he plans to make to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on electronic voting in Divisions. [32383]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): In my memorandum on modernisation, I posed the question whether views in the House on electronic voting had changed since hon. Members were consulted in the previous Parliament. I stressed in the memorandum that any acceptable form of electronic voting must require hon. Members to attend the Division in person, but that electronic voting could have the advantage of removing the need for multiple Divisions.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the Leader of the House for that reply. Does he agree that one reason why Opposition Members value voting in person is that it is the one time of day when we can be sure of meeting as many of our colleagues and senior spokesmen as possible? Much can be carried out when we all know that we will meet at one place and one time. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that that view is shared by Labour Members, or are Government Back Benchers and Ministers rather more reluctant to meet than their shadow counterparts?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that insight into why Opposition Members prefer the present voting system. Given the present size of the official Opposition, I think that there are a number of halls in the building that could now accommodate them.

Of course, the fact that hon. Members all come together at Division time is very important and valuable for the cohesion of the House, and for the parties represented here. I respect that, and that is why electronic voting would have to be introduced on the basis that hon. Members would vote in person. However, are Opposition Members really content with a system whereby three or four Divisions during a debate that is subject to a programme motion can mean that more than an hour is lost that could otherwise be used for debate and scrutiny?

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I accept all the important points that my right hon. Friend has made about electronic voting. Even though party Whips might not like the idea, does he also accept that we should consider whether any electronic system should be able to record an abstention?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an important element of the debate. Indeed, the Modernisation Committee examined the subject in the previous Parliament and posed the same question. Plainly, the more modern and flexible the House is when it comes to voting systems, the more options are available. I still have an open mind on the question, but I believe that the House should be willing to explore ways in which we might make a modest advance in the way that we vote, which at present is based on the principle of the sheepfold.

Prime Minister's Question Time

47. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What representations he has received on the alteration of timing of questions to the Prime Minister. [32384]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has had many discussions on his proposals for reforming the hours of this House, and those consultations will continue.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful for that elegant reply. I wish to make a plea on behalf of those hon. Members who represent constituencies in the north of country. Will the Government oppose any proposal to move Prime Minister's Question Time to a slot before lunch, such as 12 noon or earlier? Many constituents have to travel a long way to attend Prime Minister's Question Time, which is now held on only one day each week. It would be extremely regrettable if further obstacles were put in their way in that respect.

Mr. Twigg: The aim of the proposed reforms is to increase the effectiveness of the House as a whole, and to ensure that all hon. Members benefit, irrespective of the location of their constituencies. I understand the hon. Lady's concerns as they might apply to the start time on a Monday, which we are not proposing to change, or to our finish time on a Thursday or Friday. [HON. MEMBERS: "For visitors."] I understand that the hon. Lady's question had to do with constituents. Constituents will want to visit the House at many different times during the week, and that is a factor that must be borne in mind. We propose that the House's hours on Wednesday mirror those on Thursday. It is fair to say that constituents are still able to visit the House on a Thursday, and that the experiment with the hours on Thursday has proved to be very successful. *[Interruption.]* Clearly, not all hon. Members share that view. The debate will continue in the Modernisation Committee, and it will come back to the House once that Committee has reached a view.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was asked—

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

49. **David Winnick** (Walsall, North): To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on progress in appointing the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [32386]

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on 6 February 2002, the House of Commons Commission has nominated for the post Mr. Philip Mawer, at present the Secretary General of the General Synod of the Church of England and Secretary General of the Archbishop's Council. That nomination is subject to the approval of the House, and the Leader of the House has indicated that the motion will be before the House tomorrow, 13 February.

David Winnick: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but will he confirm that the existing Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Elizabeth Filkin, carried out her duties in a conscientious way and was impartial in investigating cases? Is he aware that many of us, certainly myself, believe that she has been, in effect, fired for carrying out her duties in that way? She has been a splendid public servant and it is most unfortunate that she is leaving in such circumstances.

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his opinion, but I do not share it. I refer him to the nomination paper that will be before the House tomorrow when the motion is moved to appoint her successor. At paragraph 5, it says:

> "The House of Commons Commission would like to record its appreciation of Ms Filkin's dedication to work of the House. She has successfully brought a number of complex inquiries to a conclusion. Coupled with the Standards and Privileges Committee's consideration of reports presented to them, her work has fully validated the system of parliamentary self-regulation established following the recommendation of the first Nolan report."

That is decidedly the view of the House of Commons Commission.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise a point of order, of which I have given you notice, in connection with a private notice question from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) last week. In column 748, the Foreign Secretary helpfully replied to my question by referring to the treaty of Utrecht, which, as hon. Members will recall, was drawn up in 1713. The House of Commons Library has helpfully furnished me with a copy of the treaty, which is in the original French.

I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker, as a number of right hon. and hon. Members will seek to debate the treaty in future. Are we allowed to quote liberally from the French version or do we have to request an official English translation?

Mr. Speaker: I draw the attention of the hon. Lady to "Erskine May", page 371, which states:

> "Speeches must be made in English, but quotation in another language has been allowed on occasion, though a translation should be provided."

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. No one would have any objection to quotations, but it might be useful to have a translation of the whole treaty in the Library, since one of the things that it does is to exchange Gibraltar for Florida. If we are to reopen negotiations, we could perhaps consider having Florida back.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady has a point.

Waiting Time for Discharge From Hospital

3.33 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide an upper limit on the time that a person who is ready in all respects for discharge must wait before leaving an acute hospital.

On 4 July last year, the Prime Minister told hon. Members that

> "bed blocking is probably the most urgent problem that we face in the national health service."—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 259.]

According to the latest figures available—I have just been sent them—bed blocking has not got any better, nor has it stayed the same; it has got worse. Rather like Robespierre, the Prime Minister sees a wrecker around every street corner. His remarks on wrecking completely mystified those of us who have worked in the public services.

My Bill is constructive, for it deals with a situation that touches the lives of so many constituents as patients, carers and members of the caring professions. It sets a standard to which I believe no Government or no hon. Member could reasonably object.

"Bed blocker" is a horrible, pejorative term, but it has something of an advantage over the alternative term, delayed discharge, because it conveys something of the awfulness of what is going on.

The national beds inquiry found:

> "At least two out of every 10 days spent by people aged over 65 in acute hospital beds could be better provided in alternative facilities such as intermediate care beds."

But all health statistics come with a health warning these days, for there are as many ways of tweaking the figures as there are hon. Members. Some bright spark recently realised that if the wheels were taken off a hospital trolley, it became a hospital bed and there were no more trolley waits. So it is better, then, to rely on the press. Indeed, it is thanks to the *Daily Mail* that the Government had to concede in October that, during the year, there had been more than 680,000 elderly bed blockers.

Our dear old friend the postcode lottery pops up to produce a huge disparity across the country and even between localities served by individual trusts. For example, the Royal United hospital, Bath, finds it more difficult to discharge my constituents than it does to discharge people from other districts. People wait to get out, so people have to wait to get in. The Prime Minister was forced to admit during last week's questions that the number of operations that had been cancelled has risen substantially since 1997, and it now emerges that that number has risen as a proportion of operations performed.

Last week, a London consultant told me that bed blocking was so bad in his hospital that patients regularly have to sleep on the floor. In the 21st century in Britain, patients are sleeping on hospital floors. Those of us with first-hand experience as in-patients will know full well that life on a hospital ward is unsettling whether or not people are fortunate enough to have a bed—for the elderly, that would be a gross understatement.

Hospitals cannot always cure people; they cannot always make them feel much better, but at least they can ensure that they do them no harm. Busy hospitals are

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

dangerous, profoundly unsatisfactory places for elderly patients to be for a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. The consequences of delayed discharge—hospital-acquired infection, deep vein thrombosis and bed sores—may seem like small beer to the fit and healthy specimens in the Chamber, but they represent the grim reaper for many debilitated patients.

The Government will say that they are working hard to tackle bed blocking, but before we get too excited about increased funding, we should note that the King's Fund thinks that activity has actually declined, and the reason, very largely, is that the system is all blocked up. In response, the Government have tipped a wheelbarrow of extra cash on to social services, but the National Care Homes Association has said that that money represents little more than a sticking plaster.

The Health Act 1999 made my Bill possible. My cue lies with the increased flexibility as between health and social services that it introduced, but experience from Northern Ireland suggests that it is unlikely that the joint working arrangements that the Act encourages will alone magic away bed blocking. Funding increases for the national health service have far outstripped social services. Logically, that should drive up in-patient activity, but what happens downstream? The balance is clearly wrong, as the King's Fund has pointed out.

The bed blocking Bill would make two assumptions: first, that patients who are ready for discharge are better off supported in their own homes or in homely settings in the community; and secondly, that insufficient community care and support is the greatest single impediment to timely discharge. The Bill would facilitate a model based on the Swedish approach to delayed discharges. That hugely successful innovation provides for cash transfers and penalties between agencies to achieve bed blocking targets.

Bed blocking is not just the result of finite resources; it is the result of the resources being used inappropriately. My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) revealed that it costs £1,630 to have someone in hospital for a week and £319 for a week in a care home. Where is the sense in that?

The wait for admission is resource dependent, but the wait for discharge need not be, and both would be eased by a Bill that sets a maximum wait beyond an agreed discharge date. The date would be agreed by the relevant agencies on a case-by-case basis and would be supported by the cross-transfer of funds. This is such a reasonable measure that hon. Members who seek to wreck it will have a great deal of explaining to do in their constituencies, and I am very sure that there are no wreckers in this place. I ask the House to support my bed blocking Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Dr. Andrew Murrison, Dr. Richard Taylor, Mr. Mark Hoban, Mr. John Butterfill, Mr. Hugo Swire, Mr. Gerald Howarth, Mr. John Horam, Mr. Peter Duncan and Mr. Robert Key.

Waiting Time for Discharge From Hospital

Dr. Andrew Murrison accordingly presented a Bill to provide an upper limit on the time that a person who is ready in all respects for discharge must wait before leaving an acute hospital: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 April, and to be printed [Bill 93].

Orders of the Day

Employment Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 6

COMPLAINTS ABOUT GRIEVANCES

'(1) This section applies to the jurisdictions listed in Schedule [*Tribunal jurisdictions to which section* [*Complaints about grievances*] *applies*].

(2) An employee shall not present a complaint to an employment tribunal under a jurisdiction to which this section applies if—

(a) it concerns a matter in relation to which the requirement in paragraph 6 or 9 of Schedule 2 applies, and

(b) the requirement has not been complied with.

(3) An employee shall not present a complaint to an employment tribunal under a jurisdiction to which this section applies if—

(a) it concerns a matter in relation to which the requirement in paragraph 6 or 9 of Schedule 2 has been complied with, and

(b) less than 28 days have passed since the day on which the requirement was complied with.

(4) An employee shall not present a complaint to an employment tribunal under a jurisdiction to which this section applies if—

(a) it concerns a matter in relation to which the requirement in paragraph 6 or 9 of Schedule 2 has been complied with, and

(b) the day on which the requirement was complied with was more than one month after the end of the original time limit for making the complaint.

(5) In such circumstances as the Secretary of State may specify by regulations, an employment tribunal may direct that subsection (4) shall not apply in relation to a particular matter.

(6) An employment tribunal shall be prevented from considering a complaint presented in breach of subsections (2) to (4), but only if—

(a) the breach is apparent to the tribunal from the information supplied to it by the employee in connection with the bringing of the proceedings, or

(b) the tribunal is satisfied of the breach as a result of his employer raising the issue of compliance with those provisions in accordance with regulations under section 7 of the Employment Tribunals Act 1996 (c. 17) (employment tribunal procedure regulations).

(7) The Secretary of State may for the purposes of this section by regulations—

(a) make provision about the application of the procedures set out in Part 2 of Schedule 2;

(b) make provision about what constitutes compliance with paragraph 6 or 9 of that Schedule;

(c) make provision about circumstances in which a person is to be treated as having complied with paragraph 6 or 9 of that Schedule;

(d) make provision for paragraph 6 or 9 of that Schedule to have effect in such circumstances as may be specified by the regulations with such modifications as may be so specified.

(8) The Secretary of State may by order—

(a) amend, repeal or replace any of subsections (2) to (4);

(b) amend Schedule [*Tribunal jurisdictions to which section [Complaints about grievances] applies*];

(c) make provision for this section to apply, with or without modifications, as if—

(i) any individual of a description specified in the order who would not otherwise be an employee for the purposes of this section were an employee for those purposes, and

(ii) a person of a description specified in the order were, in the case of any such individual, the individual's employer for those purposes.

(9) Before making an order under subsection (8)(a), the Secretary of State must consult the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

(10) In its application to orders under subsection (8)(a), section 51(1)(b) includes power to amend this section.'.—*[Alan Johnson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.41 pm

The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment (a) to the proposed new clause, in line 43, leave out subsections (8) to (10).

Government amendments Nos. 47, 48 and 52.

Government new schedule 1—*Tribunal jurisdictions to which section [Complaints about grievances] applies.*

Alan Johnson: Clause 33 contains general powers for the Secretary of State to introduce regulations preventing complaints from being presented to tribunals before all or part of the relevant statutory procedures have been followed. It is an important clause that is designed to ensure that complaints are first raised internally before being taken to a tribunal. It also has implications for access to the tribunal system.

In Committee, I explained in detail how we planned to use these powers. I explained how we intended to set several simple criteria that tribunals would apply when deciding whether to admit a complaint. Given the issue's importance, I consider, on reflection, that there are advantages to providing more detail about the policy in primary legislation, which should narrow the role for secondary legislation. I am sure that hon. Members will appreciate the benefits of including more detail in the Bill.

Let me proceed by describing how the new clause works. As I said, its main purpose is to set new admissibility criteria that tribunals will apply to certain categories of complaints brought by employees. The criteria are set out in subsections (2), (3) and (4) of the new clause. I should mention first that the criteria would apply only in relation to tribunal complaints arising out of grievances. They would have no application to complaints arising out of disciplinary action.

There are three criteria. First, the employee must have completed step one of the statutory grievance procedure. That means that the employee must have set out the grievance in writing and sent a copy to the employer. Secondly, 28 days or more must have passed since step one had been completed. That minimum 28-day period gives time for the parties to discuss the grievance and try to resolve the problem. The third criterion deals with the special case in which an employee may have failed to meet the other criteria with an initial application. For example, the employee may have failed to send the step one letter to the employer. We do not want to deny the

[Alan Johnson]

employee access to the tribunals in such circumstances. Instead, the employee would be given another chance to submit a valid application. That would often involve extending the normal period for making applications to tribunals, using the powers under clause 32.

We want to ensure, however, that the grievance is quickly brought to the employer's attention during any extended period. That should ensure that recollection of the events surrounding the grievance remains fresh. We therefore stipulate in subsection (4) that the step one action must have been completed within a period of no more than a month after the normal period for making applications to tribunals has ended. For most jurisdictions, the normal period for bringing complaints is three months. For those jurisdictions, the third criterion means that the step one action needs to be taken within four months of the event that gave rise to the grievance.

New schedule 1 to the new clause lists the jurisdictions to which the admissibility regime was intended to apply. However, the criteria will not apply to unfair dismissal, other than to cases involving constructive dismissal, because dismissal is a disciplinary matter. We also think that with the exception of constructive dismissal, the criteria should not apply to ex-employees. That exclusion will be covered by regulations under subsection (7) of the new clause. The regulations will also define those particular cases—extreme bullying and the threat of violence—in which an employee should not be obliged to complete even step one of the grievance procedure.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Why is it unreasonable for an employee to complete step one even in such extreme cases? After all, it only involves writing a letter, which is hardly intimidating in any circumstances.

Alan Johnson: It depends on the circumstances. It would be wrong to insist that an employee write to an employer in cases involving, for instance, serious violence against an employee by an employer or racial or sexual harassment. We should not force the employee in those circumstances to open up a dialogue with the employer. However, that will be dealt with in regulations and those are subject to consultation.

The criteria are simple to understand and it should be relatively easy for tribunals and the parties to ascertain whether they have been met. There is limited scope for parties to dispute whether a case should be admitted. In most cases, there will be no need for tribunals to hold preliminary hearings to assess compliance.

Subsection (8) of the new clause gives the Secretary of State an order-making power to change the admissibility criteria if necessary. It is prudent to take that power in case experience shows that the criteria need to be amended. Subsection (9) requires the Secretary of State to consult the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service before exercising the power. The power also allows us to extend the regime to non-employees if necessary.

Amendments Nos. 47 and 48 deal with consequential matters. Amendment No. 47 ensures that clause 32, which is on time limits, includes a necessary reference to the new schedule. Amendment No. 48 deletes clause 33 and amendment No. 52 makes a consequential change to clause 51.

The group of amendments greatly improves the Bill and makes our intentions plain. It constructs a workable and sensible admissibility regime to ensure that most grievances are aired before they are taken to tribunals. The regulations will build in safeguards to ensure access to justice.

Mr. Hammond: I declare an interest as an employer. I hope that we will hear very full declarations of interest from hon. Members on both sides of the House either as employers or as recipients of the largesse of trade unions, in the form of sponsorship of their constituency parties.

As the Minister said, the purpose of the new clause is to include in the Bill—

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Gentleman invites hon. Members to declare an interest. That is a reasonable request and I am a member of a trade union. However, as there is no such thing as sponsorship, will you clarify whether it is necessary for members of trade unions to declare an interest?

Mr. Speaker: If a matter is recorded in the register, it should be declared. If it is not, it is up to hon. Members to decide what to do. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hammond: Thank you for that ruling, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, following recent clarifications of the rules, it is not necessary for hon. Members to list sponsorship of their constituency parties in the register. However, as we will discuss amendments and new clauses that are a clear and well established part of the Trades Union Congress agenda, it will help people who are interested in the debate to know whether the hon. Members who propose them—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When those matters are before the House, hon. Members will decide what to do. At the moment, we are debating new clause 6 and the associated amendments, and the hon. Gentleman should stick to that subject.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to you, as ever, Mr. Speaker, for your guidance.

As the Minister advised the House, new clause 6 includes in the Bill measures that would otherwise have been provided in regulations under clause 33, which is now deleted. It is interesting that the Government have chosen to include in the Bill detailed procedures that would otherwise have been introduced by regulation. Many clauses leave matters to be disposed of by regulation, and the Government have chosen this one clause for special treatment—removing the regulation-making power and adding a fairly lengthy new clause that spells out in detail the procedure to be followed.

Interestingly, in its briefing to members of the Standing Committee the TUC suggested that it expected the Government to table amendments to clause 33. Conservative Members were somewhat surprised that no such amendments were forthcoming in Committee, but it seems that the TUC was ahead of Parliament in knowing the Government's intentions, and their agenda—or perhaps I should say the TUC's agenda—has now been revealed.

In Committee, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members urged the Government to reveal the details of the regulations that would arise from many clauses; so will the Minister explain why the provisions in clause 33 need to be spelled out while others do not?

Grouped with the new clause is new schedule 1, which is an interesting device because, subject to a minor amendment that the Government will move later, it is identical to schedule 3. The only plausible explanation is that the Government intend, at some point in the future, to amend one or other of the schedules through regulation so that different jurisdictions apply to two different parts of the Bill. That is an unsatisfactory way for a Government to proceed.

The original decision—that it would not be necessary for an employee to have gone through the entire statutory grievance procedure before being able to bring a case before a tribunal—was a concession to lobbying from the trade union movement. That is clear from the briefing that the TUC put out for Second Reading and to the Committee. Now, an employee will have had only to write a letter to his employer outlining his grievance and then to wait 28 days before instigating proceedings in a tribunal. It is not clear to Conservative Members that that will have the effect claimed by the Government of significantly reducing the number of cases that come before tribunals.

I should like to probe the Minister a little further on the provision in the new clause for the Secretary of State, by regulation, to exclude certain classes of case from the requirement to have taken the first step. As I told the House in my intervention on the Minister, the first step consists only of writing a letter. I find it difficult to imagine a case in which the obligation to write a letter to one's employer outlining the grievance was so traumatic that it would be better to provide that the employee shall go straight to an employment tribunal.

I can understand how the provision got into the Bill. The original thinking was that the complete statutory procedure would have to be gone through before recourse to an employment tribunal, so there would of course be cases in which a face-to-face confrontation between employer and employee would be inappropriate—for example, in cases involving violence or allegations of sexual harassment. However, I am unable to think of a single substantial class of case in which it would be inappropriate to impose on the employee a requirement only to write a letter. I shall be grateful if the Minister, using the considerable resources of ingenuity available to him, comes up with at least one convincing example, so that the House can understand the need for the power to exclude.

The matter is causing employers' organisations some degree of concern. That concern flows from a fact that will be a recurring theme this afternoon: that the Government are under obvious pressure from trade unions to concede yet more. Every time the Secretary of State is given a power by regulation to concede the agenda of the TUC, there is a danger that further concessions will be made in the wider horse trading that apparently goes on between the Government and the TUC.

The Opposition are concerned that a loophole is built into new clause 6 and that the Bill including new clause 6 will not have the impact that the Government desire, in terms of reducing the number of tribunal cases. We are aware of the need to monitor the effectiveness of the provisions to ensure that they deliver the benefit for which the Government, employers and responsible trade unions hope—of reducing the number of cases that go to employment tribunals without those involved even embarking on existing in-work procedures for dispute resolution.

I wish to draw the House's attention to new clause 6(6). The procedure outlined therein departs from, or goes beyond, what the Minister described to the Committee. Subsection (6)(a) is unlikely to apply: it is unlikely that an employee will bring to a tribunal a case in which the information that he lays is such as to disqualify him from bringing it on the face of the facts. Subsection (6)(b), if I understand the provision correctly, places on the employer the responsibility for drawing the employment tribunal's attention to the fact that the employee has failed to go through the correct procedures under the statutory procedure laid down in schedule 2.

Will the Minister clarify whether an employer's failure to draw the tribunal's attention at the appropriate point to the failure of the employee to exhaust, or at least embark on, the statutory procedure will preclude that matter being dealt with at a later stage? In other words, if the employer—perhaps through ignorance: he may be a small business man who is unfamiliar with the now increasingly complex body of law—fails to draw the tribunal's attention at the appropriate point during consideration of procedural matters to the fact that the employee has not written the requisite letter and waited the requisite 28 days, or whatever period regulations specify, will it be impossible for a subsequent finding against the employer to be set aside on the grounds that the employee did not follow the correct procedure? I hope that the Minister will clarify that. It would be a further burden on employers if at that stage they had to identify the problem, so as to avoid being subjected to a decision of wrongfulness in the light of the facts.

4 pm

Amendment No. 47 sets out a power to vary new schedule 1 from time to time. Perhaps the Minister will tell us what he has in mind in varying the schedule. He must have something in mind; otherwise there would be no point in introducing a new schedule that is identical to a schedule that is already in the Bill. It is clear that the Minister intends to introduce changes at some stage.

Amendment (a) seeks to delete subsections (8) to (10). The subsections give the Secretary of State a power to amend the grounds for exclusions of a claim. The Government appear to be seeking to have their cake and eat it. On the one hand, they want to put the detailed provision of the regulations in the Bill. Presumably they have been told to do so by the TUC. On the other hand, they want to retain a power fundamentally to amend, by changing the grounds on which claims to a tribunal would be excluded by regulation. Surely that is not the appropriate way in which to proceed. Having decided not to use regulation and to set out provisions in the Bill, the Government should get things right the first time. They should stick to their guns and exclude subsection (8).

Subsections (9) and (10) would be excluded by the amendment, because they depend on subsection (8). I look forward with interest to the Minister's response.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I, too, should like to refer to a reference in the Register of Members' Interests. I am the managing director of a company, an interest to which I have referred before. I naturally have an interest in these matters.

I am pleased that the Government have decided to remove the controversial clause 33 and to replace it with a clause that seems far more sensible and will add greater clarity, which is what we were looking for. The Liberal Democrats tabled an amendment to clause 33 before we embarked on Report. We were concerned that the clause, as it stood, could act as a barrier to justice for tribunal applicants with valid cases.

We are concerned that it would be inappropriate to rule out claims altogether where they concern sexual harassment or racial abuse, for example. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) referred to the issue and wanted clarification, which I expect the Minister will give.

There may be cases where a woman is being exposed to sexual harassment or intimidation of some sort. She might feel so nervous and concerned that even sending a letter could pose a problem. If violence could be involved, for example, she might fear some form of retribution. She might be concerned about stirring things up. I am sure that the Minister will have some general thoughts about that.

The Minister has said that applicants will be required to send only written notice of the grievance to the employer and wait 28 days for a response before an application to a tribunal can be made. That is fair enough. I acknowledge that it would be reasonable to expect most employees to take the first step, but I still have concerns. That is why we tabled an amendment.

In Committee, the Minister seemed to agree with me when he said:

> "We recognise, however, that there will be rare cases in which the threat of violence or serious personal harassment may make it dangerous or intimidating for applicants to take step one action before making an application."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 18 December 2001; c. 196.]

I am sure that the Minister will explain what he meant by that and perhaps provide clarification. In addition, as the Law Society pointed out, the national minimum wage enforcement agency does not require workers who are not receiving the minimum wage to take up matters with their employer first, which might serve to increase their vulnerability. Yet

> "detriment in relation to national minimum wage"

is apparently still covered by the new clause; section 24 of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 is cited in the new schedule.

How will new clause 6 operate in conjunction with other statutory rights, such as the right to paid leave? Will the Minister repeat the assurance that he gave on Second Reading on the original clause 33 and clarify the application of new clause 6 to other measures? Can he explain who will be in a position to decide whether or not the exception is applicable, and whether applicants have a legitimate reason for taking action? Will that be for the tribunal to determine at a preliminary hearing and would it not cause further complications in tribunal proceedings? In such cases, will the second chance, which will allow the applicant to go back and complete the grievance procedure—referred to by the Minister on 18 December in Committee—apply to new clause 6? If so, does the Minister share the Law Society's concerns that such an action may sour relations between employees and employers?

Finally, can the Minister provide an assurance that applicants who do not give the correct legal label to a grievance in their written statement will not be prevented from pursuing their claim in an employment tribunal? How will that influence what is brought up in the original written statement, and how much influence will the written statement have on proceedings at the later tribunal? I look forward to the Minister's reply, but generally we welcome the fact that the problem raised in Committee has been addressed.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Radical reform of employment tribunals is long overdue. Talking to the Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Directors and the CBI, I have learned that there has been an extraordinary increase in the number of cases taken to employment tribunals. In just 10 years, the figure has risen by 300 per cent., which cannot be good for industrial relations or the economy as a whole.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell the House about the decline in the number of days lost through strikes in the same 10-year period?

Mr. Prisk: I am not in a position to deal with that claim. I am concerned with the way in which industrial relations will work from now on. As an MP with a legal background, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman may like to add to his point later.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend and, through him, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris). In the financial year 1997–98, 254,000 days were lost as a result of strike action. In the first 10 months of last year, 325,000 days were lost, which is a significant increase since the Labour party came to power.

Mr. Prisk: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, not least in helping me to channel that information to the House. The fact that 130,000 cases were taken to employment tribunals in 2000 clearly needs to be addressed; that is the principle on which I welcome the Bill's aspirations. It is clear from the CBI and the Institute of Directors that the cost to business of those cases is now about £633 million. Beyond the cost alone, it cannot be right that cases are immediately brought to court; they should be dealt with in the workplace.

New clause 6 tries to rebalance the responsibilities in the workplace, and for that reason it is welcome, in principle. The Bill sets out clear and, in some cases, quite prescriptive requirements on employers for dealing with complaints, grievances and so on, as the Minister described at length on Second Reading and in Committee. It seems only right, therefore, that we should require employees equally to accept responsibility to begin a complaint or a grievance in the workplace, and not immediately to run to the courts.

I welcome the requirement that the employee should first write a letter—that seems common sense—and that there should be 28-day waiting period, which also makes sense. Before the Minister thinks that I am going too soft, however, I shall raise one or two concerns. My first relates to new clause 6 because the Secretary of State still has reserved powers to exclude certain individuals. I reiterate the concern expressed by the Federation of Small Businesses and the Institute of Directors that that power should not be overused. I hope that the Minister will reassure me and those employers representatives that the power will not be overexercised.

My second concern is that although responsibilities are being introduced for employees in an attempt to balance the responsibilities already sought for employers, those seem a little inadequate. There is merely a requirement that the employee should write a letter, as my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) rightly pointed out. It is not a requirement to meet, to sit down and to have an intelligent and reasonable dialogue to sort out the differences. The Bill is prescriptive in the requirements that it places on employers to act, yet the Government seem reluctant to introduce similarly prescriptive measures for employees. It is that slight imbalance which worries me.

If it is right to set out three steps for employers, surely it is right to set out at least two steps—to write and to meet—for employees. Although I understand the argument of the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) that in extreme cases individual members of an organisation might not want a face-to-face meeting, that is a rare example. Wherever possible, we should encourage employees to write, to meet and to have a dialogue.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): As a full-time trade union official until last June, it is clear to me that the hon. Gentleman does not understand the process. If the employee wrote a letter and was then invited to a disciplinary hearing, and did not attend, and if the case reached an industrial tribunal, it would be deemed unfair anyway, so I do not understand where the hon. Gentleman is coming from.

Mr. Prisk: The purpose of the new clause is to encourage employees to take responsibility. I do not claim to be a lawyer, but I do claim to have worked in small businesses.

Mr. Hammond: Perhaps my hon. Friend should point out that it is the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) who does not understand what we are talking about. We are dealing with grievances, not discipline.

Mr. Prisk: I was too polite to do that, and I shall try to maintain that air of civility. My hon. Friend is right. Perhaps the hon. Member for North Durham will bear my hon. Friend's comments in mind.

There seems to be a strange omission from the Bill. It is fine to introduce a clearly defined and prescriptive set of proposals for employers, but there is a hesitancy to do the same with regard to employees. It would be helpful if the Minister could explain to the House why that omission exists. In conclusion, I welcome the purpose behind the new clause. What concerns me is that it seems, unusually for the Minister, to lack the confidence to see that through.

Mr. Simmonds: I, too, begin by declaring an interest: I am an employer in and outside the House.

I hope that the Government share my view that the main purpose of new clause 6 is to reduce the number of cases that go to a tribunal. I welcome more detailed provision for that in the Bill rather than through regulations. I should like the Minister to offer a cast-iron guarantee or to express belief that the new clause will reduce the number of applications that go to tribunals.

4.15 pm

Many employer organisations share my deep concern that the new clause will not have the impact that I described, and that an increasing number of cases will continue to go to appeals tribunals. The figures are staggering. In 1988–89, just over 29,000 tribunal applications were submitted; in 1997–98, the figure exceeded 80,000; in 2000–01, it was comfortably over 130,000. Clearly, the number of applications to tribunals has increased dramatically. I believe that that is a direct result of many policies that the Government have introduced since they came to power in 1997.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the number of new rights for employees expanded considerably when the Conservative Government were in power? That led to increases in the number of claims that were taken to tribunals.

Mr. Simmonds: I am not arguing against employees' rights. There is a balance to be struck between employees' rights and employers' responsibilities. However, since 1997, matters have accelerated and employment relations have been damaged. *Personnel Today* stated that

> "the raft of legislative changes brought in under the Employment Relations Act 1999 is the chief factor behind the big rise in tribunal claims reported by ACAS".

Nothing in the new clause will stop that acceleration.

I generally support the clause, but I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) about the open-ended list of exceptions. I should like the Minister to show us that our anxieties are not well founded.

I would go slightly further than my hon. Friend on subsection (6)(a). I cannot foresee any circumstances in connection with bringing proceedings in which an employee would inform a tribunal that he or she had not complied with the procedure, thereby barring themselves from obtaining a tribunal application. The provision is therefore superfluous.

The Minister did not enjoy receiving the letter from Judge Prophet; indeed, he provided a robust and speedy response, which he copied to us all for which I am grateful. He made a pertinent point about an employee who is dismissed and therefore entitled to redundancy payment. If the employer refuses to pay, how does the internal grievance procedure apply to someone who is no longer an employee? Is such a case one of the exceptions that the Minister proposes to make through regulations under the new clause, or will the employee have to write to the employer to express his grievance after he has been made redundant?

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I shall speak briefly. I declare that I am a member of Unison and declare my constituency arrangements: my constituency Labour party has an agreement with the Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians.

[Ms Joan Walley]

I want to give credit to the Minister for having taken account of the representations made to him not only in Committee but on behalf of people in constituencies such as mine, who had a great fear that, if clause 33 as originally drafted had stood part of the legislation, people would not have been able to take their case straight to a tribunal, and would have been excluded. I wanted a great deal of consultation about the regulations that would have come into force if the original clause 33 had remained part of the Bill.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the attention that he has paid to those of us who had concerns about this aspect of admissibility in respect of clause 33. He has been kind enough to listen to me, and said that this provision will now mean that people will not be excluded. I have listened to some of the comments made by Conservative Members, particularly in relation to people who have lost their jobs. The new clause, assuming that it will stand part of the Bill without being altered to a significant extent elsewhere—

Mr. Hammond: Several hon. Members have attempted to draw the Minister on which classes of people are to be excluded from this provision, so enabling them to apply to a tribunal without going through the procedures. If the hon. Lady has any inside information on that as a result of her correspondence with the Minister and her Labour party channels, would she be good enough to share it with us?

Ms Walley: I would be very happy to place in the Library a copy of the Minister's response to me. If, however, the hon. Gentleman thinks that I have any prior knowledge of this matter, he is mistaken. I am simply one of 659 Members who take a keen interest in the Bill.

My main concern about the original clause 33 related to cases of bullying, for example, in which people might feel that they could not raise the matter with their employer before taking it to an employment tribunal for fear of harassment. I was worried that such people might genuinely be prevented from taking their case forward, and the new clause takes considerable account of the representations that have been made on that issue.

Mr. Hammond: I am genuinely puzzled. The hon. Lady is outlining a scenario in which someone would be afraid to write a letter to their employer in case they suffered harassment for doing so, yet not be afraid of suffering harassment for applying to an employment tribunal. Surely the two are entirely comparable in terms of the risk to which the employee is exposed. Why is writing a letter more risky than applying to an employment tribunal?

Ms Walley: We are talking about a question of balance. The Government are absolutely right to concentrate on ensuring that the resolution of disputes can take place first and foremost in the workplace, and that the process should not have to go all the way to an employment tribunal. I accept that that is the Government's intention, and that is what I want to happen. I can, however, envisage certain scenarios in which people who had suffered sexual harassment or intimidation, for example, or who had been bullied, could have been prevented from taking their case forward under the original clause 33. I therefore want to record my praise for the Minister's having taken account of those concerns.

I have one further point, to which I hope my hon. Friend will reply. A slightly more complex set of arrangements is now being proposed, and people who cannot reach an employment tribunal in the first instance might be able to come back and make a second application. Perhaps organisations such as the citizens advice bureaux could find out how they might be able to advise and represent such people, because I would not want them to be excluded from access to the kind of representation that they might now need to reach an employment tribunal.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I shall speak briefly to new clause 6 and, particularly, to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friends. I want to begin by saying how much I enjoyed serving on the Standing Committee. It was a pleasure to watch two great professionals, the Minister for Employment and the Regions, the hon. Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), and my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) proceed with the business. It was noticeable that, when junior Ministers took the place of the Minister of State, the standard of debate dropped considerably. I have probably done for the Minister's career, but there we go.

Like other Opposition Members, in general I welcome the fact that the Government are including in legislation what would otherwise be dealt with through statutory instruments and regulations. That is a good idea in principle, and I also welcome the attempt to require employees to go through a basic minimum procedure before heading straight for the employment tribunal. However, like other Opposition Members, I am extremely concerned to know the categories of people that might be excluded from that procedure.

Even those who have suffered the grossest sexual or racial abuse in the workplace should at least be able to record the incident on a piece of paper. Indeed, in Committee we discussed the benefit of conducting more of the procedure in writing, and I remember with fondness that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) supported us on that point. His support was welcome and it certainly cheered up a rather dull day.

I reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds). I assume that the purpose of new clause 6 and other such provisions is to reduce the number of cases going to employment tribunals. Indeed, the Government's regulatory impact assessment suggests that the Bill could reduce them by between 30,000 and 40,000. That would be greatly welcomed by Members on both sides of the House if it proves true, but, like many other people and outside organisations, I have my doubts.

The Bill will introduce a load of new employment rights, including paternity rights and rights for adoptive parents, which I welcome, but it will also introduce new rights for union learning representatives and a complicated new power relating to flexible working, which I do not welcome. I would not be at all surprised if the legislation increased the numbers going to employment tribunals, and it would be interesting to have on record the Minister's assessment of its likely impact on those numbers.

Alan Johnson: The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) made the usual pantomime points about Trades Union Congress briefings, and so on. One minute, we in the Department of Trade and Industry are accused of being the provisional wing of the Confederation of British Industry, and the next he redresses the balance by saying that we take all our instructions from the TUC. Of course, we do neither. We listen carefully to both sides, and unlike the previous Conservative Government, who seemed to have an aversion to free and independent trade unions, we think that the trade union voice is important. We have listened to it carefully, but no more so than to other voices.

On admissibility, our response to "Routes to Resolution", which was published almost three months ago, made perfectly clear our belief that the provision should apply to grievances only. I shall deal with some questions that were asked on that point, particularly by the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), but I should point out that, as the response to "Routes to Resolution" made clear, there was no debate about whether we would apply admissibility simply to step one of the grievance procedure.

In Committee, the debate concerned whether the provision should be included in the Bill or in regulations and whether clause 33 was drawn too widely in terms of its operation. Our view was that, on balance, it would help the House if we amended the Bill to clarify the admissibility clause, thereby preventing any hares from running in respect of its use and application.

4.30 pm

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge asked why we proposed to include two identical schedules. It was a prudent move. New schedule 1 is indeed identical to schedule 3, but there may be occasions in the future—although we do not envisage them now—when we want different jurisdictions to apply to the very new admissibility clause and to the measures in schedule 3. The two schedules are identical, but they may not always be, although we have no plans to change anything at this stage.

Mr. Hammond: Is the Minister seriously saying that he is including two identical schedules in case he wants to change one of them at some time in the future, but that he has absolutely no intention of doing so? That has staggering implications. Why not include two of every clause and every schedule in every Bill, just in case the Government want to change one of them by regulation at some future stage?

Alan Johnson: We will consider that suggestion carefully. All I know at this stage is that we are moving into uncharted territory in respect of admissibility, and I think it prudent to ensure that the jurisdictions are separated.

The hon. Gentleman referred to subsection (6)(b), and the employer's challenge to the making of admissibility criteria at an early stage. We consider that reasonable. We do not want the questions to hang around until there is a full hearing at an employment tribunal; that would mean devoting extra time and resources to cases that would otherwise be inadmissible. Our approach is workable, and we think that it will ensure that preliminary issues are handled expeditiously.

The hon. Gentleman made a point about the step one letter that was made consistently by Opposition Members. They omitted one important consideration. Step one involves not just writing to the employer, but allowing a period of 28 days. Although there is no requirement for a hearing in new clause 6, we think that the 28-day period would enable employee and employer to discuss the grievance at the heart of the problem.

We intend the exceptions to be genuine exceptions. We want as few as possible, but we think it advisable for them to be made in some rare circumstances. It must be beyond doubt that the time will be used productively, and the letter must concern a case of serious sexual harassment, violence or intimidation. It must be clear that there is no possibility of the issue being resolved in 28 days, because the trust and the relationship have broken down completely—although the employee is still in the workplace. We will regulate for such exceptions, and consult on them.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): How would this statutory procedure sit with companies' internal grievance procedures? I know from my long experience as a lawyer that when cases reach tribunals there is often a lot of discussion about the fairness of the internal procedure that was carried out initially. Would the statutory procedure override existing grievance procedures?

Alan Johnson: We seem to have moved on to disciplinary procedures. Given that an employee was allowed to be informed of the so-called offence that had been committed, to discuss it with the employer—unless it was an offence of gross misconduct—and was granted the right of appeal, internal disciplinary and grievance procedures would not breach the basic three and two-step criteria.

That brings me to a point raised by several hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Hertford and Stortford and for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds). They ask what effect the new clause will have and say that it does not go far enough. At present, 6 million workers have no recourse to any grievance or disciplinary procedures in the workplace. Some 600,000 workplaces have no procedures, and a further 340,000 have substandard procedures.

Mr. Simmonds: Does the Minister accept that a large proportion of those workplaces have voluntary systems that work very successfully?

Alan Johnson: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman means by voluntary systems. If they are voluntary, they are not recorded, and the employee does not know that he or she has recourse to them. I am referring to workplaces where there is no procedure whatever. There are reports in today's newspapers of an horrific case of someone who was dismissed and had no right of appeal because there was no internal procedure to allow that.

I fully accept that people are more aware of their rights. Thanks to this Government, they have more rights to be aware of—we do not apologise for that. Given article 13,

[Alan Johnson]

which outlaws discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and age, it is almost inconceivable that the number of tribunal cases will not rise. However, we estimate that between 30,000 and 40,000 cases that go to employment tribunals could be resolved in the workplace if the procedure existed to deal with complaints or grievances there.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I appreciate what the Minister says. However, the acid test of the Bill in terms of improving employees' rights will be if more cases go before employment tribunals. My concern is that that will be seen as a mark of success. I ran a small business before coming to this place, and I am not sure what our procedures were. They were certainly not written down in a massive booklet—not that there was any problem in that regard, I hasten to add. I may well have qualified as one of the 600,000 employers mentioned. There has been increasing awareness of employee rights, with more people rushing to use employment tribunals as a first rather than a last resort. That has to be the underlying concern, given all the waste that would result for business.

Alan Johnson: I do not know about people rushing to use employment tribunals as a first recourse. However, people who have no other outlet to resolve their problem will go to an employment tribunal and slap in their IT 1.

Business organisations, including the Confederation of British Industry and the Federation of Small Businesses, support this simple fact: having a basic procedure in the workplace must be preferable to airing problems at a full-blown employment tribunal.

Mr. Hammond: Let me go back five minutes. If someone submits his grievance in writing within 28 days—I am not talking about an exception case in which harassment or something similar has taken place—and the employer suggests meeting to sort it out, the employee is entitled to ignore that and go ploughing off to the tribunal anyway. Will the Minister confirm that the Government's original intention was that the entire statutory procedure should be exhausted before there was access to a tribunal? Will he confirm that he has backed down, watering down the proposals during the Bill's consideration to the point where an employee can ignore the employer offering a grievance meeting and go straight to a tribunal?

Alan Johnson: No. The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. It was never our intention that every case must exhaust the discipline and grievance procedure prior to being allowed into the employment tribunal procedure. The hon. Gentleman should read our response to the "Routes to Resolution" document published last November, in which we talked about grievances.

The other point being missed is mitigation. Elsewhere in the Bill there is the right for an employment tribunal to take action if it believes that either the employee or the employer has not followed the procedures. First, if the employer has not carried out the basic three-step procedure and there has been a dismissal, that dismissal is automatically deemed unfair. Secondly, if the employee or the employer, without good reason—one of the exceptions such as racial harassment or bullying, for example—did not go through the full procedure but came to the tribunal before completing stage two or three, the award can be mitigated by between 10 and 50 per cent. That is a salutary and sobering prospect for people who may be tempted to think, "The procedure's there, but I'll simply ignore it."

This is a crucial point, fundamental to human rights. As things stand, someone can simply sling in an IT 1 and there are no procedures in the workplace. Should we move from that to a procedure in which people are locked out of the system altogether and prevented from seeking justice at an employment tribunal?

We took that question extremely seriously, and business supports us here. For example, there is the CBI document—although perhaps some Conservative Members now consider the CBI to be the provisional wing of the DTI. The CBI said that it warmly welcomed proposals that would require employees to raise a problem with their employer. Most business people said that for them, the important thing was not to hear about a grievance in a courtroom but, that if someone still in their employment was worried, perhaps after having been passed over for promotion, they would talk to them first and air the grievance. That view has been reflected in new clause 6.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter), whose general support I appreciate—

Mr. Hammond: The big tent.

Alan Johnson: For a moment I thought that the hon. Gentleman was insulting me; I think that my suit fits rather well.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare asked how relevant the step one letter was to the tribunal's decision on the substance of the case. The letter will be relevant to the tribunal's decision on whether the complaint is covered by the grievance that the employee raised, but not to the decision on the substance of the complaint.

The hon. Gentleman also asked who would decide whether an exemption should apply. The tribunal will decide. I agree that that might require it to hold preliminary hearings, but we think that if we get the regulations right and the exceptions are clear, there will be less need for that to happen.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford asked why the new clause did not require the employee to follow the three-step procedure. He made some curious points about why the employee gets three steps but the employer does not—

Mr. Prisk: The other way round.

Alan Johnson: Sorry, that is what I meant.

Both sides have to follow those steps or any award will be liable to serious mitigation of between 10 and 50 per cent.

This is not about one side or the other; it is about having a facility in the workplace to air grievances. Insisting that an employee had to follow the three steps before reaching a tribunal would cause a simple problem: we can imagine all the barriers that an unscrupulous employer would put up to stop the case going to a tribunal. He could ensure that, even with the extra three months that we have provided under clause 32, it was time-expired.

There is also a series of exemptions. The hon. Gentleman and I agree that certain situations need to be exempted, certainly from the full three-step procedure. We would have to have more exemptions, and there would be more preliminary hearings. The representatives of all sides of business whom we consulted shared the view that stage one of the grievance procedure was the important part.

Mr. Prisk: The Minister said earlier that the Government were sympathetic to the idea that during the 28-day period following the provision of a letter, more employers and employees should have hearings and discussions—that they should, in his phrase, use that period. Will he give businesses guidance on that?

4.45 pm

Alan Johnson: By the time we have finished, businesses will have guidance on all aspects of the Bill coming out of their ears. The proposals are very important, especially for small businesses. There are 600,000 workplaces with no discipline or grievance procedures. Those employers are under no obligation to put such procedures in the written statement that goes to every employee because they employ fewer than 20 people. We have changed that requirement also, but the matter will need careful guidance, which I certainly undertake to supply.

The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness asked how the admissibility regime would apply to a complaint by a redundant former employee. As I said when I moved the new clause, we do not envisage that the procedure will apply to former employees. For them, the relationship between employer and employee has been broken, so why should they write to a person who is no longer their employer? However, we believe that, with careful guidance, the step one procedure would help clarify and resolve constructive dismissal cases, without recourse to a full-blown tribunal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) also contributed to the debate. She was absolutely right to say that we must recognise that there could be circumstances in which it would be difficult for an employee to go even as far as writing a letter and waiting for the 28-day period.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) supplied some very welcome flattery, and that is always appreciated. However, I do not agree with him, for the reasons that I set out earlier.

I shall spend a second on amendment (a), in the name of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge. It deals with the necessary powers contained in new clause 6 that would allow the Bill to be amended by secondary legislation. New clause 6(8) provides the power to extend the scope of the clause to non-employees. We will debate that matter again in connection with new clause 2, so I shall not spend much time on it now, other than to suggest that Opposition Members are making a considerable mountain out of a molehill.

Proposed new subsection (8) provides the power to amend the admissibility criteria by order. We consider that to be prudent and sensible. We think that we have set sound and reasonable criteria that will encourage dialogue without delaying access to tribunals, but experience may show that the admissibility criteria could helpfully be recast.

For instance, it is conceivable that the 28-day period might be too short for proper dialogue to take place. We need to learn from experience about that, which is why we have given ourselves the power to deal with the matter in secondary legislation. In proposed new subsection (9), we have committed ourselves to consult the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service before making any changes in this area. Likewise, I would expect that we would consult widely before proposing any changes.

I therefore hope that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge will not press amendment (a), and that the House will endorse new clause 6 and the associated amendments.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 1

REPORT ON IMPACT OF ACT

'Not later than one year from the date of coming into force of this Act, the Secretary of State shall prepare and publish a report on the impact of the Act, including in particular an assessment of:

- (a) the total cost to employers of complying with the Act; and
- (b) the total cost to public funds of the Act; and
- (c) the distribution of costs and benefits arising from the Act between:
    - (i) employers;
    - (ii) employees of different descriptions; and
    - (iii) others.

and the Secretary of State shall, on each anniversary of the date of such publication, publish a revision of that report.'.—*[Mr. Hammond.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Hammond: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 3—*Assessment of costs to businesses*—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall, within one year of the coming into effect of this Act, prepare and publish an assessment of the average administrative costs per employee to businesses of complying with each of the requirements of this Act

(2) The Secretary of State shall, by Regulations, provide for the average administrative cost per employee as determined by the assessment under (1) above to be reimbursed to employers from public funds.'.

New clause 4—*Assessment of resources of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service*—

'( ) Before making any order under section 55(2) of this Act relating to Parts 2 and 3, the Secretary of State shall prepare and publish an assessment of the additional resources likely to be required by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service as a consequence of the coming into force of Parts 2 and 3.'.

Mr. Hammond: New clause 1 would require the Secretary of State to make regular assessments of the Act's ongoing impact on employers and public funds.

[Mr. Hammond]

It also focuses attention on the distribution of costs and benefits between different groups, including between different groups of employees.

We believe that many of the Bill's provisions are positive, and we welcome them. However, it is disingenuous to pretend—or imply—that the measures do not have costs. Businesses will face costs in terms of potential job creation, given that the Bill will reduce flexibility in the labour force. In addition, the Bill will benefit some members of a work force, inevitably at the expense of others. It is therefore right and appropriate to require the Secretary of State to focus attention on such matters by preparing and publishing regular reports on the effect and outcome of the Bill in real life.

The Bill is wide ranging. The first part deals with paternity pay and leave and with adoption pay and leave, and extensions to rights of maternity leave. The second and third parts deal with tribunal reform and improving disciplinary and grievance procedures. The fourth part is a hotch-potch, dealing with everything else. I want to focus on the first part and clause 47, the new clause introduced by the Government in Committee that deals with the right to ask for flexible working terms for employees who have children below school age or, in certain specified circumstances, older children where a disability is involved. There is also a question in terms of cost impact relating to fixed-term work, but as we will debate that matter later, I shall avoid talking about it now.

We generally support the family friendly approach of the first part of the Bill, but, in most cases, we should see the benefits delivered not as benefits to employers—although when labour markets are tight, they may help employers recruit and retain staff—or as benefits to individual employees, but primarily as benefits to society as a whole.

It is unquestionable that anything we can do to strengthen families and support parents in the raising of children will have a significant benefit to society as a whole. We will have a better-educated and motivated work force, as well as a more stable social fabric. This is a social good from which we hope all of us will benefit in terms of less delinquency, better education, better-behaved children, less crime and less call on social services and social security to support damaged or collapsed families.

We support that, but it is important to recognise that this is a benefit to society, and that society should be prepared to pay for it. In some cases, the Bill appears to impose the costs of this benefit to society on one sector of society, namely businesses. Businesses have a finite capacity to absorb additional burdens. If they are damaged by the imposition of too great a burden, that will have a significant effect on society as a whole, as business becomes uncompetitive, the economy is unable to grow, jobs are not created and wealth does not expand.

In terms of the first part of the Bill, the direct costs will be met by society as a whole through the reimbursement by the Treasury of the costs of the direct payments for paternity and adoption leave and additional maternity leave, but the indirect costs on business will fall first on employers. Time off, sometimes for prolonged periods, will create problems, especially for small businesses. On Second Reading, we rehearsed the impact on a firm employing three or four employees which finds that perhaps one or two of those employees at a time may be absent on statutory leave. Perhaps one of those employees will have a key skill that is essential to keeping the business going. The consequences could be significant if that employee were absent.

In practice, I have always believed that, in a small firm, a deal will be done with such an employee. Effectively, the employer will end up bribing the employee not to exercise his statutory rights. That is probably a sub-optimal outcome, but one can envisage situations in which it will not be practical for a small business with three or four employees to continue operating for a prolonged period in the absence of a critical employee with a real skill.

The real cost to a small business of losing a key employee is not, as the regulatory impact assessment suggests, the administrative costs of replacing him with someone else, or sharing out his work to others; it is the opportunities forgone.

In the real world of small business, the order not pursued or the customer not served will represent the costs involved in lost output, lost profitability and, perhaps at the extreme margin, lost viability for that small business, so part 1 will involve intangible costs. Flexible working imposes further burdens, and the compliance requirements for smaller employers involved in ensuring that they do not infringe all the obligations placed on them under the Bill will impose yet more burdens on small business.

Labour Members are fed up with hearing about burdens on business, but burdens on business have a real impact on all of us. The burdens that will be imposed under the Bill cannot be seen in isolation; they have to be seen in the context of a stream of regulations coming from the Government. Last year alone, the Government imposed more new regulations than in any previous year on record. Since 1997, business has had to come to grips with a raft of legislation that stems from the Government's signing up to the social chapter. Business has had to deal with the minimum wage and the working time directive, as well as the Government's determination to treat business as an extension of the welfare state apparatus and the working families tax credit, and there are more administrative burdens to come as business delivers more and more of the Government's in-work welfare programme.

Business is reeling under that onslaught. The manufacturing sector in particular is under huge pressure, struggling with very tight economic conditions and facing an over-valued exchange rate, or perhaps one should say an under-valued euro, and swingeing tax increases, some of which—for example, the climate change levy—are targeted precisely at the sector, manufacturing industry, least able to cope with them. However, many of our competitors appear to have finally got the message; they are edging away from inflexibility in labour markets and moving back to embrace the benefits of more flexible labour markets. We are moving in the opposite direction, increasing the inflexibility in our labour markets in a way that threatens the competitiveness of British business. That needs to concern us all, not merely those who run and operate businesses.

Rob Marris: I apologise to the House for the fact that, when I intervened earlier, I failed to say that I am member of the Transport and General Workers Union, that I employ two people in my office and that my constituency Labour party received money from the TGWU before the election, as is recorded in the Register of Members' Interests.

Will the hon. Gentleman give the House three examples of regulations that he would get rid of? I am sure that he will be able to do so, because I asked that very question on Second Reading, approximately two months ago, so he has had plenty of time to prepare an answer. Which three regulations introduced by the Labour Government that he thinks are burdensome on business and not socially necessary should be got rid of?

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman's declaration of interest, which I did not quite catch, ranks as the verbal equivalent of small print, but I am sure that it will make interesting reading in *Hansard* tomorrow. I do not intend to get involved in going through all 4,600 regulations that the Government introduced last year, looking at their merits and demerits. The hon. Gentleman may be right to imply that I cannot recall all 4,600 of them off the top of my head.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not attempt to stretch his memory. Under new clause 1, we are discussing the Bill's impact, and he need not stray outside it.

Mr. Hammond: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The point that I am trying to make is that the burdens that will be imposed under the Bill are, of course, incremental. I do not suggest that this Bill alone will be the downfall of British industry. That would be absurd, but the Bill has to be seen in the context of business—in particular, the manufacturing sector—facing extraordinary difficulties because a raft of new burdens, new taxes, new regulations and new legislation has been imposed on it since 1997. We are staring down a pipeline that contains a further vast array of legislation and regulations—which largely originate in Brussels—and that will descend on British business in the not-too-distant future. That is the last thing that business needs at this point in time.

5 pm

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): If [illegible] hon. Gentleman is able to talk only about the burdens imposed by this Bill, would he care to tell us which parts of the Bill, other than the provisions for union learning representatives, a proposal with which we know he disagrees, he would get rid of? Would he get rid of the paternity provisions and the adoption provisions? Will he let us know exactly which parts of the Bill he wishes to dispose of?

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Lady has perhaps missed the point of new clause 1. We must be honest with ourselves in recognising that all the good things in part 1 will impose costs on business. The next thing I was going to say was that I do not know exactly how damaging those costs will be to business. However, anybody who cares about our economy, growth, jobs and prosperity will want to ensure that we monitor carefully the impact of the legislation passed by the House. Regulatory impact assessments are prepared for Bills considered by the House. However, once we have passed them, off they go.

New clause 1 suggests that the Secretary of State should attempt to measure annually what the cost impact of the measures in this Bill has been, and continues to be, on business. That would enable us to have an informed debate about the costs and benefits, and also about the incidence of those costs and benefits. It is not a question only of the costs imposed on businesses, but of the costs imposed on other employees in the workplace.

The Bill has a particular focus on dealing with employees who have young children. However, if we accept the premise that business has a limited capacity to absorb additional burdens and remain competitive, we are selecting one group of employees for favourable treatment against other groups of employees who believe that they have claims for similarly favourable treatment. Of course, parents of young children can make a strong argument for a right to ask for flexible working, and strong arguments can be made for granting paternity leave to help strengthen families at the time of a birth. However, other employees look after elderly relatives, and in many cases they spare the state a very expensive burden. We should also consider employees who look after adults with disabilities.

Many employers attempt to be even-handed and flexible in dealing with their employees and their requests for flexible working or periods for time off. The fear must be that if one group of employees is given an absolute statutory right to ask for flexible working and to have that application considered by an employer who has to provide reasoned arguments if he will not grant the request, the natural reaction of employers will be to resist granting such extra statutory rights to other employees who are not entitled to them under the law. Therefore, a cost will be imposed on other employees in the workplace because of the real benefits being extended to a particular group of employees.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is also a benefit to business and industry if parents do not have to worry about having to get time off to look after young children? Productivity may increase. Companies that have invested in training and other matters and that allow women, in particular, to work flexibly could therefore retain them in the work force.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. In many cases, particularly in areas where the labour market is tight, employers will take the kind of measures that we are discussing entirely for reasons of self-interest. I do not disagree with that for a moment. I do, however, take issue with the suggestion that we should get into the business of Governments using legislation to force employers to do things because they are good for them. In general, the Government's record in second-guessing the best way to run a business is not top quartile. If courses of action are available to a business which a rational manager might take for himself, that should be left to education rather than legislation to determine. Frankly, I would not trust the Government to impose the best management course of action in legislation.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): The hon. Gentleman talks about forcing employers to act. How does he square the re-authorisation of trade union membership with that?

Mr. Hammond: I am not sure that I follow the hon. Gentleman.

Mark Tami: I refer to check-off, which the previous Government forced employers to carry out every three years.

Mr. Hammond *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I sense that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) is being led out of the confines of the new clause. It might be best if he does not pursue that argument.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful for that ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall plead ignorance in line with a sedentary comment from my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) who also thinks that Chekhov is a playwright.

It is not clear that the proposed measures will help UK business in the struggle to maintain productivity in the face of competition from overseas and the black economy, which we discussed in Committee. That touches on what the hon. Gentleman said. It is also worth remembering that every time we impose more legislative burdens on business, we widen the competitive advantage enjoyed by those who operate in the black economy and increase their ability to undercut responsible firms that abide by legislation, good or bad, that we introduce.

Costs that are borne by business will have to be absorbed in their total labour cost. The cost to a business of treating one employee will inevitably reduce what should be available to other employees as wages. Those employees who do not benefit from the costs that are imposed on business will be cross-subsidising their colleagues in the workplace. I am not suggesting that it is necessarily wrong to introduce such measures, many of which we welcome, but it is wrong to pretend that they do not have a cost to business, the economy and fellow employees. We have introduced new clause 1 to focus on that cost and to find a mechanism for regularly reviewing and assessing its level.

New clause 3 is supplementary to the purpose of new clause 1. It requires the Secretary of State to focus on the administrative cost to business of implementing the measures and to provide for reimbursement from public funds for that. Businesses are increasingly being asked to perform a role that was previously carried out by the state, especially in relation to administering the welfare state. The burdens are being imposed not just for the benefit of business itself but for the wider benefit of society, and they should be paid for by the public through taxation.

The Minister and the Secretary of State were keen to emphasise on Second Reading that small businesses at least will be reimbursed for 100 per cent. of their direct costs in dealing with maternity pay, paternity pay, adoption pay and so on. That is right, although it does not extend to all businesses. However, there is also a significant indirect cost to businesses. We do not know the size of the cost, but the best guide that we have is in the regulatory impact assessment. New clause 3 would provide a mechanism for regularly assessing that cost and arranging for it to be picked up by the public purse.

I understand that the Carter review of the cost to business of payroll compliance is under way. Perhaps the Minister will tell the House about the progress of that review, or perhaps it is a state secret that will be revealed by the Chancellor on Budget day. Many small businesses place a great deal of hope on the outcome of the review. They hope it will lead to a recognition by the Government that as businesses are being asked to do more and more of the state's administrative work in relation to employees, their costs must be reimbursed. Businesses may well be an efficient means of delivering services because they are geared up to administering the work of the welfare state and delivering benefits to employees, but they must be reimbursed.

New clause 4 deals with the resourcing of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. The original scheme for tribunal reform considered by the Government was intended to generate revenue through a system of fees. Under pressure, the Government scrapped that system. Until this evening, I had thought that parts 2 and 3 were intended to reduce the work load of tribunals, so I was a little surprised to hear the Minister say he thought it likely—indeed, I think he said inevitable—that the work load would increase. That makes new clause 4 doubly important because it deals with the adequate resourcing of ACAS in fulfilling its responsibilities under the Bill.

It is apparent to everyone that if the Bill is successful in reducing the burden on tribunals by diverting cases away, an additional burden may fall on ACAS. We probed the Minister on this matter but did not get a satisfactory answer. The new clause would require the Secretary of State to undertake a formal assessment of the resourcing requirements of ACAS before implementing parts 2 and 3. One of the many matters on which Members on both sides of the House have agreed during the proceedings on the Bill is that ACAS has a vital role, and it is essential that it is properly resourced to perform that role.

In Committee, we merrily talked about conciliation officers being available for this, that and the other, but ACAS is already under great pressure. Whether the work load of tribunals increases or, with a greater number of cases being handled outside the tribunal system, substantially decreases, there is likely to be a significant increase in the demand for ACAS services. I hope that the Minister will enlighten us as to what his Department envisages for the future adequate resourcing of ACAS. How can we ensure that this will not be a half-baked measure and that parts 2 and 3 will not come into force without ACAS having been given sufficient resources to cope with the responsibility placed on it by the Bill?

Brian Cotter: The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) may be surprised to find that the tent to which he referred is bigger than he thought because the Liberal Democrats support new clause 1. We agree that there should be an annual assessment of the impact of the Bill, which makes several changes to employment law. Although employees will benefit from new employment rights such as flexible working provision, we must recognise that those new rights will have an impact on businesses, which will have to comply with new regulations.

5.15 pm

Small businesses in particular will be affected. Before Second Reading, I met representatives of the Federation of Small Businesses who expressed the hope—perhaps it is a forlorn one, but we must take it on board—that small businesses would not be forced to take on the burden of too many more regulations and that any new regulations that were introduced would be examined extremely carefully. That is why we Liberal Democrats strongly support the concept of examining regularly all sorts of regulations that affect business. In fact, we would support an annual horizontal impact assessment of all regulations. I cannot talk about that now as it would not be in order to do so in this debate, but it is something that should be done regularly.

Mr. Prisk: For my benefit, will the hon. Gentleman clarify what an annual horizontal assessment is?

Brian Cotter: It covers everything that confronts businesses—all sorts of regulations. However, I am not supposed to drift on to subjects that we are not debating; I chipped this one in quickly, but I had better move back to the clause. That regulations should be examined has long been a Liberal Democrat view—in fact, I think that my party was the first to make such a proposal.

Mr. Lloyd: Given that the purpose of the new clauses is to examine the costs arising from the Bill, will the hon. Gentleman estimate the cost to Government and other sources of the exercise he describes?

Brian Cotter: If the hon. Gentleman means the costs of the exercise of examining, I cannot estimate them. However, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they need not be excessive. We have regulatory impact assessments in respect of Bills, and even if the proposal in the new clause were to carry a cost, it would surely be repaid in terms of enabling us to see the legislation's impact and to address certain matters.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) was trying to identify the rationale prevailing among the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. You seem to be arguing against an increase in bureaucracy, but at the same time you—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am arguing against nothing.

Brian Cotter: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That was well out of order. We are saying simply that we have long argued in favour of an annual assessment of the impact on the business community of all regulations and Bills.

I do not support the logic of the arguments of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge in respect of costs. Will he explain what sort of costs he believes should be removed once the assessment is complete? There are many reasons to carry out an assessment—for example, to see how regulations are implemented, how much red tape is added and how many requirements fall on small businesses.

We accept that costs will be associated with good regulations such as those covering maternity and paternity leave, which we strongly support. I do not decry those regulations, which are acceptable. Indeed, they are necessary to improve the workplace. However, when the Government implemented European regulations on part-time working, provisions that were two or three pages long in some countries ended up being 40 or 50 pages long in this country.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I question the feasibility of what the hon. Gentleman is supporting. New clause 1 would require an assessment of the impact of the legislation on employees of different descriptions. How will we collect that information? How will that be done, unless every employee completes a form stating whether he or she has children or a disabled relative, for example?

Brian Cotter: I support the argument that there must be assessment. Would the hon. Lady say that we should not assess the cost to business? Certainly not. Should we not assess how much red tape is unnecessary? I give credit to hon. Members on both sides of the House, because we are all considering how to examine Bills to determine what can be done away with and how we might say, "In practice, we do not need this rule, or that piece of paper." I am concerned that that process should be regularly undertaken.

Whether we accept costs depends on the Bill. I accept costs that relate to social requirements, including maternity and paternity leave, but there is laxity in the way in which Bills are introduced. Many regulations can be introduced after a Bill is enacted, for example.

Judy Mallaber: Taking up the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) on the distribution of costs and benefits between employees of different descriptions, can the hon. Gentleman think of any way in which such assessments could be made without asking employers to be involved in collecting that information? Such involvement would clearly place another burden on them.

Brian Cotter: I have always supported the principle of examining Bills. Sampling procedures can be carried out to assess impacts. There are different ways of assessing different things. Specific details will turn on particular Bills and particular regulations. Are we calling into question impact assessments altogether? They must be carried out before a Bill is in place. One of my long-standing criticisms, along with my Liberal Democrat colleagues, is that such assessments have not been carried out adequately. We are arguing that the assessments should be undertaken adequately, regularly and on a continuing basis.

Mr. Hammond: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is alarming that Labour Members appear to be reluctant to accept an assessment of costs? It is a matter not of ruling out things because of costs, but of wanting to know what the costs are, so that we can behave rationally and understand what we are doing. It is appalling to think that we should work while blind.

Brian Cotter: I agree, although having said that there is a broad tent, I do not incorporate into that everything for which the hon. Gentleman stands, such as reluctance to introduce a minimum wage. However, I am not supposed to refer to that, so I had better press on.

I think that I have sufficiently addressed the issue. I ask the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge to be more specific about the costs that concern him. What are the costs that he thinks could be cut? I accept the principle of assessing costs but I would like more detail, either now or later.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful for the opportunity to intervene again. Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said

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earlier, we want to assess the costs not only of the things that we think are bad, but of those that we think are good. We want to assess all costs and benefits and their incidence so that we can make informed decisions. I cannot tell him whether the Bill contains proposals involving costs that are too great for the benefits that they will deliver unless and until there is assessment, which will allow proper and rational decisions to be made.

Brian Cotter: I think that I shall leave it at that for fear of being drawn into any suggestion that Liberal Democrats do not support maternity and paternity leave and other welcome and worthwhile proposals. We must regularly examine the impact of regulations and Bills on business. I am sure that the Minister will find it difficult to argue against that. I look forward to what he and other colleagues have to say.

Rob Marris: I shall principally address new clause 3. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) talked about flexibility in the labour market which, of course, we need. He also mentioned manufacturing, which is particularly important to me as a Member representing a west midlands constituency. He talked about benefits to society being imposed on business by some of the Bill's provisions. New clause 3, which he tabled, deals with working out average costs and reimbursing them to employers; that is contrary to my view of the way in which small business operates and, I suspect, to his views. The cost for small businesses of complying with administrative requirements is often higher than it is for bigger businesses yet, in the new clause, the hon. Gentleman simply wants an average cost to be reimbursed.

The hon. Gentleman assumes—I do not—that there is a cost; many of the Bill's provisions will benefit business. Thanks to the Labour Government, employment has gone up a great deal, and there are scarcities in the labour market. That can benefit business, as it means that it will not lose part of its trained work force. Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that, as a consequence of the new clause, we go into negative accounting? If there is a demonstrable benefit from the Bill's provisions—my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) adverted to it—should business reimburse the state for having introduced them? I suspect that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge does not believe that it should.

Training is increasingly offered by the state, which is not to say that many businesses do not do a lot of training. In most cases, the Government do not seek to charge business directly for undergoing that training. In such things, there are trade-offs in any society; the new clause is therefore misconceived.

Mr. Hammond: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the Carter review to which I referred earlier? Does he anticipate a gesture in response to that review, as proposed by the new clause? The state should recognise that in some cases significant costs previously borne by the state are transferred to business through business administration, particularly of in-work welfare schemes.

Rob Marris: I am not about to prejudge the outcome of the Carter review. We must consider the practicalities of the way in which legislation operates, as I know the hon. Gentleman wishes to do. He talked about benefits being imposed on business; however, the flavour of his remarks was that, for example, he and his colleagues might wish to get rid of a swathe of health and safety legislation, which is massively beneficial to business and those who work in business. I hope that he will give an assurance that he and his party do not intend to do so. No doubt he will address that issue when he sums up.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned favourable treatment for parents when he discussed flexible working. I am delighted that there is favourable treatment for parents; I say so as someone who, sadly, is not a parent, despite my best endeavours and those of my partner. Although I am not a parent, the next generation will look after me in my old age, assuming that I have the privilege of reaching an old age. I hope that my nephews and nieces are prepared to look after me as carers, if it comes to that. I salute the hon. Gentleman for suggesting that carers should be included in flexible working. I only wish that he had tabled an amendment to that effect; we could have debated it and heard the Minister's views.

Finally, on new clause 4, I hope that the Minister will give us an assurance that sufficient resources will be available to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service to do any extra work that may be required under the Bill. I am not saying that the Bill will require extra work, but if it does, I hope that the Minister can give us that assurance.

Mr. Mark Field: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Members for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) and for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter). I suspect that the tent will not be big enough to keep us all happy, but I hope that our debate will continue in an easy-going manner.

I want to address in particular new clause 1, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) gave such a skilful introduction.

5.30 pm

I well understand what was said in relation to part 1. Although I did not serve on the Standing Committee, I have paid close attention to the Bill, which is clearly important. Behind it is a practical analysis of the modern world of work, and I fully appreciate that the family needs and responsibilities, especially of young employees, must be catered for. I should like to think, though, that many sensible and responsible employers have catered for them on a voluntary basis, without the need for legislative constraint. I recognise that the Minister will no doubt point out that some employers do not play the game and make life difficult for employees who find themselves in dire straits, for whatever reason.

My hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge hit the nail on the head. There is a great cost not just to businesses, but to fellow employees arising from many of the new rights that have been put in place. It is highly unfair, particularly in a tight employment market and in a small business context, that people who by choice are not parents, for example, find an increasing burden placed on their shoulders.

Helen Jones: Can the hon. Gentleman enlighten me? In new clause 1(c)(iii), who are the "others", who are neither employers nor employees? How would he carry out an assessment of the costs and benefits of the Bill to them?

Mr. Field: There are external costs that will not be borne directly by either employers or employees, but which may be borne by a range of bodies. For example, to promote the Act it is likely that there will be a large amount of advertising via various Government Departments, which have been known to extol the virtues of their own legislation. That expense would be covered by sub-paragraph (iii).

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) does not seem satisfied with my hon. Friend's answer. The most obvious "others", neither employees nor employers, are surely the Government—the public purse.

Mr. Field: I hoped that that was the point that I was making. I thank my hon. Friend.

Earlier, the Minister proudly announced the support of the CBI. Central to the proposal set out in the new clause is the protection of small businesses. The CBI has supported in principle a number of pieces of legislation that have been introduced in the past five years. I hasten to add that the CBI was also supportive of much legislation passed over the previous 18 years. One of the reasons for that support is that larger businesses are well catered for. They have the infrastructure in place. They have large human resources or personnel departments.

That luxury is not available to many small and medium-sized enterprises. With 10 or 15 employees, they will often not have a dedicated HR department or a payroll department. That goes to the heart of the issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) has made his own—the Carter report and the incumbent expenses on the payroll that have been brought into play by recent legislation, rules and regulations. That is a great concern to many small businesses. If the Bill is enacted, there should be an early opportunity for a full assessment of the cost to small business resulting from the new rules and regulations.

My chief concern is that many of the proposals will provide a strong disincentive for smaller employers to increase their work force. That is especially true of small, vibrant organisations which, by the nature of their business, employ a lot of young employees. With 10 employees, say, all of whom are in their 20s or early 30s, there is a risk that two or three will be on paternity or maternity leave at any one time. The prospect of having to keep those jobs open for any length of time, especially when the economy may start to go through a more difficult phase, may result in such businesses deciding that they should not grow any larger. If rules and regulations provide a disincentive to businesses to employ more than, say, 12, 15 or 20 employees, those businesses may have to set up small subsidiaries that operated under a different umbrella in order to get round the rules. That would be an unhealthy state of affairs, but the provisions in the new clauses could alert us to this at an early stage.

In many of our constituencies, whether they be the heart of the City of London, which I represent, or some of those represented by Labour Members, the days of large-scale employers being able to offer many thousands of jobs are gone. The small and medium-sized enterprise sector is the real vehicle for employment growth in the years ahead.

Mr. George Osborne: It is welcome to have a chance to debate the important new clauses moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). They go to the heart of the Bill as regards the costs and benefits that it will impose on our society and our economy.

As hon. Members who served on the Committee will know, many parts of the Bill are uncontroversial. Widespread support was given to the extension of maternity rights, the creation of new paternity rights and, especially, the creation of new rights for adoptive parents. Conservative Members found themselves in the refreshing position of arguing for more rights for adoptive parents, which is a good sign. However, the Government must accept that those rights are not introduced without costs to society and to business. Indeed, the Government's regulatory impact assessment makes it clear that substantial costs are involved. Maternity leave will cost taxpayers £305 million and paternity leave and paternity pay will cost employers £64 million and taxpayers £65 million.

New clause 3 gives us the opportunity to debate where those costs should fall. Should they fall on employers, on employees or on society as a whole? If we as a society want stronger families and believe that it is right for parents to take time off to help to bring up their children, it is important that we give them a chance to do so. We should provide financial support, if necessary, or the chance to take a career break before returning to work. It is welcome that in recent years hon. Members of all parties have come to accept that.

Other parts of the Bill received less general support in Committee. Hon. Members have mentioned union learning representatives and the requirement on employers to give them paid leave. The Government predict a massive increase in the number of union learning representatives, from 3,000 at present to 22,387 in eight years' time—I am not sure how they managed to be so precise in predicting that figure. Many of those will be in the public sector. An illuminating fact that was mentioned in Committee was that the Department for Education and Skills has no union learning representatives.

The cost of the union learning representatives clauses will be considerable. The cost to employers of the clauses on fixed-term work could amount to £136 million. The Government estimate in the regulatory impact assessment that the huge new right—the duty to consider flexible working—will cost employers £286 million, possibly more. As I think that the Minister would freely admit, we are not sure whether that figure is remotely accurate, because the provision opens up a whole new area.

Judy Mallaber: The hon. Gentleman may be interested in my previous experience as an employer in a small organisation. By helping to rearrange someone's working hours, I saved the money that would have been spent on advertising to recruit a highly skilled employee and on training that person. Employers can cut costs in that way.

Mr. Osborne: I am happy to accept that flexible and part-time working, and helping employees to spend time

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with their families, often help a company by improving relationships in the work force, and often ensure that someone who would otherwise leave a company for good comes back to work. We are flying blind, however, so far as the Bill is concerned. We do not know what impact it will have on society and on businesses. New clause 1 will at least give us a route map.

Mr. Simmonds *rose—*

Mr. Hammond *rose—*

Mr. Osborne: I shall give way first to my Back-Bench colleague.

Mr. Simmonds: Does my hon. Friend accept that we must consider not just the direct impact of the Bill but the administration that will ensue, particularly in small businesses that do not have personnel departments? That will be the real impact on the running of the business.

Mr. Osborne: My hon. Friend is right; real indirect costs arise from places being left vacant that are difficult to fill. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge wish to pursue his intervention?

Mr. Hammond: Is my hon. Friend surprised that, notwithstanding the lessons of history, hon. Members on the other side still apparently believe in the power of the statute to tell businesses what they should do in their own best interests? Does he not find that quite startling?

Mr. Osborne: My hon. Friend is right: that is indeed striking. One of the things that I would have expected the Labour party to learn from the supply-side reforms of the 1980s is that we cannot continue piling costs and legislation on businesses without having an effect on their competitiveness. When economists and historians look back on this period of history, they will judge those supply-side reforms to have laid the foundation for the strong economic growth that we have enjoyed for the last 10 years.

There is no real evidence of what impact the Bill will have on businesses and on society. Anyone who has read the regulatory impact assessment will know that it uses fantasy figures to try to calculate the possible costs and benefits to employers, which are almost impossible to calculate in advance. It would surely be much more sensible to ask businesses what the costs were likely to be. It has been suggested that that would represent an extra cost to businesses, but in my experience, small employers are only too happy to tell me what the costs of Government regulations have been for them. They have always been very happy to volunteer that information.

It clearly makes sense that we should have some idea of the cost of the employment legislation that we introduce.

Rob Marris *rose—*

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy) *rose—*

Mr. Osborne: I shall give way to my good friend, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris).

Rob Marris: I am obliged. I think that I understood the hon. Gentleman to concede that, in certain circumstances, businesses could save money through the measures in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) gave an example earlier in relation to advertisements and so on. Will the hon. Gentleman also concede that, if the new clause were added to the Bill and the ensuing investigations showed that a business was, overall, saving money through the measures, that money should be reimbursed to the Government? That seems to be the logic of what he is proposing.

Mr. Osborne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. Businesses are already paying through the nose to the Government because of the huge increases in business taxation that have been piled on over the last four years. Frankly, we cannot ask them to pay any more.

Mr. Prisk: I would like to review new clauses 1, 3 and 4 in the style of the Miss World contest, by taking them in reverse order.

I want to begin by looking at new clause 4. At the beginning of Second Reading and in subsequent claims and comments by the Secretary of State and the Minister, we heard proud—and, I think, genuine—claims about the potential for the Bill to improve the situation in the workplace. In a letter to all colleagues in the House, the Minister stated:

> "The Bill will improve the way disputes are managed in the workplace."

He went on to say that

> "the Bill introduces a simple internal procedure and encourages both parties to use it."

He also said:

> "The Government is committed to . . . a modern and user-friendly public service, and well-informed users."

Those are all good and noble intentions that underpin the purpose of the Bill. The difficulty is that, no matter how hard I looked through the Bill, the explanatory notes and the subsequent regulatory impact assessment, I found nothing that specifically identified the resources required to achieve the aims set out in the Bill's preamble and by the Minister during his promotion of it.

5.45 pm

New clause 4 would enable an accurate assessment of the costs to ACAS, and thereby allow it to plan. That is particularly important in the light of the Minister's interesting comment that he foresees that the number of cases coming before employment tribunals will probably rise in years to come, despite many earlier statements to the contrary by him and his colleagues. It is right to bring that principle of assessment to the heart of a vital part of the Bill.

Although I do not want to overdo the cross-party consensus, I strongly support the request from the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) that the Minister make it clear that resources will be forthcoming. New clause 4 would allow him to ensure that those resources are accurately identified and brought forward appropriately.

If I may, I shall discuss new clauses 1 and 3. On publication, the Bill was accompanied by an initial estimate of costs and benefits. I have in front of me the explanatory notes—all Members will doubtless have read them from cover to cover—which set out how the costs and benefits will affect employers, the individuals concerned and taxpayers. I wish to focus on the costs to employers. In keeping with the initial regulatory impact assessment, the explanatory notes refer to a one-off cost to employers of £97 million, and an annual run-on cost of a further £272 million. On the basis of the initial estimates, we can therefore envisage a cost of £369 million in the first year and £272 million in the years following.

There is a flaw, however. Although I do not intend to be prejudicial about its content, this is not a complete Bill. It is an enabling Bill that is merely a framework. Throughout our deliberations in Committee, the Minister and his hon. Friends told us that the Bill will lead to many regulations, so the danger is that to rely on the initial regulatory impact assessment is to consider an incomplete Bill. To do so is like paying merely for the first and main courses in a restaurant without taking into account the pudding and the wine bill.

The difficulty is that regulations have not been tabled, so they cannot be costed. The £272 million is the beginning—the minimum. The danger is that, when those regulations are enacted, the House will be unable to consider and itemise the costs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) rightly said, those costs could well be substantial. That is my concern.

On the right to request flexible working, the Government produced in Committee, rather belatedly, a subsequent regulatory impact assessment, albeit that the Minister was open enough to point out that it is a partial assessment. I realise that members of the Standing Committee are probably worried that my enthusiasm for reading regulatory impact assessments might not be good for my long-term health, but I pursued the matter and went through the assessment in great detail.

It became apparent that the new clause on flexible working, which was introduced at the end of the Committee's deliberations, adds £38 million in the first year and a further £286 million every year thereafter. As the mathematicians present will understand, that is not merely a small increase in the original bill of £272 million. The increase resulting from introducing one extra clause more than doubles the original cost. The annual cost of this Bill was initially £272 million. It has now risen to £558 million—and, as I say, I fear that that is only the price of the dessert. Perhaps we have not yet considered the price of the wine and the petits fours.

My first reason for supporting new clause 1 is the need for a comprehensive assessment of all the costs. My second is that it rightly seeks to distinguish between different employers, and between different burdens borne by employers. Because the Secretary of State has reserved a number of powers, we do not yet know how they will impact on the various players. We therefore need an assessment that is comprehensive, and also distinguishes between different types of employer.

The creation of new rights, and the cost of administering them, will always pose fewer difficulties for larger employers. As my hon. Friends have pointed out, a large company with a human resources or personnel department will be able to deal with such matters. However, the Bill will impose a huge new set of burdens on small employers—not least the increased time that will have to be spent on ensuring that the business, perhaps a family firm, is sticking to the letter of the law.

To be fair, I must add that the Government have acknowledged in the explanatory notes and the regulatory impact assessment that the Bill will place a disproportionate burden on small employers. Notwithstanding Labour scepticism, I think that the burden will be experienced in two ways. First, there is the problem of time. The Bill contains 53 clauses and seven schedules, and heaven knows how many amendments will be made today. Small businesses will have to try to understand the rules—for instance, those governing the three-step process of dispute resolution. It will take time to understand, implement and verify each of those steps.

Many small firms are already struggling with the volume of paperwork with which they must deal. I am told by a number of small business organisations that the average small family firm must now spend up to 31 hours a month, the equivalent of four working days, simply complying with existing regulations. That is an appalling statistic, and I fear that the Bill will impose further burdens of time and pressure.

The second problem is this. While a company employing 100 or 200 people will be able to cover absences for statutory maternity or paternity leave if four or five people have rights to such leave, the burden will clearly be much greater for a small family business employing only four or five people when two people wish to exercise their rights. Although elements of the Bill acknowledge the existence of the problem in financial terms, I am not sure that it has been fully acknowledged.

The Bill tries to be family friendly; but—I think I made this point on Second Reading—what about the father or mother who must spend time in the evenings and at weekends dealing with paperwork for the family business, rather than spending it with the family itself? That is one of the potential conflicts at the heart of the Bill. It is friendly to some families, but not to all.

Rob Marris: Of course running a small business is hard. I have helped to do so in my time, as the hon. Gentleman may have. Given that the burden he has just mentioned may fall disproportionately on small business, however, why does he apparently support new clause 3, which refers to an average reimbursement?

Mr. Prisk: New clause 3 is intended to provide for a clear assessment of the costs and benefits for all concerned. Without that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) pointed out, we shall be flying blind. New clause 3 seeks to ensure that we know the costs, and indeed the potential benefits, so that we can be fair to all parties. New clauses 1 and 3 attempt to identify a problem accurately; they also reinforce the spirit of National Audit Office guidance to Ministers on how regulatory impact assessments should be compiled. The Minister may wish to consider that important aspect.

All that the three new clauses aim to do is provide an informed assessment of the Bill's impact on those whom it will affect. Although I have grave reservations about the costs to family businesses and other small firms, I think that new clause 1 will allow us to have an informed and intelligent debate.

Mr. Simmonds: I too support the new clauses. The Bill contains much that is good, particularly the clauses allowing parents flexible working hours when that is

[Mr. Simmonds]

appropriate and providing for paternity and extended maternity leave. Having run a small business, however, I believe that they will place additional burdens on such businesses.

I think we all accept that allowing more rights and greater flexibility in the workplace, where appropriate, is sensible and forward-looking. As my hon. Friends have said, however, the Government must understand that there is a cost to businesses. I am particularly concerned with the cost to small businesses. The provision of dispute resolution and grievance procedures are most likely to have an impact, mostly because they are less likely to have existing procedures from which to develop. According to the regulatory impact study, the total recurring cost—I am not talking about one-off costs—will be up to £610 million.

That extra money must come from somewhere. In the case of small businesses in particular, it can be found in only three ways. It may come from profits, which means that there is less money to reinvest in the business, thus enabling it to grow and making future jobs possible. It may come from a cut in employment. Some businesses living on the margin will not be able to cope with the additional regulatory burden, or with the extra administration and costs. Those businesses will disappear.

Mr. Mark Field: My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) made a good point. There will now be two sorts of employee, those who will benefit and those who are employers in small businesses. The latter will bear a double burden: they may have family commitments, while incurring large costs in terms of both money and time that will not even be included in the £610 million mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds).

6 pm

Mr. Simmonds: My hon. Friend makes a sound point. There is a paradox here in that one of the Bill's underlying themes is to create more family friendly policies so that more time can be spent with children. Yet there may be a direct impact, with those who own and run small businesses being able to spend less time with their families because of filling in forms and dealing with the administration and additional regulatory burdens imposed by the Bill.

It is my view that £610 million is an underestimate. The extension of union learning representatives will have a significant impact on small and large businesses. Furthermore, enormous additional costs could be imposed under the regulations. New clauses 1 and 3 should be considered carefully, otherwise we will have no idea of the costs for businesses.

It would be strange if the Department of Trade and Industry carried out no assessments and had no monitoring structures to ensure that these provisions did not have a detrimental impact on businesses, small and large. I hope that when he responds, the Minister will say that monitoring structures will be put in place. If not, how on earth will the Minister and his colleagues be able to judge whether the legislation has been a success? The only way in which the hon. Gentleman will be able to tell whether the Bill has been a success is if fewer cases go to employment tribunals, and he has already said that that will not be the case. He must consider the new clauses carefully, as they will ensure the Bill's success.

Many small businesses struggle to survive. It is only by the hard work and dedication of those who run them that they can thrive in a highly competitive economic situation. The new weight of red tape to be placed on employers needs to be assessed. It is my view, as I stated in Committee, that small businesses with fewer than a certain number of employees should primarily be exempt from certain aspects of the Bill. It is my belief that certain measures will be so detrimental to small businesses and their ability to create employment, grow and drive the economy forward that the voluntary arrangements that are in place and have been thriving in the past should be allowed to continue.

My view is supported by the Forum of Private Business, which says:

> "The Bill establishes formal provision—whereas small businesses operate more effectively under informal conditions. Where regulatory compliance becomes mandatory and recourse is through legal process, then advocacy requires the production of formal evidence . . . or in a word, bureaucracy."

It is not unreasonable for new clauses 1 and 3 to require the Government to report back to the House with a detailed assessment of the Bill's impact. Further burdens are already borne by business, such as the processing of loans and administration of benefits. Those are matters for which the Government are responsible. Fulfilling those tasks takes up valuable management time and distracts from the focus of what management or owners are supposed to do in running small and medium-sized businesses. I hope that that work will be clarified in the Carter review and that it will give recognition to those who run small businesses.

The burden of regulation on business has greatly increased under this Government. The one theme that runs through the remarks of all the business men and women I meet is that we must reduce red tape. I plead with the Minister: if the Bill goes through, a line must be drawn in the sand. There must be no more additional regulations and burdens placed on businesses, particularly small businesses, which will lead to a further reduction in competitiveness.

Alan Johnson: The new clauses would impose a regime of evaluation of the measures in the Bill that is both costly and unnecessary. New clause 1 requires an annual report of the impact of these measures. New clause 3 requires an assessment of the average cost to business per employee of administering each measure in the Bill and proposes that those costs be reimbursed from the public purse. New clause 4 seeks an assessment of the additional resources likely to be required by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service before the measures in parts 2 and 3 of the Bill come into force.

Let me make it clear that I entirely agree about the importance of effective evaluation policy. We have already provided details of our proposals—they are included in the regulatory impact assessment—to evaluate the impact of the separate provisions in the Bill. That assessment, as hon. Members are aware, is available in the Library. It makes it clear that individual policies will be evaluated effectively. For example, we have accepted the recommendation of Professor Sir George Bain's work and the parents taskforce. That taskforce had representation from the CBI, and the splendid Simon Topham, a small business man, and other small business representatives contributed to the nine unanimous recommendations. One recommendation is about taking a baseline survey on current practice on flexible working later this year, with a repeat study, three years later, to measure the effect of the legislation.

We have taken account of the possible costs to ACAS arising from the implementation of parts 2 and 3 of the Bill and we have assessed the impact on employers of administering the maternity and paternity pay policies.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister said that the proposals in the new clauses were costly and then went on to say that he intends to carry out precisely the evaluations that we propose. How are his evaluations not costly while the ones proposed in the new clauses would be?

Alan Johnson: I will be coming to that.

On flexible working, the specific recommendation from the Bain taskforce was that in such a brave new world, as Conservative Members have said, there was no precedent and that, as we had scant information, we should take measures now because the provisions to set a proper baseline against which to evaluate those procedures will not apply until 2003. Accepting a recommendation to conduct such surveys does not mean that we will accept every proposal to conduct surveys and reconsider costs, as proposed in the new clauses.

I shall say more about ACAS in a moment. Evaluation is important, but it cannot be produced out of a hat. Immediate impact assessment is often of limited value, as I admitted in Committee. It takes time for evidence to emerge, and it is not always possible to separate the effects of legislation from other changes taking place in individual businesses.

Conservative Members must decide which way they want to play this. On the one hand, there is a kind of "Letwinisation" that says that these measures are part of a good society and that people should have adoption and paternity leave. On the other hand, there is the old and rather tired view. I pay tribute, however, to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), who accepted that there were benefits to society but put the fascinating and quite new argument that society should pay for them. They cannot have it both ways.

The Bill introduces measures that are long overdue. It is ludicrous that adoptive parents have received no help in the past. It is ludicrous that, despite having for 20 years been part of a World Health Organisation drive to encourage mothers to breast feed their children up to six months, we have done nothing about it. It is ludicrous that so many workplaces and workers have no recourse to internal procedures for resolving disputes and grievances.

These matters must be tackled. Each new clause refers to the cost of a measure for employers and the public purse, but none of them refers to the benefits. I am pleased that some of my hon. Friends talked about the benefits. The family friendly policies, the improved dispute resolution, the modernisation of the tribunal system and the other policies in the Bill are designed to create modern productive workplaces that provide the partnership and flexibility that both employers and employees seek to strengthen business competitiveness.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister said that none of the new clauses referred to the benefits, but that is not the case. New clause 1 specifically asks for an assessment of the distribution of both the costs and the benefits of the Bill.

Alan Johnson: I stand corrected on new clause 1, but the Conservatives' whole approach to the debate, including—with a few honourable exceptions—practically all their contributions, has concentrated on the costs rather than the benefits.

It is true that many of the substantial benefits that will arise for employers are difficult to quantify in financial terms. None the less, it would be wrong to discount them. We do not want to fall into the trap that Oscar Wilde once described, of knowing the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

Mr. Prisk: One of the key points that we have tried to get across to the Minister is why we feel that there should be a continuing assessment. The reasons are that this is an enabling Bill, not a static item that can be costed instantly, and because things will change and the Secretary of State will have powers to add new elements. That argument lies behind our case, and I do not think that the Minister has tackled it.

Alan Johnson: If the hon. Gentleman saw me smile just then, I should let him know that I was not smiling at what he was saying; it is just that I could have done without the pager message saying, "Vote on new clause expected soon". I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's point in a moment; there is a special little bit of my speech dedicated to him.

There are benefits that can be quantified. Good employment relations lead to improved productivity, better retention of employees and reduced recruitment costs. The average cost of filling a vacancy in 2001 was nearly £4,000—up over 11 per cent. on the previous year—and it is often small firms that find it most damaging to lose valuable staff. If only 10 per cent. of the women who currently do not return to work after maternity leave decided to return as a result of the improvements in maternity rights, employers could save up to £39 million each year in recruitment costs alone.

We are also taking the pain out of administering the new benefits by enabling employers to claim back in advance the moneys that they are paying out. Small firms will get back more than 100 per cent. of their payments. We are almost doubling the number of small employers who qualify for that benefit, and that is an important step forward.

Like me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may remember that once, all employers received 100 per cent. reimbursement of statutory maternity pay, so you, like me, might have wondered where that went, and why they now get only 92 per cent. Lo and behold, it was the Conservative Government in 1994, who reduced the percentage.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Never.

Alan Johnson: Yes, that comes under the category of "Strange but True"—an item that I used to read every week in *The Eagle*. It was the party that is now telling us that we have to pay more attention to business, and not load burdens onto it, that cut the reimbursement of statutory maternity pay from 100 per cent. to 92 per cent.

[Alan Johnson]

just eight years ago. To coin a phrase, this is a win, win, win scenario. Employers, working people and the economy all gain.

The new statutory procedures for dispute resolution recognise the needs of businesses, both small and large. Avoiding costly, stressful and time-consuming litigation will benefit employers, employees and the employment tribunal system. The benefits should become apparent in the second year after the introduction of the procedures, producing an annual saving for businesses of between £60 million and £80 million.

What I said earlier about the number of cases is an honest assessment of how things will look in four or five years' time. The number of cases may have tripled—incidentally, they doubled before any new rights were introduced. That must mean that we have a healthier society in which people are more aware of their rights and less afraid to use them. They are more assertive, and they have more rights to be aware of; I do not apologise for that. I think that there is a consensus, even among Conservative Members, that age discrimination and so on should be tackled, so it would be strange if we did not envisage that at some stage the number of cases would pick up. Current estimates are based on the current number of cases, and we are expecting to make savings. When the new jurisdictions are introduced, having a procedure in the workplace will help to resolve the issues without a tribunal.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister is in danger of having his last remarks misinterpreted. He appeared to suggest that, as people become more aware of their rights, he welcomes the fact that they are taking more litigious action in support of them. Is he saying that a move towards a more litigious society is to be welcomed?

Alan Johnson: Not at all. I am suggesting that as so many workers now have no opportunity to exercise those rights so that problems can be resolved in the workplace, it must be right for us to introduce the changes in the Bill.

6.15 pm

I do not accept that employers should have the right to recover their average costs of complying with each of the requirements of the Bill from the public purse, any more than they should have the right to recover their costs in administering PAYE, national insurance, tax credits or VAT. The best employers already bear many of those costs, because they already recognise the value of providing their employees with those rights.

We understand the pressures that new regulation puts on business. We have, rightly, spent much time in Committee discussing the proposals, and we are committed to sympathetic implementation of the Bill and to ensuring that employers and employees have enough time to understand and plan for the changes. We will provide clear, accessible, user-friendly guidance to all, particularly small businesses. The Inland Revenue has also expanded the range of help available through business support teams, which now provide one-to-one on-site assistance to employers on every aspect of their obligations in respect of Inland Revenue business.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge said that some employees would gain from the Bill and some would not. He mentioned flexible working, and I want to address that point again, because I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) on that. It is good of him to join us tonight. He is taking a break from his endeavours to become a father, so I hope that he can hang around until the end of the debate.

My hon. Friend was right to point out that we have a two-pronged approach. There is regulation; we are introducing the measures for parents of children under six because we do not want to miss out a generation. Best practice often emerges from small businesses, which have some cracking arrangements for flexible working, which help to recruit and retain staff. We are spreading that best practice for parents and small children.

As the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge recognised, we all have a stake in helping to ensure that children are raised properly. We cannot wait a generation. There is also the work-life balance campaign. We have an enormous interest in spreading best practice for flexible working even when it is unrelated to parenthood. It might be that people have other caring responsibilities, or simply want to pursue a hobby. This is a two-pronged attack.

I have heard the backlash argument from several quarters, although the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge did not put it so—*[Interruption.]* That is true; he did not put it at all—but that does not stop me from replying to the point, in case he does put it.

The backlash argument diminishes and insults working people, who in the wide consultation that we conducted in workplaces never once raised that idea. Of course, they understood the need for mothers and fathers to spend more time with their small children, and yes, many of them said that they would like the same kind of flexible arrangements for themselves, but they did not say it out of resentment.

Mr. Hammond: I shall put that argument now, in response to the Minister. Just for the record, does he acknowledge that when it is ruled either by the courts or through new statutory provisions that, for example, a policewoman with a small child does not have to work a night shift, by definition her colleagues who are not mothers of small children will have to work more undesirable night shifts? Is that not a logical and inevitable consequence?

Alan Johnson: That is a depressing approach to the clause. The answer to the question is no, not at all. In the vast majority of cases, such problems are resolved when one employee suggests that a change in shifts would be beneficial, and then finds a colleague willing to change out of a rigid shift system.

Mr. Hammond *indicated dissent.*

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but it requires only a little thought and imagination to break away from the rigid systems that developed when women were largely absent from the workplace because only men had full-time jobs. I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong in that regard.

I am conscious that I need to make some progress. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West also referred to ACAS, and the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge was right in new clause 4, to draw attention to that body's importance in matters covered by parts 2 and 3 of the Bill. However, in seeking an assessment of additional resources likely to be required by ACAS when the measures in this Bill are implemented, the hon. Gentleman is once again concentrating on costs and ignoring benefits. It is clear from the responses received from all parties to the "Routes to Resolution" consultation paper that the services of ACAS are highly regarded. That body will play a key role in ensuring that businesses, especially small businesses, have the advice and guidance that they need.

We fully support that role. During the financial period 1998–99 to 2000–01, funding for ACAS has increased from £26.2 million to £32.4 million, a rise of 23 per cent As I said earlier, the regulatory impact assessment of the Bill already refers to the possible costs to, and efficiency gains for, ACAS arising from the implementation of parts 2 and 3 of the Bill. However, the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge will be aware that the employment tribunals system taskforce, set up by my Department and the Lord Chancellor's Department and headed by Janet Gaymer, is considering the resources of the employment tribunal system as a whole. The operational impact on both ACAS and the ETS of the policies included in parts 2 and 3 will be part of that consideration. The taskforce reports in spring this year, and we shall take account of all its recommendations when considering the funding needs of ACAS.

As I said earlier, however, there are benefits as well as costs to consider. The dispute-resolution measures in the Bill are designed to encourage parties to resolve their problems in the workplace. That should reduce the number of cases resorting to litigation and using ACAS services. Secondly, clause 24 introduces a fixed conciliation period. That will free up conciliators' time to deal with claims in which both parties are engaged in the conciliation process, and will allow ACAS to concentrate on the cases where its expertise is needed most.

Overall, the policies in the Bill strike a balance between rights and responsibilities in the workplace. I was shocked and surprised by what the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) said. People are rushing in and out of my tent at great speed, but the hon. Gentleman was guilty of trying to have it both ways. Liberal Democrat Members seem to lurch from one position to another, depending on whether they are trying to win seats in the north or the south-west. We well remember that they opposed the windfall levy that supported the new deal, and that they supported a regional minimum wage. Now, almost alone, they propose that the national rate for the minimum wage should be available for people aged 16. That is an incredible change from their original policy. I am therefore disappointed with the hon. Gentleman, who needs to rethink his approach to the Bill.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge asked whether I could say anything about the Carter committee, or whether it was a state secret. The Small Business Service has conducted a series of focus groups to obtain views about the recommendations made by Patrick Carter in his payroll review. Small businesses and other interested parties participated fully.

The SBS subsequently submitted a report to the Inland Revenue that will feed into the consultation process. However, I am afraid that Conservative Members will have to wait for the Budget report for more details, as the Carter committee was set up by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I have no news of any imminent report.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) said that the regulatory impact assessment was incomplete and uncosted. He suggested too that the cost of following the regulations provided for in the Bill was not included in the assessment. The implication was that those costs would be the wine bill that would follow the bill for the main courses.

I can tell the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge that the RIA will be updated and placed before the House with all secondary legislation fully costed. However, the RIA that is in both Libraries of the House contains the best estimates of the costs of meeting both primary and secondary legislation. It is therefore wrong to say that the existing RIA does not cover the costs of meeting requirements imposed by secondary legislation. I am aware that Opposition Members have tried to add to the costs imposed by the Bill, and a later amendment that would extend statutory paternity pay to the self-employed would carry with it a considerable cost.

I do not believe that we have to make a choice between helping business and helping the work force. I believe that we can do both. The evaluations that we conduct will look at costs but also at benefits for employers and public funds. They will take account of the time that it takes for the impacts to be felt. I hope that I have reassured the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge that these amendments are unnecessary. An assessment of the kind proposed in new clause 1 would be too narrow, too soon, and conducted too often. The proposal in new clause 3 could well mean more bureaucracy and red tape for employers, and the proposal in new clause 4 would duplicate work already in hand.

I ask the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge to withdraw the amendments. Failing that, I hope that the House will reject them.

Mr. Hammond: To continue the culinary metaphor, I sense that the House is anxious to move on to other items on the menu, so I shall attempt to be brief. I am sure that the Minister will be relieved to hear that we will get rid of the big tent a little later on, and that we will resort to our customary small tents pitched on opposite sides of the parliamentary divide.

I am disappointed by the Minister's tone. I did not expect him to accept the new clause, but I hoped that he would make a more significant gesture in respect of the need for ongoing monitoring of the costs and benefits—and I emphasise the latter—arising from the Bill, and their distribution. In the absence of a provision in the Bill requiring that such assessments be made, we shall have to rely on what might be called unmandated assessments by the Department. It will be for Opposition Members to keep the Government on their toes by making sure that the matter remains in focus after the Bill has come into force. We will then be in a better position to evaluate its real impact.

I want to thank my hon. Friends the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) and

[Mr. Hammond]

for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) for their valuable contributions to the debate. Many small businesses are worried about the Bill's implications for them, and the extent of the burdens that it will impose. It is important that we explore such matters with the Government properly and thoroughly. Finally, while we remain inside the big tent in this debate, I should like to thank the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) for his support.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) a couple of times mentioned the proposal in new clause 1 for an assessment of average costs on business. I accept that there is no meaningful concept of an average cost of doing something: different businesses will have different costs. The proposal was an attempt to establish a crude and dirty form of reimbursement that at least would recognise the costs being imposed on business.

I am disappointed that, in the 21st century, Government Members and the Minister are still capable of believing that the Government should legislate to impose benefits on business. If something benefits business, all the Government have to do is to help and encourage it through education so that smaller businesses in particular can be aware of the evidence in support of the assertion that a practice will be beneficial. I can think of no case where there is credible evidence that the Government, using the blunt instrument of legislation, have been best positioned to impose on businesses the benefits that they believe will flow from these measures.

I readily and willingly recognise that, in many cases, there will be benefits from many of the courses of action resulting from the Bill. One of the pities of the Bill is that, in many cases, we are talking about things that good employers are doing and are willing to do, and about areas where the arrangements and relationships between employees and employers are appropriate. The Government are seeking to impose a one-size-fits-all solution by imposing, by statute, a requirement that their practices be followed in every workplace.

I am disappointed by the tone of what the Minister said, but I shall look forward to seeing the evaluations to which he referred. It will be our duty to keep a close watch on those evaluations and to probe their results as they become available. I am sorry to upset the Government Whips, who may have sent out a pager message, but in view of the fact that the debate is tightly timetabled and that there is exciting business further on, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 2

ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS OF WIDENING DEFINITION OF 'EMPLOYEE'

'.—The powers granted to the Secretary of State in this Act to provide by Regulations that persons who do not fall within the definition of "employee" are to be treated as employees for the purposes of the Act and persons who fall within the definition of employee are not to be treated as employees for the purposes of the Act shall not be exercised until such time as

(1) the Secretary of State has prepared and published an assessment of the need for and expected effects of any proposed exercise of such powers; and

(2) the Secretary of State has prepared and published an assessment of the expected costs and benefits of any proposed exercise of such powers and of the incidence of such costs and benefits.'.—*[Mr. Hammond.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.30 pm

Mr. Hammond: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause deals with issues that will be familiar to those who served on the Standing Committee. In Committee shorthand, it was known as the "employee versus worker" question. In parts of the Bill, a curious architecture is employed, which is repeated in new clause 6(8)(c). It says that the Secretary of State may by order

"make provision for this section to apply, with or without modifications, as if—

(i) any individual of a description specified in the order who would not otherwise be an employee for the purposes of this section were an employee for those purposes, and

(ii) a person of a description specified in the order were in the case of any such individual, the individual's employer for those purposes."

We have a counter-intuitive provision in the Bill that allows the Secretary of State to define somebody as an employee and somebody else as his employer, even where they are not in that relationship.

The reason for this provision is that our employment law is somewhat confused. In some places, it refers to employees and in others, it refers to workers—for example, in the minimum wage legislation and the working time directive. EU directives typically refer to workers, rather than employees, but the rules governing transposition of directives into national legislation seem to allow that definition to be narrowed when directives are transposed into domestic law. That seems to be the Government's legal advice. The TUC appears to have different legal advice, which goes to show that one can get as many opinions as one can afford barristers to give them.

There is a dispute in relation to the fixed-term work provision of the Bill. The TUC disputes the Government's interpretation, which is that the EU directive applies only to employees. I understand that the TUC is threatening legal action to clarify the situation in the future.

Who are these workers who are not employees? The Minister can correct me if I am wrong, but probably Members of Parliament, as office holders, are workers—at least some of them are—who are not employees. A more important category of workers who are not employees are agency workers working for a company but not employed by it.

It is important that I set out the Opposition's position. We believe that for the UK to maintain and enhance its competitiveness, it is essential that we maintain flexibility in our work force. We recognise the increasing need in the modern workplace for flexible working. I will argue against anything that reduces flexibility in the labour force.

Some, if not all, elements within the trade union movement appear to regard any form of non-conventional work as "Mickey Mouse" jobs. It is important that we change that attitude through education. We must make it clear that there is a role for flexible and unconventional work in our economy to maintain and enhance our productivity and efficiency and to defend Britain's role in the world.

Judy Mallaber: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that most parts of the trade union movement have been keen on allowing flexibility to assist people to have better working arrangements? However, the main aim is to ensure that that flexibility is operated within an environment in which there is still protection for people's rights. We do not want a system in which, for example, an employer can say at the beginning of the day that a worker has to work an extra three hours that night. The question is how we marry decent employment rights to the flexibility that can be of benefit to people in running their lives and to their employers.

Mr. Hammond: It is interesting that the hon. Lady approaches the issue of flexibility purely in terms of flexible working hours. Flexible working arrangements and non-conventional working patterns go wider than that, encompassing fixed-term working and, in some cases, the outsourcing of work, in which someone moves from being an employee to being a self-employed contractor. That has happened in the Post Office in relation to Parcelforce delivery van drivers. The Minister may tell us something about that, as he is an expert on that subject.

There are a range of flexible approaches to work. My perception—I hope I am wrong—is that parts of the trade union movement are still relatively hostile to some of those non-conventional work patterns; for example, to the use of agency workers in business to provide flexibility at the margin to respond to demand.

That must change, but the Opposition are not in the business of defending abuse. If an elaborate ruse has been developed to pretend that somebody is not an employee, that is an abuse and it is right to deal with it. We heard some scary stories in Committee about fixed-term workers who were on their 40th fixed-term, six-month contract, having been in the same place of employment for 20 years. That is not what we are about. We do not want to deny employees proper protection by allowing artificial classifications of their work to continue.

The Secretary of State has instituted a review of the wider issue of the definition of "employee" and "worker" across the board of employment legislation. The Minister said repeatedly in Committee that the Secretary of State would not use the powers she had under the Bill to define a person as an employee and another person as his employer if they were not employee and employer, unless and until the review is completed. The new clause goes further, in that it looks for a proper assessment of the need for and the expected effects of any proposed exercise of these powers.

The new clause looks for the review to produce more than just a decision to do something; it looks for a proper and full appraisal of the arguments for doing something—in other words, the way in which the proposed change is expected to deal with the mischief that is expressed. It would require a full assessment of the expected costs and benefits and their incidence.

The Government come under pressure from the trade unions. I do not suggest that that is improper—they also come under pressure from some Labour Back Benchers. In Committee, some Labour Back Benchers put pressure on them rapidly to resolve the employee-worker issue. We are concerned that those powers are unnecessary because, if the Secretary of State waits until the review is completed and a comprehensive approach to that legal problem is formulated, consulted on and properly debated in the House, a broader Bill will be needed to deal with not only the issues raised by the Bill, but existing employment legislation.

We are forced to ask ourselves why such provisions have been included in the Bill. Our concern is that the Minister is perhaps offering a sop to the trade union agenda and the pressure that he is coming under. After all, the Labour party received £9 million from the trade unions at the last election, and it is not surprising if the Government are asked for something in exchange. The Minister is wincing. Was the figure not £9 million? If the figure was slightly different, he will no doubt correct me. Compared to the Formula 1 and Hinduja scandals, £9 million is a tremendously large sum and we might expect some pressure to be put on the Government.

Can we be sure that the review is not a cosmetic exercise? Can we be sure that the Government have not already decided to bow to that bit of the trade union agenda and cave in on the employee-worker issue? Under new clause 2, we seek to place at the end of the current review process a rigorous and proper assessment of the need for and the effects of the proposed exercise and its costs and benefits. The purpose is simply to ensure that there is a proper, fully informed debate.

Mr. Prisk: Does my hon. Friend agree that, under new clause 2, we not only seek to stimulate that debate, but in a sense adhere to the spirit of the National Audit Office's view that any new proposal should be properly assessed and involve a regulatory impact assessment?

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Although I have to tell him candidly and in confidence that I am not optimistic that the Minister will accept the new clause, I hope that, in response to it, he will take the opportunity on the Floor of the House to confirm that there will be no move to implement the powers under the Bill to change the definition of "worker" so that workers are covered by its scope until the review process is completed, the proper assessments have been carried out, a consultation exercise on the proposed legislative changes has been undertaken and general legislation is introduced to do at a stroke whatever needs to be done across all employment legislation.

In other words, I seek an assurance from the Minister that the inclusion of such provisions in the Bill does not imply that, on the basis of a quick and dirty analysis immediately after the review is completed and as a sop to the trade union agenda, he will present the prospect of including workers in the Bill's scope ahead of a more comprehensive solution if the review deems that necessary. I hope that good practice will require him to do what he would be asked to do under new clause 2, and that he will confirm what I have asked him to confirm so that Conservative Members can be comfortable in the knowledge that the changes will be made on the basis of properly assessed need, cost and benefit.

I hope that the changes will not be part of a wider political trade-off in the Labour party's smoke-filled tower, with Ministers desperately bidding to win trade

[Mr. Hammond]

union leaders' support for their privatisation of public services, while simultaneously keeping up the flow of cash into Labour party coffers. We hope that the Government will not be tempted to offer sacrifices that perhaps impose more burdens on private sector businesses, while saving Ministers' bacon and the Labour party's funding.

6.45 pm

Frankly, those are our fears, and I hope that the Minister will be able to allay them by accepting new clause 2 or, if he is not in a generous enough mood to do that, perhaps by confirming that he will follow the procedures that I suggest and not use the powers under this Bill until a general Bill is introduced to do so—if, indeed, that is the conclusion of the review.

Mr. Lloyd: I thought that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) made a fascinating speech. I congratulate him on becoming skilled at presenting an almost acceptable face for the modern Conservative party. He tries his very best to make calm, seemingly rational contributions on various issues. Indeed, he spoke for the Opposition in that manner in Committee, with one or two exceptions. Nevertheless, we get down to the visceral Tory inside him when he talks about giving sops to the trade union agenda and caving in on the worker-employee issue. Let us be a little more grown up than that. The worker-employee question involves very real issues. The simple fact is that there is genuine legal debate about the implementation of the fixed-term directive and whether the British Government's interpretation of EU law and its incorporation into national legislation is acceptable. The matter may or may not end up in the courts, but it is a serious issue.

Fixed-term contracts in higher education present us with an especially serious issue. Some 11 per cent. of employees in higher education are now on fixed-term contracts. Frankly, it ought to be astonishing that the hire-and-fire mentality is used to run our academic institutions. Let us be brutally honest: we are talking not about universities and higher education institutions dealing with the sudden excess demand that arises in the summer, when 27 more undergraduate courses in physics or philosophy may be required, but about universities cushioning themselves so that they can take on or get rid of staff at summary notice. Many of those people have been employed on fixed-term contracts for many years. Frankly, that is an abuse, and it would be a shame if the current system continued in perpetuity.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument—I am with him in that I, too, want to find a comprehensive solution to the worker-employee issue—but he may feel slightly slighted if I tell him that I do not believe that it is the Conservative party's ambition to sort out the issue in favour of those who are often in the most marginal employment circumstances and who will lose that sort of protection. I hold that view because at no time during their 18 years in government did the Conservatives go down that path. There is no evidence that they even wanted to recognise those issues. In fact, the opposite is the case, as they sought to cast into that employment never-never land far too many of our fellow citizens—people who are just as entitled to dignity at work as those who are formally given the legal status of employee.

The hon. Gentleman would have more credibility if he told us what the Conservative party would be prepared to do if it ever got back into government. What is the modern, Letwinised Conservative party prepared to do? We do not believe that it has any real credibility given the fact that Conservative Members' rhetoric runs in sharp contrast to many of the views that have been expressed. He did not talk about employers abusing their employees by imposing unacceptable employment conditions. He paid passing reference to the fact that that was not acceptable, but we need a little more than the condescending view, "We can recognise bad conditions when we see them." We need to consider how employment law can resolve such evils.

Mr. Hammond: If the hon. Gentleman casts his mind back, he will remember that we had this exchange in Committee. I suggested that the Inland Revenue had generally been pretty adept at defining a person as an employee, despite all attempts by ne'er-do-wells to define them as something else. I suggested to him that that was a good model on which to base our discussion.

Mr. Lloyd: I look forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman develop Conservative policy in this area. However, I remind him that an awful lot of the lags in legislation that this Government had to pick up in 1997 were a result of a deliberate and calculated policy. That sort of policy is always justified by the Opposition when the need for flexibility is discussed. He is right that flexibility is important. It is important to employers and it is right and proper that employment relations should be structured so as to allow industry to be maximally efficient. There is no argument about that, and certainly none that mainstream trade unionists would want to advance.

There is also an argument that flexibility cuts the other way and is also about giving the employee access to acceptable working conditions and the opportunity to take advantage of them. We did not hear a lot in the previous debate or even in the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks about the need for flexibility for employees. In that context, I appeal to my hon. Friend the Minister to reflect hard on what is being said, because the new clause has all the marks of a wrecking amendment. It is superficially attractive—it asks us to delay, to wait and to look for a little more information—but the real intent is to cement the current position more permanently, so the day will never dawn when employers are forced to face up to their real responsibilities.

Mr. Hammond: Whether that day will dawn will be in the Government's hands when they complete the review. The point of the new clause and of what I have said to the Minister is to seek his assurance that no piecemeal approach will be taken using the order-making power in the Bill and that he will wait until a comprehensive solution has been proposed, consulted on and implemented across the board as a definitive remedy. Does the hon. Gentleman support that approach?

Mr. Lloyd: No, I do not, and I shall explain why. The issues are intellectually and practically separable.

A decision on what is right and proper in relation to the aspects of the Bill that are covered by the new clause can be made coherently on its own merits. My hon. Friend the Minister will have the legal capacity to make that decision if it is in the interests of the operation of industry, commerce, employers and employees. I urge him to do it at the right time, subject to proper consideration. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that these matters require adequate consultation, but there will be no need to wait if we know what is the right thing to do.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman more generally that we must resolve the overall problem of the definition of employee and worker. I repeat that if he is asking us simply to delay the resolution of that problem, he will find no support among Labour Members. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be reasonably robust in his response and tell him that he is making a good try. However, the real Tory view is coming out in little soundbites designed for the Federation of Small Businesses and in Conservative central office press releases. That is the real voice that he wants the country to hear. Alas, the mask begins to slip away as we reach the end of debate. We look forward to more of that mask slipping to reveal the real Tory party.

Brian Cotter: There was much talk about tents earlier. On this occasion, we are in need of a tent; indeed, we have our own very large tent that is expanding by the day. People are flocking into it because we have our own view on all these issues. When the Government have been correct, we have supported them. Otherwise, we have taken an alternative view.

The Minister will recollect that, in Committee, I suggested that we should be able to incorporate the concept of worker into the Bill. To put us into line with the EU directive, it was not unreasonable for us to do so. I shall not rehearse our discussion in Committee of the various examples of people who are workers but are not covered by the fair social requirements of the Bill. I am worried that the Conservatives' new clause would not merely allow the Government's review of employment status to decide this issue, but put in its way blocks such as the requirement to prepare and publish reasons for the action and an assessment of additional costs in relation to it.

This issue must be addressed to put us in line with other countries, and I expect the Government to do that sooner rather than later. I look forward to them addressing it as soon as possible.

Ms Walley: Before my hon. Friend the Minister replies, I want to express my concerns about this issue. I did not have the dubious distinction of serving on the Committee that considered the Bill, so I was not party to the shorthand that has been used to describe employees and workers. Clause 45 is about fixed-term work and I hope that he will take full account of the views expressed.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) referred to dinosaurs in the trade union movement and to scandals of various kinds. However, I remind him of the scandal of workers whose employers classify them as such not for reasons of flexibility but because they want to deny them basic employment rights. That cannot be right, especially when we come to interpret important European directives.

I flagged up this issue on Second Reading, and I have corresponded with the Minister on it since then. I am grateful to him for considering the points that I have made and I am fully aware that a review is under way. However, the regulations on part-time workers apply to the broader category of workers. The directive that gives effect to the part-time workers regulations and that which gives effect to the fixed-term work regulations contain an identical definition of worker. Therein lies the problem.

Clearly, the Government will not accept the new clause, but it refers to the distinction in relation to considering future definitions. On logical grounds—and perhaps legal ones—it is unsatisfactory for the proposed fixed-term work regulations to have a restricted application. That will give rise to uncertainty and confusion for workers and employers. Part-time workers will have protection under the part-time workers regulations, but fixed-term workers will not have protection under the fixed-term work regulations. However, part-time fixed-term workers will have protection under the part-time workers regulations. That is an anomaly.

The representations made by the TUC in respect of establishing consistency on how to define workers and employees should be addressed as quickly as possible. I would not like the House to accept a new clause that would further prevent the Government from considering the distinction between workers and employees. They need to resolve the matter quickly, especially in view of constituents such as mine who are not receiving their fair employment rights because of the failure to resolve the issue.

Alan Johnson: I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) that it is a shame that the new Tory veneer of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) has faded away and that the old Tory is revealed in the claim that these policies are dictated to us by the trade union movement. It is water off a duck's back.

7 pm

The hon. Gentleman alleges that contributions to the Labour party have influenced its policy. We would love to know who contributed to the Conservative party when it was in government between 1979 and 1997. That would be fascinating to hear, because it might enable us to draw the same conclusions and to make the same cheap points. The truth is, however, that we do not know because it is a secret. We do not know who contributed a penny of the considerable funds that went to the Conservative party up to 1997. Labour party funding is open, transparent and governed by law. We introduced the legislation that insists on all political parties being similarly frank about the money that they receive. Before we are criticised, we deserve to know who funded the Conservative party in their 18 years in government.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The Labour party was born from the trade union movement. Why should we apologise for that or refuse to recognise that we are influenced by it?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend is right; we have nothing to apologise for. It is interesting to note that the trade union movement in many other countries donates

[Alan Johnson]

money to mainstream right-of-centre political parties. We have the curious anomaly in this country that no one would consider donating money to a party that, alone among the mainstream right-of-centre political parties, until recently opposed the provision of decent and civilised standards for people at work. Conservative Members should think about that extraordinary paradox.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that, unlike company shareholders, who have no say in donating money to the Conservative party, individual trade union members have a right not only to opt out, but to vote on the union's affiliation to the Labour party and on donations?

Alan Johnson: Another important point. Were we to have a transparent debate on who funded the political parties that have been in government over—to pluck a figure out of the air—the past 23 years, the Conservatives would regret the day they moved on to this territory. It was unworthy of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge to suggest that the trade union movement donates funds on any basis other than the desire to have a properly funded party that is broadly sympathetic to free and independent trade unionism. If he doubts that, he should accompany me when I meet my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central to discuss what policies the trade union movement proposes.

The hon. Gentleman is also mistaken in thinking that we need primary legislation because of the employment status review. We already have similar powers to extend a wide range of employment rights to non-employees by using the order-making power in section 23 of the Employment Relations Act 1999. That has been in effect since October 1999 without creating the problems that he foresees. We have to take additional order-making powers in the three main clauses because they do not relate to employment rights per se, so we cannot rely on section 23 to extend their coverage to non-employees.

On the substance of the new clause, I am happy to reaffirm that we will review employment status in relation to statutory employment rights under section 23. The mechanics of the review have commenced. We hope to publish the consultation document in late spring, when we intend to set out a radical approach. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we do not intend to use powers contained in the clauses in advance of that comprehensive review.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) mentioned the problem in the higher education sector. It is crucial that we sort that out effectively and I hope that it will be a priority. The current situation is untenable for lecturers and for the interests of academic work. It needs urgent attention.

Alan Johnson: We will consider that and other aspects of the employee versus worker issue.

The fixed-term work directive is incorporated in the Bill and covers pay and pensions. I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) that we discussed that directive in Committee. Unlike the part-time workers directive, it is not clear that the term "employee" causes a problem by leaving groups of workers outside the embrace of the fixed-term work directive. People have mentioned agricultural casual workers, but we established that they have a contract and are employees for the purposes of the Bill. It would not be possible to walk through a Post Office sorting office without tripping over a sociology student from Sheffield university who is employed as a casual worker by a contract of employment and is, therefore, covered by the fixed-term work directive. Incidentally, part-time people on fixed-term contracts are covered by virtue of the fact that the part-time workers directive covers workers and employees.

The biggest problem that we discussed in Committee related to employment agency staff. The social partners who signed the fixed-term work directive specifically excluded agency staff because they decided to have a directive that was aimed purely at agency staff, one of the three groups of atypical workers. It would be ludicrous to extend the Bill to cover employment agency staff in advance of the review under section 23 and of the directive, which the Commission is now producing since the social partnership broke down. That is why the fixed-term work directive should not be extended to cover workers at this stage. We could consider the issue in the review.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was not daft enough to think that I would accept his new clause, and I hope that I have reassured him on that fundamental point.

Mr. Hammond: I suppose I should return the compliment given by the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd): he sometimes manages to look like the acceptable face of old Labour, and one has to peel away the veneer to see what is going on behind. For all the talk of big tents, some people will be relieved to know that the small tents are alive and well. They are close at hand should we ever need them, as I suspect some of us might in the forthcoming debate.

There is a proper issue at stake. I have acknowledged that and the hon. Member for Manchester, Central is doing me an injustice in suggesting that I pay lip service to it. Apart from anything else, there is a ridiculous confusion. There is no point in having legislation that cannot be understood by a reasonably educated English-speaking person. Clearly the confusion between worker and employee has become intolerable and needs sorting out. We merely want to ensure that that is properly and objectively dealt with on the basis of the facts, of the benefits that are likely to flow from any changes and the costs of making the changes.

We are trying to disentangle the real issue from what I characterise as political horse trading. The hon. Gentleman might deny that until he is blue in the face, but the Opposition and most of the 56 million people in this country do not believe that difficult discussions do not take place on items of the trade union movement's agenda, because it funded the Government to the tune of £9 million to fight the general election campaign that put them here. We want to ensure that this issue is not lost in political horse trading but dealt with properly and objectively on the basis of the facts. I ask the hon. Gentleman to accept that at face value; it is up to him whether he does so. I detected in some of his comments a hint of the old attitude that any job that does not conform to a conventional work pattern is a Mickey Mouse job. We must try to get away from that.

Mr. Lloyd: I shall read with interest not only the hon. Gentleman's speech but my own, and I think that if he reads my speech carefully he will detect no such attitude. Flexible working is in the interests of an efficient economy and, very often, it is in the interests of employees; but we must get the balance right.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman must understand that such work involves not only flexible working times and patterns for employees but what the Minister described as atypical forms of work. Typically, atypical workers will be difficult to unionise, and I understand that there will be an instinctive reluctance on the part of the trade unions to embrace atypical forms of work. That is a legitimate, self-interested approach, but I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that we must change our attitude in the interests of maintaining flexibility in the economy and trying to maintain our competitiveness against our European neighbours, many of whom are now beginning to embrace concepts of flexibility in the work force after years of our deriding them for not doing so. We must accept that atypical workers will form an important part of this country's total labour force.

In this debate the Minister has, perhaps tactically, thrown up a little smoke in anticipation of the debate to come. I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you would not want me to stray too far into the subject of trade union funding for the Labour party, but the Bill is about delivering part of the trade union agenda. I am not saying that that agenda is wholly wrong or that we should reject it, but we are entitled to question the relationship between the Government, acting as the Government of the day, the Labour party, recipient of substantial largesse from the trade union movement, and the trade union movement, which has an open and published agenda, some of which is being incorporated in the Bill. Indeed, some of it has been incorporated at a late stage in the Bill's passage. That is a legitimate public concern, and we would be failing in our duty as an Opposition if we were not probing the matter and asking questions.

Judy Mallaber *rose—*

Mr. Hammond: I give way for the last time.

Judy Mallaber: Will the hon. Gentleman at least accept that the motivation of Labour Members on issues such as those that I pursue, including rights for part-time workers, the worker-employee issue that I raised in Committee, decent working conditions and the ability to combine family and work, arises from genuine individual concern and just happens to be the same as that of the trade unions? Will he please stop casting aspersions on our motivation, because it is not influenced by the question of whether there is money in the equation? I espouse those views regardless of money. Does he accept that Labour Members' motivation is honourable?

Mr. Hammond: I suggest that the hon. Lady get herself a slightly thicker skin. We have a Government who got themselves elected in 2001 on £9 million of trade union money and a pledge to bring the trade unions to heel and impose a solution to reform our public services. So far, all we have seen is repeated backtracking. Conservative Members are entitled to ask, "What is going on?" We are scrutinising a Bill that implements a significant number of items on the TUC's published agenda. There is nothing wrong with that published agenda, but we are entitled to ask questions.

7.15 pm

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) *rose—*

Mr. Hammond: Although I said that I would not give way again, I am tempted to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Andrew Mackinlay: I think that there is a third angle. [HON. MEMBERS: "A third way?"] No, a third angle—there is a substantial difference. I have been listening to the debate, and I can no longer restrain myself from speaking. I am of the view that the trade unions are far too acquiescent, and they do not flex their muscles on the Labour party's national executive. They have not exercised their right to interfere with manifestos. This is a matter that will come out in memoirs, but it needs to be said. My criticism is that trade union officials sit on their hands at the national executive committee when the manifesto is being drawn up; they are too deferential to people from the Prime Minister downwards, and then they go to the TUC conference—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) responds, I point out that we are dealing not with memoirs but with new clause 2, and I trust that he will bear that in mind when he responds to the intervention.

Mr. Hammond: Of course I shall bear it in mind, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) will stay to regale the House with his thoughts in the next debate.

The Minister accused me of being veneered. I always think of veneer as rather cheap, and I prefer to be thought of as solid. He suggested that my veneer was peeling away, but we are beginning to see some veneer peeling away on the Labour Back Benches. We have a Prime Minister who appears to be biting the trade union hand that feeds him, and who describes as "wreckers" people who oppose the Government's mandated agenda for reform of the public services, and we have Conservative Members who seek to advance the trade union agenda. It will be interesting for us and, I suspect, for the public, including my constituents who only narrowly avoided a strike by South West Trains today, to see how the Minister responds to some of those issues later this evening.

I sense the House is ready to move on to the next debate. Conservative Members are somewhat reassured by what the Minister has said about the non-piecemeal implementation of the results of the review being undertaken by his Department. We look forward to a full and proper debate on the conclusions of that review before any secondary legislation is proposed. The Minister has previously indicated that there will be proper consultation

[Mr. Hammond]

and an opportunity for parliamentary review. In the interests of economy of time, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 5

PARTICIPATION IN OFFICIAL INDUSTRIAL ACTION

'(1) The Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 (c. 52) is amended as follows.

(2) In section 238A (participation in official industrial action)—

- (a) In subsection (2) the word "(a)" and the words ", and (b) subsection (3), (4) or (5) applies to the dismissal" are repealed; and
- (b) subsections (3) to (7) are repealed.'.—*[Mr. Lloyd.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Lloyd: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 8—*Dismissal and participation in industrial action*—

'(1) The Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 (c. 52) is amended as follows.

(2) Subsection (2B) of section 238 (dismissals in connection with other industrial action) shall cease to have effect.

(3) Section 238A (participation in official industrial action) shall cease to have effect.'.

Mr. Lloyd: It is interesting that new clause 5 is grouped with new clause 8 in the name of Conservative Members. I think that, once again, we will see a sharp divide. There has been talk of big tents, but there are big marquees on the Conservative Benches and tents on the Labour Benches—we know which interest the Conservative party ultimately seeks to represent in these issues.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) does not seem to understand that it is possible to have the concept of fairness in the workplace. We ought to strive towards that and try to ensure that our legal regime is fair for employees and employers because, in the end, that proper balance is in the interests of individual industries companies and society in general. The hon. Gentleman must accept that an attempt to erode the advances made by the Employment Relations Act 1999 would be not only counterproductive but grossly unfair. The Minister for Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), who is in his place, was the architect of that pioneering and transforming legislation. Not only the House but the country owes him a debt, because that measure moved industrial relations a long away from the confrontational view of the world of work that characterised the 18 years of Conservative Government. The Conservative new clause coupled with mine—in fact, I hope it is not coupled with mine—would move the clock backwards.

Among other things, the 1999 Act provided recognition that when a lawful industrial dispute occurred, it was not only unreasonable and unacceptable, but incompetent to allow an employer simply to dismiss the work force. That power to dismiss was used relatively rarely. I am sure that we will hear a lot from Conservative Members about South West Trains and all manner of cases, but the notion that a large organisation like South West Trains would seek to dismiss its work force is ridiculous—a work force cannot be got rid of or replaced overnight from the queue at the benefits office. However, some individual employers used that lack of legal protection for employees on strike and got rid of them to resolve an industrial dispute. There is in such action nothing of the concept of fairness at work, nor of negotiation, nor of trying to find an acceptable balance. It is simple abuse of power by one party—the party privy to all the power.

It is a matter of fact that the right to strike is recognised in international obligations, for example, the International Labour Organisation convention. The legitimate right to strike is accepted throughout the world. Nothing in that suggests that there is a desire to strike, or that there is always a happy conclusion to strikes—industrial disputes can be bitter and difficult to resolve. However, sometimes the only industrial weapon that employees have at their disposal is withdrawal of their labour. The 1999 Act acknowledged the right to strike and provided that an employer who tried to dismiss people during the first eight weeks of an industrial dispute would be deemed to have acted unfairly, so employees would have recourse through industrial tribunals. It is right and proper that there is protection that forbids employers to take arbitrary action during the initial phase of an industrial dispute.

It is also a matter of fact that the overwhelming majority of industrial disputes last for nowhere near eight weeks. Eight weeks is an extraordinarily long time for people to withdraw their labour. I remind the Opposition that people who go on strike do not simply not go to work: they do not get paid, they have no money to support their families, and they get none of the things that take people to work in the first place. To strike is no small action.

The eight-week cut-off undoubtedly reflects some sort of compromise. Those who argue that there is a trade union agenda would say that many trade unions wanted more than eight weeks, but the Government at the time took the view that since the provision was a new one, eight weeks was appropriate. However, since the passage of the 1999 Act, we have gained experience of the practical operation of the legislation.

Let me tell the House about a company in the constituency of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams), in which constituents of many of my colleagues representing that part of Wales work. Friction Dynamics was originally part of the Turner and Newell group; it made brake linings and had been in existence for many years. The current owners took over in 1996, and between that time and roughly this time last year, the relationship between management and those who worked for the company deteriorated. Many of the employees had worked there for many years—far longer than Mr. Craig Smith, the current employer, had been at the company.

Contemplation of industrial action was triggered by changes that Mr. Smith wanted to make. Some of those changes affected the company's health and safety regime, others involved arbitrary and swingeing cuts of 15 per cent. in basic pay rates, and cuts in shift premiums. The management proposed those serious changes, and the members of the Transport and General Workers Union in the company balloted on and took industrial action: they went on strike. After striking for one week, those people tried to go back to work, but Mr. Smith locked them out of the workplace—an arbitrary action.

Hon. Members might say the strike and the lock-out were equally arbitrary, but let us not attempt to judge the merits of either. I am not here to discuss the merits of Mr. Smith's stewardship of the company, although there are serious questions about how he got there and how the company got into that position. However, during the period of the lock-out, there was no meaningful attempt on his part to negotiate with the trade unions or his employees, only his insistence that he would make the proposed changes. I mentioned that Mr. Smith tried to change the health and safety regime. During the dispute, someone still working in the company lost some fingers; that was because health and safety protection was poor after the employer reduced it.

At the end of the eight-week period, Mr. Smith decided summarily to sack all the members of his work force who had been on strike for one week and had been locked out for a further seven. If Conservative Members rise to justify Friction Dynamics' actions in that case, we will know exactly what the Tory party is about, but I trust that they will speak to the issue. Hard cases define whether law is good or bad. The case I describe does not represent a romantic retreat into old-fashioned trade union defence. This is 2002, and I am talking about a real work force comprising real people whose rights in the workplace were arbitrarily snuffed out by their employer.

Mrs. Betty Williams: At the start of my intervention, I declare that I am a full paid-up member of the TGWU. I thank my hon. Friend for mentioning Friction Dynamics, from which 87 workers were deplorably dismissed during the events he describes. Many are constituents of mine, and they have assured me that they give new clause 5 their wholehearted support. I am sure that my hon. Friends are aware that they brought their case here to Westminster; they lobbied us hard, seeking support for their cause. The 1999 Act gave protection to my constituents for eight weeks—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady appears to be starting a speech. She has made a long enough intervention. I call Mr. Lloyd to continue his speech.

Mr. Lloyd *rose—*

Andrew Mackinlay: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If it is to be the habit that everyone declares what they are, I should make it clear that I belong to the TGWU, I am closely associated with the Graphical, Paper and Media Union, and I formerly worked with the National and Local Government Officers Association, now part of Unison. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you cut me in half, you will find that I am like a stick of rock, with trade unions running all the way through me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If hon. Members interests are on the Register of Members' Interests, it is important that they declare them; otherwise, it is entirely a matter for individual Members to decide.

Mr. Lloyd: In a way, that is the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge had a little fun suggesting that there was something terribly unpleasant about the relationship between trade unions and other members of society, specifically Members of Parliament. The trade union agenda for the work force at Friction Dynamics was extremely clear. It was explicit. It was felt that the work force had been dealt with atrociously by the management and that they were legitimately seeking recourse to Parliament to persuade Members that an injustice had been done. Parliament was asked to resolve an injustice. There was no Luddite trade unionism; instead, the proper and acceptable use of the parliamentary system was employed.

7.30 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am not aware of the case of Friction Dynamics, but it seems to be an appalling one. Is it not the case that if the employer had refused to negotiate, to seek conciliation and to engage in arbitration, the dismissals that he pushed through would have been unfair, and the unions would have been able to have the employees reinstated through the tribunal process?

Mr. Lloyd: They would not have been able to have the employees reinstated because the tribunal would not have that capacity. It is a romantic view to bring back reinstatement. There are many examples of employees who have gone to tribunals following dismissal. The idea of going back to the same workplace would be ridiculous. I do not say that unkindly, but there would not be that possibility.

The hon. Gentleman has touched on a point that I intended to make—

Llew Smith: I, too, am a member of the Transport and General Workers Union. I do not apologise because I am quite proud of that fact.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) seemed to imply that there is virtually no difference between a strike and a lock-out in the context of Friction Dynamics. I was staggered. The Friction Dynamics' work force are defending their conditions and health and safety standards. Is it surprising that they would want to do so? Surely going on strike in those circumstances is different from a lock-out, where conditions are removed from the work force.

Mr. Lloyd: That is right.

Almost certainly the employer's ambition from the beginning was to engineer an industrial dispute. It is up to the employer now to demonstrate that that was not the case and that he did not sack the members of his work force with a view to eroding the terms and working conditions of those at Friction Dynamics.

As a trade unionist, I would not be prepared to defend that form of industrial relations. I am the chairman of a company limited by guarantee. It does not make profits and I receive no personal remuneration. However, I must take serious responsibility as an employer, and the company's employers are the people. Come the day when I could be accused of abusing other people's employment rights in the way that is alleged of Friction Dynamics, I would be ashamed even as a Conservative Member, let alone a Labour Member.

Norman Lamb: I am a member of the Law Society and a consultant to a law firm. I associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's remarks while declaring those interests.

[Norman Lamb]

The case to which the hon. Gentleman has referred highlights what I would regard as a loophole in the provision that provides for an eight-week protected period. I agree that it is ludicrous that locking out the work force for seven weeks after an initial one week on strike enables the employer to take advantage of the provision.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that his new clause goes much further than addressing that loophole? It removes entirely the concept of an eight-week protected period for people on strike.

Mr. Lloyd: It certainly goes further than addressing the loophole to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

What is the right that Conservative Members will be seeking to erode even within the eight-week period? It is not only the right to maintain employment, although the employer will not be stopped from sacking people; we are talking about the right to go before an industrial tribunal for assessment. I accept that that is much better than nothing, and that in some instances there can be exemplary payments. However, I think that the maximum award that a tribunal can make is £50,000. Someone who loses his job, especially in an area of relatively high unemployment, can lose much more than £50,000, through loss of income and loss of pension entitlement for example. The House should reflect on that. This is not a trivial point.

The right to go to a tribunal is not the equivalent of the right to stay in work to ensure that the process of arbitration is carried forward under ACAS or whatever.

Mr. Hammond: I am not familiar with the Friction Dynamics case, but I understand that the hon. Gentleman is making an impassioned plea on behalf of the work force. Will he tell the House something about the economic fundamentals of the business? Is it a hugely profitable business with an avaricious owner who is seeking to make yet larger profits, or is it, as I suspect, a marginal business that is placed under threat of its very existence by competition from abroad? What are the circumstances?

Mr. Lloyd: I am not in a position to reveal the company's balance sheet. It has not been shown to me. I can tell the House that Mr. Craig Smith was engaged in a lawsuit in the United States before he bought the company. It is alleged that moneys that he used to fund the purchase of the company were in fact compensation payments to the victims of contact with asbestos. Mr. Smith might want to tell a different story, but not all of Mr. Smith's actions are those of a reputable employer.

If the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge is saying that a company in financial and commercial difficulties may arbitrarily erode working conditions, refuse properly to negotiate and then sack its work force, he has a different view of the rights and responsibilities of employers. That is not merely my belief, but the view of the overwhelming majority in this country.

Mr. Hammond: Of course I am not saying that. I am saying that the hon. Gentleman must tell us the whole story. What happened before the strike began? If Friction Dynamics is a business that is up against the wall, facing foreign competition and its very existence is under threat, what concessions were the work force willing to make? We need to know all the circumstances. If the hon. Gentleman is to hang his entire argument on a specific case, he needs to ensure that Members are fully informed of the circumstances of that case.

Mr. Lloyd: The information given to the House is fairly comprehensive. The actions of an employer who engineers a dispute by imposing swingeing cuts in pay rates and eroding the fabric of the health and safety regime are not those of a high-quality employer who is determined to build a modern Britain.

We are talking of an employer who follows a week's industrial dispute by a lock-out—he is not at the forefront of modern management techniques. He is an employer who then sacks his work force.

There is a little more information, that may be merely colour or emotion on my sad part. The company is the subject of an improvement order that was issued by the Health and Safety Executive because its health and safety standards are not up to scratch. That is the sort of employer about which we are talking. Conservative Members may be delighted to defend such companies, and that is fine. At least we know clearly where the tents begin and end. However, I do not want to be in a tent that defends such companies. I want to be in a world that says that the summary dismissal of employees in industrial disputes is not the way, even after eight weeks, to resolve industrial disputes. We should be moving forward by using mechanisms of arbitration.

Mr. Weir: I understand that the work force of Friction Dynamics agreed to a pay freeze for four years. It was not a rapacious work force but one who was willing to help out the company. Yet they have been treated as the hon. Gentleman has described.

Mr. Lloyd: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman as I had forgotten that; it provides me with a reasonable answer for the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge, who may now begin to accept that the company is no employment angel.

Mr. Hammond: I am not going to comment on an individual case about which I do not have the facts. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman has gone a long way down the line of reciting allegations about an individual; I certainly do not want to follow that route. For the benefit of Members who may not be fully aware of the history, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the item that he is putting on the agenda in his new clause has not sprung from the Friction Dynamics case? It is a long-standing item on the TUC agenda to remove the eight-week limit.

Mr. Lloyd: With great respect, that is a silly point. We are talking about Friction Dynamics, which is a real company; 87 people are involved. That may not matter to the Opposition Members, who may simply wish to discuss the new clause as a theoretical exercise. However, the world of work is not a theoretical exercise; it is real and matters enormously to the 87 people who have been sacked, their families and their communities.

The House must make up its mind whether it simply regards the actions of a company like Friction Dynamics as unacceptable or whether it wishes to use its legislative capacity to begin to move the agenda on. It should not seek to tip the balance towards the mythical trade union agenda imagined by Opposition Members, but should recognise that, at the moment, relations are one-sided; an employer who can dismiss employees has too much opportunity to exercise arbitrary power. We do not want a shift so that trade unions can determine working conditions; we are simply asking for equity and justice. It is desirable for employers to get back to the arbitration process.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Will the hon. Gentleman reflect again on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond)? Having moved a new clause, it is incumbent on him to tell the House its scope because we are legislating. I do not know the circumstances of the case so I shall not comment. A bad employer may well be involved, but it is still incumbent on the hon. Gentleman to explain to the House the full scope of the new clause that he is asking us to accept.

Mr. Lloyd: I am not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman was here for the early part of the debate.

Mr. Knight: I was here for all the hon. Gentleman's speech.

Mr. Lloyd: Had the right hon. Gentleman listened, he would have realised the full scope of the new clause, which aims to remove the present eight-week time limit on protection against unfair dismissal. That would apply to Friction Dynamics, Ciba-Geigy and any company or organisation in the land. All legal protection is bound to be based on real-life events. This is not a game or a theoretical or intellectual exercise; it is not something that we are debating in the learned debating societies of our best universities. It is about real people and real employers; it is about companies and employees. In this case, the employer, instead of choosing to work in harmony with his work force—the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) made the point that the workers had already made significant sacrifices to try to maintain the company's viability—was prepared to abuse the power and rights that, sadly, the law gives him.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way; he has been generous in accepting interventions. Can he not conceive of any circumstance during an industrial dispute, however long it has gone on, in which it would be appropriate for an employer to dismiss the work force for breach of contract? For example, people may simply refuse to do the job that they have been employed to do. Can the hon. Gentleman not conceive of such a situation arising? Under his new clause, it would never be possible fairly to dismiss a striker.

Mr. Lloyd: Holding out for the bad employer is not a rational way of going about dispute resolution. Bearing in mind that taking industrial action involves a real cost to employees, only a tiny number of industrial actions last anything like eight weeks. I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at the statistics; he will find that it is all there in evidence.

Conservative Members believe that they can score a political propaganda point in this kind of debate. However, if they seek to make cheap politics out of the situation, they should remember that they do so at the expense of people's livelihoods and families. The present law is defective, and does not give protection to employees; it gives too much opportunity for the arbitrary exercise of power by employers, which is why the new clause attempts to move things on.

7.45 pm

Llew Smith: When we debated earlier amendments, we were accused of merely responding to the demands of the trade union movement. Does my hon. Friend not think it ironic that the Opposition spokesperson appears to be responding to demands of rogue employers, of which Friction Dynamics is one?

Mr. Lloyd: I agree, and I invite the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge to make his position clear. I have outlined the case; the hon. Gentleman has tried to hide behind the protection of saying, "Well, of course I do not know the details." I have given him the details; if he wants to challenge them, he should do so. But comments on the case should relate to real people. As I said, this is not an empty exercise; it is real and is happening now.

I have spoken for longer than I intended. I know that Opposition Members are champing at the bit because they want to reinvent their version of the class war. I shall therefore conclude my speech and make way for others.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Hon. Members may find it instructive and useful if I give some objective information about the dispute at Friction Dynamics, which is in my Caernarfon constituency. Conservative Members may not wish to hear the facts, but I shall give them none the less.

The dispute has dragged on for 43 weeks, and resulted in the workers being sacked after eight weeks. It is still awaiting resolution, which may not come until next May—more than a year since the dispute started—at an industrial tribunal. The current owner, Mr. Smith, took over in 1997.

Mr. Hammond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Do the sub judice rules that we normally follow in the House not apply to employment tribunal cases?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not aware that the comments of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) affect anything that is sub judice.

Hywel Williams: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The current owner took over in 1997 and tried to impose a four-day week without overtime, attendance at meetings without pay, removal of bargaining agreements and a no-strike agreement. The employees had agreed to a four-year pay freeze, as the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) said. They tried to negotiate, but came to the reasonable conclusion that their employer was not interested in agreement. They have a proven commitment to the company and its predecessors; many of them have worked there for 20 or 30 years—all their working lives, in fact. Some trained there as young apprentices.

[Hywel Williams]

The workers would not act without thinking or without just cause, particularly given their present circumstances. They would have been aware of the consequences of being out for 43 weeks, and perhaps over a year. The union held a ballot strictly in accordance with the law, and the workers initially went on strike for a week. I accompanied them on their first day back and witnessed the employer himself locking them out; that is the nature of the relationship that he has fostered. The dispute continued. As I said, the workers were sacked after eight weeks and are still out after 43 weeks; they maintain a 24-hour picket and have acted with dignity and moderation. They, and the union, have always been willing to negotiate.

The community in Caernarfon is solidly behind the strikers, including, Conservative Members may be interested to learn, the local business community, which has made a substantial donation to the strike fund. It realises the damage that the dispute is doing to local businesses, not least to Friction Dynamics itself. It realises the damage that is being done to investment in business in north-west Wales. It wants to see the dispute resolved, but resolved with justice.

The employer has been enabled to sack the workers. He has been encouraged in his intransigence and unreasonable attitude by the power that the eight-week rule has afforded him. Some hon. Members might say that if protection from the sack is justified for eight weeks, it is justified thereafter. I would agree, but I would also point to the practical and catastrophic effects that have resulted from the entrenchment of the employer's power to be unreasonable.

It cannot be right or reasonable that a strike is dragged out for 43 weeks, and eventually for more than a year. Workers at Friction Dynamics and in the community of Caernarfon cannot understand why that is allowed to happen. They do not want a tribunal. They want their jobs back in circumstances of justice and fairness. They see justice denied and justice delayed. For that reason, I am glad to support new clause 5.

Dr. Cable: I shall deal with new clauses 5 and 8 together, as I believe that that is a more helpful way to deal with the issue. The two new clauses pull the existing balance in different directions, and in many respects in extreme directions.

The eight-week rule was a carefully crafted compromise. One new clause seeks to eliminate it entirely, and the other seeks to make it indefinite. Both seem fundamentally unreasonable. A useful starting point—here, I believe, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) was on the right track—is to put the debate in context. We are living through a period in which industrial action is at a very low level. In the last year for which recorded figures are available, 500,000 days were lost, as against an average of 660,000 over the past decade and about 7.5 million for the 1980s, with comparable figures for the 1970s. During the present period of economic boom, one would expect more industrial action.

Mr. Hammond: Does the hon. Gentleman agree, though, that we are having this debate against a backdrop of what appears to be a change in trend, with a rising tide of trade union militancy facing the country?

Dr. Cable: Indeed, there are specific points that relate to the public services, which I had intended to deal with and which present specific problems. Had new clause 8 been directed to that issue, I would have had more sympathy with it. In fact, the hon. Gentleman's new clause is broadly couched and would withdraw the eight-week rule from all employees in all disputes. I will address the current wave of unrest in a moment.

I agree with the hon. Member for Manchester, Central that we are in a period of relatively subdued industrial action. It hardly calls for a major upheaval in the legislation, or one that tilts the balance radically in one direction or the other.

Mr. Simmonds: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that new clause 5 would increase industrial discord and strike action above its present level?

Dr. Cable: I doubt that new clause 5 would do that, but I do not support it. I doubt that the new clause would make a great deal of difference. Essentially, we are debating a point of principle, rather than its consequences.

The underlying point made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Central is that the right to strike is a fundamental right and should not be qualified in the way that it currently is. I do believe that workers have a right to withdraw their labour. There should be a right to strike, but it is not an unqualified right. There are conditions: strike action must be reasonable and must take account of third parties. We will come to that when we deal with the issue of the railways, as I am sure that we will.

Mr. Lloyd: It is one thing for the hon. Gentleman to interpret what I said, but it is another for him to make up things that I did not say. Of course the right to strike is conditioned. I pointed out that the dispute that I described had gone through the full legal provisions, a ballot and so on. It was a legal strike. A strike is quite a constrained activity in our society. Employees cannot simply walk out or withdraw their labour at a moment's notice. Those days hardly existed, and do not exist now.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the new clauses tilting the balance. Does he seriously believe that the change that would be introduced by new clause 5 would have any dramatic effect, taking into account the fact that the overwhelming majority of strikes—not just 99 per cent., but 99.999 per cent.—last for far less than the eight-week period that the provision covers?

Dr. Cable: As I said a few moments ago, I doubt that the new clause would have any dramatic effects one way or the other. The hon. Gentleman raised it as an issue of principle, and I believe that on the issue of principle, he is wrong. If we confined the discussion to the effects on the firm described—the hon. Gentleman told a horrific story, and a rather moving one—I am sure that the facts that he gave are right and I have total sympathy with the work force involved, but the attempt to create legislation around one case seems fundamentally unsatisfactory.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) said in an intervention, if there is genuinely an anomaly about a lock-out being included as part of a strike, that is a ludicrous situation and the legislation should be amended to deal with it, probably in another place.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Central is in danger of creating a situation in which, say, an entirely different trade union, in a different environment, might embark on a prolonged period of industrial action—which, as the hon. Gentleman said, is difficult and might be costly to the work force—without any regard for its consequences for the industry. The union might refuse to embark on arbitration or conciliation, in which case the employer might well have a genuine feeling of grievance, but there would be no opportunity for the employer to bring the dispute to an end.

Although the hon. Gentleman was correct to say that the right to go to a tribunal is not equivalent to holding on to one's job, the fact remains that after the eight-week period, workers do have protection through the tribunal system. Statute 238A, which is the cornerstone of the Bill, provides a considerable degree of protection. I do not know what happened in the case described, when the 87 workers took the employer to a tribunal, but it provided them with a considerable level of protection, although perhaps not perfect protection. New clause 5 is an excessive response to what was clearly an unjust situation and an unjust action by that employer.

New clause 8 goes wholly in the other direction. By allowing a dismissal to take place for a strike without any period of protection whatever, it would effectively withdraw the principle of the right to strike. It would be likely to make many employers use dismissal as a first rather than a last resort.

Mr. Hammond: My understanding is that until the Employment Relations Act 1999 came into force, that was the situation. The eight-week rule did not apply, and I do not remember it being a burning issue in this place or outside.

Dr. Cable: I remember that there were emotive debates around the 1999 Act, when it was felt that some degree of balance should be restored. I believe that it was, and I would defend the current position.

I would have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge if his new clause were more narrowly drawn. There is a real issue now in the public services, which is quite different from the Friction Dynamics case. In the case of the public services, the victims of the dispute are the general public. We need legislation to deal with that. In some parts of the public services, there are already restrictions on the right to strike. The most obvious and extreme case is the police force, but others are constrained in different ways.

There is an argument for restriction within the public services, and I define public services widely to include the railways, because of the subsidy element. That restriction might well be linked to a willingness to arbitrate. There would be a case for saying that the eight-week protection could be withdrawn in certain circumstances in essential services if the parties to the dispute had refused to arbitrate. The arbitration element in that does not tip the balance towards the employer. If arbitration is compulsory, the employer is bound to take the result. The outcome is taken out of management's hands. There is a concession in both directions. If new clause 8 were more narrowly drawn, I would have more sympathy with it. If the Government come under growing pressure from industrial action, perhaps they will amend the Bill in another place. However, the new clause would apply across the national economy, including manufacturing industry, which accounts for only 10 per cent. of industrial action. That is excessive and inappropriate and I cannot therefore support it in its current form.

8 pm

Rob Marris: I shall be brief because we have much to discuss. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) asked whether there should ever be dismissals during a strike. Most, if not all hon. Members would agree that anyone who committed gross acts of violence against the person or criminal damage could be dismissed. However, many of my colleagues and I believe that no one should be dismissed simply for going on strike. Existing law allows that to happen after eight weeks.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) appears to be under the illusion that those who are fired after eight weeks can simply go to an employment tribunal. They can try, but they will not succeed under current legislation. After the eight weeks have run out and the employer has fired the employee, the latter will not succeed in an employment tribunal because the dismissal does not count as unfair under existing law.

I suspect that most hon. Members hoped that the eight-week rule would shorten industrial disputes. However, it can have the opposite effect. The employer can simply sit out the eight weeks. That tends to lead to longer disputes. If employers know that they cannot simply wait for eight weeks, but might have to wait indefinitely, it would be a greater incentive for them to bargain in good faith. Clearly, Craig Smith has not done that.

Mr. Osborne: Those who served with the hon. Gentleman in Committee remember that he tends to talk about amendments, but not vote for them. Will he assure us that he will press new clause 5, to which he is a signatory, to the vote?

Rob Marris: I shall give no such assurance until I have extended my hon. Friend the Minister the courtesy of listening to the Government's response. It would be foolish to do otherwise.

Norman Lamb: If the Minister does not accept the proposals in the new clause, will the hon. Gentleman and other Labour Members press it to a vote? He asserts that the protection ends when the eight weeks have elapsed. Does not he accept that section 238A(5) of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 provides continued protection when the employer has not gone through proper procedures to resolve the dispute? Protection therefore does not exist simply for eight weeks. Will he comment on that?

Rob Marris: I shall gladly comment on both points. I did not mention proposals; I said that I would listen to

[Rob Marris]

the Minister's response. Section 238A(5) simply provides people such as Craig Smith with a fig leaf. It allows them to display a veneer—a noun that was used earlier—of negotiating and going through the motions with no intention of settling a dispute. They then fire people after eight weeks. The eight-week rule tends to prolong disputes, and I do not believe that that is hon. Members' intention. Most of us want shorter disputes that are resolved justly and fairly. Clearly, that has not happened for the 87 workers from Friction Dynamics and their community.

Does the Minister believe that the eight-week rule accords with the United Kingdom's duties under the International Labour Organisation conventions that we have signed? If it complies with their wording, does it accord with their spirit?

Mr. George Osborne: As hon. Members would expect, I oppose new clause 5 and support new clause 8. I enjoyed serving in Committee with the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), who often makes a good deal of sense. However, I was not familiar with the case to which he drew our attention, and I am not convinced that it shows the need for a change in the law that would affect all companies throughout the country.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) will speak on anything anywhere, but I hope that other signatories to the new clause will speak in the debate. It is interesting to learn Labour Back-Bench Members' true feelings and moods. Students of new Labour will realise that the Minister is in the ideal new Labour position of being between new clause 8, tabled by Conservative Members, and new clause 5, tabled by old Labour Members. The right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) probably dreams of being in such a position when he is not dreaming about the Cabinet. As the Prime Minister would put it, the Minister is between Conservative wreckers and old Labour wreckers.

Rob Marris: That puts the Minister in the position of fluid dynamics rather than Friction Dynamics.

Mr. Osborne: The hon. Gentleman has redeemed himself by making a good point. When the Minister rejects the new clauses and says that the principle of fairness, not favours means that the Government have to be somewhere in the middle, he will adopt the ideal third-way position, although Ministers no longer use the term, which has been dropped from the lexicon. Anyone who examines the Government's record will realise that they have handed over a stream of new powers to trade unions, including statutory recognition, protection for strikers, which new clause 5 would extend, and easing rules on strike ballots. Trade union recognition agreements have increased from a little over 100 a year under the Conservative Government to 450 last year. A huge expansion in trade union power therefore took place even before the Bill was introduced.

The Bill grants further powers to trade unions. We have discussed the explosion in the number of union learning representatives and the example of union pressure paying off when the Government dropped the modest charging regime that they planned to introduce for employment tribunals. That miraculously happened a few days before the Prime Minister was due to speak to the Trades Union Congress. The fixed-term European directive has been gold-plated and Conservative Members are left wondering why all that has happened. We therefore delve into the Labour party's accounts and its constitution. People who listened to our proceedings today would have been struck by the fact that almost every Labour Member who spoke voluntarily declared trade union involvement.

The Labour party's accounts show that trade unions gave them £9.5 million in the election year. Anyone who has been involved in politics knows the indirect help that trade unions provide through advertising, manpower and so on. One does not have to be a cynic to perceive a connection between the enormous extension of trade union power under this Government and the great provision of trade union money and manpower to the Labour party.

Mr. Weir: I have no connection with a trade union, but I am prepared to support the new clause. The hon. Gentleman's speech is interesting, but new clause 8 would remove any protection from workers who are on strike. They could be sacked the day after a strike began.

Mr. Osborne: New clause 8 would simply mean reverting to the position under the Conservative Government. Most people who consider that Government's history will probably regard their greatest achievement as curbing trade union power.

Norman Lamb: New clause 8 proposes that:

"Subsection (2B) of section 238"—

of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992—

" . . . shall cease to have effect."

That seems to go back beyond the position that existed through the last years of the Conservative Government, and to provide less protection than there was pre-1999. Will the hon. Gentleman explain whether that is the case?

Mr. Hammond: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hate to say this to the hon. Gentleman, but he cannot intervene on an intervention.

Mr. Osborne: I shall be happy to take my hon. Friend's intervention.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I hesitate to say this, because I know that the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) is an employment lawyer, but if my memory serves me correctly, the Employment Relations Act 1999 inserted subsection (2B) into the 1992 Act to which he referred.

Mr. Osborne: My hon. Friend anticipated what I was about to say. Perhaps I should quit while I am ahead by saying that the result of the Government's actions has not been fairness, not favours, but favours, not fairness. There has been a string of new trade union powers, and we all know the reason for that. As I said earlier, the Minister is in an ideal position to do the new Labour trick of saying that he is neither one thing nor the other and that he is in the middle, but we should not be deceived.

Norman Lamb: I shall deal first with the new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), who spoke of his concerns about a very real case. That highlights a potential loophole, and I invite the Minister to comment on the possibility of considering a narrower amendment to the Bill to close that loophole. It seems extraordinary that workers can go on strike for one week, which is followed by a seven week lock-out, and then be fairly dismissed because of the original one-week strike. That is unacceptable, and there is certainly unanimity among the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Back Benchers tabling that new clause. I invite the Minister to respond specifically to that point.

The new clause goes far beyond addressing that particular mischief, however; and to destroy the delicate balance created in the Employment Relations Act 1999 would be a retrograde step. Subject to this loophole being closed, it makes sense to have a protected period in which the right to strike exists, and to have a period after that date in which that right continues to exist if the employer does not go through the proper procedures. Throwing all that out would be throwing the baby out with the bath water and going way beyond addressing the mischief to which the hon. Member for Manchester, Central referred.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) in relation to urging the Government to consider the position of public services and to examine the possibility of introducing arbitration as an alternative to the right to strike which exists outside the core public services.

New clause 8 seems to go back in the wrong direction and to be extreme on the other side. The delicate balance that was created by the 1999 Act appears to have worked reasonably successfully, notwithstanding unusual cases such as that of Friction Dynamics. It has not lead to an enormous growth of strikes. Strikes have increased of late, but there is no suggestion that that is because of the reasonable and limited protection that the 1999 Act provided in terms of the protected period. There is not a case for going back to the pre-1999 period; there is simply a case for addressing the mischief that has been highlighted by the hon. Member for Manchester, Central.

8.15 pm

Mr. Hammond: This has been an interesting debate. The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) is to be congratulated on having introduced his theme oozing reasonableness under the smokescreen of a specific case, the details of which I confess I do not have. Other hon. Members have also alluded to that case. My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) and the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) have made the point that we cannot base such far-reaching legislative proposals on a single case. The hon. Member for Manchester, Central will just have to accept that we will never be able to deal with every situation in society that might give rise to a potential injustice.

We must consider the background to the two new clauses. Legislation has followed legislation—including the Employment Relations Act 1999—since the Government came to power in 1997. Further employment legislation is in the pipeline that will tilt the playing field still further in favour of the trade unions. The result of all this is an upsurge in trade union activity. My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton quoted figures for the dramatic increase in recognition agreements. Mr. John Monks is on record as saying that the trade unions were back in business. Who would expect them to be anywhere else, when they have just paid the party that now forms the Government £9 million to fight their last general election campaign?

Mr. Kevan Jones: In regard to trade union recognition, do not individual workers and members have to vote for that recognition? It is not the trade union bosses or the trade unions getting the recognition; it is individual workers demanding representation at work by trade unions.

Mr. Hammond: All that we are talking about here is a change in the mood—a change in the tilt of the playing field—and a perception that there is now an agenda to concede some of the points that the trade unions have been arguing for a number of years. My perception is that industrial relations during the 1990s—let us not go back to the 1980s—had stabilised at a generally constructive level. Since 1997, we have had a Government who have been determined to tilt the situation in favour of the trade unions, making life more difficult for employers at a time when they are facing significant economic difficulties themselves.

Part of the backdrop to these issues is that the trade unions are acting not as economic guardians of their members but as political pressure groups, apparently determined to wreck the Government's agenda of public sector reform—an agenda on which the Government were elected in 2001. There is a resurgence of militancy in the public sector unions threatening chaos across the public transport system. Many of our constituents in the south-east have to f[illegible]hat chaos, with the strikes by South West Trains. Other train companies face a similar situation in constituencies further north.

Against that backdrop of a rise in union militancy and an increase in disputes that have less to do with employee-employer tensions than with internecine warfare and power struggles between different would-be trade union barons, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central wants to send a signal that we wish to move further away from the status quo that was working well during the last Parliament, and to move back to a situation that would be more akin to the 1970s if the hon. Gentleman's new clause were taken to its logical conclusion.

Mark Tami: Did not the Conservative Government privatise the train system? We now have a vast number of companies, which encouraged the end of national bargaining and got rid of a lot of train drivers. The market is taking hold. Does not the hon. Gentleman support the market?

Mr. Hammond: To be honest, I am not sure of the import of that intervention. The rail disputes are being presented as an old-fashioned disagreement about differentials between train drivers, who are in extremely

[Mr. Hammond]

short supply and have to be paid good wages, and other workers, who are in less short supply. Inevitably, differentials are opening up.

Mr. George Osborne: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Prime Minister unreservedly condemns the strikes? Interestingly, Labour Back Benchers do not.

Mr. Hammond: I suspect that there is a large gulf between the Prime Minister and some of his Back Benchers, some of whom may even support the wreckers, who the Prime Minister condemns regularly and vociferously.

Rob Marris: My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) merely made the point that when the hon. Gentleman referred to the public sector he should have referred to public services. The railways are a public service, but they are not in the public sector. They were privatised by the Conservative Government.

I shall explain to the hon. Gentleman what happened with a number of train operating companies, because he clearly does not understand. After being privatised, they laid off loads of train drivers, causing them to be in short supply, and there was leap-frogging between the privatised companies, which needed to hire drivers. Train drivers are in short supply because the companies caused them to be in short supply.

Mr. Hammond: The disputes are not about train drivers. We all understand that drivers are extremely scarce, which is why they are cutting good deals with their employers. That is the marketplace working, and I have no problem at all with train drivers achieving good settlements. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I have no problem at all with people who have valuable but scarce skills cutting good deals with their employers—that is bound to happen.

The events in the railway industry are being presented as an old-fashioned differential dispute with people in a different labour market demanding that some magical differential between them and the more highly paid train drivers be maintained in the face of the market evidence.

Mr. Lloyd *rose—*

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) *rose—*

Mr. Hammond: Before I give way, let me point out that it is not too cynical to observe that the real issue behind the rail strikes plaguing this country has nothing to do with the pay and conditions of guards, but everything to do with the ambitions of different would-be union barons to control the RMT and its extended and improbable election process.

Mr. Lloyd: I hope the hon. Gentleman will concede that his remarks are totally irrelevant to new clause 5. I can only assume that, as his new clause would remove any recourse to unfair dismissal procedures following industrial action, he wants employers to use the method of the sack to resolve industrial disputes.

Mr. Hammond: To get to the point, new clause 5 would make it always unfair to dismiss a person who breached his contract by striking. New clause 8 would return us to the pre-1999 Act position, which I submit worked very well. The hon. Gentleman said that dismissing a work force is unlikely to be a practical solution in an industrial dispute. Employers are not in the business of dismissing their work force, as their companies and livelihoods depend on them.

To put it bluntly, we are talking about sending signals, and the hon. Gentleman wants to send a further signal that the playing field is tilting in favour of the trade union agenda. We are moving steadily and further down that line. His Government imposed a solution only two years ago, but the matter is to be reopened and pushed further in the direction of the TUC's long-standing agenda. New clause 8 would send the signal that, in the face of increasing militancy, increasing disruption of public services and increasing chaos for our constituents, we shall not return to the industrial relations chaos over which the Labour Government of the 1970s presided. We turn our back on that. New clause 8 sends the signal that we would return to the status quo of the late 1990s, which was workable and coherent.

Mrs. Betty Williams: Will the hon. Gentleman at least concede that the catalogue of events highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) shows the true picture and what happens on the ground with ridiculous employment practices that take us back to the 19th century? Will the hon. Gentleman please agree with us on that point? We have an opportunity to put things right.

Mr. Hammond: It would be wrong to comment on the individual case, because I do not know the facts, and I certainly do not know the broader facts surrounding it. I hear what the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Manchester, Central have to say. On the facts presented by the hon. Gentleman, I agree that we have not heard about a model employer and his conduct towards his employees, but I tell the hon. Lady that if we in this place set ourselves the task of framing legislation that makes every injustice and every bad practice impossible, we shall fail.

The hon. Gentleman's solution—making it always unfair to dismiss a person who breaches his contract by going on strike and refusing to work for his employer as he is contracted to do—is totally disproportionate. He has not adduced a single example of the benefits of his new clause, other than in respect of the case from north Wales. He is sending a signal that must be examined in the context of where we are at this point: the Government, who are relatively newly elected, have a mandate to bring the public sector trade unions to heel and to deliver reform of public services that they have publicly rejected. That was always going to be a tough task for a Government who got themselves elected by taking £9 million of union money.

We face increasing chaos in our public transport system and the threat of a Post Office strike that will bring what remains of our postal services to their knees. I suspect that Consignia will never be able to recover, thus precipitating the collapse of postal services and the post office network which the hon. Gentleman predicted from the other side of the barricade in 1994.

That is the background and that is the situation: the Government are introducing Bill after Bill and moving in the direction of the trade union agenda. We are all aware that there is more in the pipeline—legislation from Brussels and from the Government's own agenda. In response to that, the hon. Gentleman wants to send the signal that the Government are not going far enough and not going fast enough: "We'd like more, please."

The hon. Gentleman cited one case in defence of his argument that we should make it always unfair to dismiss someone who is on strike, breaching his contract with his employer. There are two points of principle here. Yes, a person has a right to go on strike, but, equally, an employer must have a right to dismiss a person who has broken his contract and has decided to go on strike rather than working as he is contracted to do. Of course employers will not usually resort to that, because it would be absurd and would not be in their interests to do so, and of course employees and trade unions will not usually resort to strike action in pursuance of disputes and discussions with employers. We are talking about extreme cases.

8.30 pm

The new clause has been presented as framing a point of principle. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman, who asked me about the eight-week rule, that I could not defend that as a point of principle. When a point of principle is involved, it should be argued either that it is always unfair to dismiss a striker—that is the hon. Gentleman's argument—or that once a contract of employment has been broken, it is fair to dismiss the person who has broken the contract. No argument can be made in principle for the eight-week rule.

Norman Lamb: I agree that the extreme view that it is never lawful to dismiss people on strike, however long the strike and whatever the circumstances, is unacceptable and that a balance needs to be struck between the competing rights of the parties. But is it not also wrong to go to the extreme that the hon. Gentleman seems to be proposing? Is he really saying that it is reasonable for a group of workers who go on strike lawfully for one day to be sacked with no recourse against their employer through tribunals?

Mr. Hammond: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will leap up to correct me, but as far as I know, until the 1999 Act came into force we were not plagued by outrageous dismissals of work forces who had been on strike for one day. That simply did not happen, for all sorts of practical reasons.

I suspect that neither new clause 5 nor new clause 8 would make a huge practical difference to disputes on the ground. Our aim is to send a signal about climate, mood, balance, and the direction in which the Government are travelling. I am astonished that, in the 21st century, such issues still appear to be at the forefront of some people's agenda. I should have thought that most trade unions—let me qualify that and say "most trade unions in the private sector", which brings me to the point made by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable)—had long since adopted a much more constructive approach to achieving what was best for them. It staggers me that, in the 21st century, it should still be thought that conferring the ability to strike indefinitely without being dismissed fairly is the way to pursue the interests of workers—employees and trade unionists. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Manchester, Central and his co-signatories fall within the Prime Minister's definition of "wreckers".

Whether or not new clause 5 is pressed to a Division, I hope that the House will divide on new clause 8.

Alan Johnson: The new clauses concern the protections against dismissal for those taking the protective industrial action introduced in the Employment Relations Act 1999. New clause 5 seeks to extend the protections, while new clause 8 seeks to remove them. The Government consider both unacceptable.

New clause 5 aims to amend the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 to ensure that it is automatically unfair to dismiss an employee for taking part in protective industrial action at any time, whether during or after that action. The Employment Relations Act 1999 significantly strengthened the protections against dismissal for those taking lawfully organised official industrial action. It made it automatically unfair for an employer to sack employees for taking part in industrial action, either within the first eight weeks of the beginning of the action or after that, if it ended within the eight weeks. Most industrial action is short-lived; the rules therefore protect employees in the overwhelming majority of cases involving industrial action.

The 1999 Act also makes it unlawful to sack employees for taking industrial action after it has continued for more than eight weeks where the employer has not taken reasonable steps to resolve the disputes. "Reasonable steps" include the following of disputes procedures and the involvement of third-party conciliation or mediation. That is an important part of the Act.

It is important to recognise that the Act did not amend some dreadful piece of employment law legislation introduced under the Thatcher regime. For students of these matters, it is the 101st anniversary of Taff Vale, another Welsh dispute. Since then, it has always been the case that workers could be sacked from day one of an industrial dispute. In 1999, we provided protection for the first time for eight weeks, and beyond that if no attempt had been made to resolve the disputes.

The Government believe that those changes represented a major advance in protecting individuals who exercised their fundamental freedom to withdraw their labour. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) says that these things did not occur before. Conservative Members are so wrong about this it almost hurts. One reason why they were swept out of power in 1997 and lost again by a landslide last year is that they refuse to understand the difficulties of people at work and continue to be hostile to free, independent trade unionism. I find it reassuring to know that that gap is still there. *[Interruption.]* "Absolute rubbish", say Conservative Members from a sedentary position. Yet the Leader of the Opposition has suggested that the solution to the RMT dispute—and no one was more disappointed than Conservative Members when the dispute this week was called off—was to sack the workers from day one. The Leader of the Opposition said on television and is quoted as saying in print that one of the dreadful things that the Government have done was to introduce protection for eight weeks. That must mean that the solution to these industrial problems, according to the right hon. Gentleman—the human resources manager from hell—would be to sack the work force from day one.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge says that this was not the case before the 1999 Act was introduced. It was—these things happened all the time.

[Alan Johnson]

I can think of several high-profile disputes in which such things happened. Indeed, I was involved in a low-profile dispute at Critchley Labels in south Wales. It had a work force of 36, 99 per cent. of whom were unionised. Job numbers had to be reduced, to which the union agreed. Management decided that the four people to lose their job were the branch chairman, the branch secretary, the treasurer and the committee member of the local union. The work force took balloted industrial action to protect those four people who were disgracefully earmarked for dismissal. The management then derecognised the union. The work force had a 100 per cent. yes vote for industrial action and were all promptly dismissed on day one of that industrial action.

Conservative Members need to carry forward Letwinisation and understand that what we did in 1999 helped to resolve such disputes. Union recognition did not have to be fought on the picket lines and in the trenches. People who wanted their union to be recognised and were prepared to take official, legal, balloted industrial action for that to happen were no longer forced to go through a recognition procedure that involved a dispute. Instead, they had a sensible procedure to follow.

Conservative Members seem to find it disgraceful and disappointing that unions are picking up members again. I suppose that it is ironic. Who would have thought, 10 or 15 years ago, that at the beginning of the 21st century the trade union movement would be in a better position than the Conservative party? I understand Conservatives' disappointment in that respect. It should not be a matter for disappointment that people can follow a properly regulated procedure under which they vote to have their unions recognised and avoid the kind of dispute that we had at Critchley Labels.

Mr. Hammond: Before the Minister gets too excited about the increase in trade union membership, will he confirm that union penetration in the private sector is 19 per cent. and in the public sector, 63 per cent.?

Alan Johnson: I try not to get excited about these issues. I am merely pointing out that the trade union movement in this country has increased its membership. There have been more recognition deals, including at Honda. Conservative Members seem to view that as the collapse of civilisation as we know it.

As for how such disputes begin, the Employment Relations Act sorted out the problem with union recognition. It also solved the problem caused by the fact that, having held their ballot and got a mandate, union members had to take industrial action within 28 days or the mandate would be lost and they would have to reballot.

That was sensible, and I hope that it may be the solution to the dispute currently predicted at Consignia. These days, if both sides are in constructive discussions they can agree to decide that there is no need for the union to be put in the ridiculous position of having to take industrial action—albeit token action—to keep its mandate. The mandate can be extended by another 28 days so that there is a chance of resolving the dispute through arbitration. That is another of the sensible solutions introduced in the 1999 Act that has helped to resolve disputes.

Mr. George Osborne: I seem to remember that when the Minister was a union leader, he found it more useful to employ Lowe Bell than to take his members out on strike—but that is another matter. *[Interruption.]* Apparently he did both. So that I know where he stands in the spectrum of Labour party opinion on the dispute at South West Trains, will he tell me whether he joins the Prime Minister in unreservedly condemning the strike? Yes or no?

Alan Johnson: I am not interested in that sort of silly question. I am dealing with what I thought was an important debate on how employment relations are to go forward in this country. I was shunted into a siding for a second, but let me come back to new clause 5, moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd).

The changes to the 1992 Act that came into effect on 24 April 2000—they have now been in place for about 22 months—were an important step forward. I am making that point—and I know that my hon. Friends agree with me—because some of the criticism that we have received implies that we did something terrible to undermine trade union rights and the rights of workers in dispute when we introduced those measures in the 1999 Act.

There is no evidence that employers are increasingly trying to sack strikers; they have not taken the advice of the Leader of the Opposition yet. In fact, sackings and threats of sackings are rare. However, I have listened to the debate and I recognise that the new clause has direct relevance to the dispute at Friction Dynamics in Caernarfon. That case has caused much distress to the workers concerned and to their local communities in north Wales. I am probably one of only three people in the Chamber who have met the striking workers at Friction Dynamics, and I have received many representations on their behalf. I know and understand their plight.

Some of the sacked workers have made applications to an employment tribunal claiming unfair dismissal. The first of those cases will probably be heard soon. The Friction Dynamics example is the first known to Government in which sacked strikers have invoked the new law and taken an employer to a tribunal. Obviously the outcome will be instructive, but we will not know the result for some time.

One of the questions asked by the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) was whether the lock-out that has turned into an eight-week strike was allowable under the 1999 Act. In our view it probably is not—but I understand that that is exactly what the employment tribunal is considering.

Norman Lamb: Will the Minister give way?

Alan Johnson: In a little while.

I believe it would not be right to amend the legislation on the basis of one case, in advance of a considered approach to any changes after full consultation with all interested parties. The Government believe that it would be wrong to use the Bill to change the law in that area on the basis of one unresolved dispute. It would be much better to address the issue in the round in the forthcoming review of the Employment Relations Act.

Does the hon. Member for North Norfolk want to intervene now?

Norman Lamb: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way to me now, but I think that he has already answered my question. I wanted to ask him whether he would seriously examine the outcome of the tribunal case and consider a possible narrow amendment, if necessary, to address the mischief that appears to have arisen in this case.

Alan Johnson: The House will know that we are committed to reviewing the whole of the Employment Relations Act 1999, including the provision discussed in new clause 5.

8.45 pm

Mr. Lloyd: It is very important that my hon. Friend the Minister tell the House how the proposal will work in practice. I do not expect him to anticipate the results of the review, but he has made it clear that there is a commitment to making the eight-week rule workable and practical. Obviously, other matters—including the question concerning lock-out raised by the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb)—will have to be considered in the review of the 1999 Act.

Alan Johnson: Yes, we are committed to reviewing the whole of that Act. The review will include an examination of the law on the dismissal of strikers. We are committed to introducing any resulting legislation within the lifetime of this Parliament.

I understand the concerns felt by hon. Members on this issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) has raised the matter with me several times, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central. However, I think that it best to channel such concerns through the imminent review of the 1999 Act, not least because new clause 5, if it were agreed tonight, would do nothing to resolve the dispute at Friction Dynamics. No such provision could be applied retrospectively, as the members of the work force understood completely when I spoke to them a couple of months ago. I therefore ask my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central to withdraw the amendment.

I turn now to new clause 8, which I believe would turn the clock back. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge was blatant about that. As with so many things, the new clause shows the inability of the Conservative Members to adapt to change. The world of industrial relations has moved on, and has apparently left them behind.

New clause 8 would repeal all the additional protections for those taking official, lawfully organised industrial action which were introduced in the Employment Relations Act 1999. It would take us back to the law that preceded it, under which there were only modest protections against dismissal for strikers.

It is also important to recall that, under the previous law, tribunals could not hear complaints from workers dismissed during a strike if all of them were dismissed. They could hear complaints from strikers only if they were dismissed selectively, or were offered re-engagement selectively, within three months. Even then the strikers might not win their case. Such workers could not even take their case to an employment tribunal. That is the law that Conservative Members want to reintroduce.

The protections remain in place for those dismissed during action that is not lawfully organised, but we recognise that they were incongruous in relation to lawfully organised, balloted industrial action. They gave completely free rein to employers to sack everyone taking industrial action. So if 100 people were taking action, it was completely lawful for the employer to sack them, as long as he dismissed all 100.

We therefore changed the law with the 1999 Act to give important extra protections to everyone taking lawful industrial action—that is, official action that has been organised in full accordance with the law. Once unions have met the many demands of the law when organising action, we believe that their members should enjoy a measure of protection when they take such action.

The new law has been in place for a little under two years. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge wishes to imply that there has been a significant upturn in industrial action as a result. That is simply not the case. In fact, it is absolute nonsense. There is no evidence that the number of stoppages has increased since our legal changes took effect. The number of stoppages in the year to November 2001 was just 190—the lowest since records began in 1869. That total was 20 fewer than in the preceding year—

Mr. Hammond *rose—*

Alan Johnson: I anticipate that the hon. Gentleman wants to ask what has happened since November, but I assure him that I shall get around to that in a second.

The number of stoppages in the year to November 2001 was 20 fewer than in the preceding year, and 40 fewer than the average annual figure for the 1990s, up to 1997.

Mr. Hammond: Like the members of his Whips' Office, the Minister has wrongly anticipated my intervention. I was going to ask him whether it had occurred to him that 2001 was a general election year. The trade unions financing the Labour party's campaign were hardly likely to pull the rug from under the party's feet by going in for a massive increase in industrial disputes in the run-up to the general election.

Alan Johnson: I feel the need to take the hon. Gentleman, whom I very much like, out for a gin and tonic, and sit him down and go through all of this. *[Interruption.]* Well, perhaps I will stretch to a half of lager. I have not heard this stuff about a huge conspiracy for some time. He should have talked to my mob half way through the election, because they were coming out quite merrily. The idea that industrial action just disappears when we snap our fingers and hold a general election has me holding my sides.

Mr. Hammond: Will the Minister give way?

Alan Johnson: I can take a bit more entertainment, so yes.

Mr. Hammond: Frankly, I find it astonishing that the Minister is suggesting that the trade union movement, which supports the Labour party financially and morally, would not attempt in the run-up to a general election to avoid any action or any questioning of Government policy, however violently it might disagree with it, until after the election was over. Is not that precisely what we

[Mr. Hammond]

have seen: utter silence in the run-up to the general election and then an immediate exercise of the unions' veto over public policy once Labour is in office?

Alan Johnson: I ought to point out to the hon. Gentleman that the majority of the unions affiliated to the TUC are not affiliated to the Labour party. In terms of the figures, he just cannot get away with it. In the last year to November, a year in which there was a general election, we had the lowest level of industrial action since records began. This year, even with the regrettable and high-profile disputes that we have seen—incidentally, they are high profile because there are no disputes anywhere else—we will have the second lowest level of industrial action since records began.

The number of days lost to industrial action is minuscule by historical standards. In the twelve months to November 2001, an estimated 473,000 days were lost due to industrial action. This compares with 1.3 million days lost in 1996; not the 1980s.

Mr. George Osborne: The Minister had something to do with that.

Alan Johnson: I fully accept that, in another capacity, I had something to do with that. But Opposition Members are suggesting that the problems of industrial disputes and industrial action lie with the Government. In that case, what do they say about the 1.3 million days lost in 1996? In the 1980s, the annual average was 7.3 million days lost each year—a decade in which the Conservative party ruled entirely. I shall emphasise those figures: 7.3 million days lost on average each year in the 1980s compared with 473,000 under this Government. And we are told that we are having some kind of 1970s revival night.

Mr. Prisk: I will allow the Minister to calm down gently. Does he expect that, over the next quarter, the number of strike days will rise or fall?

Alan Johnson: With the measures taken since the Employment Relations Act 1999, we have everything in place to deal with disputes in the proper way, either through arbitration—

Mr. Prisk: Will it go up or down?

Alan Johnson: We certainly have a better way of dealing with disputes now, whether they are about union recognition or anything else, than we had prior to the measures that were introduced in 1999. If the new clause were accepted, it would do nothing to meet the problems that we have seen in industry over the last few months.

There is no case for repealing this law. It has not created a new wave of industrial militancy. Instead, it underpins a basic freedom: the freedom to take industrial action, which is part of a mature democracy. The law is balanced and provides real incentives for both parties to resolve their differences. Opposition Members obviously do not value such provisions. In place of negotiation, they presumably favour heavy-handed tactics, with employers sacking anyone who takes action.

New clause 8 is a desperate attempt by Opposition Members to resurrect "Back to the Future". As always, they attack not just trade unions, but their members. The new clause has no place in this Bill and we will have no reservations about opposing it if they have the temerity to push it to the vote.

Mr. Lloyd: This has been a fascinating debate, partly because of the illusions and myths about the reality of industrial relations that have been mentioned. Although the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) makes a good point about the lock-out, I ask him to reflect seriously on the fact that all the protection that exists, even now, is that the sacked worker can go to a tribunal. An employer could show that the sacking was fair, even during the strike, if other factors were relevant. So the new clause is no strikers' charter. The most important point—this has totally escaped Conservative Members—is that we are talking not about a massive trade union agenda, but about a rare set of events. I suggest that they grow up a little, please. The Friction Dynamics dispute is the only one that I am aware of since the Employment Relations Act 1999, but it matters to the people in that company.

It is obvious that Conservative Members wanted to adopt a different agenda. They wanted to talk up the concept of industrial strife, not because they have any interest in industrial justice or industrial peace, but because they want to talk about what they regard as tough Tory politics. My hon. Friend the Minister hit the nail firmly on the head many times in exposing them for what they are. The very idea suggested in new clause 8, under which day-one sackings are proposed as the solution to industrial disputes in this country, is ludicrous and childish. That is why it will not gain the sympathy of the House.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister recognises the strength of feeling behind the Friction Dynamics dispute and the more general issue. The dispute has not merely popped up in recent days; it is now in its 44th week. People are enormously troubled that the legal balance is not right. My hon. Friend has made it clear that the review of the law will take account of the process. On that basis, it is genuinely in the interests of the House not to vote on new clause 5, but to vote against new clause 8, proposed by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), and I very much look forward to voting in the opposite Lobby to the one in which he votes. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 7

REPEAL OF SECTION 109 OF THE EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT 1996

'.—Section 109 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (c. 18) (Upper age limit) is hereby repealed.'.—*[Hywel Williams.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Hywel Williams: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The purpose of new clause 7 is to remove the age limit on protection against unfair dismissal, so that an employee over the age of 65 would have the same protection as any other employee. Under section 94 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, an employee has a right not to be dismissed unfairly. However, under section 109 of that Act, that protection does not apply to the dismissal of an employee who has attained the retirement age for an undertaking and the age was the same whether the employee was a man or a woman or, in any other case, the employee had attained the age of 65.

Under new clause 7, that existing age limit on protection against unfair dismissal would be removed. That would ensure that an older person could claim unfair dismissal, just like any other employee. It would also bring that right into line with a great many other employment rights that are not subject to an upper age limit—for example, the right to paid leave and a minimum wage. That right would be consistent with the right to claim unfair dismissal for specified reasons that are automatically regarded as unfair, such as trade union membership.

9 pm

Mr. Hammond: The Opposition have a great deal of sympathy with the principles behind the hon. Gentleman's new clause. However, we do not feel that it is right to legislate on this matter in isolation. A much wider issue must be addressed. We look forward to a constructive discussion on how to protect the rights of older workers in the work force when the consultation in which the Government are engaged is discussed in this place.

Question put and negatived.

It being after Nine o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour, pursuant to Order [27 November 2001].*

New Clause 8

DISMISSAL AND PARTICIPATION IN INDUSTRIAL ACTION

'(1) The Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 (c. 52) is amended as follows.

(2) Subsection (2B) of section 238 (dismissals in connection with other industrial action) shall cease to have effect.

(3) Section 238A (participation in official industrial action) shall cease to have effect.'.—*[Mr. Hammond.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 127, Noes 342.

Division No. 166] **[9.1 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Key, Robert
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*

Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil

Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Fraser Kemp.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1

PATERNITY LEAVE

Amendments made: No. 37, in page 2, line 17, leave out—

'a single period of leave of'.

No. 38, in page 2, line 17, leave out "weeks" and insert "weeks' leave".

No. 39, in page 2, line 27, leave out paragraph (c) and insert—

'(c) make provision about how leave under this section may be taken.'.

No. 40, in page 3, line 12, leave out—

'a single period of leave of'.

No. 41, in page 3, line 12, leave out "weeks" and insert "weeks' leave".

No. 42, in page 3, line 26, leave out paragraph (d) and insert—

'(d) make provision about how leave under this section may be taken.'.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Clause 2

STATUTORY PATERNITY PAY

Amendments made: No. 43, in page 7, line 5, after "pay" insert—

'in respect of any period'.

No. 44, in page 8, line 20, leave out from "choose" to "as" in line 22 and insert—

'to receive statutory paternity pay in respect of—

(i) a period of a week, or

(ii) two non-consecutive periods of a week,

such week or weeks within the qualifying period'.

No. 45, in page 8, line 24, leave out "is the" and insert—

'shall be determined in accordance with regulations, which shall secure that it is a'.

No. 46, in page 8, line 25, after "of" insert "at least".—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Clause 24

CONCILIATION

Amendments made: No. 16, in page 33, line 38, at end insert "and".

No. 17, in page 33, leave out lines 39 to 43.

No. 18, in page 33, line 46, at end insert—

'(4) In that section, the existing provision (as amended by subsection (3)) becomes subsection (1) and at the end there is inserted—

"(2) If employment tribunal procedure regulations include provision postponing the fixing of a time and place for a hearing for the purpose of giving an opportunity for the proceedings to be settled by way of conciliation and withdrawn, they shall also include provision for the parties to proceedings to which the provision for postponement applies to be notified that the services of a conciliation officer may no longer be available to them after the end of the postponement."'.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Clause 32

CONSEQUENTIAL ADJUSTMENT OF TIME LIMITS

Amendment made: No. 47, in page 37, line 10, after "3" insert—

'or [*Tribunal jurisdictions to which section* [*Complaints about grievances*] *applies*]'.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Clause 33

NON-COMPLETION OF STATUTORY PROCEDURE: EXCLUSION OF CLAIMS

Amendment made: No. 48, in page 37, line 20, leave out Clause 33.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Clause 34

PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS IN UNFAIR DISMISSAL

Amendments made: No. 19, in page 37, line 39, at end insert—

'( ) one of the procedures set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Employment Act 2002 (dismissal and disciplinary procedures) applies in relation to the dismissal,'.

No. 20, in page 37, line 40, leave out "relevant statutory".

No. 21, in page 38, line 1, leave out "that" and insert "the".

No. 22, in page 38, line 9, after "to" insert—

'the application of a procedure set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Employment Act 2002,'.

No. 23, in page 38, line 9, leave out "the relevant statutory" and insert "such a".

No. 24, in page 38, line 10, leave out "its" and insert "the".

No. 25, in page 38, line 10, at end insert "of such a procedure".

No. 26, in page 38, line 11, leave out "the Employment" and insert "that".

No. 27, in page 38, line 12, leave out "2002".

No. 28, in page 38,, leave out lines 13 to 19.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Clause 51

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

Amendment made: No. 52, In page 58, line 5, leave out "33" and insert—

'[*Complaints about grievances*]'.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

New Schedule 1

TRIBUNAL JURISDICTIONS TO WHICH SECTION *[Complaints about grievances]* APPLIES—

Section 2 of the Equal Pay Act 1970 (c. 41) (equality clauses)

Section 63 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (c. 65) (discrimination in the employment field)

Section 54 of the Race Relations Act 1976 (c. 74) (discrimination in the employment field)

Section 146 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 (c. 52) (detriment in relation to trade union membership and activities)

Paragraph 156 of Schedule A1 to that Act (detriment in relation to union recognition rights)

Section 8 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (c. 50) (discrimination in the employment field)

Section 23 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (c. 18) (unauthorised deductions and payments)

Section 48 of that Act (detriment in employment)

Section 111 of that Act (unfair dismissal)

Section 163 of that Act (redundancy payments)

Section 24 of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 (c. 39) (detriment in relation to national minimum wage)

Schedule 3 to the Tax Credits Act 1999 (c. 10) (detriment in relation to tax credits)

The Employment Tribunal Extension of Jurisdiction (England and Wales) Order 1994 (S.I. 1994/1623) (breach of employment contract and termination)

The Employment Tribunal Extension of Jurisdiction (Scotland) Order 1994 (S.I. 1994/1624) (corresponding provision for Scotland)

Regulation 30 of the Working Time Regulations 1998 (S.I. 1998/1833) (breach of regulations)

Regulation 32 of the Transnational Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations 1999 (S.I. 1999/3323) (detriment relating to European Works Councils)'.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Schedule 3

TRIBUNAL JURISDICTIONS TO WHICH SECTION 31 APPLIES

Amendment made: No. 49, in page 65, line 29, leave out "Part 8" and insert "Paragraph 156".—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Schedule 4

TRIBUNAL JURISDICTIONS TO WHICH SECTION 38 APPLIES

Amendment made: No. 50, in page 66, line 22, leave out "Part 8" and insert "Paragraph 156".—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Schedule 6

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 29, in page 76, line 2, at end insert—

'29A In section 98 (fairness of dismissal: general), in subsection (6)—

(a) for "are" there is substituted "is", and

(b) in paragraph (a), for "99" there is substituted "98A".'.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

9.16 pm

Alan Johnson: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank hon. Members for their important contributions to debate on the Bill, not only on Report, but on Second Reading and in Committee. Those who have participated have done so constructively and with great good humour, and they have provided thorough and helpful scrutiny of the Bill's provisions.

The Bill is an important one, touching on many aspects of people's work and family lives. It represents a balanced package, providing new rights and responsibilities for employers and employees alike. The Bill introduces new rights that will ensure that parents are able to spend time with their children when it is most valuable, while they are young—the children, that is, not the parents. We are for the first time introducing statutory paternity and adoption leave, and a requirement that businesses seriously consider requests for flexible working.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): On the issue of paternity and adoption leave, my hon. Friend will recall that in Committee I tabled probing amendments in respect of those who would not be eligible because their earnings were below the lower limit. He informed the Committee that the Department for Work and Pensions was thinking of redressing that problem to coincide with other provisions, and in correspondence the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has informed me that the Department intends to make regulations to deal with that.

None the less, I should like to ask my hon. Friend to ensure, with his colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions, that when those regulations are introduced there is no gap. Normally, benefits are paid after the event, because one has to claim them when one is in the given situation. We need to be sure that people are able to get the top-up income support at the time that they need it, not a couple of weeks after.

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend raised that issue in Committee. There was general consensus on the need to do something about it, and I have been considering it in some detail with colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions. I am delighted to say that we have now agreed that the income support regulations will be amended to enable fathers who are entitled to paternity leave but who do not receive statutory paternity pay to claim income support. In addition, parents who receive paternity pay but who are normally low paid will also be able to top up their income with income support.

Those changes will ensure that household income does not fall below a certain guaranteed minimum, currently about £130 a week for a couple with one child where the father takes paternity leave. That will provide a degree of financial security sufficient to ensure that all low-paid employees have the opportunity to take up their statutory right to paternity leave. Regulations will be made later in the year, to coincide with the introduction of the new paternity rights. I thought it would be helpful, in response to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), to confirm that to the House today.

Mr. Hammond: As we did not reach amendment No. 6, will the Minister confirm also that self-employed people on low pay would be included within the arrangements that he has outlined to the House?

Alan Johnson: I cannot confirm that. That is a completely different problem. As I explained in Committee, that point applies to a group of people whom we would have to place in an expensive and bureaucratic new system. That would be necessary to meet the same provisions. However, we undertook to consider that as part of the employee-worker review, which I confirmed earlier will be taking place in late spring.

The Government are extending maternity leave and simplifying the rules governing maternity leave and pay. Following extensive consultation with a wide range of interest groups, we have designed the new paternity and adoption rights to mirror the simplified maternity provisions. Business representatives asked for that in their responses to our consultation, and we listened to them. These are changes that benefit society as a whole. The new and improved rights will make it easier for parents to make choices about how they balance their work and family lives.

Removing pressures will encourage employee commitment, motivation and productivity. Many companies already recognise this and use such benefits to employees as an essential part of running a successful and productive business. These measures have been welcomed by business and employees' representatives alike.

Equally, the involvement of partners of people receiving working-age benefits in work-focused interviews will increase participation in the work force and bring other benefits to society and, therefore, ultimately to the economy.

The second substantial area covered by the Bill is dispute resolution. A wide range of provisions will introduce new ways of handling disputes in the workplace, and will help deliver modern, competitive workplaces in Britain through better awareness of rights and more and better communication within organisations.

Ms Walley: Given that we did not reach the amendments that relate to the statutory modified disciplinary procedure, will my hon. Friend give an assurance that he will give further consideration to the amendments which were tabled but not called before they go to another place? There are now only two steps in dismissal cases, and there has not been the opportunity for anyone to conduct a proper investigation. Will my hon. Friend give further consideration to those matters?

Alan Johnson: As always, we shall keep those issues under review, especially as the Bill goes to the other place. We think that there are clear reasons why the modified two-step procedure is necessary, not least to ensure that those who have been involved in violence and serious cases where there has been discrimination and harassment do not have to discuss the issue. There is the right of appeal. That is why the modified procedure is in place for gross misconduct.

As I have said, the second substantial area is dispute resolution. The Bill represents a real opportunity to change the way in which workplace disputes are managed by putting communication before litigation. It will ensure a modern user-focused tribunal system that will provide swift and efficient justice. The idea that grievance and discipline procedures should be used in the workplace is neither new nor innovative. The introduction of statutory minimum standards will mean that about 3 million employees who do not currently have any procedures available to them in their workplace, and a further 3 million who have substandard procedures, will in future have a right to a basic but crucial first course of action should a problem arise.

There are many other provisions in the Bill. The introduction of an equal pay questionnaire will enable the facts of a case to be established early. It will encourage the collection of evidence and the settlement of cases before they proceed to tribunal. The absence of transparency on pay information contributes to and perpetuates the gender pay gap. The Government are determined to eliminate pay discrimination, and the questionnaire provision is one step towards that goal.

Another long-standing problem in the workplace is the provision of training at all levels. The Bill introduces the right to time off for union learning representatives. This will ensure that vulnerable groups of workers, such as older men, people from ethnic minorities and part-timers, who currently all too often miss out on training and development opportunities, will be given support and encouragement from their representatives, who are adept at reaching precisely those groups.

The provisions on fixed-term employees are equally important. We are ensuring that people on fixed-term contracts cannot be treated less favourably than their colleagues on permanent contracts. We are outlawing the abusive use of consecutive fixed-term contracts. All those measures contribute to the new framework of basic minimum employment rights in a flexible labour market, which the Government are committed to establishing.

Let us not lose sight of the bigger picture. The Bill is well rounded and balanced, and has been introduced after extensive, in-depth consultation with all the stakeholders. It will allow employees some control over their working lives when they have small children, and will lead to better dialogue in the workplace over working patterns when disputes arise. Such dialogue and an increased use of an open partnership-based approach at work will make employees more motivated and businesses more productive. An increase in productivity is the way to make this country more competitive, which is why the Bill is important and why I commend it to the House.

9.25 pm

Mr. Hammond: I, too, congratulate all hon. Members who spoke on Second Reading and subsequently served on what was a constructive Committee.

This is a Bill of parts, which do not always hang together. It is therefore convenient to deal with them separately in the order in which the Committee considered them. Parts 2 and 3 deal with procedures for grievances and discipline. We generally welcome the Government's attempt to reduce the burden on tribunals caused by cases that should be dealt with in the workplace. We welcome measures aimed at encouraging and increasing the use of workplace dispute resolution measures. We regret the fact that some of the Government's earlier ideas have been watered down along the way, and it remains to be seen whether the Bill will deliver effectively the Government's stated objective of resolving a significantly greater proportion of disputes in the workplace and imposing a significantly reduced work load on tribunals.

Two issues remain unresolved: the resourcing of the tribunal system, which we touched on earlier, and the rather difficult relationship between the Government and the president of employment tribunals. Members of the Committee have seen the robust correspondence between the president and the Minister, which hardly bodes well for the future of employment tribunals. Generally, however, we welcome the Government's approach, although we regret the fact that they have backed down on a number of issues. We shall watch carefully to see whether their intended results are delivered.

[Mr. Hammond]

Part 1 introduces a raft of new rights, to which the Minister referred. The Minister described them as new individual rights given to workers. However, throughout proceedings on the Bill, I have thought of them not so much as individual rights granted for the benefit of individual workers but as rights granted for the better functioning of society, which will support families and ensure that children are brought up properly. In that context, I can certainly relate to the Bill, which will have tangible benefits for society. However, it is important to realise—the Minister will agree that this has been the theme throughout proceedings on the Bill—that we are not giving people time off for their own benefit; we are doing so for the benefit of their families. We are not giving adopters time off for their benefit; we are doing so in order that they can bond with the children they are adopting.

That is a sensible approach, and deserves great support. However, we are concerned, both about the burden of costs and the incidence of costs in connection with the benefits resulting from provisions in part 1. The simple fact is that business, particularly manufacturing, is groaning under the weight of regulations, taxes, new legislation, an overvalued exchange rate and foreign competition. This is not the right time to impose further burdens on business; they will damage competitiveness, reduce flexibility and ultimately affect the ability to invest and deliver jobs.

Our plea throughout, and the purpose of our new clauses on the subject today, was to ensure that there was a mature debate about the costs and the benefits that will arise from part 1—there are certainly benefits, as well as costs—the incidence of those benefits and costs, and who, in fairness, should meet those costs. Unfortunately, we have not persuaded the Government to move very far. Although there will undoubtedly be benefits for society and probably for some individual employees, there will be disbenefits for others, and the cost will, by and large, be borne by business. We very much regret that during consideration of the Bill we have not persuaded the Government to move much on that issue.

I was disappointed by the Minister's response to my earlier intervention. I had hoped that he would find a way to include low paid self-employed people in the arrangements for statutory paternity pay, so that they too could benefit from the good that we are delivering, in the same way as low-paid mothers benefit from statutory maternity allowance.

Part 4 is the ragbag that collects all the other bits and pieces. In this part of the Bill especially, we see the agenda of the trade unions. Clause 43 introduces on a statutory basis union learning representatives, with a right to paid time off for union activities. We are the first to recognise that union learning reps have played and do play a significant and constructive role in some workplaces, though apparently not in the Department for Education and Skills, where there is none.

Ministers have been at great pains to tell us throughout the Bill that the introduction of learning reps on a statutory basis will be to the benefit of employers, but the statistics suggest that the largest employer in the country—the Government—has not taken heed of its own advice to any significant extent. One cannot take best practice where it is working well and impose it across the board by legislation.

In a workplace where industrial relations are not harmonious and functioning properly, one cannot introduce by legislation the role of trade union learning reps in the way that that works in the best workplaces, where unions and employers are both committed. It is a matter for education, not for legislation. We believe that by introducing union learning reps as a statutory right, the Government have gone down the wrong route in seeking to impose across the board a practice that will not work in many cases, and in other cases will damage the good work that is going on between employers and their workers.

Clause 45, which deals with fixed-term working, gold-plates the EU directive, as unions have urged the Government to do and Conservative Members have urged them not to do. We are concerned that there is still a residual hostility to non-conventional work patterns. I emphasise our support for measures that eliminate abusive practice. The Minister mentioned artificial sequential fixed-term contracts. We entirely support the Government's intention to remove that abusive practice.

Our new clause, which unfortunately we did not reach in the timetabled debate, would have exempted from the provisions of clause 45 cases where the employer had offered the worker a permanent employment contract on the same terms as other people in that workplace doing similar work, but the employee had rejected the offer. The purpose of the new clause was to draw the Government's attention to the fact that, although there may be abuses at the bottom end of the employment curve, at the top end there are many people working on fixed-term contracts whose employers would love to get them on permanent long-term contracts, but are unable to do so. It is their choice to work on fixed-term contracts. The Bill does not recognise that.

Clause 47 on flexible working was a late addition to the Bill. When it was introduced, I said that it was appallingly drafted, and I still believe that it is. A great chunk of it was lifted from the Bain report. The Minister has ignored the criticisms and questions that we raised about the wording in clause 47. It introduces terminology such as "staff", which is unknown to the Employment Rights Act 1996 into which it is inserted. Our noble Friends in the other place will want to give those matters further close attention.

The flexible working provisions will impose a new and further burden on business that is not justified by any benefit that will be delivered. I emphasise that we support flexible working, but it cannot be effectively imposed by statute. The issues that we raised have not been dealt with.

There are many other rather more minor matters that we have not had time to discuss tonight. Our noble Friends will want to take those up when the Bill reaches another place.

We are considering the Bill in an environment of increased union militancy in which trade unions are asserting a veto over public policy—even public policy that the Government were clearly mandated to implement in the general election of 2001. Business has suffered a barrage of legislation, regulations, directives and taxes, some of which are specifically designed to hit the manufacturing sector, which is the worst affected.

Business faces one of the toughest environments for a decade. Britain is slipping down the competitiveness league. The productivity gap between the United States and the United Kingdom is widening. The Government respond by piling more cost burdens on business, which will damage our competitiveness still further.

There are many good ideas in the Bill. There are also some very bad ones, and I am sorry that during its passage we have not persuaded the Government to modify or drop the worst of them. Even for many of the good ideas that we support and endorse, the time is simply not right. Business, especially small business, is reeling under a torrent of Government legislation, regulation and taxation burdens. It needs a breather and space to recoup, to recover and to regain its profitability. This is not the right time for the Bill and I must urge my hon. Friends to vote against Third Reading.

9.37 pm

Mr. Lloyd: There is not much time, so I shall try to be brief.

The Bill contains many good provisions. Unlike the Opposition, I believe that union learning representatives will be widely welcomed throughout industry, not only by employees, but by employers. The measures on paternity pay and leave and rights for adoptive parents are important steps forward. My hon. Friend the Minister's announcement tonight of the minimum income guarantee underwrites that. It is an important part of the process.

If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I want to ask him to look hard at how we can improve the Bill before it passes to another place. I regret that we did not have time to reach the amendments that were tabled in my name and those of my hon. Friends.

The Bill provides a new floor for dispute resolution, which is an important step. As the Minister knows, some of us took the view that it would have been better if the ACAS code had been adopted as the basis; we shall have to agree to differ about that. I hope that he will consider the right to be accompanied and the need for proper investigation to take place during the dispute process.

I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the continuing doubts about whether the concepts of hearing and meeting are really the same thing. I hope that he will reflect on that.

I turn briefly to tribunals. My hon. Friend knows that there is already concern about the loading on of different types of costs to the tribunal structure, as well as the new additions in the Bill. We have not had time to debate that tonight, but I want to draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister the deterrent effects involved.

I shall quote briefly from a case that was brought to my attention. It involved an individual who claimed unfair dismissal and who initially acted for himself. His employer's representatives wrote to him, stating:

> "It is clear from the facts that your claim is wholly without merit and is bound to fail. Therefore, we hereby place you upon notice of costs as we are of the view that this claim is frivolous and vexatious and is bound to fail. For the avoidance of doubt, if you withdraw your claim, we shall not pursue you for costs."

That individual finally sought help from his local law centre and was awarded £50,000 compensation, but his employer's representative had clearly tried to take him out of the game altogether.

This is a serious issue which cuts through the question of costs and other forms of compensatory structure, and I hope that my hon. Friend will reflect on that. I do not know what he can say tonight to move the debate forward, but I should perhaps remind him that one or two of our noble Friends in the other place are already sitting there with bear traps waiting for the unwary.

I was intrigued by the gap between the performance of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) in Committee—the reasonable and, I think, the real hon. Member—and his performance tonight, for which he had been wound up by the Leader of the Opposition and forced to come along and make rather more divisive comments. Some of those comments were ludicrous, but they are all helpful in ensuring that we shall probably not see another Conservative Government in my lifetime.

9.41 pm

Mr. Prisk: I am aware that time is short, so I shall attempt to be brief. I congratulate the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) on the professional and concise way in which they have led the debate. They have done so with style and often, dare I say, with aplomb, and one learns from this as a new Member of the House. This has meant that we have been able to have a predominantly constructive debate, which we all welcome.

On that note, it is good to see maternity leave being matched by paternity leave in the Bill. It is important that we try whenever possible to recognise the role of fathers in families today, although I am disappointed that low-paid, self-employed fathers seem to be excluded from that generosity. I hope that the Minister will rethink that point.

I shall return, as the Minister would expect, to the question of small businesses. I am still deeply concerned that the Government admit that the Bill will place a disproportionate burden on small firms. We make a fuss about small firms because they are the engine of the economy. They employ the most people and we rely on them for most of our services. The total cost of regulation to business will be in excess of £558 million every year from now on—never mind any costs arising out of the regulations to come—and a disproportionate part of that will fall on the small businesses on which we rely and on which the Chancellor relies for much of his income. The fact that that burden falls on them in that disproportionate way needs to be borne in mind, and I am sure that the Minister will do that.

Unfortunately, the Secretary of State is not here at the moment. She will be given reserve powers to implement various regulations under the Bill, and I ask the Minister to pass on to her a request that the use of those powers should be sparing, well thought through, and carried out in a thorough manner.

In the preamble to this debate, and during our discussions, much has been made by Ministers and their supporters of the fact that this is a family friendly Bill. That is an admirable quality, but there is a group comprising 4 million households that the Bill will not help. I am talking about self-employed people, who already spend 31 hours a month trying to deal with the existing bureaucracy, and who will now have to lose another weekend or evening that they could have spent

[Mr. Prisk]

with their families. Please let us not forget those families; they are important and we should not ignore them. I hope that the notion of this being a family friendly Bill will be extended to them as well.

9.44 pm

Ms Walley: I congratulate the Government on having listened to much of what has been said since the initial consultation. However, given that this evening's debate has been cut short and we were unable to consider two groups of amendments that I very much wanted to discuss, I shall use the couple of minutes available to implore the Minister to look again at the issues that they cover.

Last July, the Government introduced a new regulation in respect of employment tribunals which enables on-the-spot costs awards of between £500 and £10,000. It is already clear that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) said, employers are using the regulation to harass and intimidate, and as a disincentive to taking cases to employment tribunals. I do not want this splendid Bill to be spoiled by people being unable to take cases to employment tribunals because of the fear of incurring costs.

Before the Bill proceeds to the other place, I ask the Minister carefully to consider introducing a right to argue against costs and new regulations requiring employment tribunals to take into account people's ability to pay on-the-spot costs of £10,000. Such a requirement does not exist in case law. That is an important issue for smaller companies in particular, where there is often little trade union representation.

On amendments Nos. 12, 34 and 35, which we were unable to discuss, I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central. The newly modified statutory procedure does not take account of the basic rules of natural justice. I have discussed that issue with the Minister, and in my view we could introduce a procedure that is easier to follow.

I congratulate the Government on enabling far more people to be brought under the new regime, but we shall not make progress if our attempts to simplify undermine natural justice and give employment tribunals carte blanche to find against individuals. I implore the Minister to consider those important points of detail before the Bill progresses to the other place. The devil is always in the detail, and the rest of the Bill and the huge gains made on fixed-term contracts, maternity and paternity pay and adoption leave should not be spoiled by a failure to take account of those two small but none the less significant procedural issues.

9.48 pm

Norman Lamb: I begin by reiterating that there is considerable support on the Liberal Democrat Benches for the vast majority of the Bill. We strongly support the introduction of paternity leave, extended maternity leave and adoption leave, which are good and welcome reforms. The introduction, with a light touch, of flexible working is also extremely welcome and it builds sensibly on existing law on indirect discrimination. We are concerned, however, about the Bill's impact on small businesses, which is why we support regular monitoring not only of its benefits, but of its cost to that sector in particular.

I want to focus on an issue raised by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), which I regard as a matter of absolute principle. I have already crossed swords with the Minister, far too early on a Sunday morning, on BBC Radio 5 Live over the question of the modified dismissal and disciplinary procedure, but I will raise it again. In effect, the procedure removes a fundamental right to defend oneself before dismissal. That applies to all cases of gross misconduct which, obviously, are the most serious cases.

I do not understand the logic. Why are people's rights diminished when the allegations are of the most serious kind? The opposite obtains in criminal law: when serious allegations are made, people have a right to trial by jury. They have almost extended rights of protection. Under the Bill, those confronted by such allegations will not even have the right to a hearing before being dismissed. That is quite simply wrong. An entitlement that survived 18 years of Conservative government is now being removed by a Labour Government.

In cases involving gross misconduct, the facts are often complex. A mass of documentation is often involved, and often the original allegation can be disproved by the employee concerned.

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman should understand that in all cases, including those of gross misconduct, there is a right to appeal.

Norman Lamb: I do understand that, but I know from considerable experience as an employment lawyer—indeed, we all know—that once an employee is out of the door, the right of appeal will rarely lead to reinstatement. The chance to have a say must come before the decision is made.

In Committee and on other occasions, the Minister has said that the Bill provides, in a sense, a bottom line and that many companies have more detailed procedures. He must accept, however, that part of the Bill constitutes an effective reversal of the Polkey principle. That means, in layman's terms, that if an employer can convince a tribunal that going through the more extended procedures would have made no difference, the dismissal is fair. Inevitably, employers will go to tribunals and argue that case. They will say that they have ignored the more extended procedures because they would have made no difference, and that the dismissal should therefore be found to be fair. The result will be less protection for employees.

Moreover, as time goes by employers are bound to amend their disciplinary procedures to bring them more into line with the basic provisions of the Bill. In cases of gross misconduct, employees, according to companies' own disciplinary procedures, will have no right to a hearing before being dismissed. All they will have is a rather hopeless right of appeal after the event.

We hear from the Minister that the ACAS code provides additional guidance and protection, but we are told that ACAS will amend the code in the light of the Bill. Who knows what will result from that? I think it almost inevitable that ACAS will reduce the protection in line with the reduced protection provided by the Bill.

There is no doubt that existing case law provides the right to a hearing before dismissal. That case law, however, is flexible enough to recognise the existence of exceptional cases. The Minister gave the example of a "one-man band", when an employee thumps his employer in the face. A disciplinary hearing would be of little value in such circumstances; under existing law, a tribunal would find a dismissal without a hearing to be fair. Existing law also enables an employer to remove an employee from the premises by way of suspension, in order to remove a difficult problem pending a hearing. The hearing, however, must still take place.

I urge the Minister to listen both to Labour Members and to us, and to seriously consider whether, in cases of gross misconduct, he really wants to remove the right to the fundamental protection provided by a hearing before dismissal. As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) said, it would be a shame to damage a Bill that has so much merit by removing a protection that survived 18 years of Conservative government.

9.54 pm

Judy Mallaber: May I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to take account of the points that have been raised by my right hon. and hon. Friends? I will not rehearse the arguments which have been put by my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) and for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley). We have concerns about issues such as preparation costs and whether they will act as a disincentive to people taking cases forward.

I should like to highlight the very positive items in the Bill, especially the paternity and adoption leave provisions. I could give numerous examples of how flexible working will benefit employers and employees. I know of nurses who are unable to return to work, although we want them to do so, because local management is not prepared to be flexible about adjusting their rota to enable those nurses to deal with their child care provision.

I am intrigued by the attitude of Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) was almost cuddly and positively friendly in Committee, yet tonight he tells us that the Bill is all about burdens on business. There is a considerable contradiction in Conservative Members' attitude. My hon. Friend the Minister pointed out the benefits and savings available to employers in operating flexible working conditions. The proposals have been put forward in consultation with employers, unions and representatives.

I was astonished to find that as soon as we discussed union learning representatives—promoting education in the workplace and using that huge trade union experience and history to promote education in basic skills and other areas for people at work—Conservative Members suddenly went completely doolally and decided that this was the end of civilisation as we know it. We spent nearly a whole day debating it—it was simply amazing. Conservative Members have displayed considerable contradiction in their attitude to the Bill's very positive proposals. We should be using people's skills and encouraging them; it is difficult to get people at work to acknowledge that they have a skills gap and that they need training and education. The more help there is to achieve that the better.

I applaud the Bill's positive proposals. We have seen the clear division between Labour Members who want a positive attitude towards relations in the work force and Conservative Members who, even when they are trying to be good and nice on various issues, end up reverting to type in wanting to create conflict rather than co-operation.

9.58 pm

Mr. Simmonds: There is much in the Bill that I welcome, such as new rights for parents, flexible working, maternity and paternity pay and leave and, in particular, the reform of the tribunal system. However, we should be under no illusion: the Bill is driven by the Government's desire to acquiesce to the trade unions. In effect, it is payback time. The Bill redresses the balance and moves the fulcrum from the position that it has occupied, correctly, for so many years.

There are serious issues in the Bill with which I disagree, such as the allowance of trade union learning representatives—time off in which to continue to ply their trade—and fixed-term contracts. Many complicated issues to do with pensions, of tremendous concern to employer organisations, have not been debated properly. Burdens on businesses, particularly small businesses, will continue to lead to the further erosion of competitiveness. Apparently, we have dropped from ninth to 19th in the table.

I urge the Minister and future Secretaries of State to use the regulations provided for in the Bill with consideration and thought, and to bear in mind the continued burden and cost to businesses.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 358, Noes 132.

Division No. 167] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
  (Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
  (Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Caton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
  (NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
  (Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy

Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Donohoe, Brian H
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Key, Robert
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

TERRORISM

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Continuance of Part VII) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

Question agreed to.

Rail Services (Bromley)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I am delighted to have this opportunity to talk about rail services in Bromley and to have the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), who is in the Chamber because she is as concerned about those rail services as I am. I tell the Minister, who is listening with his usual assiduity, that many thousands of people commute daily from stations such as Orpington, Petts Wood, Chelsfield and St. Mary Cray, in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend. Those people make a massive contribution to London's economy, which now represents one fifth of the United Kingdom's entire economy.

Some 21 per cent. of our national income comes from London, and my constituents make a huge contribution to that. Indeed, the public revenues, which the Minister is here to represent on this occasion, receive a net contribution of £13 billion to £23 billion, depending on how it is calculated, from London, to which my commuting constituents make a solid contribution. I could say of them what John Milton, one of our great English poets, said in addressing Parliament:

> "Lords and Commons of England—Consider what nation it is whereof you are and of which you are the governors: a nation not slow and dull, but of quick, ingenious and piercing spirit; acute to invent, subtile and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point that human capacity can soar to."

Such are my constituents—they are the very backbone of our economy and nation in my view and in that of many others. As they commute in and out of our great metropolis, they deserve a good commuter rail service, but the fact is that they are not getting that service today.

I have raised this issue continually, as the Minister is well aware because he has replied to at least two of those debates. In this Session, I have raised it time and again. I referred to the commuting problems of my constituents on 26 June in the debate on the Loyal Address. I raised the issue in Westminster Hall in the debate on transport in the south-east, which was initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). I did so again in the debate on Railtrack initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 13 November, and in the Christmas Adjournment debate on 19 December, and I also asked a question when the Transport Secretary introduced his strategic rail plan on 14 January. The Select Committee on Environmental Audit, of which I have the privilege to be the Chairman, also had the interesting experience of cross-questioning the Secretary of State.

I have raised the issue on several occasions in the House because it is a daily problem for my constituents, and I am very concerned about their daily problems. In addition, in December, with the help of my friends in the Orpington Conservative association, I stood outside the four stations—not all at once, obviously—in my constituency and handed out questionnaires, which my constituents were happy enough to fill in. I have here the responses, or at least a proportion of them, and I should be happy to pass them to the Minister if he would like to look at them.

I am a one-man focus group so far as the Minister is concerned. I can tell him that a great deal of pain is expressed in those pages; they contain my constituents' honest comments on the rail service that they receive. Their main complaint is overcrowding, closely followed by punctuality—perhaps I should rephrase that as delays or non-punctuality—further followed by the fact that there are few late-night trains and by the lack of disabled access. However, there was very little criticism of the staff. Both the station staff and the train staff were universally praised for the concerns that they have shown. The staff should be praised, because it is not their fault that the train services are bad.

I took all the information to Mr. Olivier Brousse, the managing director of Connex South Eastern. We had a useful conversation and I formed a favourable impression of his managerial capacities. I also gained the impression that he was doing his best to provide a good rail service to commuters in my constituency but that he needed the proper support. Subsequent to that meeting, Mr. Brousse's chief of staff wrote to me to say:

> "Thank you for taking the time to meet Olivier last week to discuss the Connex rail network."

The letter confirmed:

> "Your recent passenger survey reflects the concerns of our passengers across the south-east and I am grateful to you for detailing the most common complaints."

My remarks are therefore reinforced by the views of the managing director of the rail company providing the service to my constituents.

As the House knows, the Government have regrettably ceased to publish figures for the punctuality of train services and will not do so until March. I do not quite know why that it is—

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): We do know.

Mr. Horam: Well, we suspect that we know even if we have yet to receive a formal explanation.

The Government reckoned without the assiduity of the shadow Minister for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). He invoked the passengers charter, which says that train companies must publish monthly their figures for punctuality, and he has put together the figures. They show that, since Railtrack was put into administration in September, delays on the south-east Kent link line have increased by 47 per cent. and that delays on the south-east Kent coast line have increased by 58 per cent. That represents a huge collapse in punctuality since Railtrack was taken into administration. Mr. Brousse also told me that the number of seats lost per day has risen from 24,000 to 100,000, and that fact further explains the overcrowding on the service.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I am listening to my hon. Friend carefully, because his experience mirrors mine. However, there are only four railway stations in his constituency whereas there are 13 in mine.

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the simplest solutions to overcrowding would be to lengthen the trains? To lengthen the trains, it is necessary to lengthen the platforms, but the Government's takeover and renationalisation of Railtrack means that there is little chance of being able to carry out the development that will lengthen the platforms and help to relieve the problem of overcrowding.

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I shall come to that exact point and direct questions to the Minister that I hope he will be able to answer.

Apart from the ongoing problem of overcrowding that my hon. Friend and I have mentioned, there has been a disastrous collapse in punctuality following the events of September. The managing director of Connex South Eastern was quite plain about the causes of that. He said that it resulted from the collapse of morale of Railtrack staff that had followed the Government's decisions. The staff simply do not know what sort of company they are working for. Decisions are being delayed, so they do not know what sort of company they will work for. They do not know whether it will be a German company, a private company or a Government-sponsored company. They are in a state of confusion and that obviously affects their morale.

Although things have been better since Christmas, the improvement is fragile. I share the opinion of the managing director of Connex South Eastern that if the Railtrack problem is not resolved inside six months there is a danger of losing key staff and the situation will spiral further downwards. When will Railtrack come out of administration? When will we have some certainty about its future? The Minister will recall that the Secretary of State said on "Breakfast with Frost" that that will take just over six months, but it has already been nearly six months. Are the Government talking about another six months? Will it happen this autumn?

The Minister may also be aware of the power supply problem. We have had the wrong leaves and the wrong snow; we now have the wrong power. The new 375 trains are too powerful for the electric current that is used on the south-eastern track. They are coming into service in the next few months and cannot be used except in "a degraded form", to quote the managing director. They will have to go much more slowly so that they do not overload the power system, which means that punctuality will again be unsatisfactory. When will that problem be resolved?

Overcrowding, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham referred, is also a problem. The phrase "cattle-truck commuting" has been used to describe how people are so squashed into carriages that they have less room than many animals do when we transport them around the country. As a consequence, we have the phenomenon of rail rage. The House may not be familiar with that term, although we have all heard of road rage. I have witnessed rail rage at Charing Cross station in the evening when too many people are trying to get on to a train. Inevitably, the unsatisfactory rail service puts pressure on people, forces them into disputes and causes friction and anger. The Government must pay attention to that.

As my hon. Friend said, the solution in the medium term is to lengthen platforms and re-site signal boxes so that instead of the usual four-car or six-car trains, 12-car trains can be used to carry more people, especially during peak travelling times. I have a copy of the shortened version of the strategic plan, which is beautifully presented. It contains the commitment that by 2005 most of the 11,000 platforms throughout the country will be lengthened and the problem will be addressed. Will all the stations on the Connex lines—the Kent link and the Kent coast line—that serve Bromley be lengthened so that we have 12-car trains to tackle the problem of overcrowding? Will that be resolved by 2005?

Mrs. Lait: Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that no Liberal Democrats are present to listen to his clear exposition of the problems that commuters face in Bromley?

Mr. Horam: This is a matter on which we could have a measure of cross-party agreement. The Minister is here, and I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight). His constituency is far from Bromley, but he is still interested in these matters. It is disappointing that there are no Liberal Democrat Members present, and in view of what they have said in the past it is rather surprising.

I should like an answer to the crucial question of whether platforms at all the stations along the line from Orpington, Beckenham, St. Mary Cray and Chelsfield will be lengthened so that they can take trains long enough to resolve the problem of overcrowding.

It has been suggested that the toilets and seats should be removed from coaches to cram in more people. That is a desperate measure, and it would be a move backwards, not forwards, if people could not even get a seat on the train or go to the toilet. I hope that the Minister will comment on that. From Orpington, it may take 25 or 30 minutes to get to central London, so there must be no question of removing the seats and toilets from those trains. What, then, is being suggested? Are we talking only about very short journeys, of perhaps 10 or 15 minutes, in which case the train is more like a tube train and it may be acceptable to have no seats or toilets?

On my final point, safety, I shall be brief, as I want to give the Minister time to reply fully on this important matter. Like Conservative Members, he knows that the railways have a history of being very safe; and they remain so. Whether nationalised or privatised, the railways are the safest mode of transport, although the issue of safety was not well handled by the Deputy Prime Minister when he was in charge of these matters, or by the Government as a whole. There are still worries about safety, particularly in overcrowded trains such as those from Bromley and Orpington. People wonder, "What if something goes wrong while I am packed into this train like a sardine?"

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham may know that there was a derailment at Beckenham junction only 10 days ago. There were two serious incidents of signals passed at danger near Orpington in which, fortunately, no one was killed or seriously injured, and there was a fire on a train from Orpington to central London. I understand from the strategic plan that the train protection and warning system will be in place by 2003. Does that mean that all the trains coming from Bromley and Orpington will have the TPWS installed by the end of next year, so that the sort of accidents that occurred last year and continue this year will no longer be possible?

I invite the Minister to remember my initial remarks, which were that this debate concerns the most important people—the backbone of this country's economy—who come from Bromley every day to run London's economy.

[Mr. Horam]

They deserve, and are certainly sorely in need of, a sensible and comfortable daily commute in and out of London.

10.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) on securing this debate. He noted my assiduity in listening to him, which I always do, and I noted his assiduity in raising this matter in the House on so many occasions.

I was sorry that the tone of the debate was somewhat lowered by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait). I believe that the Speaker's guidelines are that no reference should be made to Members of other parties who may or may not be in the Chamber during half-hour debates. Perhaps the hon. Lady should refresh her memory in that respect. She also mentioned the renationalisation of Railtrack, and some may harbour an ambition to do that, but I am sorry to disappoint her: Railtrack is in administration and will come out of administration when that is what the administrator advises.

I am aware of the contribution made by the people of south-east England to our economy. The hon. Member for Orpington said that they were the most important; some might differ from him on that point, but I shall not engage him on it tonight. We recognise the importance to our economy of the south-east and those who travel daily to work. I hope he will note that I have the good grace to admit there are transport problems—he described them as a daily problem for his constituents. In return, he might have the good grace to admit that those problems did not start on 1 May 1997.

I have little time to respond to the debate, but let me first address the current performance of Connex South Eastern, which provides the service to and from Bromley North and Bromley South. The latest figures published by the Strategic Rail Authority for the period 1 April 2001 to 13 October 2001 show that 83.9 per cent. of Connex South Eastern services arrived within five minutes of their scheduled arrival time. Since those statistics were published, I understand from the SRA that performance has deteriorated, mainly due to adverse weather conditions and a consequential increase in infrastructure and train failures. The hon. Gentleman cited the figures for recent months, but I am sure that if he looks back over many years, he will see that performance figures tend to deteriorate at this time of year, and generally pick up as the weather improves.

Connex is well aware that improvements are necessary. On 10 January, it launched a new performance drive—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is familiar with it. Called "Over 90", it is aimed at achieving more than 90 per cent. peak punctuality. I understand the current results are encouraging.

The plan for the future of the railway published on 14 January by the SRA identifies priorities for improving Britain's rail network to ensure that the Government's growth targets are met. The plan outlines how improvements for passengers and freight customers will be delivered in the medium and short term, and also sets out our long-term ideas for the next decade.

Although rail traffic has grown substantially since privatisation, which requires extra trains, the existing infrastructure has sometimes failed to match network capacity, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. That has inevitably led to operating difficulties and poor perception of our railways. However, there is no question but that Britain's railways have a key role to play in the economy, in reducing road congestion, in offering a safe form of travel, in protecting the environment, and in safeguarding health and promoting social inclusion.

London and the south-east will benefit vastly from the strategic plan, as travel to and from London is the major source of demand for passenger rail travel: 70 per cent. of journeys nationally are made on the London and south-east network. The London and south-east area suffers from the worst overcrowding: the numbers passing daily through the main London terminals are now at an historic high. Measures will be taken to tackle overcrowding on all 10 London train operating companies. That may require longer trains, longer platforms and increased track capacity.

Early developments on the Connex South Eastern franchise will ensure the introduction of 210 vehicles of new class 375 rolling stock by 2002; I will say more about that shortly, if there is time. The company will also invest £40.5 million in rolling stock reliability improvements for class 465, 466 and 508 trains. Connex South Eastern has 145 stations eligible for upgraded facilities under the incremental output statements scheme described in the strategic plan, with which I am sure the hon. Gentleman is familiar. The works are due to be completed by the end of 2004 and could include facilities such as waiting rooms, toilets, security and information systems.

Significant capacity will be freed on the existing network in 2007, when the channel tunnel rail link is planned to open. It will offer fast domestic services from Kent, with new trains, and will contribute to a major reduction in overcrowding, as well as reducing the number of Eurostar trains running through Orpington from 2003 and through Bromley from 2007. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recognises that as an improvement.

In common with other train operating companies, Connex is required to remove all mark 1, slam-door rolling stock from service by 31 December 2004. The obligation to replace this stock is contained within its current franchise agreement.

Connex has 55 new trains, which are currently undergoing tests and modifications, which must be completed before they can go into passenger service.

The hon. Gentleman talked about power supply. The Strategic Rail Authority is leading a cross-industry team that is charged with overseeing the programme for replacing the slam-door trains in the Southern region and ensuring that the future electric power and infrastructure improvements are capable of meeting both the 2004 deadline for replacement and longer-term needs. I am assured that currently there are no vehicles sitting idle because of power supply problems. I am sure that that will be good news for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Horam: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I will give way, but I will be inhibited from responding to some of his other points.

Mr. Horam: Does what the Minister says mean that the power supply problem will be solved by the end of 2004?

Mr. Jamieson: I am saying that the power supply problems, as they exist, will be addressed by that time. It is hoped and anticipated that the problems will be dealt with in that time. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it is difficult to make an assessment because the amount of power required for the new units and how many will come into commission by that time are matters for the company. Another factor is delivery from the rolling stock companies. As I have said, that would certainly be our ambition.

The Strategic Rail Authority has funded a number of workstreams aimed at identifying the enhancements to the network that might be necessary. Last month it agreed funding for the establishment of a dedicated project team within Railtrack charged with continuing this work, and putting a plan together to resource and deliver it.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the strategic plan objective for Connex to extend platforms to accommodate 12-car trains to increase capacity and reduce overcrowding. Extended platforms on the Dartford via Bexleyheath and Sidcup routes will be included in the Thameslink 2000 project while extending platforms on the Gillingham and Dartford via Greenwich route is also proposed in the strategic plan. I hope that that is also good news for the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman was also concerned that Railtrack in administration may be affecting morale and subsequent performance. Railtrack was a company that failed. It had massive cost overruns, and in the end it was incapable of delivering the improvements that we and its customers had every right to see. I hope to see Railtrack come out of administration quickly, but the length of administration is set by the administrator, who has duties both to its railway and to the shareholders of Railtrack plc, and to is creditors. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman shares the Government's objective that the process can be completed as quickly as possible.

It is not surprising that uncertainty has affected Railtrack staff since the company went into administration, but the Government remain committed to providing £30 billion of support to the railways over the 10-year plan. Railtrack being taken into administration has not altered that commitment one jot. I am sure that that will be good news to the hon. Gentleman.

We now have an opportunity to meet the ambition that the hon. Gentleman and his constituents have to create and operate a better railway system. It will be for the administrator to make recommendations to Ministers on the most appropriate structure for Railtrack to emerge from administration.

This has been a short but useful debate. Sadly, I have not had the time to cover all the points made by the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Beckenham—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 13 February 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD (DISSOLUTION)

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Address praying that the draft Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dissolution) Order 2002 be made in the form of a draft laid before your House on 8 January.

I will comply with your request.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL (*BY ORDER*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second Time on Wednesday 27 February.

CONTINGENCIES FUND 2000–01

Ordered,

That there be laid before the House accounts of the Contingencies Fund, 2000–01, showing:—

(1) the Receipts and Payments in connection with the Fund in the year ended the 31st day of March 2001; and

(2) the Distribution of the Capital of the Fund at the commencement and close of the year; together with the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Police Reform

1. **Mr. Jim Murphy** (Eastwood): If he will make a statement on police reform in Northern Ireland. [33133]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): Our aim is to develop a modern police service that is effective and widely accepted throughout the community that it serves. Good progress has already been made in restructuring the police and in establishing a Policing Board with representatives from across the community.

Mr. Murphy: I welcome that answer, as I do the long overdue police reform in Northern Ireland, but does my hon. Friend agree that the families affected by the Omagh atrocity are not helped by the fact that people of considerable influence, including some politicians, refuse to assist the police in their inquiries into the Omagh events? Does she also agree that, despite the important work carried out by the Policing Board, the undignified public squabble between the police ombudsman and other authorities only adds a sense of frustration to that of loss and anger, which is already felt by the bereaved families?

Jane Kennedy: Everyone wants the perpetrators to be brought to justice. To convict those responsible for that appalling crime, the police need evidence. Speculation and intelligence are not enough. This remains a live investigation, and I hope that the recent publicity about the tragic events in Omagh on 15 August 1998 will encourage those with information to come forward.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): If the Minister is keen to have a good police service in Northern Ireland, does she agree that it needs to be properly funded? There is a deficit of more than £40 million for this year, and it will probably be £80 million next year. Without resources, how can we have good policing in Northern Ireland?

Jane Kennedy: The Government are fully committed to ensuring that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has the resources that it needs to continue to deliver a high-quality policing service to all in the community. The police grant for this year amounts to £656 million, which represents a high level of commitment by the Government. In August, the Secretary of State allocated an additional £10 million to the police grant to relieve pressures arising from the costs of policing disturbances earlier in the year. I am pleased to announce today that a further £16 million has been made available to the PSNI to meet all the remaining pressures identified by the Chief Constable in this financial year.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Does the Minister agree that the most fundamental and necessary principle of law and order in any society is agreement on the system of government—in other words, agreement on the system of order? When that is absent, no matter where it is, the police service will always be seen to be on one side or the other. Unfortunately, that was the situation in Northern Ireland.

Now, that fundamental principle has not only been put in place, with agreement on our system of government, but overwhelmingly endorsed by the people. That being so, does the Minister agree that it is the duty of members of all democratic political parties who regard themselves as democrats fully to support the policing service and to take their place in all the bodies relating to it?

Jane Kennedy: I entirely agree with everything my hon. Friend says.

Lady Hermon (North Down): Will the Minister please address a serious issue? The Patten report recommends that, over 10 years, the strength of the police service should be 7,500. That represents a significant fall in a short time. What is being done to redress the balance as regards that dangerously low level of policing?

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland is recruiting well, and levels of recruitment from both sides of the community are at a higher level than even Patten envisaged in his report. I am encouraged by the response that the communities have given to the reforms in the police service in Northern Ireland, and I have every confidence that we will have all the officers that we need to police Northern Ireland in the future.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I have here a letter from the hon. Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron), who is Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It states:

> "Dear Colleague,
>
> Northern Ireland Questions: Wednesday 13th February 2002.
>
> Thank you for your interest in Northern Ireland, and your help in tabling questions. I attach a suggested question . . . If you would like an alternative, or would like the question tabled on your behalf, please contact either myself, or Shona McIsaac, PPS to Jane Kennedy MP, Minister of State for Security and Policing . . . If your question is listed and is likely to be called, there will be assistance available with supplementaries".

Does the Minister agree that it is a pretty good waste of Parliament's time for her and her colleagues to answer questions cooked up in her office?

Further to the question of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), will the Minister accept that she told us on Monday that the number of victims of paramilitary violence was now 50 per cent. higher than when Patten wrote his report, and that the staffing level of the police service is now 300 below the level envisaged by Patten? Does she agree that this would be the wrong time to start disbanding the full-time police reserve?

Jane Kennedy: In one short question I have been asked about police staffing, police resources and the very difficult matter of Omagh. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to suggest which of those issues we should not be questioned on?

Good Friday Agreement

2. **Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): What aspects of the Good Friday agreement remain to be implemented. [33134]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): All aspects of the Belfast agreement have now been started. Our task is to ensure that the implementation process continues on all fronts.

Roger Casale: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Now that the new institutions are operational, will he continue to do everything that he can to encourage all parties, including the Unionists, to work together in those institutions? Will he also continue to support the economic development of Northern Ireland, which is one of the ways of bringing people—especially young people—together and ensuring that all the people of Northern Ireland have a better future?

Mr. Browne: I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government are faithfully implementing the agreement. As he rightly points out, implementation is not a matter only for the Government; it is a joint enterprise. I would like to take this opportunity to praise the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for the significant work that they are doing in this regard. The Government have consistently encouraged and persuaded others to fulfil their obligations, and we are still doing so. We continue to face challenges, but we also continue to make steady progress on all aspects of the agreement.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Is the Minister aware of the existence of the recently formed Ulster Political Research Group, whose aim is to address the political alienation from the Good Friday agreement process felt by loyalist communities in Northern Ireland, particularly in north Belfast? Would he be willing to accept representations from that group, and from one of its leading contributors, Mr. Frankie Gallagher?

Mr. Browne: The Government recognise the potential contribution that the Ulster Political Research Group could make to progress in this regard. That is why officials from the Northern Ireland Office met a delegation from the group on 28 January. There was a constructive exchange of views, and it was agreed that further meetings could take place when appropriate.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): While welcoming what the Minister has just said about engaging with loyalism, may I ask the Government to consider their own position? When are they going to demonstrate that they fully respect the letter and the spirit of the agreement's constitutional provisions, particularly those that recognise the legitimacy of Northern Ireland's place as part of the United Kingdom? When are the Government going to respect that? They completely failed to do so in certain aspects of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. Are they going to repeat that mistake with regard to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, or will they allow the proper expression of British national symbols in the courts of Northern Ireland on the same basis as the rest of the United Kingdom? That is the logic and the spirit of the agreement, but the Government have not yet recognised that.

Mr. Browne: I have already assured the House that the Government are implementing the agreement faithfully, including aspects mentioned by the right hon. Gentleman. As for his specific point, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made the Government's position clear on Second Reading of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, and in Committee yesterday I had an opportunity to repeat what he had said. We are prepared to consider all aspects of that Bill, and the Secretary of State is considering the points made to him by the right hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does the Minister not think that far too much attention is already being paid to symbolism, not just in Northern Ireland but in Britain more generally? Would it not be appropriate to think about reducing the importance that we attach to symbols, and attaching more importance to reality?

Mr. Browne: That is of course an important aspect of the agreement, in that the agreement requires the symbols and traditions of both sides of the community to be acknowledged and respected. The Government will continue to implement that provision.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): The whole House will have noticed that the Minister of State spectacularly failed to answer an important question about the Government's commitment to running down the full-time police reserve in Northern Ireland. I am afraid that the whole population of Northern Ireland will draw very pessimistic conclusions from that evasion.

I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State and his colleagues sincerely share my disappointment that there has been no further act of decommissioning since the Sinn Fein-IRA single act of decommissioning last October. Is the Under-Secretary of State surprised?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman knows the position relating to the full-time reserve: the Chief Constable will review the situation in April, and the Government will act on his recommendations.

We want more decommissioning, as, I think, do all Members. We maintain, and must maintain, local, national and international pressure on all terrorist groups in order to make further progress. This is not just a republican issue, however. We must not lose sight of the need to encourage movement from loyalists: indeed, to some extent that must be our priority.

Mr. Davies: Is it not time the Government learned that giving rewards and concessions to people who do not fulfil their obligations is not a very clever way of inducing them to do so? Will the Minister assure us that, short of the completion of decommissioning and the abandonment of the armed struggle by terrorists and former terrorists, there can be no question of an amnesty for terrorists on the run? If the Government proceeded with such an amnesty in the present circumstances, they would have no defence whatever against the charge of a complete sell-out—a sell-out of all the law-abiding people in Northern Ireland, in both communities, and indeed of all principles of judicial propriety and good sense.

Mr. Browne: The Weston Park proposals set the issue in its proper context. It arises from the Belfast agreement, and is a logical extension of it. As we have said repeatedly, the Government are still considering how this might be achieved, and when our considerations have been concluded we will publish our proposals for debate here.

Military Presence

3. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): What progress is being made towards reducing the military presence in Northern Ireland. [33135]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): As a result of the general lowering of the threat from terrorists, the Chief Constable was able to announce on 22 January a number of further normalisation measures.

Laura Moffatt: Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the attack on the Magilligan training camp, and extend his sympathy to the civilian victim's family? Will he assure the House and everyone else that that terrible act will not impede the process of normalisation in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: I have no hesitation in condemning the recent attack on the Magilligan training centre. I am sure that I speak for all Members in extending sympathy to the victim and the victim's family.

Clearly, there are those who still wish to inject the poison of the past into Northern Ireland society in an attempt to stop the progress towards the normal, stable, decent, democratic Northern Ireland that the people there deserve. They will not be allowed to achieve that objective; but it is worth making absolutely plain that the abnormal level of troops in Northern Ireland is not a result of any aspiration or ambition on the part of the Government or the House, but a direct result of the abnormal threat to the lives and property of Northern Ireland citizens, and to the police. Of the people who demand the reduction in troop levels the loudest are those who, by their vicious actions, ensure that those levels remain above the normal level for the rest of the United Kingdom.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Does the Secretary of State agree that the best way in which to reduce the regular Army to garrison levels, which all reasonable people want in Northern Ireland, is to maintain a civil police force of such numbers, size and operational ability that it can be the prime force in defending law and order? In two areas of Northern Ireland, north Belfast and Coleraine, the regular Army has been brought in recently to back up the RUC, the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Will the Secretary of State or the Minister come to a meeting that I have called for next Wednesday night at Ballyclare town hall to hear the complaints and concerns of the full-time RUC Reserve? Forty per cent. of the operational police on the ground have an "R" on their shoulder. If they are taken out in March or April, we will have no law and order in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Reid: Of course, the Minister responsible for security and I meet constantly with members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, including members of the full-time reserve. I would not for a moment underestimate the difficulties in facing up to the challenges that the police service faces.

Decisions on the full-time reserve will depend on an assessment by the Chief Constable, which will be made in April this year. However, I caution the hon. Gentleman against even implicitly—I know that he does not mean to do this—laying the blame for the high level of troops in Northern Ireland on any inadequacy in the policing. The level of troops in Northern Ireland is a direct result of the threats to the lives and to the property of the police and the citizenry in Northern Ireland by dissident republicans in particular, but also by rejectionist loyalists. They are the people who are refusing to mend their ways and creating an abnormal society in Northern Ireland. We are the people who wish to see normality return.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Does the Secretary of State agree that the primacy of policing and policing decisions is a hallmark and a core element of any normal and stable society? Does he further agree that until there is a reduction in the military presence the primacy of policing decisions will be incomplete? What plans does the Northern Ireland Office have of now to ensure the removal of installations in south Armagh that are manned exclusively by military personnel?

Dr. Reid: As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is our aspiration to achieve a normal level of troops in Northern Ireland. Indeed, partly because of the success of the police service, in co-operation with the Garda from the Republic of Ireland, the threat level has been assessed as lower and, in the past four months alone, from memory, we have reduced two establishments, and announced that another barracks is to close and a battalion and three towers are to be removed.

I repeat that we have no ambition to keep a higher level of troops in Northern Ireland than is absolutely necessary, particularly when British troops, because of their professional expertise, are in demand across the world by the United Nations. However, the main obstacle to that is the fact that there remains a higher than normal threat to the lives of our citizens and to the police service. It is the first duty of any civilised Government to defend the lives of our citizens and to combat the threats against them.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Given that the Ministry of Defence's liability so far for its part in the Saville inquiry is £14.5 million, will the Secretary of State give an assurance that that will in no way compromise any part of the MOD's operational budget in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: Yes, I can. Our military expenditure in Northern Ireland in the past 30 years has been astronomical. As a result of the progress that we have made in the peace process, part of which addresses very difficult issues of truth about the past, the troop level in Northern Ireland is lower than it has been for 31 years. We have reduced the number of soldiers there from 27,000 to 13,000, with commensurate back-up. The savings from that alone far exceed any costs of the Bloody Sunday inquiry to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Police Effectiveness

4. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): What discussions he has had with authorities in *(a)* the United States and *(b)* other countries to identify means of improving police effectiveness in Northern Ireland. [33136]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): I have ongoing contact with a range of authorities on policing matters. I returned this morning from a two-day visit to the United States, which gave me an opportunity to discuss policing and other matters with Secretary Powell, Robert Mueller, who is director of the FBI, and assistant Attorney-General Larry Thompson, among others.

Mr. Chapman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is an indivisibility about terrorism, and that the assistance provided by the United States will therefore be particularly welcome to the people of Northern Ireland? In so far as there are resource implications of that assistance, will the needs of the Police Service of Northern Ireland be met adequately and in full?

Dr. Reid: I agree with my hon. Friend on both counts. I have no hesitation in saying publicly that we are enormously grateful for the assistance that we have been given by the United States authorities and, most recently, President Bush's agreement to joint training between the FBI and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. As my hon. Friend points out, the Government are committed to providing the resources necessary to supplement assistance from outside. That is why we recently awarded an additional £10 million. As my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for security said today, we are happy to announce that an additional £16 million will go to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): I welcome the announcement today in response to my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) of additional money for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Can I press the Secretary of State further to reassure my constituents in north Belfast and other people in Northern Ireland that the axe that currently hangs over several police stations, including two in my constituency that cover areas where there has been trouble in recent days—in the Whitewell area and between Tiger's Bay and Newington—will be removed? Will the Secretary of State ensure that those police stations will remain open and that security will not be reduced at a very difficult time?

Dr. Reid: First, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's acknowledgement of the Government's commitment to resource the police service. I do not often have the opportunity to welcome such acknowledgements but I am grateful for it. On decisions about the future of police stations in general, the key role will be played by the Policing Board. Despite the cynicism and attempts by people to undermine the role of the Policing Board, it has risen magnificently to continual challenges, not least most recently on the subject of the Omagh inquiry. I am sure that it will act with just as much wisdom, circumspection and concern for effective policing on the matters that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Devolved Administration (Discussions)

5. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): What recent discussions he has had with the devolved Administration regarding the support given to victims of the troubles. [33137]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): I met Ministers of the devolved Administration on 25 January. We discussed a range of issues that impact on our respective strategies for responding to the needs of victims of the troubles. Such regular consultation is vital to ensure that the needs of victims are properly addressed.

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I draw his attention to the very good work of the Northern Ireland centre for trauma and transformation. What assurances can he give about its future funding?

Mr. Browne: I can assure my hon. Friend that the centre's work has been fully recognised by the Northern Ireland Office. Significant funding has been committed so that it can go ahead as the Northern Ireland centre for trauma. The centre is doing good work in Northern Ireland, and internationally.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome what has been done for victims, but does the Minister accept that we have fresh victims daily, who sometimes seem to be forgotten about? Will it be possible for the Minister to use his influence more to prevent the constant changes in our policing that keep people writing reports instead of working on the streets?

Mr. Browne: I recognise the need for less bureaucracy in this matter. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are about to take a fresh look at our strategy with regard to victims to ensure that it is capable of responding to the changing context that the hon. Gentleman has identified.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [33163] **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 13 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Before listing my engagements, Mr. Speaker, may I say on behalf of hon. Members on all sides of the House how deeply we express our sadness at the death of her royal highness Princess Margaret? She will be remembered by the whole nation with huge affection for her love of culture and art and her sense of fun, but most of all for the service that she gave our nation. Our thoughts and deep condolences are with the Queen, the Queen Mother, and all the royal family.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. I also had a meeting with some 600 chief executives in the national health service. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Dr. Naysmith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that matters such as MMR and BSE illustrate how important it is to understand the risk factor in science? Does he also agree that science and discovery centres such as At-Bristol play an important role in achieving that? Will he therefore accept that such centres deserve to have central Government funding, as many museums and art galleries do?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate the centre in Bristol on the work that it does, and I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important that we invest in science for the future. That is why the Government, in partnership with the Wellcome Trust, are committed to making available some £1 billion over the next few years for investment in science. That will be an investment not only in the learning of our young people, but in the economic future of the country.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I join the Prime Minister in offering our condolences to Her Majesty the Queen, the Queen Mother and the royal family on their sad loss. The Prime Minister is right to say that Princess Margaret was a strong servant of her country, through war and peace. She will be mourned and much missed throughout the country.

When the Prime Minister signed the letter to his Romanian counterpart on behalf of LNM on 23 July 2001, was he or his chief of staff—*[Interruption.]* I repeat, was he or his chief of staff aware that the owner of that company, Mr. Mittal, had at any time—I repeat, at any time—donated money to his party?

The Prime Minister: It is of course a matter of public record that Mr. Mittal is a donor to the Labour party and a supporter of the Labour party. Why is that a matter of public record? It is because this Government introduced the open rules for political funding. For years and years, no one had any idea of how the Conservative party or any political party was funded. We introduced rules of transparency.

As the right hon. Gentleman probably knows, the letter that I signed mentioned not Mr. Mittal but his company, LNM, of which I had no knowledge. However, having said that, had I known that Mr. Mittal was a supporter of the Labour party, it would have made no difference whatever to the signing of the letter. That was entirely justified, as was the advice from the embassy.

This is a complete load of nonsense from beginning to end. It is not Watergate, it is Garbagegate. It is the biggest load of garbage since the last load of garbage, which was Enron.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is very interesting that the Prime Minister now says that it is garbage to raise a concern that he, as the Prime Minister and on behalf of the whole country, should have written a letter in support of a company—by the way, it is a competitor to our main steel manufacturer—which turns out to have fewer than one tenth of 1 per cent. of its employees working in the United Kingdom. The company is registered in the Dutch Antilles. Will the Prime Minister tell us whether at any stage he or his chief of staff were aware, as he signed the letter, that it was in support of someone who had donated money to the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I have already said that it was a matter of public record that Mr. Mittal was a donor to the Labour party. However, what the right hon. Gentleman says about the letter is total nonsense. It was written at the instigation of the British embassy in Romania. It was written for the very simple reason that this was a reform, namely the selling off of an old state industry, which we supported strongly. I am delighted that a British-based company has succeeded. What is more, I am pleased that the embassy asked us to do this—it was the right thing to do. If the right hon. Gentleman is seriously saying that because the company is owned by someone who is a supporter of the Labour party, we should not write such a letter, even though the British embassy requests it, that is totally contrary to the practice of previous Governments throughout the ages.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister already knows that, apparently, in the draft letter the word "friend" was struck out before he even signed it. The real point is not whether the Prime Minister was right to sign on behalf of the company but how many of the companies that employ fewer than 100 employees in this country and are registered abroad he backs by letters to foreign countries in support of contracts? The Prime Minister seems to have missed the point. Until he is able to say that he knew specifically about the matter and discussed it with his chief of staff and then decided, despite that, to go ahead, we will never be the clearer and will always be left doubting whether the Prime Minister acted in the best interests of Britain. To clear this up, will the Prime Minister now tell us whether he will agree to a full public and independent inquiry into this affair?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly tell the right hon. Gentleman the answer to that—it is no. As I pointed out a moment ago, I signed the letter unchanged, and it made no mention of Mr. Mittal. However, had it done so, it would still have been entirely the right thing to do. The right hon. Gentleman says that it was wrong to sign the letter. I will explain again to Conservative Members why I did so.

The embassy in Romania asked us to sign the letter because it was an important contract. We fully supported the Romanian Government's policy of economic reform. We therefore wanted to celebrate the fact that the contract had been awarded to a British company and the fact that the Romanian Government's programme of economic reform was right for Romania. If the right hon. Gentleman reads the comments of the Romanian Prime Minister today, plainly puzzled at the nonsense being raised by Conservative Members, he will see that the decision to award the contract was made before the letter was even written. Therefore, all we were doing was welcoming the fact that this process of economic reform was going forward.

The reason the right hon. Gentleman is raising this is simple—no one would know of any donations but for the legislation that we introduced—it is because the Conservative party got into such difficulty in the previous Parliament, because previous leading members of the Conservative party are either in jail or have just come out of jail—*[Interruption.]* What Conservative Members want to do, because of the trouble they got into, is smear us with the same brush. I am afraid that all they do when they engage in this nonsense is remind people of their own record.

Hon. Members: More, more.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Derek Twigg (Halton): My constituency has some of the highest mortality rates in the country for certain cancers. What concerns my constituents are the inequalities in health service provision. Historically, we have had a shortage of health professionals for a number of years. What are the Government doing to ensure that we have more professionals, such as doctors and nurses, in the health service so that health inequalities in areas such as mine are dealt with?

The Prime Minister: The most important thing that we can do to recruit more professionals into the health service is obviously to put in the extra investment. That is why we are recruiting more doctors, more nurses and more consultants. We are recruiting at every level of the health service for a very simple reason: we believe that one of the principal problems of the health service is undercapacity in it. We need those doctors and nurses. In the past year alone, we have recruited more than 15,000 more nurses. As a result of that, we will meet the NHS planned target on recruitment of nurses some two years ahead of schedule. That will only succeed if we keep that investment going through the health service and do not take it out—which is of course the policy of the Conservative party.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I fully associate my right hon. and hon. Friends with the tributes paid to the late Princess Margaret. Our condolences go to the other members of the royal family.

May I invite the Prime Minister to take the opportunity this afternoon to welcome the decision—the policy initiative—taken this week in the Welsh Assembly by his party and by the Liberal Democrats to reintroduce grants for poorer Welsh students?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to congratulate the Welsh Assembly on its decision. Obviously, we are looking at how we can improve access for students in our country. It is worth pointing out that, under the proposals introduced by the Government, 50 per cent. of students do not—I think—pay tuition fees.

Mr. Kennedy: The Prime Minister's welcome is itself welcome. Given that his party and our own party have legislated both in Scotland and in Wales for a fairer deal for our students and potential students, is not the logic of that position that we should legislate at Westminster as well? The right hon. Gentleman would have the support of two thirds or four fifths of his Back Benchers. Why does not he do it?

The Prime Minister: When the right hon. Gentleman talks about the Scottish system, that is different altogether from grants for poorer students. In fact, in this country, we already have bursaries for some of the poorer students and, yes, we are looking at how we can give poorer students greater opportunities to apply for those bursaries. That is important.

In respect of Scotland, I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Scotland is entitled to go its own way on this—that is part of the devolution settlement. The right hon. Gentleman should point out to people that in fact students in Scotland pay as a result of the Scottish system. We are looking at how we can achieve a fairer balance between the contribution the state makes and the contribution students make; but if we are to get our higher education participation rates above 50 per cent. there is no way that we can do that under the old system. That was why, under the previous Government, Sir Ronald Dearing—now Lord Dearing—held an inquiry into how we could change the system. In today's world, there is no way that we shall be able to get more and more students in and still get resources to the front line of universities unless we change the system of student finance. That is why we have introduced the reforms that we are making. We are looking particularly at how we can help poorer students, but there is no way out of that difficult choice on the balance between state funding and student contribution.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Does the Prime Minister support the sentiments expressed in the Green Paper published by the Foreign Office yesterday, which suggest that we should employ mercenaries—who often work for the most odious regimes and whose only loyalty is to money—to support the United Nations in a crisis, because among other things, they are cheaper than our own national armed forces?

The Prime Minister: Of course, our own armed forces do fantastic work peacekeeping throughout the world. I think that the Foreign Secretary was saying that the use of mercenaries has to come within some proper system of regulation. Until now, that has not been the case and that is why it is important that we ensure that there are proper rules on the use of mercenaries.

Q2. [33164] **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): I have given the Prime Minister prior notice of this question. Last week at Prime Minister's Question Time, I challenged the accuracy of the statement made by the right hon. Gentleman to the House about Railtrack on 19 December, when he said:

> "However, the longer the administrator's work has gone on, the more financial difficulties he has uncovered."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 288-9.]

Since last week, the administrator has again given evidence to the Transport Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions at which he contradicted that statement by the Prime Minister. I have sent the right hon. Gentleman a transcript of that evidence. Will he today accept that his statement was not correct and will he withdraw it?

The Prime Minister: No, I am afraid I will not—on the basis of what the hon. Gentleman sent me. Obviously, we shall have to wait for the administrator to give a full account of the exact assets and liabilities of Railtrack, at a later date. However, one thing is clear: the reason that the company had to be put into administration was that it was effectively not a going concern—it was totally dependent on Government subsidy. When the administrator makes his final tally and accounts, I think that the hon. Gentleman will see that I am right and that he is wrong.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): The Prime Minister may be aware that the new accident and emergency unit to be built at Warrington hospital is a pilot project in which staff expertise will be used to design better emergency care for patients. Will he join me in congratulating the staff at Warrington on the work that they have put into the project and in recognising their skill? Will he assure me and the House that any NHS reforms will draw on the expertise of those who understand it best—the staff?

The Prime Minister: That is part of a programme of renovation of all the accident and emergency departments that are needed in the country. They are under tremendous pressure—of course they are—and the staff do a fantastic job in difficult circumstances. My hon. Friend's example is one among many of how changes in working practices, extra staff and extra investment in capital and equipment are making a real difference.

Q3. [33165] **Mr. Paul Keetch** (Hereford): The Prime Minister will be aware that, 10 days ago, the city of Hereford was effectively cut in two when the River Wye flooded for the third time in four years. Businesses were affected, homes were flooded and the city was gridlocked. Although a flood alleviation scheme is in place, there are real concerns that it might be delayed because of statutory consultation and the discovery of archaeological remains. Will he assure the people of the city of Hereford that if there is a delay, any increased costs will be met by Government funds and not by the flood defence committee?

The Prime Minister: May I express my sympathy for those affected by the floods in the hon. Gentleman's constituency? I think that the Environment Agency is considering a scheme to deal with that problem. It has to be subject to a certain amount of consultation, but we are doing everything that we can to ensure that the process is as swift as possible and I am happy to correspond with him on how it will be taken forward.

Q4. [33166] **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): For more than 20 years, employees who contracted lung cancer through exposure to asbestos have been compensated. However, a recent Court of Appeal judgment threatens thousands of current and future claimants who cannot identify the fibre or fibres that first caused the cancer. Will my right hon. Friend look into the matter urgently and ensure that the Government do whatever they can to overturn that cruel injustice?

The Prime Minister: The judgment has been widely perceived as an injustice and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will announce today that we shall pay compensation to the relevant people who meet the qualifying criteria, which could mean payments of more than £30,000. We are aware of the problem and we are doing our very best to deal with it, but, obviously, we must study the judgment's consequences carefully.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Prime Minister tell us whether street crime in this country has gone up or down since he was re-elected?

The Prime Minister: According to the British crime survey, overall levels of crime are down, as is violent crime. However, it is correct to say that street crime has risen significantly in the past year, which is why we are taking a series of measures to deal with it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I suggest that the Prime Minister heed his own advice. When he was shadow Home Secretary, he said that

"the country is not looking for complacent statements about the situation getting better when it is getting worse".—[*Official Report*, 22 October 1992; Vol. 212, c. 550.]

Home Office figures leaked last weekend show that street crime nationwide has not just risen, but risen by more than a quarter since the election. Perhaps the Prime Minister can also tell us whether muggings and street crime in London have risen or fallen since the election.

The Prime Minister: I have just pointed out to the right hon. Gentleman that I accept that street crime has risen, particularly in the past year. I said that we are taking a series of actions necessary to deal with that. Let me explain them. First, we are recruiting more police officers. Indeed, in London, in just the past few months, there are more than 600 extra officers and, since this time last year, more than 1,000 extra officers. Last year, there were more than 2,500 extra recruits, and I am pleased to tell the House that, this January, recruitment was up 20 per cent. on last year.

There are also reforms in the new Police Reform Bill that will allow new powers for civilian staff, so that we can free up more officers on the beat. There is also record investment in closed circuit television—some £200 million. We are also funding some 400 extra secure accommodation places and 2,500 more prison places. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members ask why street crime is going up. One of the main reasons is to do with the theft of mobile phones, which accounts for about one third of the rise in street robbery. As a result of the measures that we are taking, however, we will be able to get that down. But, of course, that will only happen if we invest in extra police, CCTV and secure accommodation places, rather than take it out, which is the Conservative party's position.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That was a very long answer, but not the answer to the question that I asked the right hon. Gentleman. I asked him whether, in London, muggings and street crime—two separate categories of crime—had gone up or down. The answer is that street crime in London has gone up by nearly 40 per cent. and muggings have gone up by one third since he was re-elected. That means that people in London have suffered something like 183 street crimes a day, every day since he was re-elected. The Prime Minister has just said, "It's all right; we are getting more police," but his own Home Office Minister, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), has now confirmed that Metropolitan police figures show that they were short by 1,200 officers last year. No wonder the chairman of the Police Federation has said:

"Morale has reached an all-time low."

The reality of the Prime Minister's tenure is simply that in London, people are now twice as likely to be mugged walking the streets as they would be in New York. Does he not think that that is a record of failure by any measure?

The Prime Minister: First, it is correct that street crime and mugging have gone up in London in the past year, which is precisely why we are taking the action that we are taking. The right hon. Gentleman mentions the number of police in place in the past year, but, as I say, in London alone, more than 1,000 extra police have been recruited. Indeed, as a result of the additional investment, I think that, by the end of the year, we will have record numbers of police—more than in all the years of Conservative Government. It is correct, of course, that one of the answers is to get more police on the beat, more investment in secure accommodation and swifter court action. That is exactly what we are doing, but the key to doing all of it is to put in the extra investment. *[Interruption.]* The Conservatives go on about five years, but, overall, the crime rate doubled under the 18 years of Conservative Government, while in the five years of this Government it has fallen, not risen. Vehicle crime is down by 30 per cent; burglary is down by more than 20 per cent. Overall, crime is down by 12 per cent. So if we compare the records of Conservative and Labour Governments, we see that, under the Tories, crime doubled; under us, it has fallen.

Hon. Members: More, more.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Q5. [33167] **John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington): The Prime Minister will have heard the announcement this morning by British Airways, based in my constituency, of 6,000 job losses on top of the 7,000 job losses announced before Christmas. The aviation industry is recovering slowly from the events of 11 September and is grateful to the Government for the assistance that they have provided, but would he be willing to meet a delegation of Members of Parliament from the west London airport constituencies to consider not only the short-term measures that can help those people who are losing their jobs, but the long-term measures that will help us to tackle the structural problems in our local economy?

The Prime Minister: I am, of course, aware of the concern that there must be about the job losses announced by British Airways, and our sympathies are with the constituents in my hon. Friend's constituency and the other constituencies that will be primarily affected by those losses. I know that this announcement has been the product of detailed consultation, however. The company has to engage in restructuring, and it has been closely involved with the unions on how that is to be carried out.

I would, however, certainly be very pleased to meet a delegation of Members of Parliament from the area affected.

Q6. [33168] **Mrs. Annette L. Brooke** (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Does the Prime Minister agree that the anticipated massive increases in council tax in authorities throughout the country will particularly hurt pensioners and those on low incomes? Will he consider that the Government should give urgent consideration to looking at the underfunding of basic services such as social services? Will he further look at the basis of local taxation, so that it relates better to ability to pay?

The Prime Minister: I understand why the Liberal Democrats are always keen to widen the tax base, but it may not be the case that everyone wishes to do so. I put it to the hon. Lady, however, that the amount of money that we are giving to local government has significantly increased. Let us wait and see what the actual council tax rises are.

The hon. Lady spoke of the position of pensioners. Of course we are concerned if any pensioners face unacceptable rises in their council tax, but I would point out to her that the Government have done a lot for the income of pensioners. [HON. MEMBERS: "What are you going to do about it?"] Let me explain what we have already done. We have made large increases to the basic state pension, introduced the £200 winter allowance, as well as free television licences for the over-75s and the minimum income guarantee. In fact, we have put billions of pounds of extra money into helping pensioners. Of course we will watch carefully what happens in relation to council tax, but I hope that the hon. Lady would accept that we have done our level best to try to raise the income of pensioners.

Northern Ireland

Q7. [33169] **Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): When he will next visit Northern Ireland? I should say that it is a closed question.

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for telling me.

I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Barnes: Tomorrow there is to be an important debate in Westminster Hall about those forced into exile from Northern Ireland by paramilitary intimidation. As representatives of Sinn Fein are now allowed into Westminster, they could at least listen to that debate; and would it not be a good idea if, afterwards, they were to have discussions with those of us who attend that debate to consider the ways and means by which paramilitary organisations will end intimidation? After all, I believe that that was the reason why many of us wanted those representatives here.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. I think that he is right. I hope that representatives of Sinn Fein listen to the debate and I hope that they are prepared to take part in discussions. Indeed, I hope that all those political parties that have been connected with paramilitary organisations are prepared to take part, because this is not simply something that is about republicans; it also applies to loyalists.

If we are genuinely concerned, as we should be, about putting the past to rest in Northern Ireland, one major part of that is people who were intimidated out of the country—the so-called exiles. Of course they should be allowed to return in peace. That, I think, would be a proper part of any significant undertaking in relation to the peace process. If the parties really support the peace process, they should support every dimension of it.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): It is very good to hear the Prime Minister going that far, but will he go a little further? Is it not rather shameful that the Government should be considering introducing legislation to give amnesty to criminals who are outside this country, and to prisoners who escaped, allowing them to return? Distasteful as that may be, it may be necessary in the overall context of the peace process, but will the Prime Minister give us an assurance that he will use his considerable personal influence to ensure that no such legislation is brought to the House before he has an absolute guarantee from those who control the paramilitaries and the political parties that are associated with them that the punishment beatings and expulsions will end? In that way it would be a two-sided agreement and not, like so many in the past, a one-sided one?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he has said about recognising the necessity of making difficult—indeed, distasteful—choices in moving the peace process forward. I will certainly listen very carefully to what he said. I repeat that there can be no place for punishment beatings, attempts to exile people or any so-called paramilitary activity which is outside the rule of law and destined to undermine democracy rather than support it. I have listened very carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said and I agree that we should make it quite clear that those people who have been excluded from Northern Ireland should be allowed to return.

Q8. [33170] **Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): Will the Prime Minister reconsider the equal value claim made by female canteen workers against the former British Coal? Although progress has been made and £40 million has been paid out to 1,300 workers, more than double that number are in the same situation and are set to receive nothing. The problem springs directly from bad practice by one of the trade unions. In the spirit of fairness, will the Prime Minister join us in looking for a solution?

The Prime Minister: The relevant Secretary of State and I will note my hon. Friend's comments. He is right to state that we have paid out £40 million and that more than 1,000 people who were affected have received compensation. The difficulty is that strict rules govern whether equal pay claims are allowed and there would be considerable implications were we to digress from those.

I am happy to consider my hon. Friend's concern, but I am afraid that I can make no promises or give any undertakings in that respect.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the Prime Minister break one of his new year resolutions and take time to speak to Mr. Ken Livingstone today? Will he tell him that the mayor of New York is a welcome visitor to London today and that if Mr. Livingstone wants to know how to run a great city properly, he should have discussions with him?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly be in a better position to consider that after my discussions with Mr. Giuliani today.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Following question No. 1 to the Advocate-General yesterday, have you been able to reflect on the difficult problems of media privilege on the one hand and parliamentary privilege on the other in relation to the trial that is taking place at Zeist on events at Lockerbie?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order.

I have no responsibility for what may or may not be said by the press. My responsibility is to the House and to uphold the rules that it has agreed will regulate its proceedings. It has long been the practice of the House that matters awaiting the adjudication of a court of law may not be raised in debate or in other parliamentary proceedings, including questions.

On 15 November 2001, the House reaffirmed and clarified earlier resolutions about matters bound by the sub judice rule. The 2001 resolution makes it plain that the rule covers appeal proceedings. I understand that an appeal is currently being heard on the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I cannot, therefore, allow references to the case in the House until the appeal proceedings are ended. I hope that that helps him.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given you prior notice of my concerns and you will have heard the exchange between myself and the Prime Minister in Prime Minister's Question Time. I have expressed concern over a period of time that Members should be able to rely on the accuracy of statements made by Ministers to the House. I am not satisfied with the response today and fear that the Prime Minister is unable to substantiate his comments. I seek your leave to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has written to me on that matter and I have replied to him. I will not comment on it when it is raised as a point of order. He has no right to continue raising it in such a way.

Patients Without Legal Capacity (Safeguards)

3.33 pm

Mrs. Helen Clark (Peterborough): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Mental Health Act 1983 to provide protection for persons with a mental disorder who are unable to consent to being treated in hospital.

The Bill, which is supported by hon. Members from the three main parties, the charity Mencap and the Alzheimer's Society, attempts to close a loophole in the legal protection of the most vulnerable members of society. It would introduce a procedure whereby decisions that involve deprivations of liberty are taken in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law which can be challenged. That will ensure that patients who are informally detained benefit, as far as is practicable, from the rights that formally detained patients have under the Mental Health Act 1983 the moment a carer challenges the informal decision.

My Bill applies to people with a mental disorder who are unable to consent to being admitted to hospital. They have no capacity to consent to admission but are deemed from their behaviour not to have dissented to that admission. The proposals would apply to those with severe learning disabilities who are unable to make decisions for themselves and to people with dementia whose loss of capacity may be permanent.

The issue was prominently highlighted in the Bournewood case in the constituency of the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), [illegible] is one of the Bill's supporters. The case is that of a 48-year-old autistic man, known for legal reasons as Mr. L, who cannot speak. Mr. L had been a resident at a hospital run by the Bournewood NHS trust and had gone to live with a couple who were his carers. They regarded him as one of the family. One day, at a day centre, Mr. L became agitated. His carers could not be contacted, and Mr. L was given a sedative and taken to hospital. The doctor decided that there was no need to detain Mr. L in hospital under the Mental Health Act as Mr. L was compliant and did not resist or attempt to run away. He was kept in hospital on an informal basis.

Mr. L's carers described the fact that they were not allowed to see him for nearly four months

"as of the greatest importance to Mr L".

They demanded his release but had no legal basis on which to challenge the doctor's decision. The carers took action against the trust, claiming that he was unlawfully detained. The Court of Appeal ruled that he was unlawfully detained, but the decision was reversed in the House of Lords. The judgments relate to the scope of section 131 of the 1983 Act. This section preserves the right to admit on the basis of common law. Common law is a useful concept, but it contains none of the safeguards of that Act, and that is what my Bill seeks to address.

In any event, the concerns raised in the case of Mr. L certainly have not gone away. At the time of the judgment, Lord Justice Steyn said that those patients who would continue to be admitted informally would not benefit from any of the protections provided by the 1983 Act. In particular, they would continue not to have the right to apply for, or to be automatically referred to, mental health review tribunals in accordance with the provisions of that Act.

[Mrs. Helen Clark]

Currently, people who for whatever reason lack the mental capacity to consent or dissent can be informally detained indefinitely, on the opinion of a single doctor. Relatives and carers have no right to appeal against the doctor's view of the best interests of the person being detained; nor do they have a right to be consulted prior to the detention. There is no mechanism to review the lawfulness of the detention and no requirement to review the patient's conditions of detention. Such patients are not protected by any formal safeguards at all and have to rely on good professional practice to defend them. They are not even open to a writ of habeas corpus since they are not being detained. That places effective and unqualified control in the hands of hospital psychiatrists and other health care professionals.

I am aware of other cases. An Alzheimer's sufferer, Mrs. P, has been informally admitted to hospital because of her aggressive behaviour. She is very agitated and her carer—I shall call her Joyce—does not think that she should be in hospital, but Joyce has no legal basis for challenging the doctor's decision that Mrs. P should remain in hospital. The Bill would allow Joyce to challenge the decision on whether Mrs. P should be allowed to go home. The Alzheimer's Society tells me that this case is typical of those in a number of calls that it receives on its helpline each week.

I am not for one moment suggesting that all those cases should or would proceed to a tribunal. Speaking from experience, however, I think that if carers knew that legal safeguards were in effect, that would give them the confidence to dispute a decision to detain or continue to detain their loved one if they did not believe it to be in that person's best interests.

The Government have published a White Paper on the review of the Mental Health Act. It contains proposals to address the deficiencies in the current legal framework, but I do not know when a Bill will be introduced or whether it will deal with this issue. I believe that my Bill would do so in a simple and effective manner. It is not about preventing informal admissions when nobody objects to them, about undoing the good work of the Mental Health Act review or about putting the cart before the horse in mental health reform.

We cannot ignore the fact that the Bournewood case has drawn attention to the deficiencies in the present law. Mr. L was detained without any right to have his detention reviewed by an independent tribunal. Only one month ago, the health ombudsman strongly criticised the Bournewood Trust for detaining Mr. L for four months. My Bill provides that once someone's placement is challenged, formal procedures come into play.

The way in which we choose to safeguard the rights of individuals who do not have a voice to speak up for themselves reflects our maturity as a civilised society. Reform is needed to uphold an individual's rights to liberty and to be treated with dignity, and to ensure their freedom from detention. We also need to safeguard against misjudgments and lapses of judgment on the part of health professionals—these can occur.

The law as it stands fails to give adequate protection to a vulnerable group of individuals, and it discriminates against those who are most disadvantaged and their families and carers. Mr. L's carers have already sought an application arguing that Mr. L's detention contravened article 5 of the European convention on human rights. I hope that the House will accept my Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Helen Clark, Mr. David Amess, Sir Paul Beresford, Mr. Roger Berry, Peter Bottomley, Mr. Paul Burstow, Mr. Tom Clarke, Dr. Julian Lewis, Jim Dobbin, Dr. Ian Gibson, Ms Debra Shipley and Dr. Jenny Tonge.

PATIENTS WITHOUT LEGAL CAPACITY (SAFEGUARDS)

Mrs. Helen Clark accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Mental Health Act 1983 to provide protection for persons with a mental disorder who are unable to consent to being treated in hospital: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 April, and to be printed [Bill 94].

Standards and Privileges

[The Fifth Report from the Committee on Standards and Privileges, Session 2001–02, HC 605-I & II, on the Complaint against Mr. Keith Vaz, is relevant.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House—

(i) approves the Fifth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (House of Commons Paper No. 605-I); and

(ii) accordingly suspends Mr. Keith Vaz, Member for Leicester East from the service of the House for one month.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

3.42 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I completely accept the report of the Standards and Privileges Committee and its recommendation. I apologise to the Committee and the House. In so doing, I underline my unreserved support for the integrity of the House and its procedures.

I am very pleased that the report clears me of all the main allegations made against me. I note what the Committee says about minor issues relating to events that took place eight and 15 years ago. However, the Committee was critical of me in respect of two further matters, the first of which relates to a telephone call that my mother received from, she believes, one of the complainants, a person all of whose allegations were dismissed by the Committee and who has for almost two years subjected my wife to constant attention.

That person, Eileen Eggington, who told Mrs. Filkin that she was a former protection officer of Margaret Thatcher and Salman Rushdie, has represented Rita Gresty, a former employee of my wife's law practice, in various claims against my wife, none of which has been sustained and none of which relates to me. Miss Eggington told Mrs. Filkin that Rita Gresty, sadly, has been suffering from a serious illness, and despite what has happened, I very much hope that she will make a full recovery.

I reported the call in good faith to the police and to Mrs. Filkin. My only concern in so doing was the welfare of my mother. My mother, a cancer patient who is seriously ill, has never been interviewed about those matters, although she is most willing to explain what happened. The police wrote to her on 25 January; I am most grateful for their response.

The second criticism is that I have not co-operated with Mrs. Filkin. I believe that I have co-operated in every possible way, and I have sought legal and other advice throughout the process to ensure that I have done so. I have given hundreds of answers and numerous supporting documents. I shall not rehearse again on the Floor of the House my real concerns about process. However, there is little point in having rules of procedure—written by the commissioner and agreed by the House on 5 April 2000—which appear not to have been adhered to.

May I make one plea for the future? It is that evidence collected by the commissioner should be retained so that the Member can examine it. My attempts to obtain a crucial tape recording of a meeting between Mrs. Filkin, Miss Eggington and Mrs. Gresty were frustrated when I was told on 5 February, three days before the report was published, that the tape had been erased. Mrs. Filkin decided to publish her memorandum, as she herself stated, without my corrections of fact, comments or observations. She has a right to do so.

The inquiry, like others, has been dogged by leaks. Mrs. Filkin's report was given to a Sunday newspaper, and the Committee's draft report to another Sunday newspaper. I am grateful to the Chairman, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), who has always been courteous and helpful to me, for initiating a leak inquiry. I am sure that he will pursue that vigorously, and I look forward to hearing the results. The leaking of a Select Committee report in this way is, of course, a contempt of the House.

Much has been made of my connection with members of the Asian community. I am proud of my ethnic origin. I am proud of what the Asian community has done. The community must always be allowed to take its rightful place in society, and I shall continue to raise the concerns of the Asian community in an appropriate way. I am also grateful to my constituents in Leicester, East for their tremendous support. I shall strive to repay that support with my continued devotion to them.

The House will shortly be debating the appointment of a new commissioner. I wish the new commissioner well, and I hope that we will have a new era in which the rules of natural justice and fairness are applied firmly. As Michael Beloff, in his opinion quoting Lord Atkin, said:

> "Convenience and justice are often not on speaking terms."

I am very sorry that I have detained the House today and the Committee on these matters. I apologise again most sincerely to the Committee and the House. Plaudits from one's colleagues are always gratefully received. I assure hon. Members that criticisms from them are taken most seriously indeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak. In accordance with precedent, I shall now withdraw.

3.47 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) felt unable to make a personal statement in the usual way. That means that I will need to say a little more than I had hoped. I am very disappointed that, for the second time in less than four months, I have to support a motion to suspend a fellow Member from the service of the House.

The report is my Committee's second major report and, like the last one, it brings to a conclusion an inquiry that was started in the previous Parliament. I am glad to say that the Committee is now up to date with its work. I believe that both the reports give further proof that the system of parliamentary self-regulation is working successfully.

I am grateful to my colleagues on the Committee for the hard work that they have put into the report over the past two months. We are all grateful to the commissioner for her work in investigating these complaints since last March—indeed, for her distinguished service to the House since her appointment three years ago.

I need spend very little time on the complaints originally made against the hon. Gentleman. Of the 11 allegations, we upheld only three, two of which we did not regard as serious. We are having this debate today not because of the original complaints but because of the way in which the hon. Member responded to them. We were

[Sir George Young]

deeply dissatisfied with the way in which, he dealt with the commissioner. The commissioner described his approach to the inquiry as one of

> "obfuscation, prevarication, evasiveness and delay".

The commissioner has a job to do which the House has given her. All Members have a duty to co-operate with her inquiries. We found that the hon. Gentleman failed to do so. He did not answer her questions fully, directly, clearly and promptly. We were dismayed that it took him five months to provide the commissioner with information about his property interests, which must have been readily available to him. All the relevant correspondence is published in our report, so hon. Members can read it if they wish.

The hon. Gentleman was criticised by the Standards and Privileges Committee in the last Parliament for failing to co-operate with the earlier inquiry into complaints against him. That makes his lack of co-operation with the latest inquiry all the more serious. We found that the hon. Gentleman had failed in his duty of accountability under the code of conduct.

The more serious charge against the hon. Gentleman is that he wrongfully interfered with the House's investigation process. According to his oral evidence to us, his mother received a telephone call on 4 October last year and the words "Eggington" and "Filkin" were used. Miss Eggington is one of the complainants in this case. He informed the police that Miss Eggington had made a harassing telephone call to his mother, linked her with another witness in the case and gave the police her address. Then he told the commissioner that Miss Eggington had made the call, had claimed to be a police officer and had put questions to his mother, claiming to be acting on the commissioner's behalf.

Those allegations went way beyond what the hon. Gentleman and his mother told us they knew. Moreover, the hon. Gentleman made it clear to the commissioner that he expected her to follow up the matter. He asked the commissioner what action she proposed to take over his allegations against Miss Eggington. Miss Eggington has strongly denied these allegations, and the Committee accepts her evidence. We do not believe that she made any telephone call to Mrs. Vaz.

The police are now satisfied that no calls were received on the day in question which could be attributable to Miss Eggington or the other witness. The police officer in charge of the case said:

> "We have found nothing that would lend weight to the allegations originally made by"

the hon. Gentleman. The police officer continued:

> "Indeed, I am satisfied that no malicious calls were made."

The police would not make such categorical statements unless they were absolutely sure that they were well founded.

The Committee is also satisfied that the hon. Gentleman's allegations are false, yet on the basis of his false allegations, both Miss Eggington and the other witness that the hon. Gentleman identified were put through the ordeal of being interviewed by the police. The commissioner was also led to investigate his accusation against Miss Eggington.

We concluded that the hon. Gentleman recklessly made a damaging allegation against Miss Eggington to the commissioner, which was not true and which could have intimidated Miss Eggington or undermined her credibility. The hon. Gentleman also set the commissioner on a false line of inquiry, then accused her of interfering in a criminal investigation and threatened to report her to the Speaker. The hon. Gentleman failed in his public duty under the code of conduct and committed a contempt of the House.

The hon. Gentleman has made matters worse by his subsequent behaviour, which in my view has been aimed at undermining the entire investigative process. He was, perhaps, unwise to hold a press conference last Friday in which he sought to play down the severity of the Committee's report—he is quoted as saying:

> "I am pleased that the Committee has found me innocent of many allegations"—

by focusing on the areas where complaints were not upheld and minimising the importance of those that were upheld. I believe that he was also unwise to criticise the punishment as "disproportionate" and the report as "misled".

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before we leave the question of unwisdom, should not the House have some explanation as to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on the matter of leaks from the Committee? To some of us, that seems very unwise.

Sir George Young: I take the leaks seriously, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) says. I have launched a leak inquiry. I hope that he will discover who leaked those documents as the leaking of them is damaging to the investigative process and the integrity of the Select Committees.

Returning to the matter of the punishment, we reflected carefully on the appropriate punishment. We did as Sir Gordon Downey proposed and had a tariff before us of all previous punishments. We were anxious to be consistent and to be fair to the hon. Gentleman and others who came before us. We unanimously agreed on the punishment, which hon. Members are now considering. It is for the House, not the hon. Gentleman, to decide whether it is disproportionate.

The report was not rushed out, as the hon. Gentleman asserted on Friday. The commissioner's report was completed on 13 December, two months before her term of office ended. It would have been submitted earlier if the hon. Gentleman had co-operated. I vigorously reject the claim that our report was rushed out to meet a deadline. We sat for many hours in January and February to complete it. We wanted to do that sooner rather than later because we believed that it was in the interests of the House and, indeed, the hon. Gentleman to conclude our inquiry. However, nothing was rushed about our proceedings and, as Chairman, I resent that implication. No voice went unheard, no argument was stifled. We deliberated responsibly and fairly, as hon. Members would expect.

The hon. Gentleman said, "Natural justice should prevail." Our findings against him show that he was perhaps ill advised to make a plea for natural justice. His strategy appears to have been to throw mud at the commissioner in the hope that some might stick to the Committee. He asserted earlier that he had co-operated; he did not. He did much to obstruct our inquiry. He challenged the right of two members of the Committee to serve on it because they had signed an early-day motion. On the eve of our final meeting, he made representations that we should ditch the commissioner's report and start again.

We know that the hon. Gentleman has little time for the commissioner. The House is not debating her report, but that of the Select Committee. We read the commissioner's report and the annexes, we interviewed the hon. Gentleman and read all the documents that he presented to us. We then asked ourselves whether his behaviour fulfilled the code of conduct that the House has set.

In two similar debates, I said that the House is a forgiving place if an hon. Member admits that he has made a mistake. Even at this stage, the hon. Gentleman appears unable to acknowledge that he has done anything wrong. He has failed to apologise to Miss Eggington for what happened.

Our conclusion that the hon. Gentleman committed serious breaches of the code of conduct and contempt of the House was reached unanimously. We also unanimously concluded that he should be suspended for one month. I believe that we have been fair to the hon. Gentleman and to the House. I ask the House to endorse the Committee's report.

3.57 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I want to make a small but important point, which I hope will be helpful. I have not read the whole report; I suspect that few hon. Members have. However, I read the summary with great care and anxiety. Paragraph 50 states:

> "In his response to the investigation of the complaints against him since February 2000 Mr. Vaz failed in his duty of accountability under the Code of Conduct by refusing to submit himself to the scrutiny appropriate to his office as a Member."

The date is important because at that time, and for a long time afterwards, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) was a Minister of the Crown.

We have to ask whether the relationship between the code of conduct that applies to ordinary Members properly interrelates with the ministerial code that the Prime Minister issued in July 2001. Several aspects clearly need reviewing in the light of the case. I appreciate that that is not the Committee's responsibility, but the Leader of the House is responsible for representing the House's views to his colleagues in the Government.

The first paragraph of the ministerial code states:

> "Ministers of the Crown are expected to behave according to the highest standards of constitutional and personal conduct in performance of their duties."

It is not clear whether that refers to their duties as Ministers or as Members of the House, from which they derive their authority as Ministers under our constitution. The statement is not supplemented or explained by paragraph iv on page 2, which states:

> "Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament and the public, refusing to provide information only when disclosure would not be in the public interest which should be decided in accordance with the relevant statutes and the Government's Code of Practice on Access to Government Information".

It would seem that that does not apply to an individual Minister's personal interests, or to information that he should be obliged to give to the Committee set up by the House to enforce our rules of conduct.

Even the seven principles of public life, which are set out as an annexe to the ministerial code, do not provide the clarity to which we are entitled. They mention a number of qualities, including selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability and openness. Openness seems to be the most applicable to this case, and to the report from the Committee. The part of the code dealing with openness reads as follows:

> "Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands."

Again, it is by no means clear whether that applies in this case, or whether it applies only to a Member who happens to hold ministerial office at a particular time.

All that I ask is that the Leader of the House gives us an undertaking that there should be a review of the interrelationship between our code of conduct and the ministerial code. They cannot be completely separated. Ministers have authority only under the House and under our parliamentary democracy. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to give us an undertaking that this issue will be reviewed as a matter of urgency.

4.1 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) has fully accepted the findings of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. I think that the whole House accepts the Chairman's statement that the report was drawn up with all due consideration and no undue haste, and that it was unanimous. Clearly, however, findings of this kind will cast a long shadow over the reputation of any Member of the House.

I hope that the House will forgive me if I say a few brief words about the report and the punishment that it advises. I have known my hon. Friend—and his mother, a redoubtable woman who, in another era, would have been an MP of a peculiarly frightening type—for more than 25 years. This is a serious report and its findings are serious, but it is also the case that my hon. Friend has always been a conscientious and hard-working Member for all the people of his constituency, and he remains a very popular Member to this day.

Much has been made of my hon. Friend's relationship with the Asian community. Some of the allegations—both in the report and in the press—turn on that relationship. I remind the House, however, that when my hon. Friend entered the House in 1987, he was the only Member of Asian descent in this House or the upper House. For years after that, he dealt with casework from the Asian community across the midlands, and raised issues of policy in relation to the Asian community across the country. I hope that the findings of the report will not detract from the diligence with which he has pursued those issues and helped those many thousands of people.

I first entered the House in 1987, along with my hon. Friend, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), and the then Member for Tottenham. It is hard to look back now and remember the euphoria with

[Ms Diane Abbott]

which we all came into the House. We were all relatively young, and my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East was the youngest—the baby, if you like—of that particular gang. At that time, I do not think that we would ever have contemplated this type of report being produced about any of us, and it gives me great sadness to take part in this debate today.

4.4 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): This is indeed a sad occasion, as the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has just said. My view, for what it is worth, is that I would rather that there were no Register of Members' Interests or Committee on Standards and Privileges. I take what I recall to have been Enoch Powell's view on the Committee when it was set up, which is that we are trusted by our constituents to come here, and that we should be honourable people who can be trusted. About four years ago, a Labour Member informed me that he had been told that the rottweilers were after me because I had registered my disapproval of an action by the Prime Minister. We all dislike witch hunts; they do not add to the esteem of the House, and neither does this sort of occasion. I would rather that this did not happen, but, sadly, we do not live in an ideal world.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) is a neighbour of mine in Leicestershire. That is why I am speaking in the debate, and why I submitted two complaints to the Standards and Privileges Committee, both of which were upheld. The hon. Gentleman and I have always had perfectly cordial relations, and I should hate to think that anyone believed there was a vendetta against him on my part or on the part of other Conservative Members. That is not the case. Indeed, it has been alleged that to make the complaints is in some way racist. That is not the case either. I made the complaints because in Leicestershire, as in all constituencies, allegations will be passed to a Member of Parliament if someone does not like what is going on in a neighbouring constituency and cannot obtain satisfaction from his or her own MP.

As I have said, both my complaints were upheld, although the Committee described them as not serious. I take issue with that slightly. My first complaint was that the hon. Gentleman had not registered a £3,000 donation from the Caparo company, or from Lord Paul, in 1993. That had been in *The Sunday Telegraph* some time last year, which is why I raised it. I hasten to add that I do not criticise Lord Paul in any way; but the explanation given for why the donation had not been registered was unacceptable.

The hon. Gentleman said:

> "I was not aware that a Register was published in 1994. I was telephoned while I was at a European Council meeting in Stockholm. Access to Registers on a Friday night in Stockholm is not good."

I have always understood irony to be the lowest form of wit, and I must say that I concur in this instance.

The Committee said:

> "We do not regard Mr. Vaz's initial failure to register as particularly serious, but he should have admitted his shortcoming frankly."

I will not take issue with the Committee, except to say that in my time as an MP no one has given me a £3,000 cheque for my association. People deal directly with the association. I am surprised that this should happen. Certainly, when large sums have come to the association, if not via me, they have been declared. I suspect that every Member on both sides of the House would say the same.

My other complaint concerned a law centre. Mr. Price-Jones, the former town clerk of Leicester city council, says:

> "Mr. Vaz remained on the payroll of Leicester Advice and Information Services until at least the end of September 1987."

That was at least four months after the 1987 general election. It is not easy to forget that one is being paid for four months. It was suggested by the hon. Gentleman that he was taking a holiday. I do not know of many organisations that would give people such a holiday. It is not a very big issue; the reason I raised these issues—

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I believe that my hon. Friend said not that he had taken a holiday, but that he had been paid for accrued holiday that he had earned in the time leading up to the general election. That is rather different, is it not?

Mr. Robathan: He did say that, but I do not think that he was employed long enough to be given such a holiday. The hon. Gentleman, of course, takes an interest in the issue because he too is a Leicestershire Member.

I will not drag out my quotations from the Committee's report, but Mrs. Filkin considered the argument spurious, and did not accept it at all. That is the point.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East said that he had been cleared of various complaints. In fact, hon. Members should read the report. It says that inquiries were incomplete on several issues. That is different from complaints not being upheld or indeed being cleared. *[Interruption.]* It is in the report. I am sure that the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), who is a member of the Select Committee, will read it.

This is part of a pattern since 1987. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington said that the hon. Member for Leicester, East was the baby of the group that was elected in 1987. He should perhaps have received better advice from his party Whips and party organisation. I do not believe him to be an evil person in any way. He could have been helped rather better here, but the problem is that it is part of a Labour party pattern.

I come now to the Labour party national executive committee inquiry and the Adjournment debate of 25 April 1995, to which Elizabeth Filkin referred, on local government in Leicestershire. In that debate, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said:

> "I have seen two detailed confidential reports to Labour's national executive committee. They were apparently sent to every member of that committee . . . under cover of a letter signed by 16 senior Leicester Labour politicians. They included . . . three former lord mayors of Leicester . . . the Labour party shows no signs of taking any action".—*[Official Report*, 25 April 1995; Vol. 258, c. 762.]

The charges of interference in the affairs of Leicester city council—

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I point out that that forms no part at all of the Select Committee's report? I cannot understand why the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) is going on about those things, which are not in any way, shape or form part of the report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The hon. Gentleman must leave these matters to the occupant of the Chair but I understand the point that he makes and I say to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) that we are discussing the report and he should direct his remarks to that.

Mr. Robathan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I most certainly will. The point is that that matter was referred to by Elizabeth Filkin and by the hon. Member for Watford (Ms Ward), who is in her place, in evidence to Elizabeth Filkin in the report last year.

I should like to take up the district auditor's report, which deals with the same matter that was raised in that Adjournment debate. It said:

> "Housing bosses were wrong to reinstate an evicted tenant after an MP intervened and this cost Leicester city council some £1,800."—

[Interruption.] Instead of laughing, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) should understand that this is part of a pattern.

Elizabeth Filkin, in her report, dealing with the evidence of the hon. Member for Watford, to whom I spoke before she came into the Chamber, states:

> "They arranged a further day's hearing, but came to no immediate conclusions and made no report. Ms Ward told me she was surprised when, the next day, the Party's regional secretary issued a press release announcing that the inquiry was complete and that the membership's concerns were being dealt with . . . Ms Ward expressed her concern to the regional secretary about this purported summary of the inquiry's conclusions."

That was a big issue. "Dispatches" made a programme on it. "Newsnight" did a story on it. For the Labour party to pretend that it did not know what was going on in the Leicester, East constituency Labour party is bizarre, because the NEC carried out an inquiry into it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is again straying rather wide of the report. He should direct his remarks specifically to the report before the House.

Mr. Robathan: Very well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hear what you say and I shall not in any way transgress, except to say that I would like the NEC report to be published because it is relevant to what Mrs. Filkin was saying. *[Interruption.]* Since I am being so barracked, I will not go any further, but I hope—

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Has the hon. Gentleman actually read the report, in which Ms Filkin says in fact that she paid no attention to the Labour party inquiry?

Mr. Robathan: I have indeed read the report. Mrs. Filkin paid no attention to that because it was not within her remit, but as the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said, it is within the remit of the Leader of the House. When he was Foreign Secretary, he said about the hon. Member for Leicester, East:

> "I have seen nothing in any of the stories that have been produced about Mr. Vaz that are not innuendo and guilt by association as to where he is supposed to have broken the ministerial code of behaving properly as a minister."

Perhaps the Leader of the House will address that issue. He must have known about the NEC report, and perhaps he will publish it.

4.15 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): These are always melancholy occasions for the House and it gives no one any pleasure to deal with them. However, we must deal with them, as they are the key element in the self-regulatory mechanism that the House has set up to deal with such matters.

I want to thank the Chairman of the Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), and all the members of the Committee for performing a difficult and melancholy task assiduously for a long period. I must also thank the commissioner for the way in which she has dealt with the matter, lengthy and complex though it has been.

I want to add my words to those of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). It is now time that the Government looked at the connection that should exist between our code of conduct, with which we are dealing, and the code that covers ministerial conduct. I do not want to press the point, but I hope that this occasion will give added impetus to the increasingly obvious necessity for that matter to be considered.

I hope that the House will support, with sadness, the recommendations made by the Committee in the hope that such support will represent yet another move towards right hon. and hon. Members understanding our obligations so that, in a sense, we can render the work of the Committee redundant.

4.16 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I add to the remarks of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) by expressing the Government's thanks to the Chairman and all members of the Standards and Privileges Committee. We also appreciate the diligence with which the commissioner has pursued this case. The work that she put into it is fully recorded in the 150 pages of text that the House is considering.

No Member with a balanced opinion can come to such a debate without a sense of regret about the matter before us. Nor should we come to it without a recognition of the necessity of acting on such a report. That is why the Government have acted quickly to bring it before the House at the earliest opportunity. That is right, and, according to tradition, we shall accept the Committee's recommendations and we expect that the House will do the same.

I listened with care to the comments of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), which were echoed by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. I shall reflect on those points. They would both expect me to consider their remarks calmly and with the text in front of me. Whatever might be the narrow interpretation of the text, there can be no question of the Government not taking fully into account and acting on such a report, which resulted in a Member being suspended from the House. That suspension plainly has a severe implication for whether such a Member, if he were a Minister, could continue as a Minister, whatever the text might say. We can consider whether there should be an explicit read-across between the two texts.

[Mr. Robin Cook]

With those few words and as the House will soon be ready to come to a decision, I commend the report. We shall certainly accept all its recommendations, and reflect on what it may mean for the future in terms of the ministerial code.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House—

(i) approves the Fifth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (House of Commons Paper No. 605-I); and

(ii) accordingly suspends Mr. Keith Vaz, Member for Leicester East from the service of the House for one month.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

4.19 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I beg to move,

That Mr. Philip John Courtney Mawer be appointed Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards on the terms of the Report of the House of Commons Commission, HC 598, dated 6th February.

On behalf of the House of Commons Commission, I warmly recommend to the House the name of Mr. Philip Mawer as the next Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards on the terms set out in our report to the House.

The previous debate showed clearly the complexity of the commissioner's job and the qualities of toughness and persistence that are required; Mr. Mawer has those qualities in full measure.

I wish to pay tribute to the outgoing commissioner, Elizabeth Filkin. It is no secret that the past few weeks have not been happy ones on either side, but it is right that we should acknowledge her dedication to her work on behalf of the House. She undertook a number of difficult and complicated investigations and brought them to a successful conclusion. We believe that her work, together with the Standards and Privileges Committee's consideration of her reports, has fully validated the system of parliamentary self-regulation set up following the first Nolan report. I will have a word to say about that system shortly.

Like many other hon. Members, I have known and respected Mr. Mawer for his work as secretary-general of the General Synod, and more recently as secretary-general of the Archbishops' Council. He is a person of clear vision, absolute integrity and strong moral values. You would not be surprised, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to find those qualities in someone who has held the highest lay post in the Church of England.

Philip Mawer has much more to offer. He is a man of immense ability. He was principal private secretary to the Home Secretary, and when he was barely 40 he held one of the key jobs at under-secretary level in the Cabinet Office. Ten years before, as a relatively junior official, he was secretary to Lord Scarman's inquiry into the Brixton riots. Lord Scarman, whose views we would all respect, described Philip Mawer as a very clever and hard-working man, with tremendous mastery of detail. Mr. Mawer is a brilliant man in handling questions of principle. Since then, his career has borne out Lord Scarman's assessment.

It is reasonable to ask and answer two questions: Mr. Mawer may be clever, but is he tough enough? Is he not a bit of an insider? The House may not be surprised to hear that Church of England politics are at least as tough as anything that we are used to in this place, although the vocabulary used may be a little more restrained. The issues with which Mr. Mawer has grappled in his present job include the ordination of women, the role of bishops in another place—for the avoidance of doubt, I use our conventional phrase to mean the House of Lords rather than any more exalted forum—and racial discrimination. Such issues are neither simple nor easy.

In one of Mr. Mawer's previous posts he was responsible for Prison Service discipline. In another post, he was head of industrial relations for the Prison Service. A private secretary to one of the most senior members of Government also needs to be pretty tough. The House of Commons Commission has no doubt that, as Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, he will be as tough as it takes. To use a phrase I used on television, he frightens the life out of me, so I do not know what he will do to our colleagues.

Is Mr. Mawer an insider? He certainly knows a good deal about this place and about politicians, which can only be a good thing. However, I inform anyone who thinks that familiarity will make him a soft touch that that is not likely to be the case. There is no shortage of people to testify to the fact that Philip Mawer is his own man and, if the House approves the motion, we will all soon come to know and respect his personal authority and independence.

Some may think that my description is of a rather fearsome person. No doubt, Philip Mawer can be fearsome when he wants to be, but he is also a man of understanding and trust. He will pull no punches in his reports, but he is someone whom I for one will readily consult in the certainty that our conversations will remain entirely private.

The Commission's report describes the selection process. We were determined to follow best practice for an appointment of this importance, and the interview board that produced the shortlist included two external members—Sir Gordon Downey and Lord Newton of Braintree, who is better known to us all as Tony Newton. In addition, the later stages of the sifting process, the meetings of the interview board and the final interviews by the Commission were observed by Ms Sheila Drew Smith, an independent assessor recommended by the Commission for Public Appointments. I should like to thank all three for their expert contributions, which were much appreciated.

Our report also notes that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, joined us for the final interviews. We were very glad to have his help, and to draw on his detailed knowledge of the work of the Committee and the commissioners. We look forward to hearing his views on the level of resources required to support the new commissioner's work, and to co-operating closely with him and his Committee.

I shall say a brief word about resources. Mr. Mawer's appointment will initially be on the basis that he will work three days a week, but it will be for him to judge how much time is required. If he thinks that four or five days a week are needed, there will be no difficulty about that.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will my hon. Friend say why the commissioner will work for three days? The job of the commissioner who is leaving was advertised as requiring four days a week. More relevantly, she believes that the job should take up more than three days. I know that some would be happy if the job occupied only one day in the week, but I should have thought that four days would be far more suitable than three.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful for that intervention. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire said in the previous debate that the work of his Committee had now concluded. Therefore, we will begin with a clean sheet. If the work requires three, four or five days a week, it will get three, four or five days. A pro rata increase in Mr. Mawer's salary would take that into account.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I do not think that the Committee's work is finished; other inquiries are going on, and the former commissioner was dealing with them. The Committee will continue to make inquiries. I am sure that my hon. Friend would not want to give the false impression that everything was suddenly clean, neat and orderly.

Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Commission found it necessary to give a large amount of backpay to the commissioner who has just resigned, as a result of the extra work that she had done? Will he also confirm that the commissioners did not act on the audit of the work that she was doing until after she had gone, and that she had been working under tremendous pressures? Will he explain—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman has given the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) enough to answer.

Mr. Bell: With regard to the first point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), I was simply repeating a point made by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire in his statement in the previous debate—that the publication of the report that we discussed earlier concluded a particular piece of work. No doubt there will be other work in the pipeline.

I have no knowledge of the second matter raised by my hon. Friend. I should be happy to send him a written reply and, if necessary, place it in the Library.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again, and I am sorry to delay the House. Will he say how soon the new commissioner will be able to take up his post in full, given that he might work only one, two or three days a week?

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend anticipates my next paragraph.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I hope to catch your eye a little later on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As a former member of the Commission, the question of procedure and process is of great concern to me. The hon. Gentleman has just said that the commissioner would, if necessary, work more than three days a week. Is that provision formally and clearly set out in a proper contract of employment?

Mr. Bell: The answer to that question is yes.

On the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North, Mr. Mawer expects, if appointed by the House, to begin work from the beginning of March. Initially, he will work one or two days a week. The House will understand that it will take him a little while to relinquish his present responsibilities, but he will increase his commitment as quickly as he can. Those who know Philip Mawer as well as I do know that he will fulfil all the obligations thrust upon him, given that there are seven days in a week.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the hon. Gentleman not find it somewhat surprising that, although the House of Commons has lost the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards under what he described as

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

unfortunate circumstances, our first opportunity to debate that is in a debate on the appointment of a new commissioner? Was that the view of the Commission, of which he is a member, or was the timing of the debate a matter for the usual channels?

Mr. Bell: The appropriate procedure is for the House of Commons Commission to propose the nomination of a candidate in a report presented to the House of Commons by the Speaker. The report was printed on 6 February and presented to the House; this is the first opportunity to debate it.

The House's internal revenue service is considering the staffing resources that the commissioner's office will require and we expect it to report to us shortly. We will then take the views of the Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and the new commissioner, and we have undertaken to provide whatever resources are judged to be needed.

I said that I would return to self-regulation. Our present system was introduced following the recommendations of the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life—the Nolan committee. Sir Gordon Downey, the first commissioner, pointed out in a recent article that the House went further than the Nolan committee recommended by giving the commissioner responsibility for assessing whether a case had been made as well as whether there was a case to answer. Sir Gordon also described the introduction of self-regulation as

> "a major step for the House to take. Since Charles I and before, the Commons had spent much of its time resisting attempts by the monarchy to control it and the courts had no jurisdiction over it. Yet voluntarily, in 1995, the House subjected itself to outside scrutiny by a non-elected person. This was not a negligible reform."

There has been much discussion of late in the media about parliamentary self-regulation. In my view, self-regulation has to work; outside regulation could create profound constitutional difficulties. It is also my view that self-regulation works and that it will continue to do so. The key elements are the wise guidance and non-partisan recommendations that we expect from the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire and his Committee, the readiness of all of us to co-operate fully with the system and a strong, independent Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. Mr. Mawer has all the qualities needed to ensure that the system of parliamentary self-regulation continues to work effectively, and that it is seen to do so both inside and outside the House of Commons.

Mrs. Browning: I have now had a chance to see the Speaker's paper, especially its provisions on resources. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for pressing this point again, but it is pertinent to what I would like to say later if I get the opportunity. Has the new commissioner been given a formal written contract of employment—as we would understand the term in commercial environments, and as opposed to a job description—that clearly sets out not only the parameters and conditions of the job but the processes to be applied when disputes arise. I note that resources have now been brought under the remit of the IRS and the Committee on Standards and Privileges. It is extremely important, however, if the new commissioner is not to experience the same difficulties as the previous commissioner, that there is a contract of employment that can be made available to members of the House of Commons Commission.

Mr. Bell: There certainly is a contract. It is a proper contract and, although I believe that it may be confidential, it covers all the points that the hon. Lady raises.

With that, I commend the motion to the House, and I commend Mr. Mawer to the House.

4.35 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I should like briefly to endorse the speech made by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and thank the Commission for allowing me to take part in the selection process to choose the new commissioner. The Committee on Standards and Privileges clearly has an interest in that appointment and I know that its members welcomed representation in the decision-making process. I found that process thorough and professional. We were confronted with some high-calibre candidates and, as a result, a difficult choice.

I welcome the decision to appoint Philip Mawer. He understands the House of Commons, but is independent of it. In my judgment, he has the right qualities of trust and discretion to develop the preventive and advisory role of the commissioner, to conduct investigations thoroughly and impartially and to prepare reports for the Committee. I look forward to working with him when he starts in March.

As the hon. Gentleman just said, Mr. Mawer's work will be especially important as the Committee on Standards in Public Life, chaired by Sir Nigel Wicks, begins its review of self-regulation in the House of Commons.

I welcome the Commission's comments on resources, the fact that there is no restriction on the number of days that the commissioner will work and the recognition that the resources deemed necessary will be made available. That is welcome reassurance for my Committee.

Finally, may I pay tribute to the outgoing commissioner, Elizabeth Filkin? As Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, I enjoyed a good working relationship with her. I admire the qualities that she brought to the job. She handled some complex issues—one of which we have just debated—with thoroughness, impartiality and some courage. She displayed the independence that is a key part of the role of the commissioner. I thank her for her work and wish her well in the future.

4.36 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I want to echo some of the points that have been made before returning to some more formidable points that the House might briefly consider.

I endorse exactly what the Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges said about Elizabeth Filkin; she genuinely will be a difficult act to follow. We often use that phrase, but it is true in this case. Mr. Philip Mawer's curriculum vitae gives me every reason to believe that he is an admirable person to try to do this difficult job on our behalf.

We should recognise that over the past few months the perception of our ability to regulate our conduct in this place has been, at best, under attack. Some would say that our ability has been weakened; our role needs to be reviewed.

I hope, however, that hon. Members and people watching, listening to or following our proceedings will take comfort from the way in which the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) and his Committee approached the difficult issue that we addressed a few moments ago. The report is admirable and will, I hope, restore to some extent confidence outside and inside this place in our ability to self-regulate.

I note the point made by the right hon. Gentleman about our being looked at by Sir Nigel Wicks and his colleagues. I hope that the evidence taken by Sir Nigel will not be all negative. I hope that he will see some merit in the way in which we have handled such matters in the recent past as well as some points for inquiry and possibly criticism and improvement.

I hope that Sir Nigel will look carefully at the crucial relationship between the work of the commissioner and that of the Committee on Standards and Privileges in performing the difficult and sometimes invidious task of self-regulation. On many occasions, Members of the House and people outside this place have drawn my attention to the fact that that relationship is critical in achieving effective self-regulation. I am concerned that, on occasion, either the Committee has not seen that role with quite the clarity or definition that we would have hoped for, or the commissioner has found it difficult to see the proper frontier between his or her role and that of the Committee.

As one Member put it to me, it is surely the role of the commissioner to act as the linesman—to put up the flag—but it is the responsibility of the Committee to act as referee. That may not be a perfect way to describe the respective roles, but I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will agree that it has some validity.

I share some of the anxiety that Members on both sides of the House expressed about how soon the new commissioner will be able to take up a full role and perform the full task that we are laying upon him. Initially—in a matter of weeks—he will be able to give us one day a week. If, with the leave of the House, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) responds to the debate, I hope that he will say how quickly we will progress to the absolute minimum requirement of three days; otherwise, a backlog will inevitably build up in a matter of months.

What period of notice do Mr. Mawer's ecclesiastical employers want him to work? Is he under a great obligation to them or, indeed, to a higher authority? *[Interruption.]* Hand signals are being given to me from across the House, although I do know not whether they are the result of divine intervention. A substantial backlog could be created within a matter of months, which would lead to a problem. We must hope that no cases are brought to the new commissioner's attention, but if they are it would clearly be unsatisfactory if his terms of employment failed to meet the needs of the House.

The House has not covered itself in glory by dealing with the matter as it has done in recent months—a view that is widely shared within it. Even if the media have been over-critical in some respects and have jumped to conclusions, I am afraid that we have given them [illegible] cause to do so. We sometimes get the press that [illegible] deserve, and on this occasion we have.

I have a particular concern that is not new; indeed, I expressed it when the Braithwaite inquiry examined the way in which the House conducts its business, runs the building and performs its work. It seems invidious that we cannot question the Chairman of the Commission. Despite the responsibilities that we lay on the Speaker, we cannot challenge, question or probe him in the House. The issue before us should have brought that concern to our immediate attention.

I expressed that concern to Braithwaite in the different context of the financial management of the House, which involves millions of pounds. None the less, it is wrong to ask the Speaker to chair the Commission on our behalf, given that he cannot be accountable to, or answerable to, the House. We cannot question the Speaker in that manner, because to do so would endanger his authority in many other ways.

I hope that the Leader of the House, the Commission and the Speaker will look again at the problem, because it is likely to recur time and again if we do not address it now. That implies no criticism of successive Speakers or of successive members of the Commission. Back Benchers who are non-ex officio members of the Commission—at the moment there are two, but there will be three—serve the House in that capacity without payment, reward or recognition. Usually, they receive only brickbats, and we should think carefully about that. That role has been particularly onerous in recent months, and has subjected them to much criticism. I hope that we can consider that issue.

I pay full respect not only to the commissioner but to the way in which the Standards and Privileges Committee undertook its responsibilities in particularly difficult circumstances in recent weeks. I enthusiastically endorse the nomination before us, but I hope that the Leader of the House and all those with a role in other parts of the building will think carefully about the issues that I have raised.

4.43 pm

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I begin by wishing the new parliamentary commissioner well—it would be wrong to do otherwise—and I hope that he will carry out his duties in the way that we would all wish. Indeed, I have no reason to believe otherwise. However, the circumstances in which Elizabeth Filkin is leaving today are, to say the least, disquieting. My speech will be critical of the fact that her contract has not been renewed. If that is a minority point of view, so be it; it is mine and I want to explain why I have reached that conclusion.

When the House debated Elizabeth Filkin's appointment on 17 November 1998, there was much praise for the way in which she had carried out her previous duties.

I have given the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) notice that I shall refer to his remarks, and I make no criticism of him. He said of Mrs. Filkin:

> "I encountered her when she was adjudicator for the Inland Revenue. I was impressed by her commitment to her job and her staff, but, crucially, I was impressed by the fact that she retained the confidence of the Revenue, the body that she was investigating. That showed that she was fair, and that her work commanded respect."

[David Winnick]

Likewise, I sent a note to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), who was then a Home Office Under-Secretary. She spoke on behalf of the Leader of the House and said of Elizabeth Filkin:

> "Her recent role as the adjudicator for the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Department of Social Security Contributions Agency will ensure that she brings to the post a wealth of experience and a reputation for independence and integrity."—[*Official Report*, 17 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 809-21.]

Of course, that did not necessarily mean that the arrangement would work in practice, but my argument is that Mrs. Filkin brought to the position the qualities mentioned by those two Members. She is leaving because she was too independent and too determined to be fobbed off in the investigations. That is why her contract was not renewed.

Those qualities—independence and determination—are normally thought to be admirable, not a reason for what amounts to dismissal. Although I have encountered criticism of Mrs. Filkin—not in the Chamber, but around the place—I have not heard a single Member say that she is politically biased for or against any particular party. In view of the investigation she carried out, any such accusation would be laughable.

It is strongly denied that there was any whispering campaign against Mrs. Filkin, but she clearly does not accept that, as stated in the correspondence between her and the Speaker. I agree with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, that perhaps the question of who chairs the Commission should be considered. I make no criticism of the Speaker, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is difficult to quote the Speaker in debate, and one does not wish to do so because it is rather invidious. That is the situation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) said, the House of Commons praised the work undertaken by Mrs. Filkin. Indeed, she is praised in the House of Commons Commission document. Fine words, but this question is inevitable: if she carried out her duties in such a manner, why was she not reappointed?

Mrs. Filkin wrote to the Speaker on 28 November, and it is important for her view as set out in that letter to be heard:

> "I wrote to the Clerk of the House on 5 November 2001 to request that you explain to me why it has been decided that, exceptionally, I would not be offered a second term. I have received no explanation. The Leader of the House, in response to a question about this new procedure of readvertising the post after one term, said that it had been adopted in the interests of openness and transparency. This is hard to accept. This arrangement was not required in the case of my predecessor, nor, it appears from the published advertisement, will it be for my successor."

It is up to the House to decide with what seriousness to take the following comment—I take it very seriously. She said:

> "Security of position, which this decision violates, was established in relation to my predecessor. It applies across the board to Nolan-inspired posts which require independence and impartiality. Job security in such posts matters because it allows, where necessary, conclusions to be reached which may be unpopular with the employer in the short term."

Clearly, Mrs. Filkin is not leaving because she wished to do so. Clearly, she would have been willing to carry on in the position if her contract had been renewed. As I have said, we have had no explanation.

Why has not the present parliamentary commissioner, who will be leaving this week, been offered the position? It is said that she can apply for her own position—a rather humiliating situation, even if there was any chance that she would be accepted. Would a single hon. Member who is in the Chamber now say that, if Mrs. Filkin had gone through the humiliating procedure of applying for her own job, she would have stood a chance? No—the silence is adequate. The real criticism against Mrs. Filkin was not that she spoke to the press or that she involved herself in matters outside her remit. I do not believe that those allegations have any substance.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Is my hon. Friend aware that Mrs. Filkin was regularly quoted in the press, including statements that she made on a Saturday, for example? How does he account for her having such ready access to the press on a day when servants are normally not available?

David Winnick: If the press rang the parliamentary commissioner and she was conducting an investigation, I see no reason why she should not have said so.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

David Winnick: I shall give way in a moment; I am replying to an intervention. Let us be clear—are we saying that, in effect, Mrs. Filkin has not been reappointed because she spoke to the press? If so, we should have had an explanation from the House of Commons Commission. Allegations about speaking to the press should be made official; let the House of Commons Commission say so, and we would then have an explanation that we could accept or reject. I do not think that we can work on the basis of what my hon. Friend has just said. I have a great deal of genuine respect for him, but I do not believe that that is a good explanation.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that we have to make a differentiation about speaking to the press? Mrs. Filkin was entitled to speak to them about the nature of her work and her office, and we should not to impute from that that she was guilty of leaks, which she was not. I hope to deal with that later.

David Winnick: I entirely agree. I do not believe that she was responsible for leaking information in any way whatever, and I am glad that my right hon. Friend has cleared that up.

Mr. Salmond: Would not the right way to bring complaints about our Standards Commissioner have been through the House of Commons Commission to the Floor of the House, where those issues could have been properly examined, debated and, I suspect, largely dismissed?

David Winnick: Indeed. I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. As I have said, it was up to the House of Commons Commission to deal with such issues. On reflection, it accepts that, in many ways, matters could have been dealt with very differently.

The critics say that Mrs. Filkin lacked a sense of balance and that she could not distinguish between serious allegations and those that were not in that category. Again, I do not believe that that was the case. She had a duty to investigate fully. After all, until she investigated, how could she know whether the allegations had any substance? Let us not forget that this is not the Inland Revenue; this is a political battlefield. Hon. Members on each side of the House will make accusations against the other, as political ammunition. We are in politics—that is part of democracy. Such allegations are made, and it is up to the parliamentary commissioner to investigate them, recognising the place in which she undertakes her duties. She simply cannot say that they are tit-for-tat matters; she has to decide whether they have any substance.

The impression that one gets from the critics is that Mrs. Filkin had a wish to do down the Commons and make adverse reports as often as she could. I cannot for the life of me see why she should have any such motive. Why should she wish to do down the House of Commons?

An hon. Member, whom I shall not mention by constituency or name—I could not mention him by name in any case—told me today that he had been treated very fairly by the Standards Commissioner. He was one of several hon. Members who told me that the commissioner had asked to see them after allegations had been made about them as individuals, sometimes—as in the case of the hon. Member that I mentioned—allegations that were made outside the House. Such Members said that they were very impressed. They were heard courteously, their explanation was accepted, or very nearly accepted, and the commissioner made no adverse report but gave good advice. It is unfortunate that those hon. Members have not said that in today's debate; it would perhaps have given a sense of balance to what is happening.

When the parliamentary commissioner thought that there had been an infringement of the rules relating to outside financial interests, she said so regardless of position and seniority, and certainly party. Is not that what we wanted from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards? Is not that the way in which we wanted the work to be carried out?

If we are to continue with self-regulation, which my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough has said should be the case, there is an argument that responsibility for appointing and renewing the contract of the parliamentary commissioner should be given to the Committee on Standards in Public Life. If that were to happen, the recommended person would be subject, or otherwise, to the confirmation of the House, and then of course the House would debate accordingly. However, self-regulation has its difficulties. We are saying, in effect, that we should appoint the parliamentary commissioner and decide whether the contract should be renewed. By following that procedure, we arrived at the present very unhappy position.

It gives me no satisfaction whatever to have been so critical, but I am, as my remarks have obviously shown. I repeat that I would have liked the parliamentary commissioner to be reappointed. It was a shabby aspect of the whole matter that she was not reappointed to her position, and Elizabeth Filkin is leaving in circumstances that do not bring much credit to the House of Commons.

Mrs. Filkin can leave with a sense of pride, because she has carried out her duties in the way that she promised when appointed. She has been impartial and conscientious. She has acted honourably at all times—that is my view and seems to be the view of the House of Commons Commission—and has undertaken her duties with undoubted ability. She is going—let us have no illusions on this score—simply because she has been too conscientious. That is why Elizabeth Filkin will be leaving the services of the House of Commons this week. By not renewing her contract—by allowing her to leave in such circumstances and without good reason—I believe that we have let ourselves down.

4.58 pm

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): To summarise what I am about to say, I agree with the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick).

I also agree with the nomination put forward for our approval by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell). The House of Commons Commission and those who helped it have made a good choice. I imagine that if they had not chosen Mr. Philip Mawer, they would have picked someone just about as good. They follow in the line of those who chose Sir Gordon Downey and Elizabeth Filkin.

No criticism can be made of the quality of the people who have been nominated to serve our country by being employed as the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

There is a question of fact about who the commissioner is actually employed by. We are told that it is the House of Commons Commission, but I have looked at the 23rd annual report of the House of Commons Commission, trying to find a reference to the Commission's responsibilities in employing the commissioner. I have not found one.

Opening the report at random—say, in the middle where the staples are—I see that the Serjeant at Arms Department uses traffic lights to denote whether targets have been met. If they were used to test the Commission's actions over the past year with regard to the present Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, the traffic light would not be smiling as it is on page 44 because performance is below target.

I do not intend to criticise any individual on the Commission, although I will get fairly close to that with the Leader of the House. In August last year, an article in the *Financial Times* reported:

> "Elizabeth Filkin, the parliamentary commissioner for standards, is unlikely to have her contract renewed when it expires in January—despite recent supportive comments from Robin Cook, leader of the House of Commons."

It goes on to say that the remarks by the Leader of the House in the previous month

> "were designed to 'cool' the whispering campaign against Ms Filkin and that his words should not be interpreted as his formal backing that she should stay on."

I do not want to ask the Leader of the House to explain how those remarks got into the newspaper. All I want to do is to use them as evidence that it was on the record and known to the House of Commons Commission by then that there was a whispering campaign against the commissioner.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The hon. Gentleman said that he was not going to ask me about that, but with his permission I will respond. I checked my diary after he raised this matter in the House some time ago. In the two weeks preceding 20 August, I was not

[Mr. Robin Cook]

in London; I was in Edinburgh. I spoke to no one from the *Financial Times* throughout that period and can shed no light on how those words appeared there. If he is suggesting that I communicated them to the *Financial Times*, I hope that he will withdraw the comment.

Peter Bottomley: I would, but I did not suggest that. The right hon. Gentleman should be slightly less sensitive.

Mr. Cook: I am being criticised; of course I am sensitive.

Peter Bottomley: The right hon. Gentleman should wait until I get around to the criticism. So far, he has responded to a question that I explicitly did not put to him. I accept what he says and have not contradicted him. He has not faced an accusation.

I was making the point that people knew about the whispering campaign. If the House of Commons Commission was fulfilling the role of employer and also, therefore, protector, of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, it needs to ask itself collectively whether any action was taken on the whispering campaigns against her before the Speaker's letter. I believe that the whispering campaign started long before that. The Commission should have taken action that would at least have become known to the Standards and Privileges Committee.

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point about why the Commission did not intervene in the so-called whispering campaign. The Speaker wrote to Elizabeth Filkin but she was unable to supply evidence. Had the letter been sent earlier, there would have still been no evidence.

Peter Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman did better in the first part of that sentence. The Speaker, in his role as Chairman of the House of Commons Commission rather than in his role as Speaker—the distinction is not important and I am not criticising him in any way—wrote the letter in November. The *Financial Times* had the report in August and it only confirmed what many people already knew about the attacks on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards by those who felt vulnerable.

All I am trying to establish is that the House of Commons Commission or a member of it first asked the commissioner about a whispering campaign in November. The letter could have been better drafted. It could have said that the Commission would protect the person fulfilling the function of the commissioner, whether or not the whispering campaign and the pressure were having an effect on that person.

It is some years since I gave up my fellowship in the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, which used to be called the Institute of Personnel Management. However, my experience in personnel management is extensive. I have had ministerial and professional responsibility for it, and I know a lot about it.

What has happened to the present commissioner would, in most employments, be an open-and-shut case of unfair, constructive dismissal. I shall illustrate that with one example.

Answers from the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who answers for the House of Commons Commission, say that the Commission knows that the commissioner has been working for five days a week. The Commission knows that it has been paying her for four days a week. It advertised her job at three days a week.

I turn now to the Leader of the House. On several occasions in the past two months, he has repeated the abbreviated remark, which is true, that the commissioner could apply for her job up to the moment when the applicants on the shortlist were interviewed. There is not a single recorded occasion on which the Leader of the House, speaking as a senior member of the Government and close associate of the Prime Minister, as the representative of the House or as a member of the House of Commons Commission, acknowledged in public that what he failed to say is that the commissioner could apply for her job, which she currently does for five days a week, on condition that she applied to do it for three days a week with 60 per cent. of her present work load.

Mr. Robin Cook *indicated dissent.*

Peter Bottomley: When the Leader of the House shakes his head, I assume that he is agreeing with me.

Mr. Cook *rose—*

Peter Bottomley: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he will say when, on the Floor of the House, he said that the commissioner could apply for her job, which she is doing for five days a week, but she had to apply to do it for three days a week.

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to respond by saying that what the hon. Gentleman says is simply not true. If the commissioner had applied for and got the job, she could certainly have asked to be appointed on the present basis, which is four days a week. I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that if we had appointed her and she had sought to work for four days, then, just as with Mr. Mawer, she would have got four days. There is no question of her having been invited to apply on the basis of a cut in pay or hours.

Peter Bottomley: I shall not repeat it more than once, but my point is that I have not found a recorded occasion in the House in the past two months—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman would do better to listen. I have not found a recorded occasion in the past two months when he has stated the additional fact that he was inviting the commissioner to reapply for her job although it was advertised at three days a week. Not only was that fact not explicit; it was not mentioned at all.

We know that the commissioner was working five days a week, that the advertisement was for three days a week and that there had been a row about that reduction, but the right hon. Gentleman never mentioned that. From his reported remarks it sounded as though the commissioner could carry on as long as she applied—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Sedentary interventions do not help the debate.

Peter Bottomley: With the Leader of the House chuntering away like that, I almost feel that I should apologise for speaking. The point has been made, and I think that he accepts it.

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman will give way, I will reply to his allegations.

Peter Bottomley: I give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Cook: For the avoidance of doubt, there was never any suggestion, to Mrs. Filkin or to anyone else, that if she applied for the job and was reappointed, there would be a cut in pay or a cut in hours. Had she been reappointed, she would have retained her pay and her four days a week. Although the job was advertised at three days, we have made it plain in the House on several occasions that we were willing to discuss with whoever was appointed the number of days that that person would work. Indeed, I seem to recall my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) saying precisely that in relation to Mr. Mawer.

Peter Bottomley: The Leader of the House will be able to read what I said, and I hope that when he has done so, he will understand that his interventions have been off the point. I said that I would repeat what I had said only once, so I will not go on with that point.

We now come to the question of when the House of Commons Commission, of which the right hon. Gentleman is a member, decided to pay the commissioner for the extra days that she has been working, when up to now she has not been paid for them. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough for saying that if a written question is tabled, the House will be given that information. I think that the answer will confirm my belief.

No one on the Commission has been motivated by malice. However, the Commission's responses to certain matters included a combination of mistakes and misunderstandings, and an impression of apparent malice on the part of some people outside the Commission has been created.

Some inaccurate answers have been given which the Commission has, rightly, corrected. For example, it gave an answer that said that Sir Gordon Downey had been working—and been paid for—three days a week. In fact, he was always paid for four days a week. When he left his post, he said that if the work load decreased, the job could be done in three days a week, and that may have been the comment that people had in mind. It was a simple misunderstanding and the mistake has been corrected.

What was not correct was an assurance that the Leader of the House gave me in October, I believe. He asserted—which I think means that he thought, but did not know—that the Commission had followed the advice by which the House expects Ministers to abide in the code on public appointments. That assertion was wrong in three respects.

First, if someone is not up to the job, they should not have the chance to be reappointed. From the right hon. Gentleman's saying that if Elizabeth Filkin reapplied, she would immediately be put on the shortlist—and, we presume, treated fairly and on her merits—we deduce that she was not only up to the job, but proven to be so to the extent that she would have reached the shortlist.

Elizabeth Filkin was as competent as her predecessor, Sir Gordon Downey, who was sounded out, not officially by the Commission but by a senior member of the Government, about whether he would be interested in a second term. Having reached the age of 70, his answer was, "No, but thank you". I think that I am right in saying that the advertisement for Elizabeth Filkin's successor states explicitly that reappointment was possible by mutual agreement. The House and the country are left with the question of why Elizabeth Filkin was not sounded out about reappointment. We have had no answer—perhaps there is none, but the question is real.

A second feature of the code on public appointments is that people should be required to go through open competition if they have served for 10 years, or if they are on their third term. Neither condition is true of Elizabeth Filkin: she would have been seeking a second term, or the House ought to have been seeking a second term for her.

Thirdly, if people are not to continue, they should have a decent amount of notice of that fact. Had Elizabeth Filkin applied for her own job at the advertised three days a week, she would have known whether she had got the job a week ago—a week before her current term ends. That breaks the code on ministerial appointments. Although the Leader of the House might have been right to say that he believed that the code had been followed, that belief, albeit genuinely held, was wrong on the three grounds that I have outlined.

The system matters. It does not matter whether the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is officially responsible to the House of Commons Commission, which has not distinguished itself in that role in the past three years, or to, say, the Committee on Standards in Public Life or its Chairman. That distinction is not especially important except to the secular theologists who advise the House.

It is right to consider whether the term should be longer, and whether reappointment should be offered unless there is a reason not to offer it. The current position is illustrated by the curious circumstances of the end of Elizabeth Filkin's term. She is right that the current assumption of independence and support for impartial, fair and competent work by her office has been challenged by the events of the past six months.

The only modification that I would make to the operation of the complaints procedure—only a minor part of the work load of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards—is that in normal circumstances, a person making a complaint should be asked whether they have put it directly to the Member concerned. If the answer is no, the commissioner should urge the complainant to do so. Many misunderstandings could be dealt with and problems rectified if that were a preliminary step. However, that is a step for the House to institute, not for the commissioner herself.

I remind those who listen to our debates that the commissioner does not write the rules—the House writes them.

I turn to the curious—in a proper sense—appointment of Mr. John Stonborough to advise the Commission. I have not met him, and I will not be critical, but he has

[Peter Bottomley]

a reputation as an adviser on crisis management. I do not fully understand why, if it is dealing properly with the appointment or reappointment of a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, the Commission, or the House itself, would need such an adviser.

It is unfortunate that the "Londoner's Diary", in the *Evening Standard*, carried a report apparently directly quoting Mr. Stonborough. I do not think that any direct quotation in a newspaper necessarily means that the words were said or, if they were said, that they were reported in context. He was reported to have said something about the argument being one-sided and that, in some sense, he would balance that. The debate or argument ought to be in the House.

That leads me to the Prime Minister's answer to a question from—I think—the hon. Member for Walsall, North on the reappointment of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. The Prime Minister said that it was a matter for the House. Within hours, the Leader of the House said, "Yes, and it will wait until there is a nomination from the House of Commons Commission on who the successor might be", and that it would be possible for a Member to table an amendment to such a motion, substituting the name of Elizabeth Filkin for that of, say, Philip Mawer.

For all sorts of reasons, that is not a happy or sensible way of proceeding. The Leader of the House was wrong to suggest that it was. It clearly showed that, whichever hat he was wearing at the time, he was deliberately frustrating the option for the House to debate the merits of Mrs. Filkin. In fact, of course, we are debating the merits of Philip Mawer, which are not only self-evident but have been proclaimed by Members.

I do not think that the Prime Minister has his heart in this standards business. His whiter than white and cleaner than clean remarks do not really stand up. He has not explicitly made abiding by the parliamentary code part of the ministerial code, as the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said.

I commend to the Prime Minister his declaring, in his own voice, that abiding by Members' responsibilities is part of being a Minister, so that any Minister from now on who does not fully co-operate with the parliamentary standards procedure, and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards in particular, will cease to be a Minister. The option not to do so should just go. Then, the remarks that, sadly, were made in the previous debate on the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) by a Minister would not be necessary, although Members of Parliament could still draw such matters to the attention of the House.

The Prime Minister did not require the Deputy Prime Minister to accept the invitation from the Committee on Standards and Privileges to register the union flat. Frankly, the Prime Minister should have said to the Deputy Prime Minister, "You should." We have not had any explanation from either of them as to why that registration has not occurred.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): What has this got to do with the appointment of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards?

Peter Bottomley: In response to that question from a Government supporter, I was adding a few remarks on how I believe that the Prime Minister could help the system of which the commissioner is a significant part.

We then come to reports about the media and Elizabeth Filkin. The matter was first brought to my attention by somebody who asked me, "Did you see what she said at the Royal Society of Arts?" I asked, "What is she said to have said?" The Member pointed it out to me. I said, "I was at that meeting. That wasn't what she said; it wasn't the way she spoke. I was present, you weren't. What's the complaint?" I was told to look at what had been reported. Too many people seem to be sensitive about what is reported. The fact that the House of Commons Chamber is dominated at one end by a Press Gallery that is full of people who have the option to report what is said in the Chamber or spend their time listening to what people say in the Corridors seems to have passed such people by.

Commissioners—past, present and future—should be judged on what they are employed to do. I hope that, from now on, every commissioner will do what previous commissioners have done: explain their role and frankly answer questions about whether there is an inquiry into a complaint against a Member of Parliament. If the commissioner is not allowed to say yes or no to that, whispering campaigns against Members occur.

The parliamentary standards process is as good a protection to the public and to Members of Parliament alike, and it requires the commissioner to be able to give such factual answers. I have not heard the slightest whisper from a single journalist on any occasion during the past three years that Elizabeth Filkin said anything improper or out of order with regard to a current inquiry, unless it is considered improper for her to confirm that an inquiry is taking place or to say that no inquiry is taking place.

I think that Philip Mawer will do well. I think that Elizabeth Filkin did well. If he does as well as she did, or, certainly, as well as Gordon Downey did, the House will be well served.

As a tribute to Elizabeth Filkin, I quote the remarks of a director of the Britannia building society, who said that the question asked by the company about every proposal was whether it would pass the Filkin test—in other words, whether it was right. That is the question that she had to ask about what Members of Parliament were doing. Each of us, whether we came under her invigilation or not, will find that her advice has been good.

I hope that Philip Mawer's advice will be equally good and that he will have the support of the House. Elizabeth Filkin did not have that support from every quarter. It is about time that senior Members of the House, whether in government or not, gave her the support that she deserved, and they should give Philip Mawer the support that he will need.

5.20 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): As I did not take part in the previous debate, may I congratulate the Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee on the fairness and objectivity with which he presented the case on behalf of the Committee? It is no more than any of us would have expected of him.

I join others in endorsing the nomination of Mr. Mawer. I do not know him, but what I have heard of him suggests that he has every prospect of being able to take on a job which has certain fundamental flaws within it. The first flaw was touched on by the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley).

In the opening speech of the afternoon, there was a comment about the rules written by the commissioner. The rules were not written by the commissioner; they were written by the House of Commons. The problem for the House of Commons and for the commissioner was that when the House of Commons approved them, it did not understand the severity and tightness of the rules that it had introduced. The commissioner therefore bore much of the blame for carrying out the new standards and rules that the House, perhaps unwittingly, had determined. She should not be blamed for that.

The rules post-Nolan were made much tighter than many people realised. Indeed, we have made recommendations for a slight loosening of the rules, which I hope will be brought before the House in the near future.

The second flaw is the system. That was the point that I made when my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) was kind enough to let me intervene on his speech. As I said, I do not see that there is any problem with the commissioner speaking about her job. The allegation was of leaks.

As I was saying, the second flaw is the system itself. Within the system, anyone—too many people have been playing games in the House, as we know, with tit-for-tat referrals—can refer any colleague, or any outsider can refer any Member, and tell a journalist that he has done so. If that journalist then contacts the commissioner's office to confirm that the letter has been received, the next thing that we see is a headline "Sleaze inquiry against local Member".

Mrs. Browning: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. There are occasions when a matter comes into the public domain and is commented on in the Chamber. It is then put to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to investigate. However, when Members of Parliament decide to refer a matter to the commissioner for investigation, it is incumbent on them to wait for the conclusion of that process before notifying the world at large. I have made only one such referral to the commissioner, and I abided religiously by that rule. It would have been most unfair to have made the matter public before the commissioner had had a chance to conclude it. It is inevitable that the commissioner will be asked by the press if the matter goes the other way.

Mr. Williams: May I embarrass the hon. Lady by saying that I am sorry she gave me that prompt, because I was going to commend the way in which she dealt with the matter? The referrals that she made were based on a misinterpretation by the press of certain circumstances, and she could have tried to get easy publicity out of the situation. The referrals were then rejected by the commissioner, who never made any public comment on them. Since receiving that rebuttal, the hon. Lady has not attempted to make any political capital out of the matter. That is how it should be done. I promise her that she was already in my mind because the case happened so recently.

Many of the so-called leaks were, for no reason, attributed to the commissioner. No one has ever been able to prove that against her. The person making the allegation has only to give the press the information that he has given the commissioner, which the commissioner may have shown to the witness, and the press can run a story based on the allegation without having got any information or endorsement from the commissioner.

David Winnick: Has there ever been a case in which Labour, Conservative or Liberal Members have made such allegations to the commissioner without telling the press what is going on? Being politicians, that is the first thing that they are likely to do. Why should anyone be surprised about that, given the nature of this place?

Mr. Williams: My hon. Friend is putting the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) in a most embarrassing position—her halo is positively glistening. She is genuinely one of whom I can say—

David Winnick: One exception.

Mr. Williams: She is the one who comes to mind, but there have probably been others. Indeed, there must have been, because the commissioner has often said, "I have had five or six referrals", and we have seen nothing about them in the press. Some hon. Members show integrity; others, unfortunately, cannot resist a headline and do not care what malicious damage they do to parliamentary colleagues by exploiting the situation.

Mrs. Browning: In the run-up to a general election, it has been the practice of some hon. Members spuriously to refer a case involving another Member to the commissioner so that they can say in their election literature that that Member is under inquiry by the commissioner, in the knowledge that there is insufficient time for the matter to be properly explored. Looking below me down the Gangway, I can see Liberal Democrat Members nodding; they know what I am talking about. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we must try to ensure that that does not happen?

Mr. Williams: The hon. Lady is absolutely correct, and I do not exonerate Members of any party from that practice. The tragedy is that Members who have been so self-indulgent have not recognised that they damage not only the Member against whom they make the allegation, but—cumulatively, along with others who are doing the same—the House of Commons by giving the impression that it is sleaze-ridden. In fact, most of the referrals of the past five years did not deal with what would in the past have been described as sleaze.

Whispers are a reality of the House of Commons—that is a systemic problem—and some may be malevolent or malicious. It is a function of the way in which the House works. One has to come in here every day—the Whips make sure of that.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): Quite right, too.

Mr. Williams: Well, sometimes we listen to them. Day in, day out, we have to carry on working with friends—

[Mr. Williams]

or, worse, people who are not friends—who are aware that investigations are going on. It is understandable, if we are locked in here from 10 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night and we want to get something off our chest, that we go and talk to our colleagues. A lot of the so-called whispering is what I would call self-exoneration, or trying to explain things away. Cumulatively, however—because in many cases the exoneration was not endorsed by the Committee—that also damaged the commissioner because it gave, perhaps inadvertently, the impression of unreasonableness.

My next point goes off at a tangent, in a way, but it follows on from my complimenting the Chairman of the Committee. During the last Parliament, I stood in as Chairman when my parliamentary colleague, now Lord Sheldon, was ill. It is correct that we are now doing in this Committee what we have always done in the Public Accounts Committee. All Committees in this House have a Government majority. In Committees dealing with standards—the PAC deals with standards of financial propriety; this Committee deals with standards of behaviour—and those that deal not with Government matters but with House of Commons matters, it is important that there should be certainty in their independence.

We have always accepted that the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee should be a member of the Opposition; that created a good precedent. I hope that that will be sustained by future Governments of whichever party, and that the Chair of the Standards Committee will also always be from the Opposition. That would help to get rid of the nonsensical arguments that arise when unanimous decisions are made in the Committee, yet people in the lobby write, "Government majority on Committee dragoons its members and forces them into decisions."

Peter Bottomley: I want to add a footnote in case any historians look at this. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there was no suggestion that Robert Sheldon, who chaired the Committee during the previous Parliament, behaved any differently—although he was a Labour MP—from the way in which my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) has? The right hon. Gentleman's point about the appearance of greater impartiality is a good one, however.

Mr. Williams: I am not impugning anyone in any way. In this Committee so much depends on perception and on people outside believing in what we do, instead of doubting what we do. I am going to say something now that will offend two of my colleagues—I had not intended to say it—but it is not meant to, because they are excellent members of the Committee. However, in this Committee more than any other, its members have to make a choice. They should either be a Parliamentary Private Secretary and not be on the Committee, or vice versa. This Committee must be as detached as possible in every way from the Executive.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) for saying that, because his legal advice has made an invaluable contribution to the Committee over the last five years, particularly in the last Parliament, when lawyers—I apologise to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) here—did not abound in the Committee as they now do. That expertise was most welcome, and I hope that he will choose to stay on the Committee. However, I think that most hon. Members would understand if he felt that he had to keep one eye on his career prospects. Perhaps the Leader of the House could reassure him that if he made the right decision it would in no way undermine his prospects.

I have spoken for too long already, but this is my final point. As one who has worked as an acting Chairman with the present commissioner, I pay tribute to her assiduity, her determination and her meticulousness. Those qualities were a nuisance if one had something to hide; they ceased to be a nuisance if one had nothing to hide. The qualities she showed in investigating cases were of the highest standard, and I wish her well in whatever job she goes to.

5.34 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): When I was shadow Leader of the House, I was a member of the House of Commons Commission. I do not want to discuss some of the points that have been raised today in detail; I would prefer to speak in general terms. My hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) prayed in aid his experience of employment law and good employment practice in a former life. I too have experience of a former life—my business life, in which I spent a lot of time advising organisations, especially in the corporate sector, on communication.

When, as a member of the Commission, I considered the point that we had reached with the last Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Mrs. Filkin, I decided that the House should do something about one aspect, although it might not be unusual here. The House is not a good employer. We are not good at applying best practice in the way in which we, as MPs, would expect it to be applied in the wider business world. I think the House is now addressing that problem—the Braithwaite report, which was mentioned earlier, was an extremely useful exercise which put us on the right track—but we are not there yet.

In my short experience as a member of the Commission, I concluded that many aspects of communication—both verbal and written—had led us to the situation we are debating today. I welcome the appointment of Mr. Mawer, but it would be unacceptable if we did not learn the lessons and put them into practice pretty rapidly.

The House may recall that I questioned the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) about a proper contract of employment. I think that that is essential. I also think that the rudiments of what we would expect to find in such a contract should be accompanied by an outline, in terms, of the procedures to be followed not just when the Commissioner felt there was a need to apply for more resources, but in the event of a breakdown in communication with the Commission—either directly or through the Speaker—or when outside queries from the media and others must be handled. This is about process, not the definitive role of the commissioner in investigating individual complaints—that being part of the commissioner's remit. I believe that the last commissioner worked without that framework, which is absolutely necessary if communication is to be facilitated at all levels.

We have just had a little exchange about the way in which things go wrong when the commissioner speaks to the media—and yes, there have been complaints about a whispering campaign in the House about the last commissioner. There are procedures to resolve such problems immediately, if someone takes the trouble to think the process through and set it down. The problems will arise, owing to the nature of the job and the number of people with an interest—not least the media, who can be quite pernicious in their own pursuit of what the commissioner is up to. If the process for dealing with those problems is not properly structured and set out, and is not part of the employment contract and terms of reference given to the commissioner on appointment—or if there is no procedure for adding it to them—we shall inevitably find ourselves in the position in which we found ourselves with Mrs. Filkin. In the end, rightly or wrongly, for a variety of reasons, the commissioner lacked trust in the House and the House lacked trust in the commissioner. As an employer, it is incumbent upon the House to resolve those matters. It is incumbent upon us as employers to ensure through the Commission that we obtain good advice, if that advice is not readily to hand, so that the new commissioner's contract and terms of reference are clearly set out.

The post of commissioner is relatively new. The way in which investigations of Members of Parliament are carried out when a complaint is made is relatively new. In one or two of the more high-profile cases in the previous Parliament, the commissioner perhaps started to investigate areas that she had not investigated before. People started to say, "Is it right that she should look at that aspect of a case and that that should command more resources?" I am not going to say in a judgmental way that it was right or it was not right. All I am saying is that that matter needs to be dealt with. As and when they arise, such issues must be resolved in a timely fashion by either the commissioner or Members of Parliament.

It is a pretty simple procedure; it is not exactly rocket science. Any large organisation in the financial sector would have such a procedure in place and would be able to solve problems as they arose. We have experienced a festering over several years of many issues, all of which deserve to be addressed. However, no one took responsibility to resolve those problems.

A breakdown in communication inevitably results when a situation evolves in that way. We end up with a situation such as we had with Mrs. Filkin. When the contract came up for renewal, it was not immediately clear to many people involved exactly what the procedure was.

Peter Bottomley: The House will be grateful to my hon. Friend for at least slightly opening the curtains—

Mrs. Browning: I hope that I am not.

Peter Bottomley: May I put it this way? If there were thought to be problems and if the commissioner and the Commission did not meet, that is a failure of communication on the part of the employer. If the Commission did not consult the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, which is with the commissioner virtually every week, there would seem to be a slight communication problem, so my hon. Friend is right to say that lessons can be learned.

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am shutting the curtains as quickly as I can; it was not my intention to open them. I am sharing an observation with the House as someone who has experienced these problems in another scenario. I could see how the situation had evolved.

One of the difficulties with problem solving is knowing and identifying the problem in the first place, rather than just living with what can become a festering sore, where everyone involved is disgruntled for a variety of reasons but no one takes responsibility for dealing with the situation and for solving problems as they arise.

A proper professional framework needs to be set out so that problems can be avoided in future. It is simply a matter of good practice in the management and employment of people, whether they be a parliamentary commissioner or anyone else for whom we are responsible. The House must raise its game and adopt 21st-century practices in managing its affairs, particularly in relation to employment contracts and the framework that is set out when people are employed, for which we or a Committee have responsibility. It is not acceptable for the situation just to go on and on. Someone must take responsibility.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough said that the new contract for the new commissioner is confidential. I accept that what is type-written in the contract is confidential, but I hope that it will be comprehensive and that the annexes, if not the main document—I trust that there will be annexes—will cover the proper procedures for problem resolution and for reporting back, setting out who the key people are to approach when these matters arise again, whether it be my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, or whoever. Unless that is written into the new commissioner's contract, we will go through the whole exercise again and the House will be the poorer for it. We must learn the lessons from the employment of Mrs. Filkin.

As a lay person looking in from the outside, there were times after reading the ultimate report when I did not agree with Mrs. Filkin's judgment on individual cases and other times when I did agree, but that is what happens when responsibility is devolved to someone so that they can independently take a detailed look at matters that are reported to them. That is their job. Inevitably, we are not all going to agree or disagree with the outcome of individual reports.

The Braithwaite report has been a wake-up call to the way this establishment is run. As a Parliament, we spend a lot of taxpayers' money and we are responsible for the employment of a great many people at all levels in the House. We must be as professional and as transparent in our dealings with them as we would expect them to be, and as we inevitably expect any business organisation to be outside.

5.46 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Far be it from me to bring disunity to the Chamber, where unity usually reigns on occasions such as this, but the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) was not quite to my taste. To be honest, I found it unctuous. It bordered on hagiography.

What we need is what we had in Elizabeth Filkin: a rough-hewn character capable of fingering the collar of dodgy people who are self-serving and all too willing to

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

kick up a fuss when the heat is on. As a one-time robust criminal barrister, I admired her style. Instead we will get a member of the great and the good, an establishment figure who will bed himself in as and when he can wind down his many other important activities. Personally, I doubt whether a sophisticated insider and dextrous mandarin who is capable of reading the tea leaves in this place is the sort of person we want.

Moreover, unless I am much mistaken, as that person is a Church Commissioner he must be a member of the Church of England, an organisation of which I was a member before I became an atheist. When I was in the choir, I was told that to be a good member of the Church of England, I had to eschew theology, shut down my moral faculties and demonstrate that the only principle to which I adhered was the lack of a principle. I was told that the Church of England was a Church where doubts very occasionally led to consensus. I am not sure that that is what we want in this case.

Mr. Salmond: Is atheism widespread in the Church of England these days?

Mr. Sedgemore: If I went down that line, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would pull me up, but there was a well known Bishop of Durham who was pretty close to being an atheist.

As regards Elizabeth Filkin, I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) said. A few weeks ago, I paid a heartfelt, personal tribute to Elizabeth Filkin in an article in *Tribune*. I shall not go through it because I know that every hon. Member reads my articles in *Tribune*, but I genuinely believe that she was badly treated by Members of Parliament, and on occasions badly treated by the Committee to which she gave such devoted service and, dare I say it, by the House of Commons Commission itself.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough said that Elizabeth Filkin would not give any evidence, but one would have to live in a time capsule in this place not to know that there was a whispering campaign, which on most occasions developed in front of me into a shouting campaign. All I can say is that, if the hon. Member for Middlesbrough or any member of the House of Commons Commission really believes that there was not a whispering campaign, they would not do so if they had read my article in *Tribune*, unless they are wholly incapable of understanding the ordinary and natural meaning of simple English words.

Furthermore—I am rather loth to say this, but given some of the stuff that we have heard, I will do so—a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee once described Elizabeth Filkin to me as "mad". Some time later—I remember the day, as will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it was the last time that Oxford university played Cambridge university at rugby, and the only redeeming feature of that dreadful match was that Oxford university won—I rushed back here to do my House of Commons duties and a member of that Committee told me that Elizabeth Filkin had left not only a job at the Inland Revenue but a job at the London Docklands development corporation under a cloud. When I asked for more information, I was just told that "they"—the impersonal, unknown and unnamed "they"—were saying it. If that is how a member of the Committee can behave, I apologise to Elizabeth Filkin. I also apologise to her because, until I wrote my article in *Tribune* three weeks ago, I had not said much on the matter. I am sorry that we—and I—have let Elizabeth down.

5.51 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) is a marvellous self-publicist. I hardly dare speak because I must declare an interest as a member of the General Synod of the Church of England and as an Anglican who is not an atheist. The hon. Gentleman was having fun in his inimitable way, and I shall not follow him down some of the paths to which he pointed. However, I shall make sure that I get hold of his article in *Tribune*—doubtless he will send me a copy, which he will autograph, I hope—and I shall read it with great interest over the weekend. Whether I shall read it with much profit is another matter.

I want to take part briefly in this debate, but not because I want to talk about Elizabeth Filkin, whom I did not have the pleasure of knowing. I do not want to say anything detrimental about her; in fact, I am not able to say much about her at all. I am sure that she sought to discharge her duties with assiduity. As for the future, however, we must consider the way in which we appoint our commissioners. There is a lot to be said for appointing a commissioner for one term—perhaps a longer term than the present one—which would not be renewable. That would allow the commissioner to behave without fear or favour in any way.

It would probably be wise, in the light of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), to consider the issue of publicity. Perhaps every commissioner should either make a self-denying ordinance or have imposed on him or her some sort of restriction on speaking to the press about any matter. Officers of the House do not speak to the press as a matter of course and tradition. There is much to be said for that tradition. The Clerk of the House does not give comments to the press whatever advice he may give to the Speaker or anyone else.

What I really want to say stems from my membership of the General Synod. The House would make an exceptionally wise choice if it were to appoint Mr. Philip Mawer and endorse the recommendation made in a speech that was not at all as described by the rumbustious hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch—the hon. Gentleman who represents Hackney marshes. I have known Philip Mawer for a long time. I knew him when he was a civil servant, although not well, and I know that he was highly regarded in the roles that he played in the civil service. I have seen him at first hand in the General Synod, and I believe that he has clarity of thought and an analytical mind. I know that he has gentle and self-deprecating good humour. A sense of humour is terribly important in a job like the one that we are considering.

I also know that Philip Mawer has the ability to be impartial. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), who is the Second Church Estates Commissioner, talked about Church politics. I do not want to say too much about them, but I must point out to the hon. Gentleman who represents Hackney marshes that, if one can cope with Church politics, one can cope with the politics here. Church politics are at least as unscrupulous and devious as anything seen in the House of Commons.

Mr. McNamara: Speak for your own Church.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am talking about the established Church of England of which I am exceptionally proud to be a member. I do not seek to cast aspersions in the direction of Rome.

We must bring a certain humour to our debates. If one can cope, as Philip Mawer has coped, with the General Synod of the Church of England, one can cope with the House of Commons. His work has been remarkable because he has not forfeited the respect of any of the factions or groups—those on the Catholic or evangelical wings, the traditionalists or modernists—but has enhanced his reputation by the way in which he has dealt with them. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough knows that as well as I do, and I am sure that he would agree entirely with me on that point.

In the time that Mr. Mawer has been at the General Synod, he has been an exceptional public servant of outstanding quality. We are extremely fortunate that he wished to apply for the post and we owe our congratulations to all those—I played no part in this myself—who decided to choose Philip Mawer from what was a distinguished field. He has it within him to be a great servant of the House. I wish him well, and I hope that the House will endorse the recommendation before us.

5.57 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said that the events of recent months had not done the reputation of the House much good. I agree with him. We have not covered ourselves in glory.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick), the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) and others have mentioned the qualities of the retiring commissioner. I have spent a short time on the Standards and Privileges Committee and there can be no doubting her dedication and hard work. The machinery of the independent commissioner reporting to the Committee was very much an innovation when it was established in 1995 and it still seems to be unique among Parliaments in the world. However, as the House of Commons Commission report makes clear, Elizabeth Filkin's work has validated the position of commissioner.

The commissioner's role is a difficult one to carry out. The position was not recommended by the Nolan report, which suggested a separate investigator and adjudicator. When Lord Neill wrote to the Chairman of the Committee a couple of years ago, he said:

> "It is a fundamental principle of procedural fairness that the functions of 'investigator' and 'adjudicator' should be carried out independently".

By combining the two roles, we have imposed a heavy burden on the two commissioners who have held the post and we shall impose such a burden on the new appointee. There are various reasons why the concept of an investigating judge has been abandoned in continental countries, but the fact that such judges combine the two roles is one of them.

I want to look forward. I congratulate Mr. Mawer on his appointment. My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) outlined Mr. Mawer's qualities and my hon. Friend's remarks were endorsed by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack). I am sure that Mr. Mawer will be a splendid appointment.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) referred to the commissioner's remit, but I want to deal with that point in a slightly different way. I wish to refer to the procedures to which the commissioner should adhere.

The first stage, of course, is the receipt of a complaint. There is no need for me to tell the House that the process is used by political opponents outside to air grievances, and by journalists searching for a story. In a previous debate, I implored hon. Members—including Labour Members—not to use the process simply for political advantage. I associate myself completely with the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), and with the intervention made by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, on that point. Short-term political benefit can be gained by using the process, but the corrosive effects on the standing of the House are too great a danger in the long run.

Last year, the Standards and Privileges Committee's fifth report contained the assertion that it was a basic courtesy that any hon. Member making a complaint to the commissioner about another hon. Member should send a letter to the hon. Member concerned. Unfortunately, that is still not being done. If it were, it might be some deterrent to hon. Members who want to advance complaints against other hon. Members.

Even if we could choke off political expediency in this place, people outside would still use the process as a pretext to attack hon. Members. Mr. Mawer, the new commissioner, will need to adopt a robust approach to that. He will need to dispose quickly of complaints that are trivial, and of allegations that clearly do not require investigation.

The guide to the rules sets out clearly the rudiments of the process. Complaints must not be anonymous, they must be supported by evidence, and they will not normally be taken up if they are founded simply on a story in the media. If there is evidence, the commissioner has to ask the hon. Member involved to respond, and conduct a preliminary investigation. If there is no prima facie case to answer, that should be the end of the matter.

The present commissioner, Mrs. Filkin, has fleshed out those procedural points in a helpful document attached to the Committee's ninth report. Trivial complaints, or complaints that appear to have nothing to them, must be dealt with quickly and robustly. That calls for strength of character and judgment. From what has been said, it seems that Mr. Mawer has both qualities.

In its sixth report on standards in public life, the Neill committee endorsed an approach that resulted in the commissioner robustly dismissing malicious and frivolous complaints. In addition, it went on to suggest that, when an ill founded complaint receives publicity, the commissioner, with the consent of the hon. Member involved, should publicise his judgment. There is great merit in that suggestion, and I hope that the House will be able to debate the matter at some stage.

[Ross Cranston]

Once an inquiry begins and the thresholds are met, the commissioner must adhere to certain basic principles. They are derived from common law, and are given added force by article 6 of the European convention. Conveniently, they are also set out in the 1999 report from the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege under Lord Nicholls.

I shall isolate three of those principles. They are that there must be a prompt and clear statement of the precise allegations against the hon. Member, that there must be an adequate opportunity to take advice, and that there must be an opportunity to be heard.

The first principle is perhaps the most important. There is a great danger that an investigation can go off the rails. It is always possible for an investigator to follow a multitude of lines, to range widely over an hon. Member's affairs, and to stray into matters involving third parties for which an hon. Member has no responsibility—all in the hope that something will turn up. The length of any consequent inquiry can be unfair to the hon. Member concerned, as a cloud remains over his or her head for months.

There is therefore a need for focus, to isolate the important and to discard the trivial. The allegation must then be formulated, and put to the hon. Member involved. In most cases, the aim must be to come quickly to a conclusion. There can be no justification for keeping from the hon. Member the nature of the allegation. There is rarely a justification for keeping from the hon. Member involved the evidence on which an allegation is based.

I come now to the standard of proof that the commissioner, Mr. Mawer, must apply. I do not think that there is any controversy about that now. The Nicholls committee said that the standard was the balance of probabilities, but that a higher standard of proof might be appropriate in serious cases. The first commissioner, Sir Gordon Downey, adopted that approach, although he did not use legal terminology. The approach has now been endorsed by the Committee itself. Cogent evidence is needed to support an allegation. Where reputation is involved, especially cogent evidence is needed in the balance.

I shall say a few words about third parties. People associated with hon. Members will be affected by the commissioner's work. Spouses of MPs, for example, know that MPs have to register some of their property interests. Moreover, the commissioner will sometimes need to interview third parties in the course of an inquiry to obtain information. In the end, however, only hon. Members are answerable to the House, and only they are subject to the mandatory jurisdiction of the commissioner.

The corollary of that is that the commissioner has to be sensitive to the position of third parties. For example, spouses may have their own careers. If they are doctors, lawyers, journalists, business people or whatever, they will have duties towards other people. Such duties could include duties of confidentiality, which would mean that they could not assist the commissioner. It is MPs who have duties to this House, not other people. It seems to me that it will be very rare for the commissioner to make adverse comments—let alone reach adverse findings—about third parties in his reports.

In some cases, of course, where documentary evidence is not available, the commissioner may have to rely on oral evidence, which may come from third parties. If the commissioner accepted that evidence, no adverse comment would be made. However, if the commissioner did not accept the evidence of third parties, he could avoid making adverse comments in most cases and simply accept the persuasive evidence.

I believe that it is unnecessary in almost all cases to comment adversely on third parties. After all, the commissioner's report to the Committee on Standards and Privileges is protected by parliamentary privilege. That should not be a cloak for adverse comments on third parties in most cases.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman address the particular problem that can arise when the hon. Member who is the subject of an investigation decides to bring with him a legal representative? That legal representative may feel that his primary duty is to his client. We have found ourselves in some difficult situations when that has happened.

I was a member of the Joint Committee to which the hon. and learned Gentleman referred. We found that, when hon. Members come before their colleagues and peers in a Committee with legal representation, that can cause difficult problems. I appreciate that the hon. and learned Gentleman has considerable legal experience, and perhaps he will be able to comment from both points of view.

Ross Cranston: In most cases, hon. Members will not need to consult lawyers. If an hon. Member answers truthfully the questions put by the commissioner, the case will be disposed of easily, without lawyers. However, as the Joint Committee suggested, hon. Members should have the right to go to lawyers if that is what they want. I do not think that that is necessary in the vast majority of cases, but the right should still exist.

I shall speak briefly about privacy. Hon. Members forfeit much of their privacy when they enter public life. For a start, their financial interests have to be registered, but their behaviour is also a matter for constant scrutiny—by other hon. Members, the press, their constituents and the public in general. Anonymity goes by the board in much of their daily lives, but hon. Members should still be entitled to what I would call a zone of privacy, as long as they do not forfeit that right through their behaviour.

Matters that are not relevant to hon. Members' performance in the job include their family, their relationships with parents, their partners and children, their sexual predilections, and—a theme that arose earlier in the debate—their religious beliefs. Hon. Members are entitled to privacy in those and related matters, unless, as I said, they put those matters into the public arena.

Mr. Mawer must respect that zone of privacy. Members are under a duty to co-operate with him: they must answer his questions and provide him with information. The other side of the coin is that the commissioner must respect a Member's privacy. In most instances, of course, this issue is subsumed by my earlier point about relevance. Rarely will those aspects of the zone of privacy, as I have described it, be relevant to an inquiry. Even if they were, the commissioner should hesitate before intruding.

There have been various references to the press. As I have been provoked into saying something about this, my advice to the commissioner would be "Don't talk to the press." My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) and the hon. Member for South Staffordshire took that line. There is no need for the commissioner to confirm or deny that an inquiry is under way. Contacts with the press could lead to allegations of leaking and manipulation. My advice to Mr. Mawer would be "Don't talk to the press. Ultimately, if there is a report, what you say will be public. You stand or fall by that report."

On the statute of limitations, the first commissioner, Sir Gordon Downey, in his valedictory report, said:

> "I think there is a risk of a 'tit-for-tat' war breaking out in which Members search old records and debates for evidence of possible rule breaches."

He suggested having a seven-year cut-off point. That was endorsed by the Committee in its 19th report, subject to the proviso that the commissioner should be able to go back beyond that point, after consulting the Committee in serious cases. Mr. Mawer should use that seven-year period of limitations. Sir Gordon also alluded to the trawling through of reports and associated documents to launch fresh complaints. As well as a statute of limitations, Mr. Mawer should adopt a fresh evidence rule. It would mean that, if evidence was available at the time of the original inquiry, it should not be used to found a new inquiry.

Too often we fail to recognise how fortunate we are in our public servants. Few countries can match ours in the dedication and integrity of its public servants and the skill and independence of its judiciary. That is not an excuse for complacency; it is not a defence of the status quo. We cannot take our reputation in this House for granted. That is why there is a very heavy burden on the shoulders of the new commissioner. But in our public life there is virtually no major misconduct, and we should be very proud of that.

6.13 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am pleased to follow the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston). I thought that some of his structural points about the role of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards were very important, although he is totally unrealistic in his view of what is possible with the press.

I agree with the hon. Members for Walsall, North (David Winnick), for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) and for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) in their analysis of the situation. Some other Members are in a state of denial about what has happened. The House of Commons has, collectively, engaged in the political assassination of its Standards Commissioner—that is what she believes has happened; she believes she has been undermined. She believes that she was a turbulent Standards Commissioner who was got rid of. What is more, the overwhelming majority of the public believe that Elizabeth Filkin is to be no more because she was ferreting out things without fear or favour. Right hon. or hon. Members, on the Front or Back Benches, who do not appreciate how that adds to the cynicism about politics are living in a different political world from me. There is a seam of discontent about the events of the past few months, which may not be widespread in this place because many Members, to their discredit, take very little interest in this.

At business questions, the Leader of the House is fond of dismissing the number of signatories—49—to the early-day motion that the hon. Member for Worthing, West tabled expressing confidence in Mrs. Filkin. Thirty Labour Members of Parliament signed it, as did five Conservatives, nine Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru Members, three Liberal Democrats, one independent and one Member of the Social Democratic and Labour party. It did not include the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch, so I suspect that the list is not exclusive. Those Members and others feel a deep discontent and anxiety about what has happened to the present Standards Commissioner.

I have never met Elizabeth Filkin; I have never phoned her, had a postcard or sent her a letter. That is probably the best position to be in—it may even be a fortunate position, all things considered, because I have no axe to grind. However, I have read her reports, which have been meticulous and closely argued. They seem to be properly based and I have detected no political axe-grinding in them. Why, given the excellence with which the representative of the House of Commons Commission told us that she had conducted affairs, has it come to pass that she has, in effect, been constructively dismissed? That is what has happened to one of our employees. Members talk in employment debates about employees' rights, legal protection and European statutes, yet one of our most important employees—the one with the most difficult job of all in regulating us—has been undermined in a despicable fashion.

Structural points might lead to such a situation, almost regardless of who is in post; indeed, the better the person employed, the more likely they are to lead to that situation. The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch obviously knows Elizabeth Filkin much better than I do. I liked his description of her as being prepared to search for the truth without fear or favour, no matter whose toes she trampled on. Surely that is exactly the sort of person we want in the job.

We have a hybrid system that cannot work. The hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North referred to separating the investigative role from the adjudication role. We have lumped the two roles together. We then have a second-guess system of self-regulation in the Committee on Standards and Privileges and, possibly, a third-guess system on the Floor of the House.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has issued a report in which she upholds, in meticulous detail, four complaints against a current Minister of the Crown. The Committee on Standards and Privileges has decided today, in six brief paragraphs, to take no action. I do not think that a system in which we appoint an independent Standards Commissioner, or at least one who is meant to be independent and then have a second-guess system of self-regulation, can possibly be sustained. We must go for one or the other. We can adopt an independent system of regulation with a Standards Commissioner reporting, perhaps, to the chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. When that idea was mentioned earlier by the hon. Member for Walsall, North, the Leader of the House gave one of his characteristic scoffs. Independent regulation would mean having someone who was genuinely independent and responsible outwith the procedures and processes of this House. If we want self-regulation, we had better understand that it will always be open to the accusation that the Committee matches the make-up of the House, and some people will believe, rightly or wrongly—but, given the events of last

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

few months, probably rightly—that certain people will receive different treatment from certain other people. That will be the perception.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: If one party has been running the show, how does the hon. Gentleman account for the fact that every report has been unanimous?

Mr. Salmond: That is not the point I was making, as the hon. Member for Worthing, West, a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, helpfully points out from a sedentary position. We have a system of self-regulation under which the Committee, like all others in this place, is appointed by the usual channels. That leads to the perception that the system of self-regulation is subject to political influences. All these people, regardless of how honourable they are and how diligently they carry out their duties, are none the less politicians regulating other politicians. It is impossible for people wholly to remove themselves from the political process when they are active politicians. In an earlier speech, we were told of an unguarded remark made by a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee about the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. I do not know whether that is true, but I trust the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch. That example shows exactly the failings of any system of self-regulation. Most such systems—wherever in public life they may be—are open to challenge; they are certainly open to considerable scepticism.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) made an excellent point about tenure: whoever is appointed, under whatever system, should be appointed for one term only. I suggest that a term of 10 years would be appropriate. There should be no question of reappointment. There would thus be no pressure to reappoint—whether such pressure is perceived or real.

The person should be released from the post due only to complete incompetence or—

Peter Bottomley: Death.

Mr. Salmond: Indeed. Death or taxes: that should be the only way out of the post. Whoever is appointed should be wholly free from any pressure—real or apparent—to obtain a second term, to which they may be subjected or which is suggested by their employers. The confusion over whether the commissioner was being offered a three-day or a five-day week or whether she was to be paid for work that she had done—when someone has, in effect, to apply to get her own job back although there is no good reason for her not to be reappointed—shows how unsatisfactory the position is. A one-term appointment would free the commissioner from any possible pressure.

If the House of Commons Commission and the commissioner continue with their present responsibilities, surely the Speaker should not continue as Chair of the Commission. Some of us have greatly admired the Speaker's independence and the strength of his rulings recently. We believe that he requires support throughout the House—especially from Back Benchers—to uphold those rulings. However, we find ourselves in difficulty in this debate. We are in a debate with the House of Commons Commission, chaired by the Speaker whom we greatly admire but who cannot take part in the debate. It seems completely wrong that the Commission is not properly answerable to the House—through the Chairman or whoever—on decisions that the Commission has or has not made.

I repeat that it is disgraceful that the first real opportunity that we have had to debate what happened to our current commissioner is during our discussion of the appointment of the next standards commissioner. If there were valid complaints about the way in which Mrs. Filkin conducted her duties, they should have been brought to the Floor of the House through the Commission and debated in the open—in the light; they should not have been the subject of a whispering campaign in the dark, demeaning her character and abilities.

I have no knowledge either of Mrs. Filkin or of Mr. Mawer. I am sure that he is a true believer of the Church of England—unlike other people whose views may be more transitional. I am told that the rough house of Church of England politics will have prepared him for his role as Standards Commissioner. I must accept that.

However, I have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch: Mr. Mawer will suffer from two big disadvantages. The first is that he will be seen as an establishment candidate—as one of the chaps who knows the game and has been brought in as a contrast to his predecessor, who was outside the establishment and thus extremely difficult. Secondly, the circumstances in which Mr. Mawer's predecessor fell will surely overshadow his ability to do his job.

I wish the new commissioner well. I hope that he does well, but he arrives in especially difficult circumstances and, unless they are properly addressed, the same situation may be replayed time after time. If someone does the job too conscientiously, it will seem that they were got rid of because they were inconvenient to people in this place.

I have one more point about the Commission. When hon. Members have raised this issue at business questions—especially the hon. Member for Worthing, West, but also other hon. Members—they have been barracked by the shadow Leader of the House. I have never seen such strength of solidarity and support—*[Interruption.]* The Leader of the House does not seem to agree. There is something unhealthy about a political system where the Members of the Front Benches were so arm in arm—the Liberals were not much better—about getting rid of that independent regulator—*[Interruption.]* I certainly was not part of that cosy conspiracy at the Dispatch Box—thank goodness for that.

In summary, Mrs. Elizabeth Filkin has, to use an old-fashioned term, been wronged by this House. Those who did that wrong should be ashamed. They should be ashamed of what they did, but especially of the manner in which they did it. They acted behind the scenes, behind the Chair and in the dark—rather than in full debate and in the light, where the real issues could be addressed.

6.25 pm

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): I became a Member of the House nearly five years ago and was enormously honoured to be made a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee almost immediately.

I entered the House with a perception that the whole place was sleaze-ridden. I thought that one had to keep one's hands in one's pocket and to keep hold of one's wallet, whereas in fact this is an amazingly honest place. Across the board, the politicians whom I meet are extremely honest, but very occasionally some of them break the rules.

At present—after the three years during which our commissioner has been in place—people believe that this place is more sleaze-ridden than ever; yet during the past few years, there has been no money in brown envelopes. We have not experienced the problems that occurred in the past. There has been no cash for questions. Certainly, there have been some breaches of the regulations—often technical breaches. In relation to our earlier debate, it is worth noting that both the two substantial offences of which my hon. Friend Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) was found guilty—among the 11 with which he was charged—involved regulatory issues that occurred many years ago. That was all. There were, of course, serious matters and the House took the right decision about what should happen to that Member.

However, those issues were not sleaze—at least not according to my definition. My definition of sleaze is when one uses one's public office for private gain. If any hon. Member can think of an example of that during the past few years I should be interested to hear it, because there have been no such cases. The behaviour of hon. Members has indeed been honourable. That is why I am so sad that, as I enter my second term as a Member, my constituents—like those of many hon. Members—believe that we are not honourable and honest. That upsets me.

It upsets me when a public servant gives the impression that we are not honest and honourable. That is why I do not support the reappointment of Elizabeth Filkin. It is not because she lacks integrity; she is one of the women of the greatest integrity whom I have ever met. She is indeed a woman of independence—there is no doubt about that—but the job of the Standards Commissioner is to instil confidence about the House here and in the outside world as well: the outside world must be confident that the commissioner is doing a good job and Members must be confident that they are being treated fairly. If they do not believe that, they will not co-operate with the system. That is the nub of the matter.

Under Sir Gordon Downey, there was no such criticism as we have heard recently. During the first two years of my membership of the Committee, there were differences of opinion with Sir Gordon on some occasions, but the Committee did not disagree with the logic of the commissioner's reports as often as it has done in recent years. That disagreement is regarded as a debit for the Committee, but if the current system is to operate it is surely right that the Committee should not second-guess the arguments and evidence against Members; it should analyse them and consider them judicially.

Let us consider the report that was published this morning in which—as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) pointed out—the Committee, yet again, took a different view from the commissioner. The House should study that report and read what the commissioner said. She said that people should account for money that had been properly paid to them—thus, if someone charged a rent, the cash they received would be an improper use of public funds. That so defeats logic that one understands why some Members get upset.

I repeat that I do not doubt Mrs. Filkin's integrity, but I do question her judgment and ability to meet the evidential requirements and thus to reach fair decisions in many cases. With that in mind, the Commission was absolutely right to see whether we could do better. The decision was no more than that. It was not an unfair dismissal, but a decision not to reappoint someone to a post with a fixed-term contract. I have some experience of employment law and, assuming that the contract contained such a provision, failure to reappoint would not constitute unfair or constructive dismissal. None of us has seen that contract, so none of us knows the answer to that question, but that is another issue.

In discussing Mrs. Filkin, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) suggested that we should have a grievance procedure. Happily, we will have such a procedure, because the Employment Bill that the House passed last night provides that it be included in employment contracts as an implied term. Unhappily, the Opposition opposed it, even so, it is an important procedure that should be not merely implied but expressed in the new commissioner's contract. That would avoid many of the problems that we have experienced.

Sir Gordon Downey said just a week or two ago that the behaviour of Members in respect of their interests has improved enormously in the past three or four years. I agree, but I would extend that to the past five years. Why, therefore, does the perception of sleaze and wrongdoing remain? One reason—I am sorry to repeat the point—is the commissioner's readiness in the past three years to take on complaints of little substance.

Of course, we are also at fault, because most complaints are brought by Members against other Members not for quasi-judicial reasons but for political purposes. That is wrong, and when such complaints are found to be spurious, Members should be shown the red card for falsely complaining, rather like soccer players who throw themselves to the ground in the penalty area. There should be some form of sanction when wholly unjustified complaints are made. Having said that, we do not want to discourage people from bringing proper complaints. It is a difficult line to draw.

I agree with those Members who said that self-regulation is a difficult issue, because I am not at all sure that we can ever be trusted by the public. People do not trust us to look after our own affairs.

Moreover, the Select Committee process is perhaps not the best method of self-regulation or any other form of regulation. Although the Select Committee is skilfully managed by a distinguished Chairman, such Committees are an inappropriate substitute for a judicial body. The media will always think ill of Members of Parliament, which is a cross that we must bear. When the commissioner presents a report, it becomes public property, and nothing that the House or its Committees subsequently say is of much value. The press pick up on the commissioner's comments, rather than ours, because they want to think ill of us.

The Select Committee process is the problem. Select Committees' main objective is to reach unanimity, but unanimity is not always justice. They compromise and fudge—in one direction or another—and look for a middle way that is acceptable to everybody, but that does not always mete out justice to a given Member. For that reason, I am not at all certain that that is the best way to proceed.

If we are to proceed with the current system, if we are to look after our own affairs and if we are to instil confidence not only in the public but in Members so that

[Mr. Michael Jabez Foster]

they co-operate and so that there is no repeat of this afternoon's tragedy whereby someone took against the investigator and behaved so wrongly that we had to reach such a decision, we must consider the rules. We need procedural rules that are unambiguous and certain, which, perhaps, is our next task. I agree absolutely with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston), who clearly set out many of the requirements for achieving that objective.

In a nutshell, if we are to operate such a system, allegations must be clearly put, including references to the alleged breach of rules—not simply a letter setting out some generality, but the actual fact and the actual breach, rather like a charge sheet for a Member. That is what is required.

Members must thus be given the evidence on which a complaint is presented so that they can challenge or agree to it as the case may be. They must always have the last word—the opportunity to answer the charge—but I fear that that has not happened over recent years. There has been a fudge, with suggestions being made and considered, and new charges arising part way through the process.

That is not justice. If we want to achieve justice, not only for society, which is most important, but for Members, we must acknowledge that they have rights too. I believe and very much hope that the new commissioner will help us to achieve that objective.

6.36 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), the Chairman of our Committee, who has been extremely skilful in difficult circumstances. I also congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston), who made most of the points that I wanted to make, but far more eloquently and succinctly than I could. As a result, I shall not keep the House until 10 o'clock, or even later—a motion would allow us to continue beyond that hour—but I must make a number of points.

First, there is a misapprehension in the House and, I believe, in the media, over the way in which the system works. The commissioner's report goes to the Committee, but it is the Committee's report that matters to the House. Hon. Members can obviously read the commissioner's report and then decide whether they think the Committee's report is proper, accurate and fair, but we discuss our report and our decision. That ought to be borne in mind.

People do not understand the process properly, and I must disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster). I do not believe that natural justice was in some way overthrown in the case to which he referred—not at all. In fact, my opinion remains that the commissioner and the Committee bent over backwards to ensure that our hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) had every opportunity to present his case, produce his solicitors and have opinions from learned counsel. The Shakespearean tragedy of all this is that the person who hanged himself today is my hon. Friend, by virtue of his conduct.

As has been rightly said, of 11 charges, eight were not upheld, two were minor and one represented a slap on the wrist. However, my hon. Friend's attitude, partly to the commissioner, but mostly regarding alleged telephone calls, caused his downfall. I urge colleagues to read the whole report very carefully, if they have time. If they do not, they should read the section on Mapesbury Communications—a company established for the benefit of our colleague of which his mother-in-law and then his mother were secretary. The sole director was his wife. Moneys were used to buy a car for his mother, as company secretary.

Our hon. Friend said that he knew nothing of the workings of that company, and the Committee said, with all charity, that that was a little odd. However, we upheld what the commissioner said because all the evidence on which we could have pursued that matter further had mysteriously disappeared. The charge could not be upheld for lack of evidence, not because there was no trail to follow, as has perhaps been suggested. The trail went cold for lack of evidence.

On the telephone calls, I refer colleagues to the appendix, which contains the full text of the letter from the chief inspector of Leicestershire police. The report contains only part of that letter, which states the serious charges that the police considered they might bring against my hon. Friend. They then decided that he was seeking to undermine our system and therefore that it should be left to us to decide what should happen to him. The charges were very serious indeed.

Although I agree with what my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North said about third parties, the Committee was scrupulous with regard to third parties in that report. We dealt only with our colleague, not with other individuals about whom we might have formed opinions that we decided not to express. We were dealing with our colleague, not with the third parties. Sometimes, colleagues can drag in third parties in all sorts of ways and their reputations have to be defended—we had to defend some third parties in our report. This is a serious matter. It was most unpleasant sitting in judgment on a colleague.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) said that he felt the commissioner had been badly treated by the Committee. I have served on the Committee in only this Parliament, and I must say that there were differences of opinion, but there was respect for the commissioner and an understanding of her position in arguing points and reaching decisions. Different conclusions were reached without blazing rows or anything of that nature, and we carefully explained why we disagreed. That is precisely how we reached decisions.

David Winnick: From my hon. Friend's experience of serving on the Committee—limited though it is—does he think that our hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) is in any way correct to suggest that the parliamentary commissioner should lose her job because she has been over-zealous? In his experience, has the parliamentary commissioner done anything that a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards should not have done?

Mr. McNamara: I shall come to that in a moment. I shall refer to the allegation that the parliamentary commissioner was badly treated by the Committee, and I shall deal with my attitude towards Mrs. Filkin. I found her to be intellectually hard and very careful in her use of words. She bent over backwards to be fair and to give the benefit of the doubt when she could. In fact, the Committee felt that she had not been hard enough on one occasion, and we reconsidered the evidence on one of the accusations. We upheld her decision not to proceed further on that matter. That is an example of the Committee disagreeing with the commissioner. I found her tough, intellectual and uncompromising in terms of what she felt her proper role involved. The way that the rules were laid down may be criticised, but I felt that she was absolutely straight and upright in upholding them. I found no reason why we should throw stones at her.

On the points that other colleagues have made, when some people knew that I had been appointed to the Committee, they muttered, "Oh, that Filkin woman." How much of that was deliberately stirred up by colleagues who were subject to her inquiries only they know. Some of them may feel that, in some way or another, they have obtained a victory in her dismissal. If they think that, I feel sad for them because they have let down the House of Commons.

The parliamentary commissioner had an almost impossible job—she had to police the standards and ensure that they were upheld by some of the most self-opinionated people in the country, barring only the members of the senior judiciary. I thought that she carried out her task remarkably well, but I know that there were those mutterings and explosions. Some colleagues said that other colleagues were badly treated when they had not even read the reports or looked at the evidence on which the decisions were made. That is a criticism of us, not of the commissioner. I hope that her new job is as challenging, but that she has more support and understanding than she has achieved here.

I want to turn to the role of the House of Commons Commission. It did not completely follow the rules on establishing such posts, as laid down by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, and it came in late. Only later did the Commission involve the Chairman of the Committee. Although I accept that all hon. Members are equal in such matters, we, as members of the Committee, are more closely and intimately affected than others. However, at no time did the Commission officially—or even unofficially, so far as I know—approach the Committee to ask for our impression of the way in which the parliamentary commissioner was undertaking her role. Given what has been said this evening, hon. Members know that opinions would have differed. The least that the Commission could have done was to approach the Committee and ask, "What do you think of the commissioner's behaviour?" That was not done, and that important matter has to be examined by the Commission in future.

The fact that the Committee was not shown two audited reports on the work of the commissioner and her office—even now it has not been shown those reports—delayed things until after the recommendation to appoint the new commissioner and the virtual dismissal of the current one. The Commission behaved disgracefully in not letting the Committee know what was going on and what the problems were. I presume that it did not want us to see those reports because they showed that the commissioner was overworked and doing a good job, as were her staff. That is absolutely disgraceful.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) referred to tenure. One of the tasks that the House has given me is membership of our delegation to the Council of Europe. I am the Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee—European matters are all very complicated—that recommends to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe whom we think it should elect, from a list of three people submitted by countries, to be a member of the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg. It is in some ways one of the most onerous jobs that I have had in my life. Although those judges were originally part-time, they were appointed for a nine-year term. With the reorganisation of the court a few years ago, they were appointed for fixed terms. Under the new system, half of them, chosen by lot, will retire after three years to be replaced by others for successive six-year terms.

That system seems extremely fair, but we found some shortcomings. First, we found that in some cases, sitting judges were not reappointed, or not included on their country's shortlist, for a variety of reasons. It might have been for political reasons, because they had given or supported judgments that the home country did not like, or because their face did not fit, although they were competent judges. There was interference in that way, as there might have been on the matter that we are discussing tonight.

Secondly, we noted that some of the judges who were coming up for re-selection found it necessary to spend time at home, ensuring that their colleagues there appreciated the need for them to be on the bench in Strasbourg. To many people with judicial minds—like politicians' minds—what happened yesterday is quickly forgotten, and the judges had to remind their colleagues of who they were and why they were there.

The system was unsatisfactory. There were threats to the independence of the judges. Judges were in danger of corrupting themselves in the way that they went about seeking re-selection, and the factors influencing re-selection meant that the system did not work efficiently, which was a problem.

We shall be in a much better position if we appoint a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards for a period of, let us say, nine or 10 years, knowing that they will not be reappointed at the end of the term, knowing that they will be independent, and knowing that the means exist to get rid of them if they shoot their wife or run off with the Treasury—although they will not get away with much gold if my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer keeps going on in the way that he is. In other words, the commissioner could be got rid of for malfeasance, but not for making unpopular judgments or for ruffling the defendant. We would be in a much better position if we adopted that arrangement; for starters, we would not have debates such as this so frequently.

If we take that course, we shall know when the commissioner is due to leave office, and we should be able to appoint a new one well enough in advance to enable them to learn the ropes before assuming the post. At present, the newly appointed commissioner is supposed to attend for perhaps one day a week for the first month, and after that perhaps two days a week, then perhaps three days a week and then—if he finds the job as difficult as it is—four or five days a week. However, given the work load that the Audit Commission found,

[Mr. McNamara]

it is nonsensical to appoint someone who has to wind up his present contract, fine, splendid, pure, upright and hard-working as the man is. I do not know the gentleman and I wish him well in his job, but I believe that we could think about some of these matters more seriously.

I shall now mention legal advice. I sometimes wonder to what degree legal advice and opinions from learned counsel are introduced deliberately to waste time—to produce red herrings or further matters to be investigated, just in case the Committee could be accused of being unfair. Colleagues obviously must have that right but, in their own interests, it should be used sparingly.

Peter Bottomley: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to say that we should advise people to look at the report that was published today, in which the Member facing a complaint spoke to the commissioner and sorted things out? The commissioner thought that there was no need to go any further. There were further complaints; they were looked at. A report came to the Committee. I would argue that the Committee, by my reading—it is an agreed report, although what it says may not be agreed—agreed with the commissioner, in a sense, on three of the main issues, but also agreed that no further action was needed. In that case, legal advice did not come in. The whole process took very little time. It has been fair and open, and that surely is the best advice to others.

Mr. McNamara: Oh yes. I agree with that entirely.

The last point that I want to address is the strange description of "rough-hewn", which I think was used by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney—

Mr. Sedgemore: Hackney marshes.

Mr. McNamara: I must say that I found that rather a strange phrase to use about the elegant commissioner that we have at present. If it meant that she was tough-minded and would stand no nonsense, I would accept that, but I always found her—in my dealings with her and from observing her with other members of the Committee—ever courteous, ever helpful, ever prepared to listen, and ever ready to argue her point, but willing to concede gracefully when the Committee decided differently.

6.55 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I declare an interest, in that I was for some time a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee, I am a member of the House of Commons Commission and I was a member of the board that conducted the preliminary interviews for the position that the House is considering. In that sense, I am in this up to my eyeballs. The House should be aware of that, and can take account of it in respect of anything that I might now say.

Having said that, I have no hesitation in recommending Mr. Philip Mawer to the House because I had the privilege of being involved in interviewing him, among many other people of very high quality, not just once but twice. My view was—happily, this was the way that events turned out—that he was the best qualified of a very high-quality field of candidates.

It partly answers some of what was said in the debate that, when the post was advertised, there was no lack of high-quality applicants who, although they knew the context, still came forward because they felt that the role was challenging and demanding, because they had a sense of duty and because they wanted to play their part in maintaining the reputation of the parliamentary process and of the House. The House can therefore feel confident that this candidate will serve it extremely well if, as I hope, we agree to his appointment.

However, we must recognise—it was made clear to Mr. Mawer, as it was to the other candidates—that the position of commissioner is not an easy one, as became patently obvious during the debate. There has been no attempt to conceal it. We all know, not least from the debate, that the commissioner has to maintain a relationship with the Standards and Privileges Committee, of course; with the House of Commons Commission, although that relationship is, of necessity and rightly, much diminished after the appointment; with Mr. Speaker, of course, because of his position in the House; and with the Clerk of the House under some circumstances. In addition to all that, the commissioner must have a relationship with 655 Members of Parliament.

Peter Bottomley: What about the other four?

Mr. Forth: I thought that some clever colleague would ask me about the other four. I deliberately excluded Mr. Speaker and the Deputy Speakers. Strictly speaking, I perhaps should not have but I would be crazy not to in this circumstance. My point, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that maintaining a relationship with the entirety of the membership of the House is a key part of the job and responsibility of the commissioner, and one of the most difficult parts. It is on that ground, among others, that we must satisfy ourselves. Worse, the commissioner then has to maintain independence and integrity and at the same time be a servant of the House. That is a very difficult duty to maintain with credibility.

I am confident, however, that Mr. Philip Mawer has the experience and the capability to fulfil those very demanding requirements and maintain the confidence of Members and the public at large. I believe that he is fully capable of doing so and I commend him to the House.

6.59 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The House will be aware that I have put my name to the motion. At the risk of scandalising the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), I fully support what the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said in commending Mr. Mawer.

The House was fortunate to have a good field of candidates for the post. When it was advertised, some members of the press said that no one of calibre would apply. Indeed, one feature writer who said that himself went on to apply. The press were wholly wrong, as they so often are. The candidates were drawn from a wide field. I think that I speak for the Commission when I say that any of the three on the final short list could do the job with distinction and success. It is an even greater tribute to Mr. Mawer that he was successful in such a strong field.

It is also a tribute to Mr. Mawer that no hon. Member who regretted the departure of Mrs. Filkin expressed regret at the arrival of Philip Mawer. The hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) spoke highly of him. On that point at least we can agree. I cannot promise to rise to the hagiography that my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) accorded Mrs. Filkin, but Mr. Mawer certainly has the qualities of integrity, impartiality, tenacity and discretion that are needed for the job.

I defer to my hon. Friend for his superior knowledge of the Church of England, but from my study of 19th century literature I believe that the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) is correct in saying that the Church is not without politics and intrigue. Handling the senior post that Mr. Mawer occupied must have required tact, skill and toughness. He also served with distinction at the Home Office where he undertook tough and demanding tasks, such as acting as the secretary and writer of the Scarman report on the Brixton riots. I am confident that he brings to the post the qualities that we need and experience that has prepared him for the role of commissioner.

It is important to underline what my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) said: the process of appointment was scrupulous. In the early stages, we sought the advice and support of one of my predecessors, Lord Newton, and Sir Gordon Downey, a former Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. Throughout all stages of the process, we were observed by an independent assessor, Mrs. Sheila Drew-Smith, who was appointed by the Commission for Public Appointments. She also attended the final hearing, at the end of which she said—I wrote down her comment—that the process had been as robust as we can make it. The Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee joined us as a full voting member when we made the final choice from the shortlist of three, and he fully supported our choice at the end of the hearing. No matter what other opinions hon. Members may have, it is not possible to fault the process by which we produced the man who I believe is an excellent candidate for the post.

The arrival of the new commissioner is an opportunity for us all to look to the future of the system and the way in which the post's duties are carried out.

Mr. Salmond: No one suggested that the process of appointment of the new commissioner was not scrupulous. Some hon. Members suggested, however, that the effective removal of the previous commissioner was less than scrupulous. Having heard the views expressed in the debate, does the Leader of the House regret anything that he has or has not done as part of his role in the House of Commons Commission in the past few months, given the circumstances under which Elizabeth Filkin left office?

Mr. Cook: Not in the slightest. I have done nothing of which to be ashamed, nothing that I am not prepared to defend, and nothing that I have any cause to regret. I believe that Mr. Mawer will command the confidence of the House. In a year or two, we will look back on what we did tonight and regard it as the correct decision.

David Winnick: Would it not have been better for the House of Commons Commission to initiate a debate on why Elizabeth Filkin was not to have her contract renewed? This debate is about the new appointment, and we all wish Mr. Mawer well, but many of us are clearly unhappy about the way in which Mrs. Filkin is leaving our service.

Mr. Cook: Let us be clear about this: Mrs. Filkin is leaving our service because she chose not to put herself forward in open competition for the post. Throughout the process, I have been careful to ensure that my appreciation of her qualities is placed on the record. It is strange that those who purport to be her champions are the ones who keep pressing for a debate to explore her merits for the post. I am content to echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) said. I commend Mrs. Filkin for her assiduity, determination and meticulousness and, with those words, the House should draw a line under the matter.

There are aspects of the system that the House should consider for the future, one of which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston). Hon. Members require protection against the malicious representation of them being under investigation even when there is nothing of substance to investigate. Their reputation is important not just to their political careers, but to their standing in their community. We must not expose them to the meretricious publicity of being under investigation when no inquiry has been launched or is likely to produce a substantial result.

As Leader of the House, I would welcome the Standards and Privileges Committee's considering how to give greater clarity to the distinction between a complaint having been made and an investigation having been launched. I was much attracted to the formula that Sir Gordon Downey articulated on the radio last year. He said that he never initiated an investigation until he was satisfied that there was a prima facie case to be answered. Until we reach that stage, all Members are entitled to privacy and protection against fabricated claims that they are under investigation because of complaints without substance.

Peter Bottomley: One of the advantages of the system that the House instituted by establishing the commissioner and the Standards and Privileges Committee is that we can now take matters further. Newspaper used to attack a Member who had no way in which to get the claim investigated. We should remember that such a case would have received publicity anyway. Having a commissioner who looks into an allegation and who does not take an investigation further gives a Member greater protection than not having the system at all.

Mr. Cook: I am not suggesting that we dismantle the system, but we should protect ourselves against malicious complaints that result in headlines that a Member is under investigation. We can protect ourselves against that without dismantling the system.

Our system of self-regulation has been criticised. It is important that we restore public faith and confidence in it. Today we accepted a report by the Standards and Privileges Committee. We debated the report promptly and expeditiously, and its findings were accepted unanimously. The vigour, severity and unanimity with which we carry through the process of self-regulation compares favourably with other cases of self-regulation.

[Mr. Cook]

We are more likely to pursue our self-regulation with greater rigour and with the unanimous support of our Members than, possibly, the press do with the Press Complaints Commission.

This is Ash Wednesday and an appropriate day on which to approach the debate in a spirit of penitence and critical self-examination. It is vital that we have robust and frank procedures to call to account those Members who let down the standards of the House. We also should ensure that we and, if possible, the press retain a sense of proportion. As Leader of the House, I am distressed that the occasional lapse by a few Members is sometimes written up as if it is representative of the House as a whole. That is false. Most complaints to the Standards and Privileges Committee are not upheld. Most hon. Members come to the House with a genuine commitment to serve their constituents and their political beliefs. Some of those beliefs are entirely wrong-headed, but I respect the sincerity and integrity with which all hon. Members bring their beliefs and commitment to the House. In my view, the House is as clean as any other representative parliamentary democracy. We should not be ashamed of saying so and should take every possible step to ensure that our systems advertise that to our public, our constituents and even to our press. That is why it is of the greatest importance that we have in place mechanisms to maintain our standards and enforce our code of conduct.

I believe that Mr. Mawer will win the confidence of the House for his discretion. Even more important, I believe that he will win the confidence of the public that he will conduct his job with vigour and without fear of, or favour to, any Member. Since becoming Leader, I have frequently said to the House that I believe in the scrutiny of Government because good scrutiny makes for good Government. I believe also that good scrutiny of standards makes for a good Parliament. I believe that Mr. Mawer will be a good scrutineer, and in that spirit I commend him to the House.

7.10 pm

Mr. Bell: I should like to make a few points about the debate.

First, I want to answer a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) about Elizabeth Filkin's extra day's work. I have been informed by the Director of Finance and Administration that arrangements have been made to pay Mrs. Filkin for all the days that she has worked and for annual leave that she has not taken. I hope that answers my hon. Friend's question.

It seems a long time since we heard from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). He said that he thought that Sir Nigel Wicks and his committee ought to review the commissioner's role or his appointment. We welcome any inquiries made by Sir Nigel Wicks and his review of the procedures of the House. I simply add that the House is master and mistress of its own affairs, and it is for the House to decide whether it wishes to alter the present status.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the duties that the new nominee will have if he is appointed. He spoke of linesmen and referees. I simply say that if Mr. Mawer is appointed by the House tonight, he expects to begin work from the beginning of March. Initially, this will be for one or two days a week, since the House will understand that it will take him a little while to relinquish all his present responsibilities, but he will increase his commitment as quickly as he can. Strictly speaking, Mr. Mawer should have given six months' notice to the Church of England, but recognising the importance of this role, the Church is allowing him to leave sooner. Mr. Mawer therefore expects to work up to three days a week by May. He has said:

> "I will do what the job requires and adjust my working life accordingly".

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) made a very eloquent declaration of the merits and qualities of Mrs. Elizabeth Filkin. I have to repeat what has been said by other members of the Commission and by right hon. and hon. Members of the House: the Commission has valued Mrs. Filkin's work and regrets that she did not take the opportunity to apply to be considered for a second term. The nomination report records the Commission's appreciation

> "of Ms Filkin's dedication to the work of the House"

and notes:

> "She has successfully brought a number of complex inquiries to a conclusion."

We also believe that her work has validated the system of parliamentary self-regulation established following the recommendations of the first Nolan report.

Much has been made of the press and its contacts and relationships. The new commissioner, like all Officers of the House and like his predecessor, is subject to a general requirement to maintain confidentiality. Given the nature of the position, the commissioner will need to agree with the Standards and Privileges Committee what contact he has with the media, but there is no question whatsoever of gagging Mr. Mawer. Indeed, should the House approve his appointment today, I am sure that he would be ready to talk to the press tomorrow.

The hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) made an interesting, intriguing and delightful speech, as always. I can only paraphrase Voltaire and say that I do not agree with what he said, but I would defend to the death his right to say it. The Commission and the House welcome his warm words for Philip Mawer in his early-day motion. I have read in the press—it may be malicious gossip—that the hon. Gentleman intends to resign from the Standards and Privileges Committee. I can only give him the advice of Lord Beaverbrook: "Never resign. Wait until you're sacked." Since no one is likely to sack the hon. Gentleman from that role, I urge him to stay where he is and to give Philip Mawer positive advice. I know that Mr. Mawer would welcome that.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who was a member of the Commission for some time, as she said, asked about the accountability of the commissioner. The Speaker and the Clerk of the House will have general management and oversight of the commissioner, but under Standing Order No. 149, it is for the Standards and Privileges Committee to oversee the commissioner's work. No doubt that role will fall on the gentleman sitting next to her, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young). The hon. Lady made great play of what the commissioner's contract would say. If the House approves the motion, Philip Mawer will sign a detailed contract, which covers dealings with the media and all the other matters to which she referred. It contains written arrangements for dealing with problems and grievances that may arise. I hope that I have answered sufficiently the points that she made.

I come to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) and his articles in *Tribune*. I have to tell him that I preferred him when he was playing cricket for *Tribune* rather than writing his articles. I know that he has probably given up the cricket, but he has not yet given up his articles.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) made an eloquent speech, as we would expect. Like me, he knows Philip Mawer from a long time back. He is right in his assessment of Mr. Mawer's character and qualities. He said that he thought that there should be a long-term commissioner, and no doubt that point will be taken up in the weeks, months and years to come.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) made a positive contribution, which the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) summed up nicely when he said that it related to structural arguments. It was a fine, thoughtful speech, and one that we ought to take into account as we constantly review our proceedings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) made a refreshing speech. It was a minority speech, and it takes a lot to be the only one in step, especially in the House of Commons, but he made powerful arguments. Of course, the public do not think very highly of MPs and their standards, but since 1974 we have been on a par with estate agents. I do not want to disparage estate agents, but we have never quite lifted ourselves from that level.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North, who made an eloquent speech, brought the debate to a close. He has a different element of faith from some of us. He knows that I, a Protestant, have a Catholic wife, and so we go to a Catholic church as well as to a Protestant one. For Philip Mawer to have the full support of Catholics and Protestants, and for him to be nominated on Ash Wednesday, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has said, would be worthy of the House, of the Commission and of Mr. Mawer, and I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That Mr. Philip John Courtney Mawer be appointed Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards on the terms of the Report of the House of Commons Commission, HC 598, dated 6th February.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Ordered,

That Sir Patrick Cormack be appointed a member of the House of Commons Commission under the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Orders of the Day

British Overseas Territories Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Clause 8

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

7.18 pm

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 3, line 28, leave out subsections (2) and (3).

The amendment will be no surprise to the Minister because I raised the substance of it in meetings with him, in several interventions and in my own speech in the course of the Second Reading debate and, more recently, in a parliamentary question. Indeed, I gave notice of it to his Department. The amendment's purpose is very simple: to ensure that there is no delay in implementing the Bill, which Members on both sides of the House greatly welcome, once it has been passed. The central reason for that is to ensure that the people of St. Helena can celebrate their 500th anniversary as the British citizens that they thought they were, at least until 1981.

Nothing in the Bill suggests that citizenship rights must be dependent on the issuing of a passport—indeed, such a suggestion would be absurd because, as I pointed out on Second Reading, passports may confirm but certainly do not confer citizenship. A passport is not and never has been regarded as a prerequisite for citizenship. Even if the Bill is passed without a concession or the amendment being made, many people in St. Helena and the other British overseas territories, just like people in this country, will enjoy their citizenship and the rights that accompany it without ever applying for, possessing, needing or using a passport.

I accept that it would be administratively tidier to resolve the questions surrounding the design, printing and issuing of passports before citizenship is confirmed: those who have long waited to have their rights restored would simply have to wait a little longer. However, there are two important matters that I wish to draw to the attention of the House and especially my hon. Friend the Minister.

The first was raised with me yesterday by the representative in London of the St. Helena Government, and has been raised before by other hon. Members. It relates to those whose work permits will expire between Royal Assent being given to the Bill and the commencement of its provisions. Are we really going to require such people to leave the country to reapply for an extension of their visa and their work permit? I hope that the Minister can give some comfort on that point.

The second issue is of central importance to me and to the people of St. Helena. As I said, this year they celebrate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of the island by the Portuguese. The anniversary falls on 21 May, and the event is of huge significance to the Saints. No people were more affronted or more disadvantaged by the loss of their citizenship rights than the Saints. They believed that they held those rights in perpetuity, not least because of the royal charter conferred on them in the 17th century by Charles II. No people were more delighted by the

[Peter Bradley]

Government's welcome commitment in the White Paper and, subsequently, the Bill to the restoration of their rights.

I cannot imagine that the Government do not recognise the importance of this anniversary to the Saints, nor that the Minister does not acknowledge both the cause for rejoicing that the restoration of their rights would represent, or the dismay that its further delay would cause. I seek an assurance that the administrative difficulties with issuing passports mentioned at various stages of the Bill's passage can be resolved, and that commencement can take place before 21 May. If such an assurance is given, I will be happy to withdraw the amendment. Alternatively, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can provide a different sort of reassurance: that commencement will not be linked to the issuing of passports. In either event, the people of St. Helena and of other British overseas territories, will have their citizenship rights restored before that important date.

The matter may not be of great moment to many people. It may not be of great importance to Foreign Office and Home Office officials in Whitehall, but it is of huge symbolic value to the Saints. I appeal to the Minister to exercise his discretion to ensure that 21 May is a red letter day for the Saints. I urge him not to be a party-pooper but to ensure that 21 May in St. Helena, if not Bradley day, is Bradshaw day—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Well, if creeping will secure the concession, I am only too happy to do it on behalf of the Saints. I hope that he will take the opportunity to give full expression to the intention of legislation for which the Government deserve credit, and which would be the subject of celebration in St. Helena.

Bob Russell (Colchester): I congratulate the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) on his amendment, and on the spirit of the argument that he has expressed this evening. He speaks for everyone with a love for and an association with the island of St. Helena in voicing the dear wish that by 21 May the citizenship of its people will have been restored. That citizenship was removed against their wishes. I endorse the hon. Gentleman's arguments and invite the Minister to assure the House that, come the 500th anniversary celebrations, the people of the island of St. Helena will have had their citizenship restored so that they can celebrate as all of us want them to.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I can imagine almost nothing worse than being labelled a party-pooper, so I hope to be able to say something that will send my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) and the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) away happy.

We appreciate and share hon. Members' desire that the people of St. Helena should be able to celebrate their quincentenary on 21 May as British citizens. Our concern is that the amendment would do more to get in the way of achieving that goal than to achieve it. Were the amendment accepted, it would have consequences for those provisions of the Bill relating to the acquisition of British citizenship after commencement. That would require a further Government amendment to correct, which would delay the Bill's passage.

Let me explain why it is necessary to have a gap, albeit a very small one, between Royal Assent and commencement. It is because many fairly complicated administrative arrangements have to be put in place to allow citizens of British dependent territories, as they are now, to obtain proof of their new status on commencement. As my hon. Friend says, that proof will, in most cases, take the form of a new passport showing their new British status.

To issue passports, we need to make practical arrangements, including agreeing the format with the overseas territories. That has not been easy. Although many in the House have been waiting a long time for the Bill, many in the overseas territories are surprised at the speed with which it has proceeded through Parliament. Some had concerns about the appearance of their passports, and time is needed to train the staff involved.

We have every confidence that the practical arrangements will be in place to allow a commencement date well before St. Helena's quincentenary on 21 May, but—my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin should pay attention to this—in the unlikely event that the passport issuing arrangements are not in place by mid-May, we would make an order specifying 21 May as the commencement date.

The Home Office has been extremely kind and agreed that if we do that, it will make exceptional arrangements to allow immediate exercise of the new rights. Those arrangements would allow those who hold British dependent territory citizenship passports derived from a connection with a territory other than the sovereign bases in Cyprus to use those passports as evidence of the right of abode in this country until such time as a full British citizen passport becomes available to them.

I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that the issue relating to work permits is one for the Home Office. However, I shall take it up with my colleagues in that Department and hope that they will be as flexible in interpreting the law as they have been about accepting BDTC passports in lieu of British citizen passports. In the light of those arrangements, I ask him to withdraw his amendment.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I was listening carefully to the Minister and hoped to intervene before he sat down. Will he deal with the point raised by the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) about the principle that a passport is not needed to establish a person's eligibility for citizenship? The hon. Gentleman made the important point that some people may not need or seek a passport. It would be reassuring to people from St. Helena and the other territories if the Minister put it on the record that, although an expedited procedure for passport acquisition will be put in place, for which we are grateful, the citizenship rights of those who have no passport and do not want to apply for one will be confirmed by 21 May at the latest, or by some earlier date if the procedures are completed. That is the other assurance sought by the hon. Gentleman.

7.30 pm

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes to both of those.

Peter Bradley: There is no need for me to detain the House a great deal longer. I would be the most unpopular person in Westminster if I did, since we are probably going home early tonight.

I pay tribute to the Minister and those who advise him. If government were always so simple and it was always so simple to do the common-sense thing, we would probably all be out of a job. The news will be greeted, I am sure, with great approbation in St. Helena and by those in this country who have supported their cause over many years. This is a very good Bill, whose consideration has reached a happy conclusion in the House. I thank the Minister again, and beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

7.31 pm

Mr. Bradshaw: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I have listened with interest to the points made on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report. Nationality is a fascinating and emotive subject. The Bill may be short, specific and contain few clauses, but the debate surrounding it has opened windows on different aspects of life in territories with close and long-established cultural and traditional links with the United Kingdom, but which are geographically far removed from these shores, and in some cases isolated.

The passage of the Bill will mean that British dependent territories citizens will be full British citizens. They will be able to apply for British passports, to live, study and work in the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Union, and to share the benefits of British citizenship that we all take for granted.

I have noted with pleasure that the Bill commands widespread support in the Chamber, and I am extremely grateful to the many right hon. and hon. Members who have welcomed its introduction and spoken in favour of its speedy and successful passage. I know that for many people in the overseas territories, Royal Assent and commencement cannot, as we have just discussed, come quickly enough. I hope that commencement will be very soon after Royal Assent.

The Bill was first introduced in another place in June last year. It came to this House after thorough and wide-ranging debate, but without amendment. It has provided opportunities for hon. Members to raise a number of issues—not always central to the Bill—about the overseas territories, and in the process it has raised the profile of the territories themselves.

This was always a good Bill, but the amendment in favour of the Ilois, agreed in Committee, means that the Bill leaves us even stronger. I commend it to the House.

7.33 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): We welcome the Bill, as we have throughout its progress through the House. It contains many important and positive aspects, and my party strongly supports its aims.

The legislation is of great importance to the citizens of the 16 British overseas territories, which include Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, British Antarctic Territory, Bermuda, Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, the Pitcairn Islands, St. Helena, the British Indian Ocean Territory, the Chagos Islands and South Georgia. The legislation enjoys their full support and, as always in this House, we should pay great attention to the views of the people directly affected by it. Our relationships with those territories are multi-faceted and valued by all concerned.

Hon. Members will be aware of questions surrounding an airstrip on the island of St. Helena. The issue has been raised on a number of occasions, particularly in another place by the Earl of Iveagh, a constituent of mine. I am glad that it has been aired. In making decisions on such issues, we of course bear in mind the economic development of the area. The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) has sought to raise the profile of the island, and we are all grateful to him for doing so.

The Bill is about granting British citizenship to the citizens of our overseas territories, recognising our partnership with them and giving them proper and accorded status.

I am grateful to the Minister for the clarifications that he has offered on Second Reading and in Committee on various areas of concern. I am pleased that he has clarified the status of abandoned infants under the Bill, making it clear that citizenship granted to an abandoned infant will not be grounds for any parent or guardian who subsequently comes forward to claim it.

I am also grateful to the Minister for clarifying European Union citizenship rules as they relate to the Bill. As I understand his answers, the EU's regulations extend to territories, not to people. Therefore, citizenship regulations would apply only if a British overseas citizen who became a British citizen took up abode in the UK. That is welcome news.

There are still, however, one or two areas that we would note for future reference. One is the question of overseas fees for higher education—a matter that has been brought to the attention of the House before. It is understood how the rules work; it has become something of an EU matter. However, I should like to take this opportunity to say that the such education has a knock-on effect. It impacts on the lives of a number of young people who are able to study in this country and then return home with the knowledge that they have acquired. Such education also establishes great links with this country and most particularly benefits students' respective homelands.

The education of such young people is a tremendous investment, not only for those involved but in establishing the affection and ties that inevitably arise when part of one's education is in this country. We must continue to bear that in mind and to monitor it.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman will know that there is widespread support for that point of view. Many of us who represent universities and others hope that the necessary cross-departmental efforts can bring about the change that he has advocated and that many of us want. That will be very important and another sign of our support for the next generation of people in overseas territories.

Mr. Spring: I endorse the hon. Gentleman's message, which I am sure the Minister will have taken on board.

I am pleased that EU citizenship regulations, as they relate to the Bill, have been clarified. The relationship of the overseas territories with the EU and general nationality rules continue to be important. I truly hope that the Government will keep a wary eye on that.

[Mr. Spring]

I reiterate my party's full support for the amendments made in Committee, as I did during those proceedings. I once again pay tribute to the hon. Members for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for raising the issue of the Chagos islanders. The injustice was insufficiently recognised in the House, and hon. Members will be grateful to both hon. Gentlemen for drawing the matter to their attention in a compelling way. I hope very much that the right of return of the islanders, as recognised in a recent High Court case, will be clarified further and that the process will be taken on accordingly.

Overall, this is a very important, welcome and much supported Bill. It works towards a partnership, as the White Paper desired, and demonstrates our commitment to the citizens of British overseas territories, wherever they may be. Once again, I commend the work that has been done on the Bill and the Minister's courtesy while navigating its passage through the House and clarifying its clauses. We fully support the Bill's objectives and welcome its Third Reading.

7.38 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I thank the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) for his kind remarks about the Chagos islanders and the way that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and I have raised the matter in the House. I understand that the Minister is suffering some discomfort, so I shall be as brief as possible. So that he can get away, I shall not ask any complicated questions.

I enjoyed serving on the Committee that considered the Bill. I am particularly grateful to the Minister for sending me a lengthy and full answer to my interminable questions on the role of Antarctica in the Bill. Particularly since nobody lives there, it was very helpful of him to discuss at some length the possible citizenship of people who might at some point live there—apart from if they are in some terrible Channel 4 programme and are stuck there. That could be a good idea. I am grateful to the Minister for that. I am not sure that I wholly agree with him on the Antarctic, but I promise not to discuss it further this evening, save to say that I have a whole box of papers on Antarctica from the time that I have been in the House. The former right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and I raised the matter during consideration of the Antarctic Minerals Bill and at other times.

I agree with the hon. Member for West Suffolk about the right of access to further and higher education in this country for overseas citizens. I do not pretend that there is any simple, logical answer, but some way should be found for us to ensure that people who, after all, will be given British citizenship as soon as the Bill is enacted, should have access to higher education institutions in Britain. That seems proper and sensible, and I hope that some means can be found to achieve it.

I welcome the amendments that the Minister moved in Committee—I subsequently withdrew mine—concerning the British Indian Ocean Territories, the Ilois people and their right of access to citizenship. As my hon. Friend well understands, there is a good deal of resentment among the Ilois people about the way in which they were removed from the islands by secret interstate negotiations in the 1960s and 1970s, and deposited on Mauritius or, in the case of some, on the Seychelles, given minimum compensation and forgotten about.

Once again, we should reiterate our thanks to Olivier Bancoult and all who have campaigned so successfully and so well for so long, culminating finally in a successful High Court action which allowed the Ilois the right of return to the Chagos islands. That is an important step forward and has been warmly welcomed.

However, I ask the Minister to bear in mind that the right of return has been authorised by the High Court in this country. There is the possibility of a class action being taken in the United States on behalf of those who were moved from Diego Garcia, which is currently a US base, and that to date no Chagosians have been allowed to return to the islands. I understand that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is sponsoring an environmental impact study and a study of the economic viability of a return to the islands. We look forward to the results of those studies.

Just before Christmas, I took part in a lengthy and useful meeting with Baroness Amos in the Foreign Office with Olivier Bancoult, Richard Gifford, his solicitor, and a small delegation. We discussed all these issues. It is strange that the Chagos islanders—the Ilois people—are not allowed to return to the islands, yet I understand that the British Indian Ocean Territories police do nothing about passing millionaire yachtsmen drawing up their yachts alongside the outer islands of the archipelago and staying there for a considerable time without being told to move on.

Any Chagos islander trying to go back gets stopped by fishery protection vessels on their way to the islands. There seems to be something wrong there. *[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon) says, there could be a bit of class politics going on. Although such notions are not supposed to be popular among those on the Government Benches, some of us still understand them—*[Interruption.]*—and even practise them.

I do not ask the Minister to respond immediately, but I hope that he will look into the matter. Will he also assure me that when the assessments are complete and we have a meeting with Baroness Amos in April, when Olivier Bancoult is returning to the UK, we will be able to discuss the practicalities of returning to the archipelago as a whole, the support that will be given to the community to do that, the employment practices of the United States on the base, and importantly, the opportunity for the islanders to visit the islands, to visit their burial sites and their ancestral homes, and to see the place from which their parents and grandparents were so brutally plucked away in the 1970s?

I hope that my hon. Friend can ensure that the British Indian Ocean Territories authority will arrange for that return to take place, initially as a visit, and that when we finally have our meeting in April with Baroness Amos, which I hope to attend, we can explore the practicalities of return.

My final point relates to the islanders themselves. Had they remained on the Chagos islands, had Diego Garcia never become a base, and had the cold war never happened, the islanders would have had an elected authority of some sort. They would now be residents of those islands and they would be receiving passports, just like the people of St. Helena and all the other places. The Chagos islanders were plucked away, so the Bill had to be specially amended in Committee, and I am grateful to the Minister for that enormous step forward.

Had the Ilois people remained on the Chagos islands, their elected authority would have been supported by public funds, as is the case in all the other territories. Apart from the minimal compensation given to the Ilois on settlement in Mauritius, they have received no support whatever. We should be grateful to the Mauritius Government for the support that they have given, but the Ilois have lived in poverty. For Olivier to come to this country, they must arrange a collection among the community to buy him an air ticket so that he can negotiate with the British Government on behalf of his people. I hope that when we meet in April, there will be some recognition of the need for practical support for the community, and in addition, for pensions for the older members of the community, and access to further and higher education—primary education is provided by the Government of Mauritius.

I welcome what has been achieved so far. It has been a great step forward, but we are not quite there yet. A ghastly injustice happened. It has not yet been put right. The Americans are not allowing Chagos islanders to work on the base. The British Indian Ocean Territories police are not allowing them to return to the islands, and the impact assessment seems to be taking rather a long time.

I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and I are well seized of the matter and have no plans to let it go. We will keep on raising it in the House. We recognise the importance of what has happened, but there is a way to go. Justice will finally happen when the Chagos islanders can make a genuine choice to continue living in Mauritius or the Seychelles or to return to their ancestral homes, with the right to see the graves of their ancestors and the place from which they were so brutally taken away. A horrible injustice happened; let us put it right.

7.47 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I reiterate my support for the Bill. Its passage through the House has been refreshingly free of party political sniping. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends and I would have liked to see the measure passed when we were in government. I congratulate the Minister and the Government on introducing it.

I agree that there is a need to get the measure into law as expeditiously as possible. I welcome the Minister's comments to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) about finding a way to finesse the important matter to the islanders of St. Helena of their anniversary and the generous gesture that has been made.

I have one or two regrets about the Bill. We have heard about higher education opportunities for people on some of the territories. I should have preferred it if we could have made statutory provision for that in the Bill. We raised the matter in Committee, but it is not to be. It is clear that the Government will not move on that. I know that in various Departments the Government have schemes to help the overseas territories where there are special training requirements or where special expertise is needed.

I ask the Government to be sympathetic with regard to further and higher education. There is no reasonable prospect of very many islanders from around the world being able to afford the residence that would be necessary and the cost of higher education. I hope that the Government will keep a special place in their mind to ensure that there is a steady flow of well-educated younger people coming from and going back to the territories.

I was interested to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) about the ship and the airport. I believe that the St. Helenians and others who are interested in the matter—the Falkland islanders, the Ascension islanders and even those on the ship—recently had a vote, which came out decisively in favour of building an airport on St. Helena. There are arguments for and against that. One can appreciate the problems of an airport, including its cost and the expense of replacing the boat.

However, the islanders and those associated with the islands have expressed a clear, democratic view that they want to take what many must perceive as a risk. I hope that the Department for International Development and other partners in the project will give it a clear run. The circumstances of the islanders, especially those on St. Helena, are unusual. If they want an airport, I hope that the Government can ensure that they get it.

I regret that it was not proper to discuss British overseas citizenship in the context of the Bill. It is purely a coincidence that I wrote to the Minister yesterday about a constituency case of a British overseas citizen in Tanzania. She was given, probably mistakenly, a full British passport 10 years ago. When she tried to renew it, she was told that she should not have had it in the first place. However, for 10 years, she was sure that she was a full British citizen, and she believed that her children would also have that status. I ask the Minister to consider the letter carefully because the status of British overseas citizens remains unsatisfactory. We may have to revert to the matter on another occasion. When our authorities have made errors, sympathy should be shown to those who have been misled for some time.

My greatest regret is that we have failed to make progress on establishing an annual report to the House on the subject. The Minister rightly pointed out that several extraneous debates took place around the Bill. That happened because many hon. Members are interested in the subject, but it is rarely discussed in the Chamber. The Minister said that we cannot have an annual report or debate. However, he also said that the Overseas Territories Consultative Council meets annually in London in the autumn, and that the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs can consider the overseas territories. Perhaps it could schedule an annual discussion. The Government might wish to invite somebody from the Committee to the Overseas Territories Consultative Council; perhaps hon. Members could be involved in the meeting. If the Minister asked me, I should be delighted to attend this year.

There is frustration that we do not have sufficient opportunity to discuss such important issues except during short Adjournment debates. I ask the Minister and the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee to consider whether a regular event could be held.

Simon Hughes: I support that idea. Although there may be some obligation on the Government, I hope that the parties collaborate to facilitate a regular annual debate.

[Simon Hughes]

Other subjects have set a precedent, which we could usefully follow. Pressure on the Government should be maintained.

Mr. Trend: That was a helpful intervention. There is a problem of democratic deficit. The Government have made laws and are writing constitutions for some territories, which have no direct representation here. That problem will not go away. It will be exacerbated if the Government have other ambitions to make laws in those territories. For the sake of everyone's sanity, I therefore recommend a regular occasion for considering such matters. A problem could thus be perceived when it appeared on the horizon rather than when it got closer.

I thank the Minister, especially for the many letters that he has written and the explanations that he has given. I am particularly grateful for a recent letter about Cyprus. I probed the matter delicately in Committee, and he provided a full explanation. I am now an expert on the way in which British citizenship relates to Cyprus, and the circumstances of our treaty. I am sure that that also applies to him. I am also grateful to those in his office who have spoken to me about the complicated circumstances on Pitcairn. I hope to be kept in touch with events there as they unfold.

I congratulate the Father of the House and the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) who have done so much for Chagos islanders. I acknowledge that the Government have taken an important step forward with grace and style. That is a good development.

I wish the Bill and our new citizens well. They may not be full citizens, as some of us would like, but they are British citizens and they will have passports like the rest of us. That development, long overdue, will be welcome in all the territories. I hope that the Bill is passed.

7.56 pm

Bob Russell: Liberal Democrats welcome the progress that the Bill has made; it is on its final stretch. I thank the civil servants and Ministers who have been involved in the journey from the start.

The reasons for introducing the Bill have not been mentioned this evening. It should be put on record that a grave injustice was done 20 to 21 years ago. It is to the Government's credit that they are righting that wrong. The importance of 21 May for St. Helena has already been mentioned. However, resolving citizenship problems as soon as possible is important for all the overseas territories for the reasons that have been given. We are considering 200,000 people. That is not a large number in the grand scheme of things.

I want to concentrate on St. Helena because it introduced me to the subject that we are considering. Shortly after the 1997 general election, I received a letter from a constituent who drew my attention to the injustice that had been inflicted on that island and the other territories. That led to my visiting St. Helena. There is a connection between the island and my constituency because St. Helena is the patron saint of Colchester; I was educated at St. Helena school. The spelling is the same as that of the island, but the pronunciation is different. Many Saints who reside in the United Kingdom will welcome the Bill. I am sure that we all know Mr. Calvin Thomas, one of our Doorkeepers. He is one Saint who will be delighted that progress has been made.

More people per head of population on St. Helena volunteer for Her Majesty's armed forces than anywhere else that is connected with the United Kingdom. We have responsibility for the territories, but they have no elected representation here. When we examine constitutional reform, perhaps we could consider a way in which all overseas territories can have an input into the democratic process here.

St. Helena has a slogan: ACE—"A" for access, "C" for citizenship and "E" for economy and education. Tonight we are moving firmly towards putting a tick against the "C" for citizenship. Reference has been made to education, but the economy of the island needs more than just education; it needs further sustainable help.

That brings me to the "A" for access. Although this is not dealt with in the Bill, the island's future depends on access. I have had the joy of visiting it, but it took a week to get there. It was an enjoyable trip, but the island cannot fulfil its economic destiny if the only access to it is by means of a week's journey by boat; an airfield is required.

This is a joyous evening, and I congratulate the Minister and his team. If he can deliver these provisions by 21 May, there may well be a statue of him in Jamestown in the future.

8 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I reiterate the comments of many hon. Members in congratulating the Government on introducing the Bill. It is long overdue, and I regret the fact that these measures were not introduced by the Conservative Government. All British people should be given equal rights, and be treated in exactly the same way, whoever they are and wherever in the world they may live. I believe that everybody in this democratically elected House of Commons should support that view.

I commend the Government on taking this great step towards giving the people of the overseas territories the right to British citizenship that has been denied them for so long. The Minister talked about many of the overseas territories being geographically far away from the British isles. That is true in many cases. They are not far away, however, in terms of their desire to be British or of their determination to have the same status that we and our constituents enjoy. So, while I congratulate the Government—as everyone has done tonight—I believe that that is a matter to which greater consideration should be given.

My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) said that there was a democratic deficit, and that is absolutely true. We should all be concerned about that problem; it involves British people whom we in this Parliament govern. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who is not here tonight, spoke in the debate in Westminster Hall last week on Gibraltar. He said that the Prime Minister of Gibraltar was Tony Blair. He also said that the Chancellor of the Exchequer of Gibraltar was Gordon Brown, and that its Defence Secretary was Geoff Hoon—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman is now moving outside the scope of the Bill. This is a Third Reading debate and he must confine his remarks to the contents of the Bill before the House.

Mr. Rosindell: I shall certainly do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Although we are all congratulating the Government on introducing the Bill, we must look beyond it. We have to consider the other people for whom we have responsibility—the people of the British overseas territories—and I hope that the Minister will take on board the points that I have made.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) on his steadfast defence of the people of St. Helena. I also congratulate all those who have spoken up for the rights of the people of the British Indian Ocean Territory, and I am delighted that their rights were acknowledged in Committee. This is a huge step in the right direction. I commend the Government on what they are proposing to do at this stage, but I ask them to look at this issue in the longer term, to consider the points made about democratic representation, and to give all British people of the overseas territories the same rights that we enjoy in the British isles. My hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) suggested on Second Reading that these matters could also be considered in discussions relating to the constitutional reform of the House of Lords, and I hope that the Government will take that point on board.

8.5 pm

Mr. Bradshaw: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Please forgive me if I rattle through my speech somewhat. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) pointed out that I was feeling a bit under the weather, and I am hoping to get through this before I have to rush out. I shall try to do so without hurrying too much.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have participated in the debate. As ever, it has been excellent, and I am particularly grateful for the constructive and courteous approach adopted by the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) throughout the Bill's passage through the House. He raised a number of issues that have been raised before in Committee and elsewhere. On higher education—an issue raised by a number of hon. Members—we have a great deal of sympathy with the citizens of the overseas territories who will become British citizens under the Bill. I can only repeat that the Bill deals with citizenship, not residency. Rights and access to higher education, and help with higher education funding in this country, are dependent on residency, not on citizenship.

That does not mean, however, that the Government are not looking at new ways in which we could help, particularly in the case of some of the more remote territories that have no higher education facilities. Some such schemes are already in operation, and I remind hon. Members that a review of higher education funding is currently going on in Government, to which I hope they will contribute, making the points they have made here tonight.

I should like to associate myself with the comments of the hon. Member for West Suffolk and other hon. Members on the Ilois. That brings me to the role played by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North throughout the passage of the Bill; he has made an outstanding contribution. He is right to say that a terrible wrong was meted out to the Ilois people, and, step by step, we are putting that right. Certainly, as long as I am in this job, I shall continue to listen very sympathetically to any representations that he makes that are similar to those he made this evening. I hope that he will take up the issues directly in a meeting that he is having with my noble Friend who leads on the matter of the overseas territories in the other place, Baroness Amos.

My hon. Friend's question about the yacht intrigued me, so I asked my officials for advice. Apparently, there is nothing to stop anyone from returning to the outer islands. It is just that, at the moment, the Ilois want us to do it for them; they want us to organise a resettlement package. So, in theory, in the unlikely event of an Ilois having the money, they could hop on to one of these yachts and go back. There is no law against people arriving on the outer islands.

Jeremy Corbyn: A bit of hitch-hiking, perhaps.

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes, I suspect that that is something that both of us did in our younger days—if not still, when I occasionally find myself stranded in strange parts of the world.

The hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) touched on the issue of higher education, and I hope that what I have said will encourage him. I was asked why there was no statutory provision written into the Bill, and I have explained that that is because the Bill is about citizenship, and not about residency, which is what confers rights to higher education funding. The hon. Gentleman also spoke about St. Helena's access problems. He will be aware that the Department for International Development has agreed to fund the lower amount already, and it is discussing helpfully and sympathetically with the St. Helena Government how the difference can be made up between the cost of the airport and the new ship. I promise to give close attention to the letter that the hon. Gentleman has written to me on British overseas citizens, although that subject was outside the scope of the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Members for Colchester (Bob Russell) and for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) expressed their disquiet that the citizens of the overseas territories do not have political representation. They do, however, have such representation in that a lot of them have quite a high level of self-governance. I would suggest that they also have indirect political representation in this House and in the other place. The total population of the overseas territories is about 200,000—less than twice the population of my constituency. Given the time that the two Houses spend debating the overseas territories—quite rightly—and the time Members dedicate to championing the cause of those territories, I think they are better represented than many of our constituencies.

Mr. Rosindell: I understand that there is a proposal for Western Isles, with a population of 21,000, to retain its single Member of Parliament. Gibraltar has a population of 29,000.

Mr. Bradshaw: As Western Isles is part of the United Kingdom, there is a substantial difference.

One or two Members pointed out that a review was currently being conducted of second-stage reform of the House of Lords. I urge Members, through their parties or through the usual channels, to make their feelings known about how the overseas territories might be represented in that way; but the suggestion that they are under-represented is, I think, a long way from the truth.

The hon. Member for Colchester picked up a point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley), which I did not catch, about statues. I hope there was no suggestion that—given the small role I have played in the Bill's passage—there should be a statue of me. Many others have been involved, not least Lady Amos, the lead Minister on these matters, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who was responsible for the White Paper in which the Bill had its beginnings. My right hon. Friend still shows a great interest in the Bill, and he was extremely helpful in securing the Ilois amendments. Many people, not least in the House of Commons, do a great job in championing the causes of the overseas territories, and would be far worthier subjects of any statues, wherever they might be erected.

I thank hon. Members for supporting a Bill that means so much to so many. In particular I thank my officials, who have done an excellent job in getting the Bill through so smoothly and responding to Members' queries about its details. Those officials will consider what more needs to be done in the light of today's debate. In the meantime, I am delighted that we have agreed that the Bill can be returned to another place for final approval.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

DEREGULATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I propose to put together the Questions on the deregulation motions.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 18(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

RESTAURANT LICENSING HOURS

That the draft Deregulation (Restaurant Licensing Hours) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 24th January, be approved.

GAMING

That the draft Deregulation (Bingo and Other Gaming) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

FRAUD

That this House takes note of European Union Documents Nos. 9208/01, Protecting the Communities' Financial Interests—the fight against fraud: Commission's Twelfth Annual Report 2000, 9207/01, Protecting the Communities' Financial Interests—Fight Against Fraud: Action Plan for 2001–2003, and the Court of Auditors' annual report for 2000; and encourages the Government's continuing efforts to promote and support measures to improve financial management and reduce the opportunities for fraud against the EC financial interest.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS

That the draft Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

PARISH COUNCILS

Ordered,

That the Parish Councils (Model Code of Conduct) (England) Order 2001, (S.I., 2001, No. 3576), dated 5th November 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 6th November 2001, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Community Football

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

8.13 pm

Colin Burgon (Elmet): I am happy to have secured a debate on a subject that is of such interest to me and, I hope, to millions of other people.

As a keen student of American politics, I know that the Gettysburg address lasted two and a half minutes. I think that my address will last slightly longer, and I hope that it will buy me a place in history.

Let me begin by quoting what Nelson Mandela said to Leeds United footballer Lucas Radebe when they met in South Africa:

> "We can reach far more people through sport than we can through political or educational programmes. In that way, sport is more powerful than politics. We have only just begun to use its potential to build up this country. We must continue to do so."

That is a powerful statement with important implications, and it sets my agenda for this evening. The context of the statement is very pertinent, and I will return to it later.

As recently as 30 January my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) initiated a wide-ranging and informative debate in Westminster Hall on football club funding. Tonight, I want to concentrate on football in the community, and although this debate will be less wide ranging I hope it will be at least as informative.

Let me praise the role of the Football Foundation, launched in July 2000 under the excellent chairmanship of Lord Pendry. It is a unique partnership, consisting of the Football Association, the premier league, Sport England and the Government. Its aims include establishing a new generation of modern football facilities in parks, local leagues and schools, the provision of capital and revenue support for the running of "grass-roots" football, and strengthening the links between football and the community to harness the potential of football as a force for good in society. Football is seen as a means by which we can achieve social cohesion, and as a vehicle for education in the community throughout the country. That is the aspect that I want to discuss.

Professional football clubs today are big business. I first started attending games with my father in the late 1950s—I hope I am not giving my age away—and I have witnessed at first hand the tremendous changes, not all of them positive, that have taken place. In those days, clubs were run by a prominent local business man, with the emphasis on "local". When I first went to matches, the chairman of Leeds United was a man called Harry Reynolds, a scrap-metal merchant who made urgent half-time appeals to people not to throw their lighted cigarette ends into the straw piled on the edge of the pitch to protect the playing surface from frost. Today we have under-soil heating to protect the pitch. That small detail encapsulates the way in which clubs have been transformed.

Make no mistake: clubs have indeed been transformed. The main stakeholders are the shareholders, and the bigger the individual shareholding, the bigger the influence. That is a reflection of the world of modern business. Football clubs, however, are a very special kind of business. The stakeholders include the supporters, who feel that such clubs are truly their clubs, and the wider community, who identify with their local football clubs. In that sense football is a business, but it is certainly unique.

It would be hard to argue with the view that there is almost a perfect word association between the cities and towns of our country and their football clubs. It is impossible to think of one without picturing the other. Who could think of Colchester without thinking of Colchester United?

The world of football is a world of excitement. It is a magnet for young people who hold their favourite clubs and football heroes in great esteem. The question now asked by a growing number of professional clubs is how that power can be harnessed and used to the benefit of the community. I am very pleased that my home-city club, Leeds United, is at the forefront of that move.

As long ago as 1998 the Leeds United chairman Peter Ridsdale—a man of vision and energy—and his board of directors made a commitment that, while planning to make Leeds one of the top clubs in Europe, they would also work to make a similar impact in the area of community development. As a result, Community United was launched. Resources were put into the club. I am now informed that they are running at £750,000 a year, which attracts additional funding from both the public and the private sectors.

After four years of effort, and thanks to the imagination and commitment of Emma Stanford, the head of community affairs, the community department has 30 full-time staff, 35 part-time staff and more than 100 volunteers. By my reading, that makes it the biggest community football team in the country. Interestingly, the department is bigger than Leeds United's commercial department.

The work of Community United can be divided roughly into three areas: football in the community, community affairs and education and learning. The first area, football in the community, revolves principally around grass-roots football coaching for girls and boys of all abilities from the ages of five to 14. I am pleased that provision is also made for children with disabilities in the ability counts programme.

Almost 50,000 children are involved in the coaching programme, with the emphasis, I am pleased to say, on enjoyment as much as skill. Rewards are based on attitude and improvement rather than talent; in that sense, I would be a gifted pupil.

The second area covers community affairs—it is truly wide ranging. It encompasses such things as the fans forum, which attempts to give the ordinary fan real influence in elements of the way in which the club operates; the organising of creche and playgroups; and support for various charities.

The club has, for example, supported the well known St. Gemma's hospice in Leeds. It has worked with the Royal National Institute for the Blind to produce a pioneering large print programme, and it is currently working closely with Macmillan Cancer Relief on a badge appeal. Leeds United has donated £7,000 to produce 50,000 replica blue away kit shirt lapel badges. So far, more than 33,000 badges have been distributed, and at a cost of £1 they will give Macmillan Cancer Relief a significant financial boost. That hands-on approach to

[Colin Burgon]

supporting charities extends beyond the domestic front. For example, the club gives financial assistance to a children's AIDS orphanage in Malawi.

Carrying on the international theme, it is a source of pride at the club that when the British Council organised a one-day seminar as part of its football nation initiative in South Africa's soccer expo in Johannesburg, it chose Leeds United to make the presentation. Emma Stanford and Steve Smith, the club's education manager, were asked to explain how the education programme runs at Elland Road and to investigate the practicalities of South African clubs launching similar schemes. It was at that time that the comments I quoted earlier from Nelson Mandela were made to Leeds United and South Africa captain Lucas Radebe, whose life was partly lived in Soweto, under the shadow of apartheid.

Lucas Radebe has been centrally involved with the Leeds United against racism campaign. Along with fellow players such as Olivier Dacourt, Mark Viduka and Rio Ferdinand, he has visited schools to talk about the need to combat racism. In the past few weeks, certificates have been presented, in partnership with the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, to several primary schools in the south Leeds area for raising awareness of racism. The Leeds United against racism campaign has recently distributed 30,000 team photos to school children throughout the city and surrounding areas.

As stated in a recent match programme, the club is conscious that working alone it cannot get rid of racism—a problem that faces the whole of society. However, the club has made it clear that it will do whatever is in its power to combat racism.

That intent is particularly significant in the case of a club such as Leeds, which in the past has been bedevilled by the problem of racist groups attaching themselves to the club and tarnishing its image and, indeed, that of the city. I remember when a black goalkeeper playing for Manchester City—the Minister will probably remember him—was bombarded by the crowd with bananas. The response of the management at that time was to say, "It is just high spirits. There is nothing in it." I also saw the crowd at Elland Road endlessly bait Justin Fashanu, who played for Norwich City and who is unfortunately now dead. It was enough to turn my stomach. It was probably the only time in my life that I have cheered when an opponent, Justin Fashanu, put the ball in the back of the Leeds United net. Progress has been made.

The third area of Community United's work is education and learning. As an ex-school teacher, I am particularly interested in that aspect. I have visited the learning centre at Elland Road with Emma Stanford to see at first hand the type of work in which Steve Smith and his colleagues are engaged. Their work encompasses all the 23 primary schools and four high schools in what is called the local family of schools. It is worth noting that some 47 clubs from the premier league and Nationwide division one are involved in the playing for success programme and that Leeds was one of the three original pilots, along with Newcastle United and the Minister's second favourite team, Sheffield Wednesday.

The playing for success initiative established by the Department for Education and Skills has proved very popular with pupils, parents and schools, and nowhere more so than at Leeds United. Great work has been done in the learning centre, which is based beneath the south stand and occupies an area the full width of the football pitch. The staff at the learning centre set themselves five objectives: to raise pupil achievement; to develop pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology; to develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem; to increase pupil motivation; and to develop positive links with parents. By any subjective or objective measure, the staff are achieving real progress.

The parental feedback collected by the learning centre revealed that all parents were very pleased that their child had attended the Leeds United study support centre. The vast majority—more than 95 per cent.—agreed that the centre had helped their child to get better at reading, writing, maths and computer use. Many identified the fact that their child was more willing to go to school and had a wider circle of friends, and some believed that their child had a better chance of getting a job when they left school as a result. About 70 per cent. of parents commented that their child's confidence had also increased.

The feedback from pupils was also very positive. The playing for success sessions operated outside school hours each evening from 3.30 to 7.30 and on Saturday mornings. On top of that, children spent up to an extra hour and a half travelling to and from the centre in all weathers. To bear testimony to the popularity of the project, an impressive 40 per cent. of pupils received 100 per cent. attendance awards. The vast majority of pupils recognised that they had developed their skills in literacy, numeracy and particularly ICT. Attitudes to learning had become more positive and their confidence had increased. The only doubt that pupils seemed to have was about the quality of the orange juice on offer.

The evaluation done by the National Foundation for Educational Research also makes very positive reading. Its findings at national level can be applied to the success achieved by the Leeds United learning centre. The first key finding of the NFER report was that pupils made substantial and significant progress in numeracy. On average, primary pupils improved their numeracy scores by about 21 months, and secondary pupils improved theirs by about eight months. Secondary pupils' reading comprehension scores improved significantly—by the equivalent of about six months. Teachers also noticed particular improvements in pupils' self-confidence and ICT skills.

To underpin all those findings, the report said:

> "The football setting proved attractive to all pupils, regardless of gender and ethnic background. It was a strong element in motivating pupils to become involved in 'Playing for Success'."

That is further proof of the power and far-reaching influence of our national game and the way in which it has been harnessed to achieve positive outcomes for the community.

In drawing my remarks to a conclusion, I would be copping out—to use a Yorkshire phrase—if I failed to mention the Bowyer-Woodgate case that has generated such negative publicity for Leeds United. I agree with the comments recently made by chairman Peter Ridsdale in a match programme. He said that, due to the case

> "There has been a shadow cast over all the good work we have done . . . substantial damage has been done to the club's reputation."

Peter Ridsdale is a man with both his feet firmly on the ground. He is intelligent and perceptive enough to acknowledge the gravity of the case and its wide-ranging repercussions.

In acknowledging and highlighting the work done in the community by Leeds United football club, I hope that I can help to ensure a balanced, accurate and informed debate about the part played by football clubs and players in the community. I look forward to my right hon. Friend the Minister reaffirming his support for the Football Foundation and its valuable work in promoting football in the community, and recognising the work of Leeds United in the community. In many respects, it is a leader in this field. It is also an example to other large companies and organisations of the need to get involved in their communities.

Finally, will my right hon. Friend also use his considerable influence in discussions with the football authorities and the Professional Footballers Association to raise the issue of highly paid players acknowledging in their contracts the need to help develop football in the community? It is only right and proper that clubs and players recognise the debt that they owe to the community that in turn supports them.

8.29 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon) for bringing this matter to the House's attention this evening. It is nice to be able to respond to a debate about Leeds United in a positive way. It is good to hear about what might be called the other side of the coin with regard to the club, and to hear the argument put so forcefully by my hon. Friend. I know that he has followed football, and Leeds United for many years. He has been deeply involved in the development of the role of the club that he has described this evening.

I also wish to put on record my support for the Football Foundation and its work. I had a meeting last night with Lord Pendry and P[illegible] Lee, the chief executive of the Football Foundation, who are doing a fine job. Having laid the foundations of their work in their first 12 months in post, they are now really developing matters. I was with the Football Foundation in the north-east a couple of weeks ago, looking for ways to develop further the area's football heritage among amateur clubs.

I am also pleased that my hon. Friend mentioned Emma Stanford and Steve Smith. I spoke to them about community development at Leeds United, and credit is due to them for their vision and hard work in that respect. I am pleased that their efforts have been brought to the House's attention.

There is no doubt that certain players have brought the sport into disrepute. I do not want to discuss that in detail this evening. The House is well aware that the behaviour of a few players, on and off the pitch, is a matter for the clubs that employ them and for the sport's governing bodies.

I have made my concerns about recent developments clear to the football authorities. I still have those concerns, but I know that the football authorities are taking action. The legislation that was put onto the statute book a little while ago is helping them to deal with what I hope will be isolated incidents. I want us to get back to where we used to be with football. I believe that the sport was developing a good corporate governance which, as my hon. Friend noted, involved fans and community in a very positive way.

I was glad to hear about the efforts of some players to redeem the reputation of the Leeds United club in the local community. Those efforts have included real commitment to playing for success, which established out-of-school-hours study support centres at football clubs and other sports grounds. As my hon. Friend said, the Leeds United club deserves commendation, as it was one of the pioneers in setting up the original playing for success project. Moreover, the club's own learning centre has justly been praised.

The centres use the sporting environment as a motivational tool to raise standards of literacy, numeracy and computer skills among children who are struggling at school and who may lack motivation. Centres are located at clubs and are staffed by experienced teachers, supported by students in further and higher education. That is to be welcomed, as the linkages between the various institutions involved and the clubs are very important.

The centres usually have a first-class IT centre, generally sponsored by local business. I have seen many examples as I have gone around the country. Real enthusiasm exists, as is evident in the sponsorship—financial and sometimes material—provided by local businesses, and in the involvement of companies in the community. That involvement also reaps reciprocal benefits for those businesses.

I have been delighted with the progress of the initiative and would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all those involved with the development of this programme, both in Government and in the community sector. More than 25,000 pupils have benefited so far, and a further 25,000 will also benefit each year when all the proposed centres are opened.

Many centres are also opening during the school day, and are helping adult learning. In that way, they support other initiatives such as Learn Direct and the new deal. As my hon. Friend said, 57 football and other sports clubs have signed up to the full PFS model, and 43 have opened other centres. A further 13 clubs are involved in developing other innovative ways of linking education and sport under the PFS banner.

National evaluations of playing for success have found improvements in literacy and numeracy, ICT skills and motivation to learn. That is happening in some of the more difficult areas around the country, as that is where the centres are located. Indeed, the evaluation carried out in 2001 found significant gains in pupil performance, including numeracy scores improving by an average of 21 months. That is a staggering improvement when we consider that the young people going to these centres think that they are no-hopers.

The evaluation also found that the scheme reached its target group of under-achieving pupils, and that all benefited regardless of gender, deprivation, ethnicity, fluency in English or special needs. A third-year evaluation is shortly to be completed and early indications predict similar significant gains.

Football does a great deal of excellent work, but it is not the only sport that appreciates its important role in community development. I am also aware of many initiatives developed by the regional administrators of

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

sports such as cricket, rugby league and rugby union. In my city of Sheffield, basketball has also taken up the challenge. These initiatives, which are often developed independently of Government programmes, have incorporated the Government's message that sport and recreational activities can make a significant difference and a major contribution to neighbourhood renewal. They can bring about real improvement in a range of areas, including health, employment, education and the reduction of crime.

These sports do not always get football's publicity, so I shall say a few words about some that play a tremendous role in our communities. I have been impressed by the initiatives that have been supported by the English rugby league. The diversity and quality of some these initiatives are, in no small measure, a consequence of the location of many clubs in areas of considerable ethnic diversity and social and economic deprivation. I commend these clubs and the sport of English rugby league as a whole on their initiative and professionalism in embracing their communities in this way.

Most rugby league clubs run thriving community schemes. In Bradford, which is very near my hon. Friend's constituency, the Bradford Bulls are an excellent example of what rugby league is doing. The Bulls visit more than 100 schools each year to deliver assemblies, road shows and coaching programmes, with initiatives tackling drug awareness and racism in sport. That is a considerable achievement. As a further development, the club has set up the Bull study centre. Assisted by Bradford local education authority, the centre encourages young people to absorb positive lifestyle messages and develop self-esteem and confidence in a sporting environment.

The Bulls are involved in many other community programmes, and their success must be attributed to the club's partnership with my colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills. There is also considerable involvement with local government, private enterprise and the private sector.

Cricket is another widely supported team sport through which clubs have acknowledged their role in community development. I have been pleased to learn of the organisations for cricket played by disabled people. There are two independent organisations representing disabled cricket—the Cricket Federation for People with Disabilities and the British Association for Cricketers with Disabilities—and they are working together to develop disabled people's position in the sport.

The England and Wales Cricket Board has a disability subgroup which is charged with meeting the needs of disabled people who wish to play cricket. The subgroup is a partnership between the board and the two disability organisations, the British Deaf Sports Council and British Blind Sport. Developments taking place through the national governing body are already paying dividends. The Somerset Disabled Cricket Club, for example, is an integral part of the county set-up. The club competes effectively in the disabled county championship and works in partnership with Leonard Cheshire, the leading United Kingdom charity providing services for disabled people, now in 51 countries around the world.

Another of sport's governing bodies, the Welsh rugby union, has also embraced initiatives that invest in the community that it serves. That has been going on since 1992 through the Dragons rugby trust whose initial programme was designed to support the development of rugby union in Wales.

The trust's programme is not elitist. It aims to promote excellence as a by-product of the widest possible participation of young people in Wales. The trust attracts sponsorship from the private sector as well as support from the International Rugby Board. It also seeks to promote the more intangible facets of community involvement—building on the feelings of inclusion and enthusiasm felt by many young people in Wales when watching their national game. The personal development of young people through sport is an important aim of the trust.

The trust aims to increase the number of Dragon development officers to one per unitary authority, and to support that work through the appointment of community development officers, funded jointly by the public, private and voluntary sectors. Another important objective is to expand provision for girls and for youngsters with learning and other disabilities. Although they are enthusiastic about rugby, they sometimes find few opportunities to participate in the game. The trust is working hard to achieve social inclusion through rugby union in Wales.

Considerable work is going on throughout the country to address through the medium of sport some of the difficult problems as regards social inclusion, drugs awareness and, to some extent, health and education. My hon. Friend has been able to bring to the attention of the House the positive role that football is playing. I shall take his message to professional footballers by asking what further role they can play not only in their game but in the wider community.

I have no doubt that the PFA and the football authorities will consider the points that my hon. Friend has made. I shall also raise those points in future meetings with those bodies. If they would sign up contractually to play a role in the community, that would send out all the right signals. Of course, many of them willingly undertake such a role. They know of the importance of their grass roots and of the importance of community development through football.

My hon. Friend's proposals have value and I hope that they are picked up by the authorities. The players themselves can do a tremendous amount for the community in which they play and where their clubs are situated. They could learn from the example of the community work carried out by Leeds United. I again thank my hon. Friend for raising the issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 14 February 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL

Order for further consideration, as amended, read.

To be further considered on Thursday 28 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Small Businesses

1. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If she will make a statement on proposals to assist small businesses in the north-west. [33789]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): In the north-west, business link operators have assisted 23,557 businesses since 1 April 2001, administered 98 offers of smart grants worth £4.8 million, guaranteed nearly 300 business loans worth £17 million, and helped more than 1,500 exporters in small and medium-sized enterprises. The present business plans of business link operators in the region aim to continue to drive up the quality of the service given.

Mr. Chapman: Companies in the Wirral are grateful for all that assistance, and we have done particularly well in terms of regional selective assistance. It is, however, the medium and larger firms that tend to benefit from that. The small firms—the seed bed of future growth—have traditionally faced a somewhat confusing plethora of sources of advice and assistance. Is the Minister content that he is simplifying access, rather than complicating it, by transferring smart and enterprise grants from the Government office to the Small Business Service, for example, and by making other changes such as moving regional selective assistance to the regional development agency?

Nigel Griffiths: My hon. Friend highlights the pressing need to streamline the process. We are doing so by strengthening the Small Business Service and the regional development agencies to ensure that effective help goes to small businesses, which are, after all, the driving force behind our economic prosperity. That is why these moves have been widely welcomed.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Will the Minister explain to small businesses in the north-west, and to others around the country, precisely what they have to do, and how much they have to pay to whom, to secure the personal services of the Prime Minister in connection with their export ambitions?

Nigel Griffiths: That is unworthy of the hon. Gentleman. He should speak to the many small and medium-sized enterprises in his constituency that have benefited from the services of the Small Business Service and from the regional development agency. He should join me in praising them for their drive in exports—

Mr. Gale: Corrupt!

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a term that I wish to hear in the Chamber. Who was the hon. Gentleman referring to when he said "Corrupt"?

Mr. Gale: I was referring to the overall practice that appears to have been taking place, Mr. Speaker. If you feel that that is out of order, I will, of course, withdraw it.

Nigel Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members should speak for their constituencies and for the firms that need help. We are having to speak for them, because those hon. Members are dwelling on trivia.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Is it not rather strange that my hon. Friend the Minister, in referring to north-west businesses, has not yet referred to the extraordinary success of business in the city of Lancaster, where £1 million of extra grant from the Government has brought in £10 million of private sector finance and created 1,000 jobs; where we have economic development zones; and where the University of Lancaster is at the cutting edge of broadband technology? The city is truly at the heart of the north-west and of future science-based enterprise. Surely the answer to the question of how to help small businesses in the north-west is, "Come to Lancaster".

Nigel Griffiths: I could not agree more, and I cannot wait to join my hon. Friend.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Small businesses in the north-west and elsewhere are struggling to cope with a continuing deluge of regulation from the Government. I am sure that the Minister is an avid reader of the *New Statesman*, and that he will have read the interview in which Lord Haskins—the head of the Government's better regulation task force—revealed that 16 of the 23 members of the Cabinet are wedded to regulation as the only way to achieve results. Does not that show that there is no hope for small businesses under the Labour Government?

Nigel Griffiths: Perhaps I can commend another publication to the hon. Gentleman. He clearly has not seen a copy of the report that the Commission issued this week on the EU charter for small enterprises, which singles out the United Kingdom's Europe office of the Small Business Service as an effective voice against Brussels bureaucracy. The report commended the office to all other states. I would also be interested to know how the Conservatives defend the 10,000 regulations on business that they introduced between 1994 and 1997.

Postal Services (Slough)

2. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What assessment she has made of the quality of postal services in Slough. [33790]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Postcomm and Postwatch are responsible for monitoring the quality of service provided for scheduled postal services. The targets for those services are agreed by Postwatch and set by Postcomm in the Consignia licence.

Fiona Mactaggart: Indeed they are, and Slough consistently fails to meet the targets. Discussions with Post Office staff and management have led me to conclude that the main reason for the chronic failure of all Slough's postal services is weak management. What can the Minister do to improve the quality of management?

Mr. Alexander: I agree that there is a need for better customer services and better management within Consignia. That is specifically why, as the Government and as owner, we have appointed a new finance director, Marisa Cassoni, to Consignia's board. Allan Leighton, who was first appointed as a non-executive director, is now acting as interim chairman. I am also pleased to announce that on 15 April David Mills will join Consignia from HSBC as the chief executive of Post Office Counters Ltd. and as a member of Consignia's board. He will further strengthen the management, and the post office network will benefit from his considerable commercial skills.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Minister will know that Slough—and, indeed, Lichfield—has an excellent talking books for the blind service. Free postal services are available for the registered blind, and the Minister will agree that their withdrawal would cause considerable difficulty. Will the Minister assure the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) and my constituents that, notwithstanding changes to the postal service in years to come, free services for the blind will be maintained?

Mr. Alexander: I assure constituents in Slough and Lichfield that there is now a statutory basis for that service—the Postal Services Act 2000.

Consignia

3. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): What recent representations she has received regarding the performance of Consignia. [33791]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I regularly receive representations regarding the performance of Consignia from a range of sources.

Mr. Hoban: Given the impact of unofficial strikes by the Communication Workers Union on Consignia's performance, does the Secretary of State agree that the threat of such industrial action is reckless and irresponsible? Will she join me in condemning that union's threats against Consignia?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman has perhaps forgotten that, under the Conservative Government, the average number of days lost each year through strikes in the Post Office was 145,667. We have slashed the number of days lost through industrial action, and industrial relations have improved significantly since the Sawyer report. As I have said before in the House, I continue to urge management and unions, with the help of mediation, to settle this pay dispute as quickly as possible.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): In considering the performance of Consignia and its business, will my right hon. Friend also take into account yesterday's devastating news that Royal Doulton intends to close its north Staffordshire factory and transfer the business to Indonesia? As Consignia gets a great deal of business from Royal Doulton in north Staffordshire, will she be good enough to write to the company to find out the exact reasons for its decision, and its effect on Consignia's business and on other small businesses in the area?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point about the effect of the job losses announced yesterday on Consignia, his constituents and their families. I will of course ensure that my officials are in touch with the company, so that we can understand fully the reasons for its decision and establish whether we can give any help.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Under the Secretary of State's fingertip control, 30,000 redundancies have been announced; Consignia has lost money; thousands of sub-post offices face closure; and a terrible strike is about to hit. Does she accept that the best action that the Government can take is to set Consignia free by privatising it?

Ms Hewitt: As I said recently in the House, the Post Office's problems stem directly from the years of drift and decline under the Conservatives, and their failure to allow it the necessary freedom to make investments and changes at a time when every other postal service in Europe was making such changes. We have delivered what the Post Office needs—commercial freedom within the public sector. We are delivering the stronger management that is necessary, and management and unions are working together much more effectively since the Sawyer report, which we commissioned. Management and unions are sitting down together and talking about the business restructuring that must take place.

I am confident that the changes that the Post Office needs are being made by Government, management and the unions. As a result, customers will get the better service that they urgently need.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Has my right hon. Friend seen the rather frightening report from Postcomm, the regulator? Has she also seen early-day motion 797—signed by more than 100 Members so far—which says that we should leave Government, management and work force to get together, as they are at present, to bring about an improvement in Consignia's performance, rather than taking precipitate action? Will she accordingly allow much more time for consideration of, and consultation on, what I believe to be an unnecessary and damaging recommendation by Postcomm?

Ms Hewitt: Postcomm's proposals are simply proposals for consultation. That consultation is taking place, and I have no doubt that Postcomm will take full account of the views of Members as well as others.

I remind my hon. Friend that in the Postal Services Act 2000 we have written into law, for the first time ever, a universal service obligation, which will apply to Consignia. We have also established that Postcomm's primary duty is to ensure that a universal service is delivered. Any proposals or decisions from Postcomm about market opening must be subsidiary to that duty.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Is not today's Order Paper stark testimony to the concern in all parts of the House about our failing postal service? Does the Secretary of State not agree with the regulator's proposals for the liberalisation of postal services? If there is a national postal strike, will she back any move by the regulator to safeguard our postal service by lifting Consignia's monopoly?

Ms Hewitt: I have already said that I share the concern in all parts of the House about Consignia's performance. I have also explained why the deterioration in its performance has taken place. The hon. Gentleman should be well aware of the failure of the Government whom he supported to enable the company to make the necessary changes. Those changes are now happening.

The regulator's primary duty is to ensure that a universal service is maintained, and that would apply in the event of a strike.

Post Office Regulator

4. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): If she will make a statement on the role of the Post Office regulator. [33792]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The creation of Postcomm was part of the package of greater commercial freedom that we introduced in the Postal Services Act 2000. As my hon. Friend knows, the Act provides that Postcomm's primary duty is to exercise its functions to ensure the provision of a universal postal service.

Mr. Lloyd: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most remarkable feature of Opposition Members' comments is their failure to refer to the "strike" in investment in the Post Office that lasted for so many years, which has left Consignia far too weak to function as an efficient business? Could not the regulator's recommendations damage Consignia's ordinary operation so severely that the Government's guarantees of a universal postal service would be rendered null and void?

Ms Hewitt: As my hon. Friend knows, the Postal Services Act—for which he and I and all Labour Members voted—writes the universal service obligation into law. That means a delivery every working day to every address in the United Kingdom, and a collection every working day from post boxes throughout the United Kingdom, at a uniform and affordable price.

It is the regulator's primary duty to ensure that a universal service is delivered. Of course Postcomm will have to ensure that its decisions on market opening, which will be designed to give customers more choice and a better service, are framed in such a way that that service is indeed delivered.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): When the Secretary of State speaks to Postcomm, will she stress the need for a proper service in rural areas? Is she aware that many people in the countryside of my west Oxfordshire constituency are finding that mail is delivered later and later? How can the closure of post offices possibly help that? Will the right hon. Lady ensure that a universal service is provided early each day for people living in the countryside?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the importance of reliable mail deliveries and good post offices in rural communities. The service being provided by the Royal Mail in some rural as well as some urban areas is not good enough. That is why management are talking to unions about restructuring, which is necessary to deliver a much more efficient and reliable service to customers in rural areas and everywhere else in our country. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have very substantially slowed down the rate of closure of rural post offices, and that we have put in place the necessary funding to enable communities that would otherwise not be served to keep their post offices in operation.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a strong case for Postcomm to extend the six-week consultation, given that its proposals are far ranging, go much further than those in the rest of Europe and will, in a matter of weeks, open 40 per cent. of our postal services to competition?

Ms Hewitt: It is essential that Postcomm carries out a full consultation on its proposals. I have no doubt that it will do so and that it will take account of the views that my hon. Friend has expressed.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does not the Secretary of State agree that the rapid introduction of competition and the inevitable cherry-picking of the Post Office business will make carrying the financial burden of the universal service obligation much more onerous? Would it not be fair and economically sensible for the new private operators to make a financial contribution to the universal service obligation through a charge or levy? As that is not allowable under the present legislation, will the right hon. Lady discuss with the regulator how the anomaly could be corrected to put the universal service obligation on a sound and permanent footing?

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the excellent report that was recently published by the National Audit Office. It sets out clearly the double risk: that if competition is introduced too rapidly to the market the universal service will be jeopardised; and that, without adequate competition, Consignia will not have the necessary incentives to restructure its business and improve its service. At the moment, the regulator and the company completely disagree about the effect of market opening on the business. Therefore, the most urgent priority is for the regulator and the company to arrive at a common analysis of the implications of market opening, so that Postcomm can make decisions to ensure that its primary duty of maintaining the universal service is achieved.

Aerospace Industry

5. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): What recent discussions she has had with the aerospace industry about the after-effects of 11 September. [33793]

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): We have been in close contact with the aerospace industry since 11 September and will continue to work with it to help it to deal with the impact of the attacks and thereby to ensure a strong future for the industry.

Mr. Osborne: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware of the loss of 1,000 jobs at BAE Systems at Woodford on the edge of my constituency, which brings to an end the production of whole passenger planes in this country. The local MPs whose constituencies have been affected have genuinely appreciated our discussions with the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Defence, and last but not least, the Minister himself yesterday. Does he agree that it is vital for Britain's manufacturing base that we maintain a civil as well as a military aerospace industry, and how does he propose to foster that?

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments. I agree that it would be serious if this country lost its civil capacity, which is why I regret British Aerospace's decision on Woodford. As I told the hon. Gentleman yesterday, I am happy to discuss specifically the future of Woodford with British Aerospace and to emphasise the point about maintaining that diversity of production. There are positive aspects—some airline traffic is returning—and there is no doubt that this is a world-class industry or about the skills at Woodford and other places that are being adversely affected. We must work as closely as possible with the industry to maintain the capacity and the skills base so that we are in a position to take advantage of the upturn when it comes.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Was the Department's decision to grant BAE Systems a licence to export a military air traffic control system to Tanzania in any way affected by the after-effects of 11 September?

Mr. Wilson: I understand that the decision was thoroughly considered in line with consolidated criteria. It is a free-standing decision and it is not affected by the other matters that we are discussing.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I welcome the Secretary of State's decision on the air traffic control system, which has retained jobs in my constituency. Is the Minister willing to visit east Cowes, where 650 jobs at GKN Westland have been lost—on that subject, I look forward to meeting him on 12 March—and to help people there to boost manufacturing output on the island? In particular, will he consider restoring assisted area status to the Isle of Wight?

Mr. Wilson: Although we cannot do away with the overall impact of 11 September, I often find that significant progress can be made by taking each problem on merit and considering amelioration and various solutions. That has been my experience in a number of areas in which the aviation and aeronautical industries are particularly important. If I can make any significant contribution to improving the position on the Isle of Wight, I am prepared to do so. In principle, I am happy to visit the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Steel Industry

6. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What recent discussions she has had regarding the UK steel industry. [33796]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Ministers and officials have had discussions with key organisations representing the steel industry about a variety of issues in recent months. The latest focused on the proposed US action to impose additional import duties and quotas on a wide range of steel products.

Helen Jackson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the steel industry is no longer an old, dirty smokestack industry, but one for this century that is at the cutting edge of technology and at the core of this country's manufacturing sector? For those reasons, we welcome the Government's support for the industry and, in particular, the national metals centre in South Yorkshire and the work on America. Does my hon. Friend recognise that the industry's strength lies in the people whom it employs? Will she give continuing support for their training, their skills base and, indeed, their pay in the current circumstances?

Miss Johnson: I very much agree with my hon. Friend on the importance of new technological developments and the way in which the national metals technology centre will bring together industry, science and academia to create a unique network and facility for UK metal producers, fabricators and users. That shows how we are moving forward. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said when she announced the funding for the centre, we shall ensure that the metals industry is equipped to be a world-class competitor for years to come.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Has the Minister read the story in this morning's *Western Mail* revealing that the company controlled by Lakshmi Mittal, the Labour party donor, has already cost Allied Steel and Wire £5 million of business? Allied Steel and Wire employs 1,300 people in this country—1,000 of them in Cardiff—while Ispat employs fewer than 100. What advice would the Minister give to Allied Steel and Wire workers? Would it be to write to the Prime Minister to intervene on their behalf with Mr. Mittal? Or would it be to have a quick whip-round for Labour party coffers?

Miss Johnson: The advice that I would give the hon. Gentleman is to read Monday's press release from the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation general secretary, who said that the allegation made by the Tories and Plaid Cymru that the Prime Minister had put the interests of Romanian steel workers before those of UK steel workers was "ludicrous and cheap". He went on to say that he had explained the situation to the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price), who neglected to check the comments that had been made before going public with the allegations. The general secretary said—

Mr. Simon Thomas: Answer.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should let the Minister reply. He asked the question: he should give her courtesy.

Miss Johnson: The general secretary of the ISTC went on to conclude in the press notice that matters had not been checked before the allegations were made public. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr is reported to have apologised, but the general secretary went on to say that he was "dumbfounded" that the allegations continued to be made.

It is clear that Corus has cited general trading conditions as the reason for the pay freeze, rather than competition from firms in eastern Europe. The UK has an excellent productivity record.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is it not true that steelworkers rightly reject Plaid Cymru's malign fantasies? No one from that party took part in the negotiations last year, when Corus told my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the trade unions and MPs representing steelworks areas that nothing that anyone could do or say would alter the company's decision to mutilate and butcher the Welsh steel industry. Instead of turning this tragedy into a political football, should not Plaid Cymru Members join the Welsh Assembly and the Government in trying to heal the wounds, especially at a time when Corus is dripping a bit of extra acid into them?

Miss Johnson: As I said, the UK steel industry has an excellent productivity record. It has experienced difficult trading conditions in recent years, but the problems are not confined to the UK. We are part of a global economy, and no country can insulate itself from world economic events. The Government and Ministers are making every effort to work with Corus to ensure that the major problem facing the industry—the threatened events in the US—is dealt with and tackled in an effective manner. We believe that the issue that needs to be addressed is that, unlike the industry in the UK and the EU, the US industry is trying to export problems to the rest of the world. The US needs to grasp that nettle. Imports are not the cause of the problem.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I am genuinely sorry that the Minister has been the one to draw the short straw in having to answer this question. However, the UK steel industry is suffering from overcapacity, and there have been 6,000 job losses. Will she say what possible benefit the industry will receive as a result of the support given by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the purchase of a Romanian steel company by a company that is not based in Britain and which employs fewer than 100 people in this country?

Miss Johnson: The Prime Minister made it clear—as did his letter—that it is a market opening in Romania for British industry. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recognises that both that and the restructuring that is under way in the Romanian economy are important for British industry. In trying to trivialise those matters, is he not losing the thread of the argument that what we are about in the UK is promoting British business and British jobs, whether at home or abroad?

Mr. Whittingdale: The hon. Lady describes it as "British industry", but on what definition can a company with less than 0.1 per cent. of its work force in Britain possibly be described as British? Is she aware that British steel manufacturers have already said that a revitalised Romanian industry is bound to make it harder for British steel companies to compete? Is not that why the last Conservative Government lobbied against LNM being allowed to take over Irish Steel? Is it not the case that there will be no benefit to Britain from this takeover—other than a return for favours given to the Labour party?

Miss Johnson: The Prime Minister dealt with a number of those issues yesterday, when I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was in this place. The LNM group gives London as its headquarters address, and a number of UK-registered companies are part of the group.

Turning to the real issue for the UK steel industry at present—Opposition Members seem to have a problem focusing on that real issue, unlike Labour Members—the industry faces concerted unilateral US action on steel imports that would create fresh barriers to transatlantic trade and fresh distortions in the global steel industry. That is the real issue facing the UK steel industry.

Textiles

7. **Mr. Andy Reed** (Loughborough): What steps she is taking to assist the textile sector. [33797]

The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson): The Department is working closely with the industry's own textile and clothing strategy group to help to improve the industry's productivity and competitiveness. The Government have invested more than £80 million in the industry since 1997, and in the last year alone we have invested close to £8 million, focused principally on developing the technical textiles market, education and training opportunities, the supply chain, design skills, the benefits of e-commerce and export support.

Mr. Reed: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He knows that, over the years, I and other members of the all-party group on clothing and textiles have asked for more help and more money. It is welcome that, at last, some efforts are being put in which are making a real difference on the ground.

Does my hon. Friend agree with me and James McAdam, who is the chairman of the textile and clothing strategy group, that we cannot afford to be complacent, and that much more needs to be done to ensure a vibrant future for our textile industry in this country?

Alan Johnson: I agree with my hon. Friend that there is no cause for complacency. The industry has drawn up 55 recommendations which are being actioned; indeed, a report is due to be published shortly by the industry-led group on how Government can help the industry further. However, the textile industry realises—as does my hon. Friend, who has been its doughty champion—that it will need to make itself more globally competitive in order to ensure its success.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): What action are the Government taking to allow high-energy users in sectors such as knitting, spinning and weaving, which are not using IPPC—international pollution prevention control—processes, to enter the sectoral agreement and thereby claim a rebate from the climate change levy? They will otherwise be at a serious disadvantage. If the Minister is unable to give a detailed reply now, will he write to me with such a reply?

Alan Johnson: I am always delighted to write to the hon. Gentleman. However, he should know that, since the pre-Budget report, representations have been made on behalf of those specific sectors as regards the climate change levy. Those representations are under consideration ahead of the Budget.

Miners' Compensation

8. **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What progress is being made with respect to miners' compensation claims. [33798]

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): May I also take this opportunity to respond to the interest expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who recently raised the issue with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House?

In total, more than £700 million has been paid for both respiratory disease and vibration white finger schemes. The number of final offers on respiratory disease claims has risen sharply in recent months—nearly 7,000 full and final offers in the last quarter. I am committed to 50,000 by the end of this year. We are working with the solicitors to ensure that those offers are translated quickly into settlements. Nearly 10,000 full and final vibration white finger offers were also made in the last quarter.

Vernon Coaker: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He will have seen the report in today's *Financial Times* about the amount that the compensation scheme will cost and the number of claims that are still outstanding. He will know that, in former mining constituencies such as mine and many others throughout the country, large numbers of ex-miners and their families are still waiting for compensation. Many of those people are dying, waiting for that compensation. I know that my hon. Friend has tried to speed up the system, but there is still an awful lot of work to be done to ensure that those claims are speeded up and dealt with quickly. Will he look at the matter again, to see what more could be done to speed up those claims?

Mr. Wilson: I can assure my hon. Friend that I am looking at it on a day and daily basis; hopefully, that has contributed to the speeding up that he acknowledges. Claims are still coming in at the rate of about 1,000 a week, so by definition many claims will not be settled for a significant further length of time.

The difficulty, but also the strength, of the scheme is that each and every case is individually assessed according to the work record and medical history of the individual. It would be very easy and convenient to make blanket payments, which in many cases would undervalue what the applicant is entitled to, but every claim will be met in full. There is no capping of this scheme, as was pointed out in the *Financial Times* today, and that is why justice will ultimately be done to every miner, or every widow or every family of every miner.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Can the Minister explain how his Department and the Treasury got these figures so completely wrong? Will he confirm that in 1998 the estimate was that the scheme would cost £2 billion, and that today's figures say that it will be £6 billion; and that that is a complete underestimate of the bill that the Treasury is facing?

Mr. Wilson: I find that a very odd question, but the hon. Gentleman might acknowledge two things. First, he could acknowledge that the reason why people are dying before these claims are met is that for 20 years the Tories did nothing to meet these legitimate claims; hence people who retired from mining 20 to 25 years ago and who suffer from these serious diseases are, by definition, very elderly. Even the Tories can do the arithmetic; if one adds 20 or 25 to a retirement age, it becomes obvious that many of those people are very elderly.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman could acknowledge that we cannot estimate how much a scheme will cost when we do not know how many applications there will be. To the credit of the Labour Government, we have kept the scheme open so that everyone has a right to apply, and ultimately justice will be done to every miner. That is the justice that history will record the Tories denied those miners for decade after decade.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Minister accept from me that I am pleased that the estimate has gone up from £2 billion to £6 billion, because that means that this series of civil claims—not state claims—means that the Government have decided to set aside £6 billion to pay out common law claims? I am also pleased to note that now the figure has gone up because the widows can get the money in the case of their husbands' deaths; and I am pleased to say that, as a result of the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), payments are now made directly to the estate of families in the case of the widow's death as well.

We should bear in mind the fact that we now have the problem of fly-by-night solicitors running round the Coal Board estates, trying to whip up support, not for anyone else's benefit but simply to line their own pockets.

I am pleased that the figure is £6 billion. It means that we are going to pay out to more than 200,000 families. Let us get on with the job.

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his extremely pertinent comments. *[Laughter.]* They are hugely pertinent. Let us use this opportunity—

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful that the Opposition energy spokesman has the good sense to nod his head in agreement with me. It is immensely important that people understand that no claim dies with the individual. Opponents, particularly in Wales, are putting around the untruth that the Government have some vested interest in delay. It is the opposite of the truth, because the claim passes from the miner to the widow, to the estate of the miner or the widow, and eventually that money is paid. It costs the Treasury more to pay out on a claim if the miner is deceased. We have a vested interest on the grounds of justice, of ethics and, marginally, of finance in ensuring that every claim is met as justly and speedily as possible.

I am delighted that an additional 4,500 full and final offers were paid in January and that £25 million more was paid out for respiratory diseases alone. Let us keep the figures going and continue to work together to bring justice to every person who has served the energy needs of the country by working in the mining industry.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Can the Minister confirm whether the Government are serious about reclaiming moneys from the National Union of Mineworkers as joint tortfeasors? It is a bizarre notion to those people who understand and practise that law.

Mr. Skinner: What about the NACODS commission?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend mentions the breakaway union, the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, which is the only union to take a commission from the payments. I have no idea why a union with a membership in two digits needs that money from the claims of ex-miners.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Although I welcome the figures that the Minister gave, will he also consider the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme? Will he ask his officials to carry out an inquiry to ascertain whether the state benefits that are part of the scheme were originally meant to be part of a remunerative package? If that is the case, will he set in motion back payments for pneumoconiotics?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend is an articulate and effective representative of the interests of miners and mining communities. I will give detailed consideration to that matter.

Rural Sub-Post Offices

9. **Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): What recent discussions she has held with Consignia regarding the preservation of the rural network of sub-post offices. [33800]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Discussions with Post Office Ltd. take place regularly on the implementation of the performance and innovation unit recommendations to modernise the post office network, including those relating specifically to the rural network. The Government's formal requirement on the Post Office to maintain the rural network and to prevent avoidable closures of rural post offices remains in place.

Adam Price: I am grateful to the Minister for his characteristically unhelpful reply. If the Government are sincere in their commitment to preserve the rural network, why is the commission on the new automated teller machine system weighted against smaller post offices, because it increases with volume? If sub-post offices have fewer than 180 transactions a month, they will receive no commission. Can we have a real business plan from the Government to save the rural network, or is that too much to ask of a Government who care little for rural communities?

Mr. Alexander: The sincerity of the Government's commitment to the rural network is evidenced by the fact that we have accepted every one of the 24 PIU recommendations, which we have backed with real cash. Some £480 million has been contributed to the network to upgrade the computer systems and another £270 million has been committed as a result of the last spending round. There have been other changes on top of that. The rural transfer managers are making a significant difference in community after community across the country, and the new £2 million fund for community post offices will also have an impact across the country. In addition, there is an obligation on Consignia to prevent avoidable closures. That is in direct contrast to the previous Government's neglect.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Will the Leicestershire pilot of "Your Guide" be extended nation wide later this year? If so, who will pay for it?

Mr. Alexander: As I said in a debate late last year, the pilot will be completed on time, at the beginning of March. That will allow us not only to evaluate the effectiveness of the service and the income stream to Post Office Counters Ltd. but to expedite work across Government in considering the delivery of electronic services. I can assure my hon. Friend that we areproceeding apace not only with discussions within Government, but also with the evaluation of the pilot with Post Office Counters.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): May I again ask the Minister why, 18 months after the introduction of the £2 million interim scheme to help rural sub-post offices and urban post offices, only five claims have been made, totalling £27,000? I have asked that question before, and the issue has been raised on several occasions. There has not been a satisfactory answer, although we are seeing, week on week, sub-post offices closing throughout the country.

Mr. Alexander: I am glad to say that one of the reasons why there has not been as much demand as there would have been in the equivalent period last year is that the rate of post office closures is falling, not rising. The significant figure to which I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention is that, in the current year, the total number of closures has been far less than the 434 that occurred last year. In fact, real progress has also been made on the scheme to which he refers. In addition, more than 100 forms have been sent to organisations across the country. My predecessor ensured that many parish councils were notified of the scheme's availability. I am confident that, as the months proceed and where opportunities for community involvement in post offices exist, the scheme will provide an effective and efficient means by which to make progress.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

The Minister was asked—

Return to Work

30. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): What steps she is taking to encourage women who have left jobs in the public health and education services to return to work in those services. [33824]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Thousands of women teachers and health professionals are being helped to return to work in our schools and hospitals every year, as a result of our supported return to work programmes, our investment in child care and increased flexibility in work patterns and working hours.

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will she expand on assistance with child care? I understand that, in the recent consultations that she has undertaken in her role as Minister for Women, expensive child care was particularly identified as a problem in returning to work, especially in London, where child care costs are higher than in other parts of the country.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with the point that my hon. Friend makes. Child care costs, particularly in London, can be a real barrier to women seeking to return to work. For example, the refresher courses, which the Government are funding, for teachers returning to work include help with child care costs. The national health service is increasingly providing creches and advice for women who need to get child care close to their places of work so that they can return to work in the NHS.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Can the right hon. Lady tell the House what proportion of the women who left those sectors were full time; what proportion were part time; and what proportion left voluntarily to spend time with their families at home?

Ms Hewitt: I do not have the detailed figures for which the hon. Lady asks, but of course most of the women who left their professions did so to spend time with their children, and they have gained invaluable experience, as well as contributing to their families, as a result. Of course, we are seeking not to compel anyone to return, but to make it much easier for women who have that combination of family experience and relevant qualifications to return to work when they want to do so, on hours that will suit them and their families.

Public Appointments

31. **Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford): What steps she is taking to increase the number of women entering public life. [33825]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The women's representation Bill completed its parliamentary stages on 28 January and will, I hope, receive Royal Assent shortly. The Government's overall action plan on public appointments, together with individual departmental action plans, will be published today.

Joan Ruddock: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. May I tell her that ethnic minority women are even less well represented in the House and in public appointments than other women? A third of my constituents are from ethnic minorities. What steps can my right hon. Friend take to encourage such women to come forward for public appointments, which are generally deemed to be for the great and the good—which tends to mean white people and white men particularly?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point, and I am glad to say that, as a result of the steps that we have taken during the past four and a half years, we have succeeded in opening up many of the 30,000 appointments to a much wider range of people, so that they are no longer simply for the so-called great and the good. But she is right to say that the under-representation of women from the African, Caribbean and Asian communities in particular is a very real problem; and she will also see in the departmental action plans the specific steps that Departments are taking to increase their representation not only of women, but of people from minority ethnic communities.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): In 1997, 33 per cent. of public appointments were held by women. The women and equality unit website states that that percentage is the same today. Does that not signify the Government's failure to address the problem? Will the Secretary of State tell us today's figures for the percentage of women in public life? Will she admit that holding a few seminars around the country will do little or nothing to reach the wider cohort of women who should be encouraged to play a part in public life?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Lady will find from the report published today that the figure is now 34 per cent., which is nowhere near good enough. However, she is wrong to mock the seminars that the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, who also has a responsibility for women, is holding around the country. We are succeeding in attracting enormous interest from women who are already playing a role in their communities as governors in schools, as leaders of tenants' associations, and in Church and faith groups.

I am therefore confident that we will achieve the targets that we have set. On the basis of the departmental plans that we are publishing today, by the end of 2005, in the majority of Departments, women should hold between 45 per cent. and 50 per cent. of appointments to the bodies sponsored by those Departments.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): May I welcome the seminars being held jointly around the country with the support of the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Women's National Commission and the women and equality unit? However, I echo the view that the Government need to do everything that they can to ensure that recruitment to those seminars includes women in employment in professions such as nursing and caring, who do not think that they have the right experience to sit on public bodies—whereas, in fact, they have exactly the experience needed by those bodies.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The women and equality unit is doing everything that it can to ensure that as wide a range of women as possible are attracted to those seminars, and that as many of them put themselves forward for public appointments as possible. I urge her and other hon. Friends to help in this process by encouraging women whom they know in their constituencies to attend those seminars and to put themselves forward for appointments for which they are eminently well qualified.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Conservatives have launched an active campaign to get women into public life. We shall certainly take positive measures in the light of the changes to the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 which had cross-party support.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that progress on appointing more women in Departments is patchy? One blanket statistic disguises the fact that I am sure that she could name and shame certain Departments. Will she also tell the House whether the new diversity targets will apply to public appointments generally?

Ms Hewitt: I welcome the hon. Lady's support for the steps that we are taking. We all look forward to some of her male colleagues being replaced at the next election by women Members of Parliament.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): And by women Labour Members of Parliament.

Ms Hewitt: Indeed. Of course, we seek to achieve much greater representation from the ethnic minority communities as well as from women. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends whose Departments are not yet on course to meet the 50 per cent. target to the additional steps that they need to take.

Return to Work

32. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw): What steps she is taking to make it easier for those mothers who want to return to work to do so. [33827]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government have introduced a range of measures, including the national child care strategy and the new deal for lone parents, to help mothers who want to return to work. The Employment Bill currently before Parliament includes further measures to enable more mothers to remain in the labour market.

John Mann: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. The fact that more people are in work than ever before is clear evidence of the sound economics and judgment of this Government. Will she consider the position of mothers in rural villages, and particularly issues such as the diversification of farms and access to broadband technology, to allow more mothers in rural villages to take up the opportunities that are becoming more widely available?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Since 1997, the number of women in employment has increased by more than half a million, which is a tribute to the Government's sound economic policies. My hon. Friend is right about the particular difficulties faced by women in rural communities who want employment. The Small Business Service, through the farm business advisory service, is helping many women and men in farming communities to diversify into new areas of employment.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does the Minister accept that many mothers, whatever their age, who want to return to work want either part-time jobs or jobs with flexible hours? Does she accept also that, while we must safeguard the health of employees in the workplace and other matters, it is important that the Government do not impose on employers too much cost or regulation in respect of those who want part-time jobs?

Ms Hewitt: Of course a large number of women, and a significant minority of men, prefer to work less than full-time hours. We strongly encourage and support that. There is an increasing range of working hours in the public sector, especially in hospitals and the rest of the health service. I am proud of the fact that it was the Labour Government who introduced full-time rights for part-time workers and, with the national minimum wage, ensured that hundreds of thousands of very low-paid part-time women workers, who had been entirely neglected by the Conservative Government, now get a fair wage, as well as other help through the working families tax credit.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give the business for the week beginning Monday 25 February?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business of the House for the week following constituency week is as follows: MONDAY 25 FEBRUARY—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Homelessness Bill.

Motions relating to the Draft Social Security Benefits Up-Rating Order 2002 and the Draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2002.

TUESDAY 26 FEBRUARY—Progress on remaining stages of the Proceeds of Crime Bill.

WEDNESDAY 27 FEBRUARY—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Proceeds of Crime Bill.

THURSDAY 28 FEBRUARY—Debate on Welsh Affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 1 MARCH—Debate on the achievements of the national lottery on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 4 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill.

TUESDAY 5 MARCH—Opposition Day. There will be a debate in the names of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru. Subject to be announced.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I am doing well with Wales in my statement so far.

WEDNESDAY 6 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Office of Communications Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 7 MARCH—Estimates [2nd Allotted Day].

There will be a debate on policy on environmental taxation followed by a debate on the deployment of Ministry of Defence resources in the war against terrorism.

At 7 o'clock the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

FRIDAY 8 MARCH—Debate on police on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 27 February 2002, there will be a debate relating to the Commission Green Paper on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy in European Standing Committee A.

[*Wednesday 27 February 2002:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union documents: 7262/01, Green Paper on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy; 7263/01, Report on the state of the resources and their expected development; 7377/01, Report on the economic and social situation of coastal regions; 7378/01, Report on the implementation of the Community system for fisheries and aquaculture over the period 1993-2000. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 28-xiii (2000-01).]

Mr. Forth: I wonder whether the Leader of the House listened to his wireless this morning, when he would have heard a reference to something called the performance and innovation unit's report on energy policy. The PIU is an important body that was set up to advise the Prime Minister, no less, and on this occasion to advise him on a matter vital to the nation's future, namely energy policy. Yet again it appears that the document or its contents were being liberally leaked on the wireless this morning, and I am told—although I can scarcely believe it—that it might even be available on something called a website at this very hour or thereabouts.

What is going on? Do I have to come to the Dispatch Box every single Thursday and give you, Mr. Speaker, and the House an example of the Government yet again gratuitously leaking vital documents before they come to the House? If the Leader of the House is going to tell me that we have been reduced to a website Parliament, that is simply not good enough. I want real live Ministers to come to the House of Commons and share with us what they are up to, not to leak things on mysterious electronic vehicles.

I ask the Leader of the House for an urgent debate, which may require a whole day, on the subject "What is a British company?" That is an extraordinarily simple question, but one that seems utterly to defeat the Prime Minister. Yesterday he said:

> "I am delighted that a British-based company has succeeded."

He was talking, of course, about the mysterious company LNM Holdings and the equally mysterious Mr. Mittal. He went on to say that the Government

> "wanted to celebrate the fact that the contract"—

that is a steel contract—

> "had been awarded to a British company".—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 199.]

The Prime Minister could not have been clearer on that, but we need to know, and it may well take a debate to tease it out, whether, in his mind, a British company is one that is registered here, which this one appears not to be; one in which the majority of shareholders are British, which they appear not to be in this case; or one in which the majority of employees are British, which appears not to be the case here. What, then, is a British company? That question is important because the Prime Minister is writing letters in which he appears to be utterly confused as to what a British company is. That is a serious matter, because if the British Prime Minister does not know what a British company is and he is prepared to back companies against genuinely British companies, which has been the case here, the sooner we get to the bottom of it the better. If such a debate helped the Prime Minister to understand what a British company is, we would have done everybody a great favour.

I hope that the House and the Leader are aware of the Public Administration Committee's excellent report, published this very morning, on the important matter of the reform of the second Chamber. I hope that the Leader will give us an undertaking that we will have an early debate on the report, because it sets out the way ahead in a positive and helpful way and, not least, recommends the establishment of a Joint Committee, something for which the Opposition have been urging for some time. It also gives a timetable for realistic and responsible progress on the matter. I hope that we can hear from the Leader that he is prepared to take up those suggestions and guarantee that we will make that progress towards the culmination of the reform of the upper House.

Finally, may I draw the Leader's attention to today's edition of *The Mirror*, which has the huge headline "Moore Shame"? Jo Moore has appeared in our lives yet again, and in quite the most dreadful way. I hope that the Leader can deny absolutely the story in *The Mirror* and elsewhere, and if he cannot, I hope that he will get the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to come here to deny that this dreadful woman has, yet again, sought to take advantage of the most distressing and appalling circumstances. We really have heard enough of her; I do not want to hear of her, about her or from her ever again, and I hope that the Leader of the House can give us that promise.

Mr. Cook: It may be Valentine's day outside, but there is obviously no love-in in here. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that no one will ever attempt to put him on a website, and he will be able to stick to his wireless.

I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's recognition of the performance and information unit as a very important body. [HON. MEMBERS: "Innovation, not information."] Of course. Innovation sums up its fresh look at Departments. The PIU was set up by this Government, not the Conservative Government, precisely to provide an independent assessment of departmental work and to ensure that fresh minds were brought to bear on that. There has never been an occasion on which a PIU report has been brought to the House by means of a statement.

Mr. Forth: Why not?

Mr. Cook: I explained that to the right hon. Gentleman. These are reports to Ministers, not announcements of Government policy. The Government will now reflect on what the PIU has said and reach conclusions, and I am authorised by my colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry to say that when they are in a position to announce their response to the PIU report, they will of course make a statement to Parliament. I expect that the House will want to hold them to that commitment.

On the question of Mr. Mittal, he is resident in Britain, his headquarters are here and he employs 100 British citizens here. *[Interruption.]* I honestly do not think that any of them would find that comical, unlike Opposition Members. I can think of many hundreds of British citizens who would wish to be employed in London. If it is to be a matter of criticism to lobby for a company with British connections, I plead guilty. For four years, as Foreign Secretary, I lobbied for hundreds of such companies, some of which were successful. Nowadays, I suppose that I would be expected to apologise for lobbying successfully on behalf of such companies. Sometimes I lobbied on behalf of Swedish companies because British aerospace industries provide large numbers of components for the Grippen aircraft made by a Swedish primary contractor.

It is right that Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers should lobby for people who are employed in Britain. The two most recent Conservative Prime Ministers did precisely that. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Oh yes they did. The only difference is that we do not know whether the companies on whose behalf they lobbied had made any donation to their party; we have been transparent, but they kept the donations to their party secret.

I end by trying to make the right hon. Gentleman happier. He asked for a denial of the story in *The Mirror*. I am pleased to give him the categorical denial that the e-mail that appears in *The Mirror* today is a fabrication; there was no such e-mail; there was no suggestion that the report should come out on Friday; and there was no disagreement on the matter between Mr. Sixsmith and Jo Moore, who was not responsible for what *The Mirror* alleges.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On Monday business in the House finished at 5.40 pm; tomorrow, the House is not sitting; on the Friday after we return we have a debate on a general subject, the lottery; and the following week my right hon. Friend has announced an estimates day. Taking those matters into account, is it not clear that the Government had—and have—ample time for the promised debate on hunting with dogs? Is it not now eight months since the Queen's Speech promised to introduce that? Many Labour Members are fed up with the Government's procrastination and their failure to fulfil both a manifesto pledge and a commitment in the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Cook: The commitment in the Queen's Speech was to have a free vote during the course of this Session. I know of no reason why that commitment will not be fulfilled. There are other commitments in the Queen's Speech that have not yet been fulfilled because we are only halfway through the Session. A number of Bills in the Queen's Speech have still to be brought before the House; they mostly will be brought before the House, and I am sure that there will be a free vote on hunting.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Leader of the House take the opportunity to give Members an indication of the time scale for considering the Modernisation Committee's report on Select Committees, and to deal with rumours about its recommendations, particularly in relation to the payment of Select Committee Chairs?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We are not having that.

Mr. Tyler: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman, and hope that he and I will stand shoulder to shoulder on that issue when it is debated.

On the Public Administration Committee report which appeared today, does the Leader of the House accept that, to use his own terms, there is a centre of gravity around which he can develop consensus on reform of the second Chamber. Does he accept that there is no excuse for the dinosaur tendency, represented by his right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and his right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, to do nothing? We have to do something and get on with it; can we please twist his arm to get on? When can we debate the report?

Finally, last week, the Leader of the House kicked into touch my suggestion that it was time to review the issue of public funding of our democratic system. In view of the obvious briefing from No. 10 in the past few days to the effect that state funding is again in the frame, when can we debate that important issue which Members on both sides of the House clearly believe needs to be reviewed? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Cook: Let me try to make some peace in this unseemly exchange. I welcome the fact that the hon.

[Mr. Cook]

Gentleman has given me an opportunity to refer to the report that the Modernisation Committee issued on Monday on reforming the scrutiny committees. I believe that the report offers the House a way forward. In particular, it sets out a system of nomination to Select Committees which would be independent, authoritative and transparent and would make it plain that Parliament has control over who sits on the Committees that scrutinise Government. It also provides substantial additional resources to support Select Committees in their important and often technical work on financial scrutiny and provides a clear statement of their core tasks.

I share the hon. Gentleman's view that the reference to an increase in pay for chairs of Select Committees should be seen in that context and kept in proportion. There is a view in the House that there should be an alternative career structure for MPs through scrutiny and for that reason the Modernisation Committee on balance has put forward a proposal that the House should consider in principal whether the Chairs of Select Committees should be paid. However, that is a matter for the House and I recognise that there will be differing opinions on it. I look forward to the speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on that occasion.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I welcome interest in this statement, but perhaps hon. Members will let me finish. I welcome one clear signal that comes from the Public Administration Committee's report on the House of Lords, although I have not yet had an opportunity to scrutinise it in full. I can only say that the report has been produced on the basis of unanimity. That shows that it is possible to find a centre of gravity among those who wish to reform the second Chamber. I promised some time ago that consultation would be followed by a period of reflection. We promised that we would not conclude consultation until we received the Select Committee report and we will now consider carefully its conclusions.

On public funding, the Government have no proposals or plans to introduce the public funding of political parties. I note that we would not secure a consensus across the Floor were we to do so. It is a matter for legitimate debate and I am sure that hon. Members will be looking for ways of raising it in the House.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 779 on Saudi Arabia?

[That this House notes the recent widespread reporting of the use of torture in Saudi Arabian jails, particularly against a number of British nationals accused of participation in bombings in Saudi Arabia; recalls the disturbing findings of the 1997 report entitled 'Torture in Saudi Arabia: No Protection, No Redress' published by the All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group and REDRESS; condemns the use of torture in any circumstances; and affirms that the provisions of the 1984 UN Convention Against Torture must serve as the standard to be upheld by all governments.]

Is it not time that we had a debate in the House on our relationship with that country, given that Conservative Members lobbied so hard for the Al Yamanah arms deal; that a previous Conservative Prime Minister was involved in that lobbying; and that we have no information about it because the National Audit Office report was never published. Given that British nationals continue to be tortured in Saudi Arabia and that most of those involved in the incident on 11 September in New York were also Saudi Arabian citizens, the time for soft shoe diplomacy in our relations with Saudi Arabia is over. We should face up to torturers and have a proper discussion of our future relationship with that country.

Mr. Cook: Foreign affairs are discussed in the House on a regular basis and I am sure that there will be opportunities for my hon. Friend to press this point with my colleagues at the Foreign Office. I assure the House that vigorous and repeated representations have been made to the Saudi Arabian Government in connection with those who are detained. They go back some time; indeed, I repeatedly raised the case of one detainee who was released last year. I can assure the House that the Government have full regard to protecting the interests and rights of British citizens who are detained and will proceed in the way that we believe is the best way of preserving their rights, protecting their standards and respecting the wishes of their relatives.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): As yesterday's answers from the Prime Minister concerning the LMN Holdings affair were widely seen as woefully inadequate, and as the Leader of the House failed to answer properly the questions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) a few moments ago, is it not essential that the Prime Minister should come to the Dispatch Box to make a statement so that we can ask how many companies employing fewer than 100 people have been assisted in this way; why it is right that a company that is registered in a Caribbean tax haven is helped by the Prime Minister in that way; why a company with less than 1 per cent. of its work force in this country is helped in this way; and just how many companies have been the subject of representations from the Prime Minister to the Romanian Prime Minister?

Mr. Cook: I suspect that whatever the Prime Minister says will not satisfy the right hon. Gentleman. For the record, whenever I was asked to lobby on behalf of a company with a British base, I never asked how many people it employed or introduced a threshold before making representations on its behalf. I do not recall the right hon. Gentleman or any member of the Conservative party making representations to Lord Ashcroft about the fact that his business was based in Belize rather than Britain during the years when he handled the party's entire finances.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I shall not ask my right hon. Friend to comment on the performance and innovation unit's report on energy efficiency to which the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) referred earlier. Clearly, that would not be right. Apparently, it recommended a step change in energy efficiency, and I am sure that all hon. Members would welcome that. Does my right hon. Friend therefore welcome the Home Energy Conservation Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown

(Dr. Turner) promoted? Will he try to ensure that ample time is made available for debating the important subject of energy efficiency?

Mr. Cook: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government have tried to be helpful during the passage of that Bill. *[Interruption.]* We have. The measure has been in Committee, and the relevant Minister has held discussions with the sponsors. I hope that we can make progress and that the Bill will reach the statute book. However, we need co-operation not only from the Government but from the sponsors.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I appeal to the Leader of the House seriously to consider holding a debate on Zimbabwe, in Government time on the Floor of the main Chamber. He knows that the Swedish head of the EU observers was recently refused accreditation. I have just heard that Sir Garfield Todd, the former Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, a former Senator in Zimbabwe and a citizen for 67 years, has effectively been disfranchised along with some 2 million other Zimbabwean citizens. I believe that we should have a timely debate to ascertain whether any hon. Members have constructive ideas to help the people of Zimbabwe. That is the least we can do for that country.

Mr. Cook: The House shares the hon. Lady's anxiety. The subject has frequently been discussed in the House and I anticipate that it will continue to be debated. I know Pierre Schori personally, and he has a wealth of experience of Africa and the third world through years as a Minister with responsibility for development in the Swedish Government. He is a man of integrity and impartiality, and he is an excellent choice to head the observers on behalf of the EU. I deplore the difficulties that have been placed in his way and that of other observers. We should bear it in mind that, most of all, the people of Zimbabwe want independent observers in order to moderate the intimidation and thuggery to which they are subjected. I assure the hon. Lady that we are taking every possible measure to ensure that observers get in.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Will my right hon. Friend agree to a debate on the Floor of the House on early-day motion 800 entitled "Safety of Ships and Seafarers at Sea"?

[That this House congratulates the MV Derbyshire Family Association and their supporters for their successful campaign to re-open the formal investigation into the sinking of MV Derbyshire with the loss of 44 lives in the Pacific Ocean during typhoon Orchid in 1980; congratulates the Wood Hole Oceanographic Institution on their exhaustive survey of the wreck at a depth of two and a half miles; thanks the Government for re-opening the formal investigation in the light of this survey; observes that the re-opened formal investigation attributed the sinking to the weakness of the foredeck hatch covers, with consequent bow flooding; notes that the assessors at the original formal investigation, although instructed not to provide conclusions, had nevertheless concluded that the ship's crew had been negligent; notes that no apology for this has been received by the families of crew members, notes that Mr. Justice Colman made many important recommendations at the end of the reopened formal investigation but that none of these appear yet to have been implemented; notes that before 1980 two of MV Derbyshire's five sister ships of similar construction had suffered structural damage, that after 1980 all suffered structural damage, one sank and one was scrapped, and that between 1980 and 1998 over 40 bulk carriers have been lost at sea with a further loss of 1,634 seafarers; and calls upon the Government to schedule a debate in Government time on safety at sea, and to ensure that Mr. Justice Colman's recommendations are implemented as a matter of urgency.]

Since the sinking of the merchant vessel Derbyshire in 1980, bulk carriers have been lost at the rate of one a month world wide. Last year, after the completion of the official inquiry into the loss of the Derbyshire, Mr. Justice Colman made several recommendations that would save thousands of lives at sea. I hope that my right hon. Friend will agree to a debate on the matter.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend draws attention to an important early-day motion and an important subject. All hon. Members will have been shocked by the figures for loss at sea to which he refers. I shall consider my hon. Friend's comments and refer them to the appropriate Department to ensure that when we consider safety—we shall probably do that in the next Session—we adopt as many recommendations as we can.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The Leader of the House will know that I first raised the matter of the links between the Government and LNM Holdings and Ispat International (UK) Ltd. at business questions two weeks ago. The Leader of the House replied:

> "I will investigate the matter and make sure that one of my colleagues responds to the hon. Gentleman."—*[Official Report*, 31 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 433.]

May I ask the right hon. Gentleman how the investigation is proceeding? When can I expect a response? Given that the press is questioning the accuracy of the Government's statements on this affair, is it not vital that we should have a full debate on the Floor of the House so that we can preserve the integrity of Parliament?

Mr. Cook: I cannot think of anything more preposterous than the House having a full day's debate every time a Minister of the Crown lobbies on behalf of a company with a British connection. Nor have I heard anything more preposterous than the claims of Plaid Cymru that, somehow or other, Corus was disadvantaged by LNM succeeding in Romania, when Corus was not even bidding in Romania.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I am sure that the Leader of the House will recall the case of my constituent Diane Blood. I want to raise a question about her son, Liam Blood. The rest of us have the opportunity to claim our parents as our own on our birth certificate. Will the Leader of the House consider how we could frame legislation to enable my constituent Liam Blood to fill in the blank space on his birth certificate that should rightly be filled with the name of his deceased father? In so doing, my right hon. Friend would be maintaining the commitment to introduce such legislation made when a private Member's Bill fell before I was elected to the House.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a profound issue, on which there will be different views within the House.

[Mr. Cook]

I fully respect the importance of the point that he raises; these are sensitive matters for the individuals concerned. I am not sure that the Government would have it in mind to introduce legislation on such a difficult and sensitive point, on which there are different views. I fully appreciate my hon. Friend's wish to see the matter handled by private Member's legislation, and we would make sure, if possible, that if such a Bill were introduced, it would receive a fair hearing in the House.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): May I press the Leader of the House on a matter that has already been raised twice, namely the Public Administration Committee's report? Does he recognise that the report speaks of the importance of "maintaining the momentum", and outlines a programme involving a Government response in April and a draft Bill in June? Does he agree that that is an entirely reasonable timetable, to which the Government should seek to adhere?

Mr. Cook: I fully accept the importance of maintaining the momentum on this issue, and I welcome the fact, as I have said, that the Select Committee has demonstrated that it is possible, by unanimity, to achieve consensus. We shall continue to look for that, and to try to identify that centre of gravity. Given that that will necessarily mean trying to find common ground among people of different views, I would not fix myself to a particular date on the calendar, but I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that we are trying to maintain that momentum.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): The Leader of the House has heard the surprise expressed on both sides of the House about the lack of a statement on the energy policy announcement today, although it may fashion energy policy for the next 20 years. He is also reluctant to take any further questions about a debate on the subject of the British company LNM. May I suggest a way of killing two birds with one stone, to save parliamentary time? Will the right hon. Gentleman instigate a debate on energy policy—and, in particular, energy efficiency—to consider the interests of British companies operating in eastern Europe, especially steel companies in Romania, in relation to their energy efficiency and their record on greenhouse gas emissions, and in relation to the question of improving energy efficiency, in contrast to companies operating more conventionally in the United Kingdom which may be called British companies? Such considerations could also examine whether energy inefficiency and greenhouse gas emissions by British companies now operating in Romania should count against greenhouse gas emission targets for British companies operating out of the United Kingdom. That is a very important point.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his ingenuity, although I nearly got lost halfway through the long paragraph that followed his opening question. We should remain clear, in all our exchanges on this matter, that we want countries in central and eastern Europe, such as Romania, to come into the European Union. We want to support the steps that are necessary for that, such as economic reform and the privatisation of their big state monopolies. We certainly also want them to play their part in cutting greenhouse gas emissions within the overall European basket, to ensure that we fulfil our Kyoto target. All of that is a necessary part of coming into the European Union.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 755, on gender equality in the Church of England, which notes that the Church of England and, of course, the Church in Wales are exempted from the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

[That this House notes the Church of England is exempted from the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 due to the attitudes and activities of a minority who are in disagreement with the ordination of women; affirms the need to strengthen and forward the movement against discrimination on grounds of gender; trusts the Church will thus be encouraged to catch up speedily with the vast majority of institutions; and believes that the appointment of an Archbishop of Canterbury could provide the perfect opportunity to forge leadership which would unite the Church of England behind justice for women and end the unfortunate and embarrassing need for 'flying' bishops.]

I remind my right hon. Friend that, sadly, the Church in Wales has lagged behind the Church of England in respect of the ordination of women. Does he agree that, if the established Church and other denominations wish to be relevant in contemporary society, they must abide by the principle of equality for women and men before the law?

Mr. Cook: As a lapsed Presbyterian from Scotland, I am badly qualified to respond to that question.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will know from his sojourn in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that the Republic of Ireland's Criminal Assets Bureau to some extent mirrors the body that we are trying to introduce through the Proceeds of Crime Bill. On a recent visit to Dublin, we discovered a basic difference between that Bill and similar legislation in that country. Our Bill will affect only criminals who have appeared before the courts twice. Before it completes its remaining stages in the House and the other place, can we establish whether it is wise to allow two strikes in that way? As our experience shows, many godfathers who have never appeared before the courts have enriched themselves through the proceeds of crime.

Mr. Cook: I assume from the hon. Gentleman's last point that he is fully behind the Bill's principle, which is to ensure that criminals cannot profit from their crimes and that such profits can be returned to the community. Of course, there will be an opportunity to explore the Bill's detail during the two full days of its remaining stages. We have given an undertaking that there will be six full hours of debate on both days, and the hon. Gentleman still has time to table an amendment if he so wishes.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Does my right hon. Friend recall his answer to my request of several months ago, during business questions, for a debate on the energy review? He said that the appropriate time for such a debate was following the review's publication. Notwithstanding his assurance that the Government will make a statement on the energy review in due course, does he agree that there is an argument for having that debate now, so that the views of the House can inform the Government statement?

Mr. Cook: Of course, I am well aware that my hon. Friend and several other hon. Members have expressed an interest in the energy review as it has proceeded, but I repeat that the review is not yet complete. There must be a Government response to the study, which may be published in the form of a Government publication, and which will certainly be introduced in a statement in the House. Of course, any Member can seek to debate the matter in, for example, Westminster Hall, and I am sure that a number of my colleagues will examine such options.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Leader of the House has announced only one day for debating the final stages of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill. Because of the shambolic way in which the Government administered and programmed its Committee stage, at least 36 clauses and seven schedules remain entirely undiscussed. The Bill deals with very important matters, and although it does not give rise to controversy between the parties, details such as the introduction of an entirely new youth justice system in Northern Ireland are terribly important. That is a poor way to treat the people of Northern Ireland and a dreadful way to treat legislation. Will the Leader of the House reconsider the way in which the Bill is proceeding in Committee?

Mr. Cook: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that the Bill, which reforms the court system, is an important one for the people of Northern Ireland, and I hope that the House can make progress on it. I should point out that adequate time was provided for its consideration in Committee, although I fully understand his frustration with those proceedings. Programme motions provide a basis for full scrutiny of a Bill, but they do impose a discipline on members of the Committee to ensure that debate focuses on the major issues.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My right hon. Friend spoke previously about the Government requiring a lengthy period of reflection to digest the comments on Lords reform. Given that a unanimously agreed Public Administration Committee report was completed in little more than a month, will the Government stick to the convention of replying to it within two months?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate my hon. Friend on having joined the consensus on the Committee and I even more warmly congratulate the Chairman of the Committee on having persuaded him to do so. I do not recall using the word "lengthy" for the period of reflection, but I would not wish to use the word "rushed". We must proceed with care, but also with all expedition to ensure that we maintain the momentum to which the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) referred earlier. The requirement on the Government is to respond to Select Committee reports within two months and we shall endeavour to achieve that deadline.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Following the precedent that has now been set by the Prime Minister in lobbying for small companies, will the Leader of the House today give us an assurance that in future, Ministers will always be ready to meet companies that employ perhaps 200 constituents and which have problems with Government policy, whether or not the companies have given money to the Labour party?

Mr. Cook: As I said earlier, the common-sense question is whether the Prime Minister should have supported a company with British connections in its bid—*[Interruption.]* The company in question has British connections. Mr. Mittal is a British resident and he employs 100 people in Britain. I do not understand why Opposition Members are so scornful of companies that employ 100 people in Britain. As for small businesses, my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Trade and Industry regularly meet representatives of the small business sector and I am sure that they will continue to do so.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Could the Leader of the House find time for a debate in the near future in which we could congratulate the Chancellor on his work in beating off efforts by the European Commission to cap public expenditure? Could that debate include an examination of the stability pact and the impact that it would have on public expenditure in Britain, should we be so foolish as to join the euro now?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes his point about the euro robustly, and I am sure that he will have many occasions on which to do so in the future.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I wish to return to the subject of the energy review, which is now available to hon. Members, and to express my regret that we cannot take the opportunity to congratulate the Government on the Cabinet Office's apparently bold position on renewable energy. The review starts with a sentence from the Prime Minister:

> "I hope that this report will launch a thorough debate."

Why cannot that thorough debate occur here, especially as we had an extensive debate on the last major performance and innovation unit report, on sub-post offices, within hours of its publication?

Mr. Cook: Of course, the hon. Gentleman will understand the distinction between a debate and a statement. I welcome his support for the conclusions of the report, and I also welcome the emphasis that it places on conservation and the tight targets that it sets for energy conservation in British homes. I certainly would not wish the hon. Gentleman to feel inhibited from expressing his support on any occasion offered to him.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we debate early-day motion 841?

[That this House notes that the principle of funding political parties from public funds has been accepted in the allocation of Short money; and believes that reliance on funding from individuals and companies intent on influencing political decisions could be largely eliminated

by funding main parties activities in the same manner with moneys allocated by an independent trust on the basis of votes cast in past elections.]

That would give us an opportunity to celebrate with some pride the fact that in recent history not one British Government of any political colour has been corrupt. Those who make such accusations do more to demean themselves than they do to demean the standing and reputation of British democracy. As the principle of public funding of parties has been accepted by all the parties in the House, and as the sum of £25 million will be paid in this Parliament to opposition parties, is it not a small step to extend the funding to other party activities so that parties can be absolved from accusations of corruption—some of which are legitimate but many of which are mischievous?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes a contribution to a debate that will continue for some time, both in public and in the House, and he raises an important point for consideration. We do have public funding of the official Opposition, which I have not noticed them resisting. My hon. Friend fairly asks them to consider whether that principle should be confined to them or shared more widely.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): Could the Leader of the House arrange for the teaching of geography in schools, especially Scottish public schools, given the Prime Minister's remarkable assertion that the Dutch Antilles are British? It is easy to see how his confusion has arisen because he travels around the world so much that he does not really know where Britain is, let alone the Dutch Antilles. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has now gathered enough air miles to visit them. Could that debate be tied to a more serious debate about the Government's much-vaunted foreign policy and whether it is ethical to say to a country that is keen to join the EU that its membership could be affected by whether it gives an important contract to a company that supports a British political party or to a French company that does not?

Mr. Cook: I conclude from the hon. Gentleman's final sentence that he would have preferred the French company to receive the contract. I have to say that he will find himself very lonely among the British public. As for his remarks about the Dutch Antilles, I merely ask him why the Conservative party was content to accept Lord Ashcroft as a British treasurer when he was based in Belize. I should be interested to hear from Conservative Members how many people Lord Ashcroft employed in Britain.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The Leader of the House will have discovered from his careful reading of the newspapers that the Government have published findings and recommendations on flood defences and future expenditure on them. That will have an enormous impact on constituencies such as mine and its neighbour City of York, which experienced severe flooding in November 2000 and face serious flood threats as I speak.

Will the right hon. Gentleman make time for a full debate on a Government motion dealing with the implications of that? I am thinking particularly of the notion of charging householders a levy, thus making them personally responsible for houses that may have been built by developers who secured huge commercial gain. The current law absolves householders from any prior knowledge when they purchase their homes.

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of the importance of this issue in a number of parts of Britain, particularly the hon. Lady's region, and of the concern about rising water levels that has been felt over the past few days. It is because the Government attach so much importance to the matter that we have tried to proceed as rapidly as possible with flood defences, which often constitute a complex and long-term engineering project. I assure the hon. Lady that I will draw her remarks to the attention of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which is fully seized of the position.

I agree that those who built houses in places exposed to flooding should reflect on their responsibility to people who bought the houses in good faith.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The House will have noted the right hon. Gentleman's weasel words. He did not describe LNM Holdings as a British company, as the Prime Minister did yesterday not once, not twice, but three times. It has now been downgraded to "a company with British connections". May we, as a matter of urgency, have a debate in Government time on the interpretation of the English language by the Prime Minister and other Ministers?

May we also have an opportunity to explore the fact that, notwithstanding the disingenuous suggestion by the Leader of the House that no one in Britain could possibly suffer as a result of LNM's takeover of the Romanian steel firm, companies—including companies in my constituency in which jobs depend on the success of Corus—will be hugely damaged by the ability of a friend of and donor to the Labour party to undercut Corus worldwide and cost British jobs as a consequence of the Prime Minister's wholly inappropriate intervention on behalf of a company .01 per cent. of whose work force are employed in Britain?

Mr. Cook: Of course British industry faces a growing challenge across the board from the countries of central and eastern Europe, which in many respects provide a lower production base. That challenge would remain constant regardless of who had acquired the privatised steel industry in Romania. I remind the hon. Gentleman that it is supposed to be his party's objective to support countries such as Romania in their preparations for membership of the European Union.

I am bewildered at how far behind the times the Conservative party has fallen. It now discusses whether we should support only companies that are officially registered in Britain. Millions of people in Britain are employed by companies that are not registered in Britain, and are not British in the legal sense. That should not prevent the Government from lobbying on their behalf, and on behalf of the people whom they employ.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): Two weeks ago, I asked the Leader of the House whether he could secure an urgently needed statement from his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence about the readiness of the Trident refit complex at Devonport. Since then, not only has there been no statement but it has been revealed that the estimate for completion of the complex has risen by some £400 million, and that HMS Vanguard sits awaiting its refit while the complex remains uncertificated by the nuclear installations inspectorate.

May I ask again for that urgently needed statement? Could it be made on our return after the break? I think the Leader of the House said that this was not just a constituency issue but a national issue.

Mr. Cook: It sounds as if the hon. Gentleman has within him an excellent speech for the forthcoming debate, and I urge him to stay in the Chamber to make it.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the very important issue that was raised by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) yesterday in the debate on the report by the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, namely, the relationship of the Prime Minister to the ministerial code and its enforcement? In advance of such a debate, can the Leader of the House make available the suppressed internal Labour party document about the Leicester, East Labour party? We could then discover what the Prime Minister knew—he did know about goings on in Leicester, East—when he appointed the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) as a Minister. As *The Guardian* said on 15 March:

> "It seems extraordinary the lengths to which Mr. Blair and Mr. Cook have gone to defend the man".

Mr. Cook: I invite the hon. Gentleman to move on. We debated these issues yesterday and took a decision. The hon. Member at the centre of this is now suspended from the House. The hon. Gentleman should find something to occupy his intellect and passion.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Is the Leader of the House aware that last week I wrote to the Secretary of State for Health and faxed his private office asking for his urgent intervention in the case of a cancer patient in my constituency, since when I have heard absolutely nothing? I wrote to the right hon. Gentleman because the constituent in question was operated on for cancer in November and was told by the surgeon that she would require radiotherapy within four to six weeks. Since then she has been told by national health service managers that she will have to wait up to 16 weeks—until March—and that there is no possibility of her having radiotherapy before then.

Unfortunately, that is not an isolated incident in east Sussex, but is typical of the lack of resources and sheer shambles in cancer treatment in the south-east. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State to come to the House, make a statement, accept responsibility for that failure and tell us when he will get a grip on cancer care in east Sussex?

Mr. Cook: Of course the whole House will—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) will allow me to respond in my own way. The whole House will, of course, share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the individual case that he raises. I am not sure that I would serve the House well if I were to commit myself to bringing the Secretary of State for Health to the House for a debate on one case, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are committed to increasing substantially the number of cancer specialists in the NHS. Unfortunately, it takes seven years to train a cancer specialist. If the Government of the party he represents had increased rather than cut the number of trainee consultants, we might have a better service in his constituency.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): May I draw the Leader of the House's attention to another aspect of the crisis in Zimbabwe: the urgent need for reconstruction in the country if Robert Mugabe were to lose the election in four weeks' time? Last Wednesday, my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) and I met senior officials of the Movement for Democratic Change in Johannesburg. What was striking was that, despite all the obstacles that have been placed in their way, they still believe that they can win the election. However, they stressed that there was a vital need for assistance in the reconstruction of the country, which has been ruined by corrupt rule over many years. Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate on Britain's role in the reconstruction of Zimbabwe and on what we can do to assist, bearing in mind the urgent need for that to happen as soon as possible were Robert Mugabe to lose the election?

Mr. Cook: Although it would be premature to debate what we would do in the event of President Mugabe's defeat, the hon. Gentleman raises an important point on which my colleagues will be reflecting even now. It gave us no pleasure to withdraw economic development aid from Zimbabwe and we took that step only because it was impossible to work with President Mugabe's Administration. Nothing that we could achieve through aid would undo the damage that he is inflicting on Zimbabwe's economy. If we can find partners in Zimbabwe to work on the country's reconstruction on behalf of its people, they will find Britain a willing partner.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), does the Leader of the House recall from his time as Foreign Secretary any example of an ambassador losing his diaries? Does he believe that Ambassador Ralph, our man in Bucharest, lost his diaries, or were they buried by the Labour spin machine? Can we have a statement from the Prime Minister on this sorry event?

Mr. Cook: I must confess that I am not up to speed on the allegation of Mr. Ralph having lost his diary, but I know the gentleman in question. In fact, I think that I appointed him to the post. He is an excellent diplomat. I believe that it is absolutely right for Britain, as a champion of EU enlargement, to send a strong message of welcome for Prime Minister Nastase's bold decision to break up Romania's monopoly state-owned steel industry, which is a sign of the important preparations he is making for EU membership.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Leader of the House will recall that, before the 1997 election, the Prime Minister said that there were 24 hours to save the national health service. Since then, the NHS has developed severe problems, crime in our inner cities has soared and, in some instances, public transport is close

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

to collapse. Can we have a general debate on our public services? May I suggest that the Prime Minister takes time out of his busy worldwide schedule to lead that debate so that we can scrutinise his actions in relation to our great public services?

Mr. Cook: The House has just been treated to the hon. Gentleman's next constituency report. May I put his remarks in context? Since this Government came to office, we have 20,000 more nurses and thousands more doctors in the NHS. For the first time in 30 years, we have more general and acute beds in the NHS. If the Conservative Government had paid the same attention to it, we would be in a better state. We are making as much progress as we can possibly hope to achieve from the low base that the Conservatives left us.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Does the Leader of the House recall that the Minister responding to the recent social care debate said that she would investigate the allegation by the 15 social services departments in the south-west that the funding crisis is so severe that they have to divert money from care of the elderly to prop up child care and child protection? When the investigation is complete, will the Secretary of State for Health make a statement to the House?

Mr. Cook: I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman a statement, but I shall draw his remarks to the attention of the Secretary of State for Health and invite him to ensure that he communicates with the hon. Gentleman when the study is complete.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): To provide clarification for all small and medium-sized businesses based in this country, will the Leader of the House say whether the Prime Minister is prepared to write a letter on behalf of companies employing 100 or more people that are trying to win contracts overseas?

Mr. Cook: The Government have given full support to companies of whatever size that try to win contracts overseas. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that he will get the same service the next time any British business acquires a steel mill in central or eastern Europe.

Point of Order

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would be grateful for your assistance. I have used, as far as I can, my ingenuity to try to obtain an answer from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to letters sent by HF Holidays, proprietors of the Freshwater Bay hotel in my constituency, on 20 June and 27 July last year, to my letter of 15 August and to my questions of 6 and 23 November, one of which was replied to incorrectly on 17 December. I tabled a further question on 5 February, to which I received a holding answer. I have still received no substantive answer, so will you please advise me on what further ingenuity I might exercise in this matter?

Mr. Speaker: I always found, in the Tea Room in the old days, that more senior Members of the House usually gave advice and assistance in such matters. If the hon. Gentleman feels stuck, I suggest that he consult some senior Members. I hope that that is helpful.

Defence Policy

[Relevant documents: Defence Policy 2001; MOD Policy Papers—Paper No. 1—Defence Diplomacy; MOD Policy Papers—Paper No. 2—Multinational Defence Co-operation; MOD Policy Papers—Paper No. 3—European Defence; The Future Strategic Context for Defence; The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter—Public Discussion Paper.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

1.25 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Today's debate on defence policy is the first of a series of one-day defence debates planned for this Session. This marks a change from our previous practice of having a two-day debate and three one-day debates. It is part of a wider effort to improve the arrangements for allowing the House to debate defence issues.

This is an agreed change, building on helpful advice from the Defence Committee with regard to concerns that two-day debates were becoming less effective. We plan, therefore, to retain the three one-day debates on procurement, personnel and defence in the world, which have worked well. The two new one-day debates on defence policy and defence in the UK will provide a better opportunity for hon. Members to raise particular concerns.

It is appropriate that this debate on defence policy should be the first under the new arrangements. Defence policy underpins all that we do, including, most obviously, the involvement of our armed forces in Afghanistan. We also had to re-examine aspects of our defence policy in the light of the appalling events of 11 September and the continuing campaign against international terrorism.

Today's debate coincides with the release of a public discussion document on a new chapter to the strategic defence review. I shall say more about that in due course, but we would like to stimulate more debate about defence policy. Rather than producing one large and rather indigestible defence White Paper every year, we have undertaken to produce annual memorandums on defence policy—shorter, crisper and, I hope, more readable documents that set out our current policies more clearly. These memorandums will be supported by a series of stand-alone policy papers on specific subjects, aimed at an informed and interested audience, and available at no charge to the media, academia and members of the public.

Three of these policy papers have already been produced—on defence diplomacy, multinational defence co-operation, and European defence. We have also published a more detailed paper entitled, "The Future Strategic Context for Defence". Our defence policy is set against this strategic context. It sets out how we propose to respond to changes in the international strategic environment, and how we hope to shape it.

The period since the fall of the Berlin wall has been one of significant change. Before the end of the cold war, it seemed unlikely that a potential adversary would risk a direct military confrontation with the United Kingdom or with NATO. Since then, we have been forced to recognise other risks and sources of instability in the world, with environmental, demographic, economic and social changes becoming ever more likely causes of conflict.

Multinational peace support operations have become an increasingly important feature of international security. The operational demands on our forces are not diminishing. Almost a whole generation of British service men and women has become accustomed to operations in the Balkans, for example, where we have seen continuing instability right on the border of western Europe.

In this rapidly changing world, NATO remains the cornerstone of our security and defence policy, and our instrument of first choice for managing crises. It has proved its worth across the Balkans—most recently in Macedonia—and in supporting the continuing operations in Afghanistan. The Prague summit later this year will give us an opportunity to ensure that NATO is even better placed to face the challenges of the foreseeable future and to maintain its efficiency and effectiveness.

However, our common membership of NATO alongside the United States, and our experience of operating alongside US troops, have demonstrated the size of the gap between the military capability of the United States and that of Europe.

It is a gap that is growing. The United States is willing to invest substantial new sums in defence capabilities and military technology. With technology developing at an increasing rate, the capability gap with Europe could grow still wider.

That is why we have emphasised the need for European nations to work together to strengthen their military capabilities. Instead of simply pursuing narrow national agendas, we must co-operate so that, together, we can play a more effective role in the modern security environment. Only through such co-operation will we be able to make a more effective contribution to the alliance and undertake military crisis response operations where NATO as a whole chooses not to be engaged. That is why the UK has supported the EU's headline goal so strongly.

This is about ensuring that Europe makes better and more effective use of its resources. It is about co-operating to deliver increased defence capabilities. It is not about Europe competing with the United States. That is why we have been so insistent about avoiding the duplication of capabilities, through ensuring that the European Union has access to military assets—such as operational planning and command and control—that NATO can already offer.

We will also continue to work closely with the United States—our closest ally—to enhance our military capabilities. It makes perfect sense, for example, for us to invest jointly with the US in technology development and acquisition; our co-operation with the US on the joint strike fighter provides an excellent example.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Before the Secretary of State leaves the European dimension, will he tell us how persuasive he has been in getting his European counterparts to increase their defence expenditure? They have not been doing that and the United States is feeling increasingly dismissive about it.

Mr. Hoon: Of course it is important that European nations should increase their defence expenditure, but it is equally important that the product of that expenditure should be effective. European nations need to co-operate more effectively to deliver military capabilities where we lag behind the United States. The hon. Gentleman needs

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to think through the implications of that. I know that he thinks deeply and seriously about defence, but in so doing he must recognise that to contribute to the alliance, European nations need to work more co-operatively, rather than less—which I suspect is his political position.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): If, as my right hon. Friend says, the European defence project is not about competing with the United States, why should it compete with the US on costs and spending?

Mr. Hoon: There is a huge discrepancy in spending—even between the United Kingdom, which has a good record on defence spending, and the United States. The size of the current proposed increase in US defence spending is rather higher than the entire UK defence budget. The project is not about competition in that sense; we are playing in a different division. It is certainly about ensuring that we have military assets and capabilities that can be useful, especially when operating alongside those of the US.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Can my right hon. Friend explain why the cost of the Eurofighter has ballooned to more than £20 billion?

Mr. Hoon: There is a range of different explanations, but undoubtedly the main one is the need to ensure that we have a world-class aircraft that will provide combat security for the United Kingdom well into the current century.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Secretary of State's rather bland answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) reveals nothing. Presumably, Eurofighter was a world-class aeroplane when it cost £16 billion. The figure announced this morning is £21.5 billion. The cost of Eurofighter has gone up by £5.5 billion and the aircraft has been delayed by a year. Why is that?

Mr. Hoon: As I said before, there is a range of explanations. Many of the delays occurred when the previous Government were responsible for Eurofighter—as did many of the cost increases. The hon. Gentleman would be the first to rise to his feet if, as a result of cost constraints, there were difficulties with the performance or effectiveness of Eurofighter. He cannot have it both ways: he complains either that the aircraft is not sufficiently capable for the purposes for which it was designed, or that we are not spending enough money on it. He cannot argue in both directions.

I have focused on our military capabilities, but we have also recognised that military solutions can only go so far. Many challenges to international security problems can be effectively tackled only by a long-term approach that incorporates the full range of civilian and military means at our disposal. We need to devote more attention to managing conflict—preventing it from occurring in the first place, reducing its impact, and developing strategies to remove the underlying causes of tension.

It follows that no current debate on the United Kingdom's defence policy could be complete without addressing the complex issue of international terrorism and our part in the international community's response to that threat. It is five months since the appalling events in New York and Washington. British forces have played an essential part in the coalition military action in and around Afghanistan. The United Kingdom has steadfastly supported the United States in the campaign against international terrorism, providing military assistance that I have described to the House on several occasions. That support continues. The Royal Air Force continues to provide reconnaissance and air-to-air refuelling support to coalition actions against remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda elements. British troops are still on the ground in Afghanistan, participating in these operations, and the Royal Navy continues to participate in interdiction operations in the Arabian sea to prevent the escape of al-Qaeda members.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): On over-commitment and the deployment of service personnel overseas, does the right hon. Gentleman share the view of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, who is peddling the idea of using mercenaries as an alternative? Most hon. Members are horrified by that suggestion, and would be grateful if the right hon. Gentleman would clarify the position of the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Hoon: As I understand the position, the Foreign Office has published a discussion document, enabling that issue to be discussed. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will make a vigorous contribution to that debate.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): My right hon. Friend mentioned the fact that we have troops on the ground in Afghanistan, but we are getting very little information about what is happening there. Professor Mac Herold from the university of New Hampshire has estimated the death toll of civilians in Afghanistan from October to 6 February as 3,600. What is the Government's estimate, and when are we going to have a debate solely on what is going on in Afghanistan?

Mr. Hoon: It has proved extraordinarily difficult to make any accurate estimate of the number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan; obviously, we regret any casualties. Certainly I do not recognise the figure that my hon. Friend has suggested as being anywhere near the reality, but it has proved difficult to make any precise estimate at this stage. I assure my hon. Friend that if we can do so, we shall report those estimates to the House in due course.

While the United States has shouldered much of the burden of the military campaign, my American colleagues have made no secret of how much they value our support and the invaluable experience, talent and skill of our armed forces. I once again pay tribute to the soldiers, sailors and air force personnel who have taken part, and are still taking part, in operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As my right hon. Friend knows, I supported the war, but I remember that he told me in an answer—I am sure that it was not his intention to mislead me—that the prisoners of war would be treated as prisoners of war under the Geneva conventions. A lot of nonsense has been talked about the Geneva conventions, but article 5 makes it clear that any dispute about the status of prisoners must be determined by an independent tribunal. Is that my right hon. Friend's understanding, and if so, why are not those Geneva conventions being upheld by the people with whom we fought the war?

Mr. Hoon: I do not want to get into a technical and legal argument with my hon. Friend, who has looked at this subject in detail, but as soon as she uses the phrase "prisoners of war" she is already generalising about the position of a number of prisoners who are not in fact prisoners of war. For example, there is little doubt that al-Qaeda terrorists do not, under any definition, qualify to be prisoners of war; in those circumstances, the position that has been taken by the United States Administration is the one recognised and agreed to by the United Kingdom.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): In support of what the Secretary of State has just said, it would have been absurd if Carlos the Jackal had been arrested and claimed protection under the Geneva convention. That would have been a manifestly ludicrous claim, but people could have argued, like the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), that until the claim was resolved, he had to be afforded such protection. Intelligence must be got from these prisoners, and that is why the protection under the Geneva convention must not be inappropriately applied.

Mr. Hoon: That is a fanciful example, but on this occasion I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Ann Clwyd: Further to that point, will my right hon. Friend give way again?

Mr. Hoon: I may be courting trouble, but I give way again.

Ann Clwyd: I would respectfully say to my right hon. Friend that it is not a technical argument. The Geneva conventions were framed to cover issues of this kind, where there is a dispute about the status of the people taken prisoner. It is not up to my right hon. Friend, Donald Rumsfeld or anyone else to determine the prisoners' status; it is for an independent tribunal. They may or may not be prisoners of war, but it is for that independent tribunal, under the Geneva conventions, to determine.

Mr. Hoon: We are getting into another technical debate. I do not recognise my hon. Friend's interpretation of how the Geneva conventions operate in this case. It is for the determining authority to decide on the status of prisoners. In the circumstances, it is proper for the United States Administration to be that determining authority. The Geneva conventions were framed against the background of war between states. That cannot apply to alleged al-Qaeda terrorists. I am confident that the US Administration and the UK Government are taking the right approach.

Many of the campaign aims that we set out at the start of military action in Afghanistan have been met. The ability of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda to pose a continuing terrorist threat has been severely limited. We have seen a change in the leadership of Afghanistan, which is no longer a state that supports or sustains international terrorism. One of our longer-term aims in the campaign was to end Afghanistan's self-imposed isolation and reintegrate the country as a responsible member of the international community.

The Bonn agreement is being implemented successfully. A key part of that is the deployment to Kabul of the international security assistance force, for which the UK is currently the lead nation. I saw that at first hand last week when I visited British troops in Afghanistan and met members of the Interim Administration. Hamid Karzai and other members of the Interim Administration deserve real credit for all that they have achieved.

In addition to the enabling force of 250 that we sent to support the early stages of the deployment, there are now some 1,700 British troops in Kabul as part of ISAF. In total, ISAF numbers around 3,600 troops, with forces from 13 of the 17 other troop-contributing nations now in place. ISAF is on course to achieve full operating capability later this month.

Hon. Members will have seen the media coverage of the joint patrols conducted by the ISAF and the Afghan police. Those have been well received. I went on patrol with a considerable number of members of 2 Para last week, so I know from first-hand experience that the reception from the local people is excellent.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am not sure whether the Royal Air Force TriStar is used in Afghanistan, but I regret that the Government have not awarded the maintenance contract to Marshall's, which is likely to cause the loss of 80 to 100 jobs in my constituency. Marshall's works to high standards and provides high-quality services to British Airways, Lufthansa and KLM.

Mr. Hoon: TriStar is not being used in Afghanistan, but I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern for her constituents and for Marshall's. I have visited that company several times and it is an admirable example of excellent British engineering. However, it has not been maintaining TriStar for about five years. Notwithstanding the quality of its bid, it was not successful in a competitive process with others that are engaged in maintaining TriStar.

It is clear that ISAF is making a difference on the streets of Kabul, and not simply by providing security. It has also been working with the Department for International Development to identify useful projects to help to restore Kabul as a functioning modern city. I saw, for example, efforts that British soldiers are making to bring a school that was badly damaged in the civil war back into use.

As lead nation of ISAF, the UK played a major role in establishing the force. We plan to maintain that role until late April when we expect to hand it over to one of our partners. We are working with Turkey to encourage it to turn its expression of interest in becoming the lead nation into a formal offer.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am interested in what the Secretary of State says about the reconstruction of Afghanistan and other improvements. What is being done about the quantities of unexploded ordnance, especially cluster bombs, that have been found in

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Afghanistan? Can he make it clear whether British, American or any other forces used depleted uranium at any stage during the conflict?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the problem of unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan. That has been a significant problem for many years, and the ordnance dates back to the occupation by the Soviet Union, the civil war and the range of conflicts that have taken place in that country. Members of ISAF are certainly engaged, day by day, in clearing parts of the city. I saw some of that work myself and heard still more of it. It is an enormously difficult and potentially dangerous task, and they are going about it with considerable skill.

Mr. Hancock: Bearing it in mind that we are now told that there are more than 7,000 prisoners of one form or another in Afghanistan, has the Secretary of State been approached by his American allies with the suggestion that British troops be deployed in holding those prisoners securely? Have any negotiations taken place on the repatriation of the British prisoners currently held in Afghanistan to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hoon: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, that has not happened. On his second point, as has been said already, what is important is that those held at Guantanamo bay are questioned on their likely involvement in the events of 11 September and on other offences that they may have committed against United States law or, indeed, against international law. Thereafter, there may be circumstances in which those prisoners are brought back to the United Kingdom, not least if there are allegations that they may have committed offences against United Kingdom law.

ISAF's task is to assist the Afghan Interim Administration in maintaining security in and around Kabul, to provide the conditions in which they can pave the way for the interim Loya Jirga in June and, ultimately, the full Loya Jirga 18 months later.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Part of Mr. Hamid Karzai's appeal when he came here was that ISAF's remit be extended beyond Kabul. Clearly, it is in everyone's interest that the four other major cities in Afghanistan also have the same degree of law and order as Kabul. What has been the British Government's response and that of the international coalition generally to Mr. Karzai's appeal?

Mr. Hoon: I had the privilege of discussing that issue with Mr. Karzai, not only in the United Kingdom but when I went to Afghanistan last week. Obviously, the Interim Administration is concerned to provide security elsewhere beyond Kabul, but that has not been possible so far, not least because of the terms of the original UN Security Council resolution and, indeed, because of practical constraints on the number of forces available. It is obviously something that the international community will continue to consider, but real practical constraints face any country that would want to be involved.

ISAF has also begun to train 600 members of the Afghan armed forces to form a national guard. The United Kingdom is also committed to playing its part, with other coalition partners, in helping the Afghans with the reform of their security sector. That is essential to create lasting stability, which, ultimately, of course, must be a matter for the Afghans themselves.

Much still needs to be done, by the international community and the Interim Administration, before Afghanistan is restored as a completely stable and peaceful country, but we are well on the way towards ensuring that Afghanistan will never again provide a haven for international terrorism.

I have already mentioned the outcome of the strategic defence review. That review and our further work on the changing strategic context put us in a strong position to respond to the appalling events of 11 September. The review placed particular emphasis on capabilities relevant to the new circumstances in which we find ourselves—reconnaissance, surveillance, rapid deployment, precision strikes and more effective command and control. That is why the United Kingdom has been able to play such a significant role in the military operations in Afghanistan. The acquisition of equipment such as the Apache helicopter, the joint strike fighter and the future carriers will enhance those capabilities still further.

The appalling attacks on 11 September highlighted the need for us to consider whether we should make further adjustments to our armed forces to take account of the threat from international terrorism and the growing likelihood of asymmetric action. So, as I announced to the House in October last year, I have set in hand work to re-examine our own defence posture and plans to ensure that we have the right defence concepts, forces and capabilities to defend us against the threat from international terrorism.

We have underlined from the outset the need to keep a sense of perspective in that work. Not everything has changed. Nor, just as importantly, does everything need to change. I emphasise again that we are engaged not in a new strategic defence review but in a new chapter to that review. However, it would be complacent not to adjust capability when that is needed, and not to address how we can prevent or deter attacks of the kind seen on 11 September. Since October, we have undertaken a great deal of work, involving other Departments and outside experts, to consider that issue.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The Secretary of State said that it would be complacent not to take account of the attacks on 11 September. The American national security review specifically identified that kind of asymmetric threat to American lives in its first conclusion and a Select Committee of the House unanimously pointed out that issue as a gap in the strategic defence review. Does not the Government's approach resemble that of allowing the people who predicted that the Titanic would not sink to determine how many lifeboats it should have?

Mr. Hoon: No, it does not. The strategic defence review included a reference to asymmetric warfare, and the issue has been considered by Government in the past. Certainly, the events of 11 September have required us to consider such threats again and in more detail. I wish any Government had been in a position to anticipate what happened on 11 September. The truth, however, was that we were not in such a position. We must now ensure that we have the right kind of military capabilities to face the challenges posed by those events.

Our thinking so far is set out in a public discussion paper which the Ministry of Defence published this morning and which has already been made available to hon. Members. It considers a range of issues and seeks to answer a number of basic questions. How much has the strategic context changed since 11 September? How should we engage with the symptoms and causes of terrorism? What balance should we strike between home defence and countering the threat abroad? What range of effects do we want to be able to achieve abroad? How might we enhance the effectiveness of our military contribution at home and abroad? What role should international organisations—particularly the UN, NATO, and the EU, but also others—play in that? How can we build on our regional and bilateral relationships?

The discussion material sets out the key issues that we face, and some of the ways in which we consider that the context in which we operate may have changed. It does not seek to reach firm conclusions at this stage. We want to obtain views from Members, from the public, from outside experts and from allies and partners before we take final decisions.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The Secretary of State rightly says that this document does not offer solutions at this stage. Indeed, it poses questions that he put to the Select Committee last November. When will he come forward with concrete proposals that the House can consider? He promised the Select Committee that a detailed set of proposals resulting from the review would appear in the spring. Will he tell us when he expects to bring forward firm conclusions arising from the consultation process?

Mr. Hoon: The purpose of the discussion document is not only to indicate the nature of the questions but to set out some of our preliminary thinking. As the hon. Gentleman will find when he considers the document in more detail, there are already indications of the direction in which we propose to go. I hope that he will give the Government credit for at least allowing right hon. and hon. Members the opportunity of setting out their views. I know that he would have criticised us if we had proceeded too quickly. We are trying to strike the right balance between soliciting ideas and views and trying to move quickly. I hope that we shall move quickly towards reaching some conclusions.

I shall set out some of the first results of our opening thoughts on these difficult questions. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said last week when he was in Sierra Leone, there is a close connection between our domestic interests and what happens on the international stage. Emerging threats in Africa, the middle east, the Gulf and central Asia can come to affect us directly, sometimes with little or no warning. Therefore, a closer link now exists between ensuring the adequate defence of the home base and our ability to undertake deployed operations.

The United States, for its part, has made it clear that it will not be deterred from operating abroad by terrorists or others who threaten the US homeland. Our position must be the same. The United Kingdom will want to continue to play a leading role in promoting international security and stability. Our role, as set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, is to be a pivotal partner, using our global influence, connections and friendships as a force for good in the world. We need to play to our strengths, including, where appropriate, participating in and leading initial short-duration peace support operations in higher-risk environments and participating in strike operations as part of a coalition effort.

We need to put more emphasis on being proactive and, where possible and justifiable, pre-empting problems rather than simply waiting for problems to come to us. In that, we should use the whole range of responses that the Government have at their disposal—not simply military means.

We need to examine the number, size and nature of the operations that we may be called on to undertake—perhaps simultaneously or in quick succession. That may involve both offensive find and strike actions, and prevention or stabilisation operations. We will need to judge whether we are likely to encounter other situations where key national interests mean that we need to engage further afield than the core regions of Europe, the Mediterranean and the Gulf, which were the focus of our thinking about our force structures during the strategic defence review.

Mr. Brazier: Although I strongly welcome what the Secretary of State has just said, does he not accept that the threat that has now been identified to the home base means that, in one important respect, we are departing from a central strand of the strategic defence review's overseas elements? It is much more likely that we will have to participate in operations without having any choice about it. The thrust of the SDR was that most of our expeditionary operations would be the result of choice, but we may find ourselves committed to operations on the very edge of our capabilities and we will have no choice about that if there is a threat to our home base.

Mr. Hoon: I certainly [illegible]nk that the key change that the events of 11 September have brought about is an end to the assumption that we face no direct challenge to our territory here in the United Kingdom. Successive Governments have made that assumption and it underpinned a number of the reviews that they carried out. However, that assumption no longer applies and, as I will say in due course, we need to think through the implications of that for the future organisation of our armed forces.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Secretary of State will appreciate that many of us are disturbed by the statement that he has just made, which did not include any reference to causes of conflicts, to legal solutions to conflicts or to the role of the United Nations. He appears to be looking at a military solution to most problems. Will he assure the House that there are no plans to increase military activity against Iraq or, indeed, to engage in any military activity in Somalia or Sudan? Many people around the world now feel that Britain and the United States make their own decisions to take whatever military action they think is appropriate wherever they think it is appropriate.

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry that my hon. Friend was not listening to my speech with his customary care and

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attention. I specifically said that we needed to operate within the generally recognised rules of law and that there were a range of responses other than the purely military ones for dealing with the causes of conflict. My hon. Friend will find those points set out more clearly in the discussion document. I hope that, when he has the opportunity of reading my speech carefully, he will realise that I referred to both those points.

On Iraq, my hon. Friend knows that British forces are engaged in operations over the no-fly zones where they regularly come under fire and where they regularly respond. However, there are no plans that I am aware of for any substantial action against Iraq at the present time. The matter is obviously kept under review, not least because of the way in which our aircraft come under attack on a regular basis from the armed forces of Iraq.

I want to turn to some of the key areas that we are considering and in relation to which we are seeking views. In the United Kingdom, the Home Office is, of course, responsible for counter-terrorism and is in the lead for domestic security, particularly in relation to the police. There is an important constitutional principle involved and it is one that can quickly be forgotten in the wake of events such as the attacks of 11 September. Any support provided by the armed forces—especially the use of force—must be at the specific request of the civil authorities.

That said, the armed forces have always played an important part in the defence of the homeland. The Royal Navy ensures the integrity of our territorial waters and the Royal Air Force defends our airspace. Immediately following 11 September, elements of the armed forces, including air defence aircraft, were placed at increased readiness. They have been scrambled to monitor suspect aircraft on more than one occasion since. Command and control arrangements have been enhanced to allow more rapid decisions about how to respond to potential threats. We are considering with the relevant civil Departments and international bodies whether permanent changes in the posture and capabilities of such forces are required.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the Secretary of State explain why in the present circumstances Her Majesty's Government have decided to stand down 5 Air Defence Squadron at RAF Coningsby?

Mr. Hoon: From his long interest in the RAF the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the shortfall in the number of pilots, which is a direct consequence of decisions taken many years ago by a Government whom he from time to time supported. In the circumstances, it has been necessary for us significantly to increase the number of pilots in training, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the effect of that will take some time to filter through the system. However, I assure him that there will be no reduction in the number of aircraft patrolling, and therefore no less protection for the United Kingdom.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): A few short years ago, I witnessed a superfluity of officers under training in the RAF—so many were there that they were sent on infantry courses to pass their time. Now, at RAF Cranwell, RAF officer cadets are being used to guard the gate in the absence of policemen. Is that the right way to set about training our fighter pilots and redressing those grievances?

Mr. Hoon: I was referring specifically to pilots. There has been a long-term problem with the number of pilots available for our aircraft, which was caused specifically by the fact that it takes several years to train a pilot to fly a fast jet, and not enough people were entering training to produce the number that we ideally require today. That is a problem of long standing, and not one that the hon. Gentleman can blame on the current Government.

Beyond the specific roles that I have outlined, there are well-founded and tested procedures whereby the armed forces assist the civil authorities. We saw what an important role they had to play when members of the Royal Marines boarded a suspected rogue ship in the English channel just before Christmas. But such support is about more than responding to the threat of terror. In the past 18 months, the armed forces have responded to requests from the civil authorities for assistance with fuel strikes, major floods, and, of course, the foot and mouth crisis.

We have good reason to be grateful to the armed forces. They have unique capabilities on which the civil authorities can call—an obvious example is dealing with explosive devices. The Ministry of Defence is therefore working with other Departments to review the arrangements and degree of co-ordination between the civil authorities and the armed forces to maximise the armed forces' ability to respond to any future requests. That work is to build on the forces' particular strengths in planning and co-ordinating operations, command and control, their nationwide footprint of people, infrastructure and communications, and their specialist capabilities.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that post-11 September it is important to reassure the public? In the United States, President Bush's appointment of Governor Ridge clearly demonstrates that there is someone in charge of homeland defence with wide-ranging powers to co-ordinate state-wide activities. I am comparing that with what the Select Committee on Defence has heard so far, which suggests that our response is to hold committee meetings of civil servants. What can my right hon. Friend do to reassure the public and members of the Defence Committee that our response does not reflect the typical stiff-upper-lip approach of the civil service, and to curb the apparent lack of co-ordination and excessive departmentalism?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is right that reassurance is important, and—I am sure that this is what he was driving at—that there should be effective action if necessary. It is perhaps a little unfair to talk about committees meeting: those committees reflect a wide range of effort throughout Government to ensure that we are in a position to act should we face a threat similar to the one faced by the United States on 11 September.

One matter that we are considering in detail is the potential further contribution that the reserves can make—perhaps by building on their wide geographical spread across the country and their associated local knowledge. Our reserve forces are integrated with the Regular armed forces. When deployed, they carry out many of the same tasks as our Regular forces. Again and again, they have proved their worth and professionalism on operations, for example, in the Balkans, where reservists have consistently represented around 10 per cent. of our commitment.

With the Home Office and other Departments, we are looking at whether any new tasks required by the new scenarios can be encompassed within the existing role and capability of the reserves. We will also consider the volunteer ethos of the reserves, as well as their availability and their training. Any changes that we decide are needed will involve supporting the civil agencies that have primary responsibility for these matters. Should we decide that changes to the role of the reserves may be necessary, we will naturally consult existing members of the reserve forces and their civilian employers first. We are scheduling this for the coming weeks and will then make public more detailed proposals.

Turning to what we can do overseas, it is a tenet of British military doctrine that it is usually better to seek to engage an enemy at longer range—before they are able to mount an attack against our interests. Our preference will therefore be to continue to place our emphasis on deployed operations, so we must continue to be ready and willing to deploy significant forces overseas to act against terrorists and those who harbour them. Our determination to do that, where necessary, should be absolutely clear from the actions that we have taken to date.

It is in the very nature of terrorist groups and those posing asymmetric threats that they will be hard to find and may be vulnerable to attack for only fleeting moments. So in many circumstances we will need to be able to strike very rapidly, and we need adequate reach. The strategic defence review set in hand a range of measures to give our armed forces the right posture and capabilities, which have stood us in good stead since 11 September.

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way to me again. He rightly referred to the importance of consulting the reserve forces themselves. Does he accept that, for many in the reserve forces, an absolutely key decision is in his gift at the moment? That is whether to continue as a part-time appointment the critical military adviser's post, director of reserve forces of cadets. The initial decision was made five years ago and was welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It means that the post is filled by someone who has a civilian job which, to use the words of one of the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues, means that he has empathy with reservists. That decision will come up very shortly. May I urge the right hon. Gentleman to keep a part-timer in that post?

Mr. Hoon: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall certainly take his view into account when the decision is made.

Mrs. Mahon: I thank my right hon. Friend for his patience in giving way to me again. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly was told recently by Interpol that a connection had been established between al-Qaeda, the Kosovo Liberation Army and the Bosnian Muslims. What investigations are the Government undertaking into the leadership of the KLA and the Bosnian Muslims both in Bosnia and in Kosovo?

Mr. Hoon: rose—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Before the Secretary of State replies, I say to the House that there is a very long list of hon. Members who are seeking to catch my eye, and if there are multiple interventions from certain hon. Members, it may affect their place on the list.

Mr. Hoon: I shall take your warning into account, Mr. Deputy Speaker, next time someone invites me to give way.

In answer to my hon. Friend's question, certainly a number of links between different organisations have been identified, each of which has been thoroughly investigated, including the one that she mentioned.

We need now to look at whether the new circumstances make new demands on us. We want to assure ourselves that we have the right shape and balance of rapidly deployable forces and that we are able to integrate them with intelligence assets and the command and control that is needed to mount effective precision operations. So we are looking closely, for example, at whether we need more of our forces at high readiness, and we are considering the enablers required, such as command and control, intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, reconnaissance and transport.

There are broadly five ways in which we can seek to counter threats abroad. We can try to prevent the conditions that allow international terrorist organisations to operate, and help less capable states to build better capabilities to counter terrorism themselves. That is similar to what the United States is doing in the Philippines at the moment. We can seek to prevent problems recurring by undertaking peace support operations, usually in coalition with others, to prevent instability or assist in stabilisation.

We can deter would-be attackers by ensuring that our range of military options and our readiness to use them are clear. We must also be able to coerce those who harbour or support international terrorism if other means have not dissuaded them. If that fails, we can try to disrupt activities that support international terrorist groups, for example by closing off sources of materiel, finance and freedom of movement. We might ultimately need to destroy active terrorist cells with military action, such as find and strike raids on key terrorist facilities. Of course, whatever action we take in response to a particular threat will depend on the nature of that threat. In some cases, defence diplomacy or peace support may be enough. In others, a robust military response will be required. We want to be able to contribute to a range of responses. We need to consider where the emphasis should lie. In all that, we will remain very conscious of the need not to place unsustainable demands on members of the armed forces and their families.

We are also examining the roles played by international organisations of which we are a member, principally the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union, but also others. They all have unique responsibilities and offer different capabilities. They have all already acted decisively against international terrorism. For example, NATO made its first ever invocation of article 5. But we need to make sure that the right organisations take the

[Mr. Hoon]

right initiatives without duplicating what others are doing. We must be able to convince potential terrorists that the international community as a whole, rather than ad hoc coalitions of states, is willing and able to act quickly and decisively.

We also need to build and sustain our military relationships with other nations. Defence diplomacy was one of the major themes of the strategic defence review. The education and training of foreign armed forces is an area in which the United Kingdom has developed proven skills. In Sierra Leone, for example, our short-term training teams have trained a total of 9,000 soldiers. We are already building on our activities and relationships in that area, but we may need to do more.

During the strategic defence review, the Ministry of Defence actively sought the views of those outside Government. We recognised that Members of Parliament and peers, local authorities, academics, industry, interest groups, non-governmental organisations, the media and members of the general public may well have ideas and opinions. Within the constraint of a tight timetable, we are seeking to emulate that approach in our work on the new chapter of the strategic defence review. So, today, I repeat our invitation for views and ideas from as wide an audience as possible. We are distributing discussion material to every library in the country; it has also gone to every local authority and is available on the internet. The armed forces are a vital national asset and I want to hear views on what their role and contribution should be in this new environment. We are working to a tight timetable, and have provided just over a month for comments, to ensure that contributors have the chance to influence our thinking. I plan to publish some conclusions from the work in the spring or early summer.

Those matters are of direct interest to us all. There have been those, certainly since the end of the cold war, who have seen the armed forces as an optional extra, and the contribution that they have made abroad as a favour that we have been able to offer to the international community. And some have perhaps taken too comfortable a view of the so-called peace dividend and the fact that an external threat to the United Kingdom seemed so unlikely. We cannot afford to think like that any longer. The military capability on which we spend the defence budget is not an optional extra; it is absolutely essential to our part in maintaining international security. We must not take that security and stability for granted.

We need to see defence as a public service—something as crucial to our freedom and our quality of life as health and education. The events of 11 September have cast a long shadow over our world. Our strategic environment has changed, not beyond recognition, but certainly significantly. That change must be built into our defence planning and policy. With the work that we have in hand, we will ensure that our armed forces will reflect the new challenges that we face so that we are better placed to defend the United Kingdom, our people and our interests, and to strengthen peace and security world wide.

2.13 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests; I remain a serving member of the Territorial Army. I apologise for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), who is in Washington. I understand that he has written to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Secretary of State.

It is a great privilege to be called to speak immediately after the Secretary of State. As he pointed out, our armed forces are on operations and in action. During the short time that I have served in the House of Commons, they have continued to distinguish themselves on land, in the air, and at sea. Will the Secretary of State convey my thanks to the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) and his staff for their work in enabling me to visit many units, which has been a great privilege?

Last Friday, I visited the Infantry Battle School at Brecon, and observed the platoon sergeants' course. When I arrived, they had already been in the field for five days in filthy weather, and they had another five days to go. They were thoroughly wet and covered in mud and so were all their possessions. They had not slept in 72 hours as they had been driven out of a position the night before and had had to tab through the night with all their kit. When I met them, they were planning an assault to retake that position at 4 am the next morning. It was exactly the sort of time when one would expect them to have a serious sense of humour failure, but not a bit of it. When I spoke to them they said, "No, sir. This is what training for war is all about, sir." No finer body of men could be found in any armed service throughout the world. As President Chirac said:

> "We must make our armed forces more like the British. They are the best in the world and must be the model for ours."

That must be the starting point of our debate. How do we deploy and preserve this enormously precious asset?

I have read the document provided by the Secretary of State, the excellent second report of the Select Committee on Defence in respect of the role of the reserves and what the Secretary of State said in paragraphs 25 and 26 of the report before us today. I have had an amount of lobbying from members of the Territorial Army concerned about guard duties at key points. It does not sound a particularly attractive role, but if the intelligence estimate is that key facilities have to be guarded, or protected in order to provide reassurance to the public, somebody has to guard them and it is a proper role for the Territorial Army.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): Does not the fact that the hon. Gentleman is both a serving member of the TA, so presumably he has lobbied in that capacity, and here debating Government policy on the TA give rise to some inconsistency with his comments some years ago of which I have some recollection?

Mr. Swayne: No. I suffer no discomfort at all. The TA is familiar with its role in homeland defence. Although the larger part of the TA was tasked to reinforce the British Army of the Rhine during the Soviet threat, a distinct and significant element of the TA was tasked with home defence to counter the threat of Soviet special forces attacking key points and of assassinations and to keep main supply routes open. So the TA is already familiar with this role and I am absolutely sure that it will have no difficulty carrying it out. My only concern is that the TA also has other roles to which I shall return in a moment.

Let me say something about the need for flexible forces to which the Secretary of State and the Select Committee drew attention. The Select Committee report states:

> "We will need more forces which can be available at short notice; more forces in other words with the training and skills of the Royal Marine Commandos, the Parachute Regiment and the Special Forces."

That is absolutely true, but we should be aware that we do have additional forces with those capabilities now. It is not a common misconception in this House, but the public believe that the 3rd Commando Brigade and the 16th Air Assault Brigade are all about Royal Marine commandos and parachutists. They are not. There is a significant infantry regiment of the line input into those brigades. We fall into a grave mistake if we have the mindset that there are specialist forces and ordinary forces. Our ordinary forces are themselves specialist forces and can do the job. We must avoid the problem that will arise with respect to morale if we categorise the infantry regiments of the line as available only for what might be called ordinary duties instead of the new, highly deployable, flexible duties which are so necessary. The infantry has been working on that ability to deploy flexibly and quickly for some time. When I visited infantry headquarters in Warminster some weeks ago, I picked up its visitors' handbook. Its first page sets out "the infantry vision". I am not sure whether we should encourage vision among infantrymen. I suspect that the phrase has more to do with the management-speak of Arthur Andersen than with soldiering. Nevertheless, the vision is:

> "That by 2020, the infantry must be equipped, structured, manned, trained and sustained to fulfil its mission in accordance with its manoeuvrist doctrine."

I put a little research into what that doctrine might be. If I may be technical for a moment, much of it turns on what is now called the rule of four. Under the doctrine, to deploy with maximum flexibility, maximum fire support under command and effective use of reserves, a battalion should have four companies, a company should have four platoons and a platoon should have four sections. That differs from the order of battle as it has been hitherto, which has only three of each of those elements.

That begs the enormous question of whether manpower will be forthcoming to sustain that important new order of battle. Those additional resources can come from one of two places. First, we could start to scrap cap badges and amalgamate regiments. However, I am certain that there is no appetite on either side of the House for that approach, because it kills off the goose that lays the golden egg—the very core of our regimental system. Secondly—this is what the Army believes—the additional resources can come, in time of war, from the Territorial Army. After all, that is not dissimilar from the TA's traditional role of filling out the British Army of the Rhine's order of battle.

However, if the TA is earmarked for homeland defence it will be difficult to sustain that new order of battle for the infantry in addition to the existing requirement on the TA to fill the gaps in the regular Army by providing what I described in last week's Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall as the 3,000 or so "serial mobilisers" who constantly go from one mobilisation to another to sustain the regular Army. The whole concept of homeland defence—or home defence, as we used to call it—raises serious questions about the proper establishment of the reserves.

We were wholly opposed to the cuts in the TA. That is not a party political point, because several Labour Members, not least some of those who serve on the Select Committee, have a distinguished record in that battle. The TA suffered significant damage as a consequence of the strategic defence review. If the Government are to make use of the asset of the TA in the way that the document describes, that damage will require substantial repair. It is evident in the problem of undermanning, in the dearth of junior officers and in the fact that short courses are 40 per cent. undersubscribed. Potential officers are turning up at the Royal Military college, Sandhurst untrained by their battalions, with the result that the course has to be changed from a testing course into a teaching course. One course per year has to be cancelled owing to the shortage.

The debate on the use of the reserves must go beyond the TA. For example, we could consider using the Royal Auxiliary Air Force to provide strike flying formations. That would be comparable with the way in which the National Guard operates in the United States.

Flexibility is vital, but I want to sound a note of caution. The axes—I use the plural advisedly—of evil in the world, be they rogue states, failed states, or whatever, have plenty of conventional armaments. There are 255,000 tanks out there, only 386 of which are ours. The Soviets alone exported some 80,000 T72 tanks. Twenty-nine countries have more than 2,000 tanks; we would be 45th in any league. There must be a balance between firepower, protection and mobility. Given the current state of technology, that balance comes out at about 70 tonnes.

Mr. Kevan Jones: What use would a tank be against a terrorist attack?

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Gentleman will recall that it is not long since this country was at war with Iraq, which has many tanks. We might find ourselves in conflict with failed states not entirely dissimilar to Afghanistan as part of the war against terrorism. Infantry set against their armour without our own armoured support would take enormous casualties. One day, we will develop technology that can replace the tank, but not yet. I suspect that when we have it, it will be fiendishly expensive.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Few individual pieces of military equipment are of any use in a terrorist attack—that is why such attacks are so dangerous. Individual pieces of military equipment are used when we carry out our response.

Mr. Swayne: My hon. Friend's point is well made. It is not only a question of high-intensity war fighting—we have found armour to be extremely useful in peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. I am sure that Ministers will confirm that.

I want to move on to an area of defence policy on which I am tempted to congratulate the Government almost unreservedly. *[Interruption.]* Wait for it. The position that they appear to be taking up as regards ballistic missile defence suggests that they have taken a quantum leap. Only two years ago, speaking on "Newsnight", the Minister for Europe said:

> "I don't like the idea of a star wars programme".

[Mr. Swayne]

We can recall the debate in Westminster Hall in which many Labour Members assured us that the ballistic missile defence programme was the greatest threat to global security. Now, the Foreign Secretary declares himself to be "open to new thinking" about it. I read with unalloyed pleasure the speech that he gave on 6 February at King's college. The soundness of his argument was matched only by its familiarity.

Just over a year ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) wrote a pamphlet about ballistic missile defence in which he stated that

> "it needs to be recognised that the shortcomings"—

of arms control agreements—

> "are inherent."

In his speech, the Foreign Secretary acknowledged that

> "it would be foolish to overlook the shortcomings"

of arms control agreements. My right hon. Friend noted in his pamphlet that the "Cold War mindset" of the anti-ballistic missile treaty required its abandonment. That is almost uncannily similar to the phrase that the Foreign Secretary has used. I do not criticise the Foreign Secretary for that; his conversion is a matter of great satisfaction to Opposition Members. Our concern is whether the Government will confirm their position on this policy issue, to show that this is not just evidence of another lurch in policy.

Another item on which I am not so sanguine about the Government's stance—although I share the Secretary of State's preoccupation with it—is the European security and defence policy. The Secretary of State made it clear in November 2000 that that was all about capability. In December 2000, the Nice conclusions stated that

> "the main challenge for member states is to develop military capabilities".

However, figures issued by the House of Commons Library on 13 February 2002 show that EU average defence expenditure has fallen by 5.5 per cent. in each year from 1997 to 2001. In that context, we must bear in mind that the St. Malo agreement was signed in 1998. It is no wonder that Lord Robertson sounds increasingly exasperated in his speeches. On [illegible] January, in Sweden, he said that Europe was becoming

> "a military pigmy".

I urge the Secretary of State to pay considerable attention to the report produced by the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union entitled "The European Policy on Security and Defence". It states that it is not clear what could be done with a European force, and warns against

> "the temptation, if the political need for an operation arises, to conduct an EU-led mission for symbolic purposes, before the EU is ready to do so."

My concern is that that might end up happening in Macedonia this summer, and I hope that the Secretary of State is alive to that concern and will be able to address it in the fullness of time.

The European security and defence policy adds nothing to military capability. It is, therefore, all the more astonishing that the EU should continue to develop political and military structures as though that capability existed and, indeed, as though 11 September had never happened.

Mr. Hancock: Will the hon. Gentleman explain what would happen if Europe did not adopt the policy that it is currently embracing, and if the Americans decided not to take part in any action if a problem arose here? What would be the Conservative response to that? Would Great Britain alone take on the responsibility of sorting out a European conflict?

Mr. Swayne: It strikes me that there is perfectly adequate provision in NATO to make available the resources on an ad hoc basis. The coalition of the willing can happen as easily in NATO—in fact, I suspect, rather more easily—as within the European Union.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Is not the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) singing from a different song-sheet from his friends on the Labour Front Bench? They constantly tell us that the purpose of the European force is crisis management and not war-fighting or conflict. Now, however, the real danger is of a war breaking out in Europe and people from European states blundering into it without the Americans being involved. That is what we have been warning about all along.

Mr. Swayne: I acknowledge the force of my hon. Friend's point. My concern is that, if we go back and look at the declarations—the summitry—behind this issue, much of the rationale for the security and defence policy is the need to project the European Union on the world stage. I would have no practical problem with that, if the desire to do it would generate the capability, but it has not done so.

Mr. Hancock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swayne: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once, and I do not want to fall into the trap that was laid for us by the Deputy Speaker.

That brings us to the subject of the war against al-Qaeda, and the whole subject of asymmetric terrorism. What is our policy in terms of pursuing al-Qaeda beyond the Afghan front? Notwithstanding the highly useful specialised forces still being deployed, we have been content to contribute to the international security assistance force. How far into the future are we prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder, as the Prime Minister described it, with our principal ally, the United States? If we are to continue to do that, should we not take on more of the burden of pursuing the rump of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, as the Canadians are doing? Or are we content to take the largely peacekeeping role in the ISAF?

I ask those questions because, earlier this week, HMS Ocean sailed with two companies of 45 Commando for the Indian ocean. We are told that they could be involved in combat operations in support of American forces, perhaps pursuing al-Qaeda in Somalia. Can the Minister throw some light on that? We have to know exactly what our policy is on this issue, and what it will be.

I shall conclude by referring to the Secretary of State's description in an interview last weekend of our armed forces being stretched but not overstretched.

On 17 December 2001, the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Guthrie, described the situation as being "dangerously over-committed" and the current chief, in his Royal United Services Institute lecture last year, used the rather chilling phrase, "something will have to give."

My starting point in analysing the problem, as I said at the beginning of my speech, is that we have the best armed forces in the world and of course we want to use them. That is what they are for. There is no point in spending more than £21 billion a year on our armed forces if we are not going to deploy them whenever we need to do so. Of course, we hope that their mere existence will be a significant deterrent, but failing that, their purpose is to deliver lethal force wherever it is required in pursuit of our foreign policy, in conjunction with our allies.

The armed forces want to be deployed. I cannot believe that many service men join up without the hope that they will see action. No one wants to spend their career back at the depot. The fact that we deploy our armed forces so often creates a virtuous circle. More than ever before, I suspect, in the British Army, any gathering of soldiers, officers or NCOs—be it an orders group or a conference—will benefit from the fact that a majority of those present will now have operational experience and a significant minority will have combat experience. So, having a busy Army is a good thing for defence policy, but there has to be a balance. There are suggestions, and there is evidence, that we have now become too busy.

Mr. Hancock: I was disappointed to hear that the hon. Gentleman was coming to the end of his speech, because I was hoping that he would say something that would keep the Secretary of State awake long enough to listen to the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch). I should be grateful if you would confirm, as you have not mentioned any policies apart from the return to the tank and the better use of the Territorial Army, that you are happy with everything else to do with defence policy—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is meant to be addressing me when he uses the second person, but I do not think that that was his intention.

Mr. Swayne: That intervention does not do the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) justice. I acknowledge that the Secretary of State was generous in giving way, but many Members want to speak today, and the brevity of my remarks—although it may disappoint the hon. Gentleman—was a necessity, and a courtesy to the rest of the House.

Over-busyness, as I described it, was perhaps strongly evidenced in answers to written questions tabled by the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), which show a worryingly high differential between military and civilian divorce rates. It was useful to see those statistics. At a reception hosted by the Royal British Legion yesterday, I was told about a worrying statistic. On the return to Bovington of an armoured regiment of about 210 men, the Royal British Legion had to deal with some 76 divorces. That worrying statistic forms part of the evidence of over-busyness.

Further such evidence is available in the form of the stretched budget. This year, some budget-holders—units—have not allowed fully for the effects of Pay 2000. The same was true last year, but that was an allowable overspend then. Budget-holders do not know whether such overspend is allowable this year, so what are they to do? Will the whole process simply grind to a halt?

Budgetary worries are also expressed in the detail of the 31st report of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. On reading beyond the headlines, one discovers some very worrying figures. The body expresses "dismay" at the

> "appalling . . . standard of much Service accommodation".

I know that the Secretary of State is alive to the problem and I am glad that he has acknowledged it, but on visiting fusiliers in Dungannon, I saw some quite shocking accommodation. I realise that they are there for a short tour of only six months, but those young men know what is available in civvy street. As the Armed Forces Pay Review Body says,

> "poor . . . standards give rise to a strong sense of not being valued by their Service."

Evidence of stretching and over-busyness is clearly available in manning statistics that have appeared regularly throughout this Parliament. The Armed Forces Pay Review Body describes the position as

> "fragile and unlikely to improve in the . . . future."

If my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) is lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will want to dwell on that problem, which he believes can certainly be remedied. None the less, it is a measure of the difficulties that an over-busy Army faces.

Perhaps the most worrying evidence is the effect on training. Infantry battle school course statistics for last year show that mortar courses were under-subscribed by 40 per cent. Sniper courses and milan anti-tank courses were under-subscribed by 46 per cent. and 20 per cent. respectively. The reason is obvious. A busy battalion that has to deploy to Northern Ireland does not need milan anti-tank support, so there is no need to send its busy soldiers on such a course. The reality is that a time will come when we will need those skills for high-intensity warfare, but they will have faded. There is a vicious circle, in that courses have be lengthened to take account of the fact that skills are not of the required standard when they begin. That is a very worrying element of the evidence that the Army is rather too busy.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) said on Monday, the Secretary of State must persuade the Foreign Secretary to reduce the commitments—I think that unlikely—or persuade the Chancellor to fund them.

Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swayne: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall continue as I am drawing my remarks to a close. As the Defence Committee's second report points out, if there is to be another chapter in the strategic defence review, the Chancellor must be prepared to pay for it. The report's conclusion is very important to us and to defence policy. It says:

> "We must not lose our sense of the urgency and importance of this task in the months ahead. We must not hesitate to take the necessary steps to protect the UK and our interests".

That must be the essence of the debate on defence policy. It is so easy, as 11 September recedes in time, to forget the urgency and importance of the task. However, we can

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be sure that we face an enemy that has neither natural sense nor natural conscience. There is no natural sense in the absurdity of a belief that Allah the merciful would lavish the attendance of 72 maidens on someone for having done no more than slaughter innocents. There is no natural conscience in the fact that the attackers, as the Prime Minister pointed out, would have multiplied the innocents slaughtered by 70 times seven, had they had the ability to do so.

We received "a wake-up call", as Mr. Kissinger described it. We can either be alive to that call or hit the snooze button and slumber on.

2.45 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). I thank him for his brevity; he took 35 minutes, and with your approval, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall be equally brief. I also thank him for his compliments on our report on terrorism. I shall reciprocate by quoting an earlier Defence Committee report that was produced just after the strategic defence review. The hon. Gentleman's speech was not vitriolic and he did not seek to score too many political points. When he did seek to do so, they were administered gently.

I encourage the hon. Gentleman to read the previous 20 or 30 Defence Committee reports. I have been in the novel position in the past few years of supporting my party's policy on defence, and I still feel a sense of exhilaration at the realisation that our views match closely. However, the problems of overstretch, which are severe, did not begin in 1997. I simply refer the hon. Gentleman to a 1996 report from the Committee, which then had a large Conservative majority. The report stated:

> "We do not accept the proposal to drive defence expenditure below 2.8 per cent. of GDP . . . We cannot recommend the 1996 Statement on the Defence Estimates to the House unless Ministers make clear in the debate that this year's Statement will not again be undermined by further defence cuts in the 1996 Budget or by any other means."

The defence budget was grossly inadequate then, as was pointed out very fairly by the large Conservative majority, led by the late, lamented Michael Colvin.

Just before the dissolution of the Parliament that preceded the 1997 general election, the Committee produced a further report on the implications of the last Budget from the then Conservative Government. It concluded that, despite some adjustment, the plans represented a standstill for the defence budget. The report stated:

> "We insist that the defence spending plans set out in the 1996 budget must at least be maintained in real terms in future years. Any further reduction would jeopardise the defence of the realm."

Before we receive too many lectures on the inadequacies of the current Government, I respectfully suggest that many of the problems that they face—some have been remedied and some have not—can be seen in the historical context of failure to undertake a proper defence review and a continuing downward spiral in defence expenditure. It is necessary to seek to remedy those deficiencies over a period of years. I do not feel guilty about what the Government have done on defence. In fact, I could deliver a strong eulogy on that score, but the Defence Committee is critical because it is not our job to deliver eulogies to any Government; certainly the last Committee did not deliver eulogies to the Government of the day, and the tradition is being continued.

Although the document in question is not "Gone with the Wind" in terms of length, being a rather brief introduction to a complex problem, I welcome it. I also welcome today's debate and the review of the strategic defence review. Of course, it is a review of only a small part of the SDR and will take the form of a new chapter. There will be no significant evaluation of the rest of the SDR.

Syd Rapson: I intervene with trepidation, but we must be fair. The implication from the Conservative Front Bench was that more must be spent on defence; all that was said about lack of facilities implied that more expenditure was necessary. What we did not hear—perhaps my right hon. Friend can pursue this point—was how much the Conservatives expected to have to spend on defence. It would be useful to know that.

Mr. George: I do not want to project my thinking too far into the future by predicting what a Tory Government might do about defence and defence expenditure. None the less, I do not wish to keep the Minister in suspense with regard to my conclusions. I welcome the small increase in defence spending that we saw two years ago. In fact, the announcement was made on board a frigate near Sierra Leone by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when I accompanied him on a visit to that troubled country. However, that increase should be just the beginning. One of the conclusions of the Defence Committee's report on the SDR was that it would be almost impossible—quite a charitable assessment—for all the Government's intentions to be achieved on the basis of the projected budget.

On 10 September, I would have argued—indeed, I did so—that the budget was overstretched. The events of 11 September will impose further demands on additional activities to be undertaken not only by the armed forces, but by intelligence, the police, local authorities, ambulance services and a range of other statutory authorities. The idea that those additional functions could somehow be sustained by the existing budget or an incrementally increased one is a fallacy. I hope that that idea will not be espoused and that Ministers will resist it. Indeed, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is already banging on the Treasury door yet again and saying that a substantial increase is needed.

If the Prime Minister wants British forces to play as significant a role in future as they do now, there is no way in which our armed forces can respond without a considerable increase in spending. If that is not forthcoming, we must adjust to the fact that we will slip down further and perform as inadequately as some of our European partners. The opportunity exists for the good work to be continued. The need is there, and the threat is more than there. Our armed forces desire, expect and should receive more money: that is certainly clear to me.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): As the right hon. Gentleman probably knows, it is likely that the comprehensive spending review bid will have to go to the

Treasury some time next week. What would be his advice to the Secretary of State about the scale of the increase in the defence budget that is now necessary?

Mr. George: I cannot give a figure, but I trust that it would be a minimum of 0.5 per cent., which would bring the level up to 3 per cent. I will not even begin to discuss the difference between our defence expenditure and that of the United States, which of course we cannot match. I hope that when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke about Britain being in a different division, he was not subliminally indicating what might happen to his local football club, Derby County, which is very likely to end up in a different division. I hope that my local team will not do so. Anyway, I think that the figure will be around 3 per cent. It should not be beyond the Treasury's capability to grant that amount—and, as I said, we are talking not only about the Ministry of Defence, but about intelligence services, police forces and local authorities, which are largely responsible for emergency planning.

Mention was made of our report "Threat from Terrorism". What happened on 11 September was clearly very different from the terrorist acts of the past. It was appalling in terms of its scale and the evident determination to inflict mass casualties among innocent civilians—an appalling example, but regrettably neither the first nor, I suspect, the last. There is a danger that a new benchmark of horror has been established. We must provide not only a deterrent, but the capability to respond. Perhaps, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) suggested, we should make a bit more effort to deal with the causes of terrorism, but we should not think that that will necessarily eliminate the problem.

We have, in fact, a broad agenda. The Select Committee—I am pleased to note that many of its members are present—has a strenuous programme. We were in Washington recently, a punishing experience but a valuable one, as my colleagues will testify. On 18 December we produced our report on the threat from terrorism, and we are undertaking a major series of inquiries into defence and security in the United Kingdom, the new chapter in the SDR, missile defence, the future of NATO, European security and many other issues. Our numerous inquiries deal with much of what is in the document that we are discussing now.

The Secretary of State told us that the new chapter demonstrates

> "how seriously we take the views of this Committee, even though it may take longer than perhaps you would like to get around to dealing with the points you raise."

I hope that the new chapter will take the Committee's points on board; after all, its judgments stood the test of time rather better than those that the MOD made in its original SDR. Before a new chapter can be considered, however, it is necessary to look at the old chapters. The Government's SDR and also the Defence Committee's review must be revisited. The Committee criticised the Government's review on the ground that it did not take asymmetric threats seriously enough. We said:

> "We are not convinced that the SDR process has initiated this interdepartmental discussion on how to respond to asymmetric threats on a consistent basis."

We also said—rather prophetically, given that this was 1998—

> "A terrorist attack could, conceivably, give rise to an Article 5 commitment for NATO . . . Any approach to the UK's security which tries to do justice to the challenges posed by the more asymmetric nature of modern conflicts must consider the UK's external resources as a whole and judge how the military instrument can maximise its comparative advantages and achieve the greatest effect when used in combination with other instruments of policy."

We said, very seriously, that in the SDR the Government were considering expeditionary warfare and were not paying sufficient attention to a threat of which they should have been aware—the threat to the United Kingdom's home base.

Our Committee said:

> "The SDR may . . . be too led by foreign policy and the commitment to the UK being a force for good in the world",

which is important. We continued:

> "We welcome the Strategic Defence Initiative, but we are still awaiting the strategic security review."

We pleaded for such a review. Perhaps 11 September has precipitated what we called for four years ago. We said:

> "We cannot afford to allow the SDR to be a one-off experiment in inter-departmental co-operation. The process of developing a government-wide security policy must go on."

The Government produced a consultative document on contingency planning before 11 September. I could find not one reference in it to the Ministry of Defence, which shows that its focus was too narrow. We emphasised the many threats that will be faced. The idea expressed by the Government that there is no serious threat to the UK home base proved, at best, premature. We concluded that missile defence was not a subject of consideration in the SDR. It is certainly being considered now.

I suppose our most critical comments related to the cuts in the Territorial Army infantry, engineers and yeomanry, which we said were "shortsighted". Cuts have been made to the TA over many years; they did not begin in 1997. We said:

> "The TA are still a valuable resource as long term insurance against the unexpected, and re-roling should be considered before cuts . . . In an asymmetric contest it is quite possible that, in addition to other 'asymmetric weapons', the UK homeland could be targeted by terrorist action designed to disrupt civil society directly, using high technology instruments such as chemical and biological agents, electronic attacks on computers and command and control systems, and attacks on major public utilities. The SDR does not address the capacity to deal with such a threat, especially at a time when our regular forces are already fully committed."

The point I make not too brutally—I am pulling the leg of a Minister, whom I admire greatly—is that before the Government start spending too much time on a new chapter, perhaps they could do us the courtesy of looking more seriously at our report on the SDR four years ago, which examined many of the items that are now under discussion.

I am deeply dissatisfied with the way in which the reserves have declined in importance. We said in our report that we welcomed the openness to reassessing the role of the reserves. Their role is now being reassessed.

I hope that the reserves and the TA will not be used just to trickle-feed the regular forces. I have always hoped that the time would come when an infantry battalion such as the 3rd Battalion of the former Staffordshire Regiment was used collectively, rather than single individuals going off to support the regular forces. That is very important.

[Mr. George]

Will they be used any differently as a result of 11 September? Of course they will. If they are used in a crisis to defend a nuclear power establishment or Heathrow airport, they will not just be there for reassurance; they will perform a function of deterrence.

There is a role for the TA in guarding the many key military and economic sites in this country, but I would not want a person, man or woman, to join the TA thinking that its members were becoming armed security guards. If that is the Government's intention, other people would be prepared to do that for the money available, which would certainly be more than what the TA would get. The TA could perform that role, but it must be combined with other important roles.

I hope that people will join the TA in greater numbers than they have so far, but not to provide a supermilitary home service whose terms of responsibility are confined to a travel-to-work area. As I said some years ago, slightly changing the famous military song in the reign of Queen Anne, "Queen Anne commands and we obey, over the hills and as far away as Wolverhampton." We do not think that the purpose of joining the TA should be to extend one's vision from Walsall to Wolverhampton, or the other way round. There are many tasks that the TA could perform. I hope that that is given serious consideration.

The MOD mocked us when we compared our reserves to the United States National Guard and said that perhaps we should move a little closer to the national guard model. We were pooh-poohed and dismissed.

One of the many things that worries me is how to ensure that if there is a major incident, the right people with the right skills are first on the scene. I am not referring to flooding, although that is serious, but an incident the like of which we have not even contemplated for the past 20 years, such as a nuclear, chemical or biological attack in a city outside London.

With a conventional bomb or an accident such as a tube crash the right people are the police, the paramedics and the fire service. The forensic experts come later to analyse what specific explosives were used. However, if there is a risk that the incident involves chemical or biological agents, it is essential that the first people to respond include specialists who can identify what agents may have been used and therefore what protective measures must be taken. Special clothing or breathing apparatus may be needed and the local area may need to be evacuated. The scale of the operation will depend not only on the potency of the agent, but on how it was dispersed and the prevailing wind speed and direction.

I doubt whether that work can be done by local authority officials, but it could be done by regular forces, if they are around. The Secretary of State mentioned the importance of the footprint of the Territorial Army. That footprint has got rather more sparse since the SDR began to be implemented. I hope that serious consideration is given to specialists trained in the TA undertaking that function, and to the need for qualified personnel to get to a disaster or emergency scene quickly once it has been confirmed that there is no threat from chemical or biological agents. I cannot think of any group that could provide more numbers, competence and bravery than the TA.

The discussion paper on the new chapter for the SDR, which was published this morning, asked whether there were additional or enhanced roles for the TA and the reserves. The original SDR took expertise in nuclear, chemical and biological attacks away from the reserves and concentrated it in a regular unit whose function is the protection of deployed forces, who may be 1,000, 2,000 or 5,000 miles away. However, to quote the discussion paper, the reserves'

"wider geographical spread across the UK"

may suggest that leaving the reserves without an NBC capability is another SDR decision that should be reconsidered.

I repeat what I said earlier. As a result of the ending of the cold war, naturally the defence budget has declined. I do not think that anyone would argue that defence spending should be at cold war levels: 5 to 5.5 per cent. of gross domestic product. In those euphoric years following the end of the cold war, many argued that an era of peace was about to emerge.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The Liberal Democrats asked the right hon. Gentleman, the Chairman of the Committee, how much extra should be spent and he has just suggested that resuming cold war expenditure is not appropriate. Given the phenomenal risk not just to our country, but to western society, exposed by events in New York, surely we should consider a serious increase if we are to give our people the protection that they seek and deserve.

Mr. George: Absolutely, but a 0.5 per cent. increase would take us substantially above the level projected by the Conservative Government. If the threat is so severe, one must argue that we should spend the amount commensurate with it. Even 3 per cent. in the short term may be inadequate. I was asked a question and I do not want to duck it. A not insubstantial increase is desirable, but it must be—

Mr. Laws *rose—*

Mr. George: I am sorry, but Mr. Deputy Speaker will shortly cast his eye on me and the clock, so I dare not continue for much longer.

The figure that I gave is worthy of consideration, but, following 11 September, the House, the Secretary of State for Defence and other Secretaries of State must seriously analyse their responsibilities. No doubt the Government and the Defence Committee will recommend that the Department and this country's armed forces—Army, Navy and Air Force; regulars, the Territorial Army and reservists—play an enhanced role, but chronic departmentalism is a curse on the fight against the threat of terrorism and the emergencies of recent years. The matter is not only for the MOD.

It remains to be determined whether the structure is ideal, but the Cabinet unit that has been established must consider matters across the board, not as hitherto in terms of lead Departments with others not particularly interested or possibly subversive. These issues must be dealt with on a cross-departmental basis that involves all the structures of international, national, regional and local bodies.

In one, two or five years, the threat may have vanished, but I doubt it. The day after the bomb attacks in Washington, New York and Pennsylvania, I was about to go through security in my car when somebody 15 vehicles behind tooted their horn. I was told that one of our colleagues was irritated by how long it was taking him or her to get through. The disaster of 11 September is not the only one that will occur. Nothing remotely similar has happened since, but that is due to luck, the action taken by the United States and others, good policing and good intelligence.

The House can be certain that organisations and individuals currently lying low are preparing for a repeat performance. Other organisations may consider what happened to be the baseline for their activities, because one that kills 1,000 or 2,000 people will be unfavourably compared to al-Qaeda, which killed 3,000. I am sure that private individuals and groups have nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, so, although I do not want to be alarmist, we should consider the possibility of a threat to 30,000 people or more. Reacting to that does not mean merely tinkering with existing structures.

Although people may be irritated by airport delays, higher air ticket prices or tax increases caused by enhanced security measures, the Government must keep a sense of balance, as the Secretary of State said. However, "keeping a balance" must not suggest that we will not go too far or that some people are upgrading the threat for their own political purposes. We are in a dangerous world, and there is a threat to the United States and to this country and many others. We can only minimise the risk—it can never be eliminated—by mobilising the Government, the public and the private sector in any way we can to reduce the possibility of an attack such as that on Washington.

The MOD will play a pivotal role in that, as will our armed forces. Although we are focusing on that this afternoon, let us be certain that the MOD is but one cog in a much larger wheel. I hope that the Home Secretary and other Secretaries of State will also initiate a discussion on the role of their Departments and what they need to do, because the reaction must be more than departmental. We must synthesise departmental efforts. Unless we create a governmental approach, I am afraid that the additional resources that I hope will be made available will be badly distributed and badly spent.

3.17 pm

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), the Chairman of the Select Committee, who always speaks with great passion, determination and sense. The debate is interesting and I enjoyed the contribution of the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). Later, I shall refer to a point that he raised.

I associate myself with the Secretary of State's tribute to our armed forces, which are a force for good. We see them on visits in this country and abroad. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), who cannot be present, was recently in Sierra Leone, and she wants to express to the Government the admiration of people there for the work being done. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who is with the Foreign Secretary in Kabul today, will also see our armed forces at work. They are highly trained for intensive combat, dispensing aid, peacekeeping and peace enforcing. They are a credit to us all.

The talk of specialisation for some of our forces is slightly worrying. It is right that they should be able to perform the tasks specific to them, but the loss of their astonishing all-round training may represent an enormous risk. Our defence forces' primary concern is protecting our nation, but, beyond that, their posture should be clearly foreign policy-led. The document produced for the forthcoming Liberal Democrat conference in Manchester makes that clear.

We have also said:

> "In the 21st century even the most powerful of nations cannot guarantee its security in isolation.
>
> Britain's defence policy must be flexible enough to respond to changes in the international strategic environment and yet underpinned by doctrines that allow for procurement decisions to be taken for equipment and related services that will be in use for decades to come.
>
> Our armed forces should be configured to give decision-makers the widest possible freedom of action when responding to challenges to national security or international stability. Defence planners must look at developing global trends that will affect international stability and their impact on the scale and structure of national armed forces and alliance structures"

in which we are involved.

Our posture should be led by foreign policy, but more difficult to predict and plan for are the shock events that change the international environment and require the remodelling of international security structures. Such events might include the sudden unravelling of the Soviet empire and the end of the cold war, which transformed Europe and, consequently, the context for British security. Another example would be the terrorist attacks of September 2001, which required the reassessment of international capability. Events such as those mean that we must be capable of flexibility.

Rather than simply withdrawing our troops from the vital work that they do, we must reassess the structure of our armed forces for a new era. Before 11 September, the SDR provided a blueprint for a modern force with which almost all hon. Members agreed. However, I believe that the principles that underlay the SDR remain compelling, even after 11 September.

I pay tribute to the international security assistance force that has gone into Afghanistan. Liberal Democrat Members supported the Ministry's decision to send troops to Afghanistan, and we support the British lead in that force. However, the initial three-month period of British lead may be extended and the Turkish commitment has not yet been guaranteed. That is a matter for concern.

We believe that sending in a force such as ISAF requires us to be prepared to get the job done. Opposition Members should not complain about mission creep. British troops should be able to get home and spend time with their families, but that does not preclude them from fulfilling the peacekeeping duties that they perform so well. If we must maintain the British lead and involvement in ISAF beyond three months, Liberal Democrat Members will understand that, and support it.

It would be unwise to throw away or prejudice the success that we are achieving in Kabul by walking away. We must remember that ISAF operates under a UN mandate. It is for the Security Council, in consultation with the Interim Administration in Afghanistan, to consider stretching the mandate beyond six months, or undertaking a wider deployment beyond Kabul. However, such matters must be considered completely separately from the UK's involvement in ISAF. I repeat that ISAF must be made to work.

[Mr. Paul Keetch]

If we are to perform that role around the world, we must do so in conjunction with the UN, NATO, and Europe. There are flaws in the mechanism of pan-European defence, but that does not mean that we should discontinue the entire process. There is a vast European force, and it would be foolish and stubborn not to tap into it. If our allies can assist in deployment from Europe and help with international peacekeeping, it would be foolish for us to withdraw from that principle.

In the same way, I am committed to the principle that we can buy in bulk from the European Community, and that in so doing we can save money and create jobs. The system of pan-European procurement is complex and flawed, but we must not run away from the prospect. We must work to iron out the flaws and to develop closer co-operation to see how we can work more effectively together. If we can do that, we can save money, procure more smartly, create more jobs and begin to ease overstretch. To shun those possibilities would be foolish.

The Secretary of State has conceded that the British armed forces are stretched and operating at the limit of their capabilities. What is certain is that an ever-changing world is placing ever-increasing demands on our armed forces. It is a world in which our forces must be able to move at lightning speed, both in and out of conflicts.

We now have a modern expeditionary Army but, as the Secretary of State has conceded, our armed forces are stretched to their limits. The hon. Member for New Forest, West made some interesting points about the Army that we now have. When I talk to units lower down the order of battle, so to speak, I encounter concern that we are developing what amounts to a two-tier Army.

The forces that we use in conflict—the Paras, the Marines and the special forces—are the ones that undertake what might be called the sexy missions. There is no doubt that they are overstretched, but other units do not get their fair share of the sexy missions. Some of those units are beginning to be underused, and to feel undervalued.

Some 27 per cent. of the Army was committed to operations in January 2002. That is a vast improvement on the 44 per cent. committed at the height of the Kosovo campaign. However, the shortfall in trained strength means that some units more than others are bearing the brunt.

The SDR concluded that, for the Army, the optimum interval between tours should be at least 24 months, for operational effectiveness and retention. For the Parachute Regiment in 2000-01, however, the interval was only 18 months. For some units, such as field hospitals, the interval is down to just 12 months.

Ministers claim that, across the armed forces, the interval between tours is 30 months. However, for our special and elite forces and for other specialist units, the interval is far too short. There is therefore a danger that our armed forces will exist in two tiers—one overstretched, and one with morale problems because its personnel feel that they are not being used enough. For the members of some of those units, twiddling their thumbs can be just as demoralising as having to go from one operation to another.

The first way in which we must address the problem of overstretch is to look at its root cause, which we believe to be recruitment and, more especially, retention. We need the right number and type of forces, and we must eliminate the shortfalls that exist in several areas. All hon. Members know about the shortage of pilots, which has been mentioned in the debate already. However, other shortfalls exist in mechanics, the defence medical services and elsewhere. We must have a coherent recruitment strategy.

The Government claim that their recruitment strategy is working. If so, they should be congratulated. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Bob Russell)—who, sadly, cannot be present today—claimed earlier this week at Defence questions that the strategy was not working. If that is so, new policies must be introduced.

The pay increase proposed by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body of 3.7 per cent. was welcome. Ministers have claimed that the costs involved can be met within the current budget, but I fear that they cannot. We should also ensure that our forces have access to retraining, and that military qualifications are recognised in civilian life. In addition, we must provide our forces with higher-quality unaccompanied and family quarters.

Our armed forces personnel staff our most precious public service, and they are also the most important bit of kit that we have. The hon. Member for New Forest, West referred to statistics uncovered by Liberal Democrat Members showing that the pressure exerted on married life by service in the armed forces has caused a dramatic fall of 22 per cent. in the number of married armed forces personnel since Labour came to power. That compares with a fall of only 8 per cent. in overall strength. Given the severe recruitment problems that the forces are suffering, we cannot afford to lose those highly trained, experienced, mature and stable married members of our armed forces.

Why is a marriage in the Navy or the RAF twice as likely to break down as an Army marriage? In 2000–01, the proportional change from married to other status in the Army was 1.8 per cent. That compares with 3.4 per cent. in the RAF, and 3.5 per cent. in the Navy. The disparity between the forces must be investigated. If best practice exists in the Army, it should be spread to the other forces.

I do not suggest that there should be marriage guidance counsellors on every base, but sensitivity to the concerns of families and partners is imperative for recruitment and retention.

Patrick Mercer: Might not it be significant that the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy have settled family policies? Largely, families in those services live in one set of quarters for a lengthy period. In contrast, Army families tend to follow the drum. Although we all welcome the increase in pay recommended by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we are yet to hear about the increases in accommodation charges that are bound to follow?

Mr. Keetch: The hon. and gallant Member makes a crucial point. However, although I may not have explained it properly, my point was that more marriages break up in the Navy and the Royal Air Force than in the

Army. Your point, which is absolutely right, makes that disparity even more surprising. As you rightly say, one would expect that marriage break-ups—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I said nothing.

Mr. Keetch: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is not just the nature of war that has changed over the course of the 20th century, but the nature of our society. Our armed forces are primarily made up of young people. I was privileged to visit the London university royal naval unit the other night. Some 50 young men and women in their first, second or third year at the university are going through the URNU course. Although one or two of them might join another service, about 20 per cent. will join the Royal Navy. It was interesting to talk to them and find out why they wanted to join the Navy, and what they expected of the service.

Almost without exception, those young men and women wanted to enter the service for a relatively short period. They did not see themselves staying in the service for as long as many of us might have expected. Other people were interested in the Royal Navy and prepared to spend time with URNU but not to join any of the services because they did not like the effect that they expected service life to have on their family life. Those young men and women had spent time at sea with the regular Navy and had spoken to people in the service but they were voting with their feet.

Those people are not distinct from the rest of society. Their values are those of the modern world. The House must be cautious about disregarding their values. We must not believe that things were better in the old days and that policies that worked when some of us served in the armed forces will work at present. That is not always so. When President Bush announced his substantial increase in defence spending, I was interested in the fact that a large part of it was devoted to family issues—pay, quarters and retention. It was not all about smart weapons, but about making sure that US forces were treated properly.

The Ministry of Defence must reflect on—and reflect—the modern world in which we live. All too often, we fail in that task. We must look after our armed service personnel. Armed forces pensions are a source of serious concern. Will they be fully funded? My question relates not only to the recent problems with tax deductions—I sincerely hope that they will be funded by the Treasury and not by the MOD—but to what is often regarded as the MOD's penny-pinching attitude. That has to stop.

We need minimum welfare standards on every base and they must be adhered to. We must have a service families charter, requiring delivery of standardised welfare services with annual reporting mechanisms. There should be a family officer on every base. There should be a review of the support offered to the forces family welfare organisations.

Much has been said about the Territorial Army and its home-guard role. I have enormous sympathy with the comments of the Chairman of the Select Committee. Will people want to join the TA if it is merely to be some type of home guard? I suspect that they will not. The principle behind the suggestion is reasonable, but we must ensure that homeland security amounts to more than sentry duty. The TA could be trained to deal with terrorist attacks and other civil emergencies. However, we must also maintain its specialist capabilities such as intelligence gathering, medical services and signalling.

We need a more co-ordinated strategy for our TA whereby we know the number of reservists who can be called up, rather than finding that only half of those called up are ready to be deployed. We need a co-ordinated, countrywide strategy to investigate where the addition of armed personnel would augment current security planning. That may not require enormous extra resources and might indeed save resources in other Departments, such as the Home Office. The TA could fulfil that role.

The SDR stressed the importance of flexible mobile forces. The new chapter repeats that. Under the SDR, the armed forces are expeditionary—able to move quickly and efficiently. We need procurement that is smart enough to give them the right equipment at the right price and the right time. I am deeply concerned that that will not happen with one procurement issue: the A400M.

I am a great believer in the project. I hope that it will work, but will the Minister of State answer these questions when he replies to the debate? Has the ability of the RAF to lease the four C17s been extended by two years as we have been told? Have negotiations been held with Boeing on leasing more C17s or indeed on purchasing the ones that we lease already? On what date will our ageing Hercules fleet cease to be significantly useful? Is he confident that the A400M will be ready to fill the gap? If he is not confident of that—whatever the reason—he should ensure that there will be aircraft to replace the Hercules fleet.

My hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) asked the Chairman of the Select Committee a question about finance. The Secretary of State seems already to have fired his opening shots in the comprehensive spending review and if my hon. Friend, who serves on the Select Committee on the Treasury, catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will come back to that point. The Chairman of the Select Committee believes that an increase of 0.5 per cent. of gross domestic product is necessary. That would add between £4 billion and £5 billion to our defence budget, significantly increasing it above the rate of growth in the economy. If the right hon. Gentleman expects the Government to award that amount and will not be satisfied unless they do, there will be a significant increase.

Will the Secretary of State obtain that amount? Some people have talked about £1 billion. If the right hon. Gentleman does not obtain a significant increase, will we see tanks rolling from the MOD to the Treasury demanding funds before they roll into action elsewhere? Will the Minister tell us what amount is needed in the defence budget to enable our forces to operate not at the limits of their capacity—as the Secretary of State says—but within it?

The Government will soon have to take some difficult decisions. The provision of adequate resources for the defence of our citizens is the major responsibility of any Government. There is evidence that the programme outlined in the SDR may be unsustainable without an upward adjustment in defence expenditure or a reduction in capability. The efficiency targets of about 3 per cent. a year, which have been an annual feature of defence planning for more than a decade, will have to go. They are becoming progressively more difficult to achieve without reducing capability.

[Mr. Keetch]

Schemes for a more rationalised approach to defence have offered economies. The outsourcing of defence activities has reduced costs. A series of initiatives have attempted to reduce the cost of equipment procurement. If the Government decide against real-terms rises in defence spending at the next CSR, they will have to initiate a future equipment programme, within an affordable cost profile, so as to meet the security challenges that we have heard about today.

We all agree that the MOD must adapt to a changing world. It must be prepared for substantial change; for example, there has been discussion in the media about the role of the main battle tank. Maintaining defence spending in real terms results in capability reductions each year unless clear savings are made through procurement. Will the Minister tell us whether—if he does not receive a boost in funding—he is considering reducing our main battle tank capability? Is he even considering not ordering as many Eurofighters?

A modern defence policy can involve modernising our defence capabilities. If the changes are for the benefit of our armed forces and of our nation, the Liberal Democrats will offer the Government our full support. If the changes do not offer those benefits, we shall oppose them. One thing is certain: our nation will face a threat at some time in the future—the problem is that we do not know where, when, how or why. It is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that, when that threat materialises, we are ready.

3.38 pm

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) who made several interesting points that were well worth listening to and studying. However, I want to caution him about one point as regards language. He equated war and killing with "sexy missions". That is an inappropriate attitude and it should not be encouraged.

The events of 11 September were a tragedy on an enormous—perhaps incomprehensible—scale. The culture of any country subjected to such an attack in peacetime would be jolted and shocked. Having suffered those appalling attacks, the United States Government took several significant decisions about their future defence policy. Those decisions will have major repercussions for Britain and the rest of the world.

The Americans feel vulnerable and they want to show signs of strength to make themselves feel more secure. However, it is a symptom of underlying weakness if the answer is to threaten all and sundry. One could also argue that many terrorists will feel a sense of victory that they have so rattled the American Government. I would not want to give such vicious thugs any sense of victory.

The increase in defence expenditure proposed by President Bush means that the United States will be spending more than the 15 next-largest defence expenditures combined. But that money is oddly spent. For example, the Americans can find funds to build a new dispenser for their cluster bombs, but not to design a new bomblet that will self-destruct or make itself safe if it does not explode on impact with the ground. The faulty bomblets become land mines in all but name so their use is morally reprehensible, yet the Americans do not find that a priority for funding.

The increased defence expenditure is paralleled by a new sense of US unilateral action. At present, Britain is America's strongest ally, but we should be careful as regards the extent to which we are willing to support America. The press is full of reports that the US plans a large-scale attack on Iraq. That would be an awful mistake and make the region less stable. It would also create grievance to an extent that could foster future terrorism. The Americans are also pressing ahead with national missile defence, a scheme that will eventually require British bases. The British Government should resist the temptation to approve the use of those bases, as NMD is likely to make the world less safe, not more so.

The US has also taken unilateral action on arms control—action that has undermined multilateral efforts. Controls on small arms and biological weapons have been weakened by American policies. Although arms control is not the whole solution to many of the problems, it is one of the most flexible tools available for promoting international security. It also sets international standards of behaviour. Without those standards, how do we assess what is right and wrong?

I do not say any of this out of a sense of anti-Americanism. Aside from the problems with certain weapons and tactics, the Americans have performed a valuable role in Kosovo and in Afghanistan, although I wish that they would do more for the humanitarian reconstruction there now. However, I have always regarded the fight against terrorism as having only a small military component. The major work has to be political and legal, including work to secure a peaceful, just outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute and an international crackdown on money laundering and corruption. On the latter, Britain, with its connections with overseas territories and its wide range of trading partners, can play a key role.

More important, the Ministry of Defence can play an important part. There is an official British report that is reputed to include details of corrupt handling of funds in the biggest arms deal in which Britain has ever been involved. That report has been kept secret, one excuse being that the Ministry of Defence would want to keep it so. Perhaps it is time for the MOD to declare that it is happy for the report to be published.

That report was written by officials in the National Audit Office in 1992 and has remained secret ever since. It is said to be critical of the way in which commissions and kickbacks were paid as part of the Al Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia. Coincidentally, John Bourn became head of the Audit Office at about the same time—having just moved from the MOD, where his responsibilities included the Al Yamamah deal. I understand that it was Mr. Bourn's decision to keep that report secret. I do not allege any wrongdoing on his part as an individual, but I fear that that does reveal a conflict of interest.

Al Yamamah is said to have made many unnamed individuals in Saudi Arabia very rich. It is also said that many unnamed individuals in Saudi Arabia have given substantial funds to support bin Laden. I cannot prove that there is any overlap between these two groups of unnamed individuals, but that is due in part to the excessive secrecy surrounding that arms deal. Some people have asked why, given that the report has been secret for so long, it should be released now. I would reply, "Because the truth deserves it, and because a Labour Government should not be covering up the Tories' dirty work."

I cheered at the news that the United States had declared Taliban captives in Afghanistan prisoners of war. Then it was soured for me by the insistence that that would not apply to the al-Qaeda captives. If it is deemed that they are a criminal gang, proper law should apply, with accepted legal rights afforded, and with transparent, fair trials. But the military action was proclaimed loudly as a war on terrorism, so I consider that the captives should be deemed prisoners of war and treated accordingly, with transparent custody arrangements in line with internationally accepted norms—in this case, the Geneva convention In both cases, there should be proper prison arrangements without humiliating and degrading treatment or torture, and international inspection should be allowed.

In recent conflicts, the United States and the United Kingdom have not declared their military actions to be wars; indeed, they have specifically claimed that they are not wars. That claim, combined with the refusal of the United States to treat al-Qaeda captives as prisoners of war, has dangerous implications. UK and US troops in current or future undeclared wars, if captured, may not be afforded prisoner of war status and treated decently, and the current US precedent in Cuba could be cited.

I wish to make some points on defence costs. First, the fact that the United States is dramatically increasing defence spending does not mean that we should automatically follow suit. The last time that the US combined tax cuts with defence rises, under President Reagan, it went from being the biggest creditor nation in the world to being the biggest debtor nation in double-quick time. We should not follow that "going broke" route. Secondly, we should not indirectly subsidise the United States' NMD programme and its break with important arms control treaties by allowing it to shift some of its military objectives, which may not be our priorities, on to us.

Thirdly, the defence gap between the United Kingdom and the United States is now so huge that it can never be filled. Our defence spending comparator should be with other countries, not with the United States. Fourthly, with the ending of the cold war, and friendship with a far less military Russia, the "threat" is simply not there to justify spending on such a vast scale. Fifthly, we should not take part in a defence increases competition that triggers a new arms race.

I do favour defence increases in some specific areas, such as all-weather planes and equipment, better refuelling facilities, and more precision-guided weaponry as part of a process for ending the use of cluster bombs, but those increases must be justified, not generalised; otherwise—the public would say this too—the money is better spent on the national health service.

3.48 pm

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not follow him precisely, because although I always listen to him with deep affection, it is usually with deep disagreement as well. I did agree with some things that he said; I shall mention them later.

The Secretary of State had many interesting things to say about the future of the armed forces. We shall applaud some of what he says and we shall listen with critical interest to many of the other things, but now that I am no longer on the Front Bench, and this is by way of being a sort of maiden speech, I can speak freely, without committing my party, on a view that I have increasingly held in recent years. That view is as follows.

As the Secretary of State said, the end of the cold war encouraged us to take what was called the peace dividend. Essentially, that meant spending less on the armed forces because the threat had reduced. In fact, the threat had changed, but in a way that should have encouraged us to spend not less but more on the armed forces, because while the cold war continued, it allowed us to rely very heavily on the highly cost-effective deterrent of nuclear missiles. The end of the cold war made it increasingly unlikely that we or anyone could rely heavily on that. If a nuclear bomb goes off in London tomorrow, does anyone seriously imagine that we will immediately press the button? That would not happen without a great deal of thought and hesitation. After all, at whom would we aim the weapons? I am not suggesting that we should get rid of our nuclear weapons, but it is obvious that they no longer work as the all-purpose deterrent that they once were.

We need to rebuild our reliance on conventional forces. That means spending lots more money. We need to pay our armed forces lots more so that they can recruit and retain more personnel and buy better and more modern equipment, if only so that we can operate with the United States. The world is not safer as a consequence of the end of the cold war; it is less certain and more dangerous. The west is not reacting to that danger, with the noble exception of the US, in the right way. Instead, we are reacting in precisely the wrong way. Although the Secretary of State had many interesting things to say about the armed forces, none of what he said matters while we give the defence of our country and our values such a low priority in spending terms.

I want to devote the rest of my contribution to the treatment of our armed forces as exemplified by the 1994 Chinook crash. A dark cloud hangs over the credibility of the Ministry of Defence as a result of its handling of that crash, and that will affect recruitment, retention and morale. I remind the House that because the pilots died and were unable to defend themselves, RAF rules required that they could not be found negligent unless there was absolutely no doubt whatever.

In July 1995, I became Minister of State, and in a debate on the RAF on 6 February 1997 I defended the decision by the RAF board of inquiry that the pilots had been grossly negligent. I have since discovered, to my considerable shame, that I was wrong to have done so. I have apologised to the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), who campaigned on the issue, and I repeat that apology to the House. A more important consideration, however, is that the Secretary of State for Defence at the time of the crash, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, has also seen the new evidence and has called for the verdict to be set aside.

The 1996 fatal accident inquiry in Scotland, working on the basis of a standard of proof much easier to satisfy—the balance of probabilities—was unable to come to a conclusion about the cause of the accident. In November 2000, the Public Accounts Committee investigated the incident and concluded:

> "The finding of the RAF Board of Inquiry into the crash of Chinook ZD-576 does not satisfy the burden of proof required".

[Mr. James Arbuthnot]

Last week, after an exhaustive inquiry into the evidence, a Select Committee in another place concluded unanimously:

> "It is not our role to determine the likely cause of this accident, and indeed on the evidence which we have heard and read it would be impossible to do so. We are nevertheless satisfied, on the evidence before us and against the standard of 'absolutely no doubt whatsoever' that the Air Marshals were not justified in finding that negligence on the part of the pilots of ZD 576 caused the crash."

So that highly distinguished Committee, including four experienced lawyers—one of them a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary—and an engineer, have decided not just that there is a doubt, but that it is impossible to determine even the likely cause of the accident. One could not ask for a more definitive analysis of the incident than theirs.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I know that my hon. Friend strongly disagrees with me, but I give way to him with great pleasure.

Mr. Wilkinson: The flying experience of the two air marshals was considerable and was gathered over many years. In the course of their careers, they would have had much experience of bad weather and other difficult circumstances. Members of the Committee in the other place were mainly lawyers and spent their formative lives and careers in different circumstances. I put my money on the air marshals' judgment.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right, but the station commanders at RAF Aldergrove and RAF Odiham also had many years of flying experience. They were part of the initial investigating board and did not find that the pilots were negligent when judged against the standard of proof required.

What is it that makes the Ministry of Defence, alone in the world, cling stubbornly to its discredited findings? It cannot be that it thinks that changing its mind will make it look bad because it knows perfectly well that the longer it clings to the verdict, the more unfair it looks. I hate it when that Ministry of all Ministries looks foolish. I obviously do not mind the Government looking less than perfect, but I am attached to the Ministry of Defence and it carries the reputation of this country with it.

So what is it that makes the Ministry of Defence stick to the verdict? I will run briefly through its arguments. First, it says that there is nothing new in the other reports. Clearly it is wrong about that. What is "new" for these purposes is what we know now that the board of inquiry did not know then, and on that basis there is much new information. The board of inquiry apparently did not know that there were problems with the full authority digital engine control system—FADEC—and that the Ministry was successfully taking Textron-Lycoming, the manufacturers in the USA, to arbitration. The board apparently did not know that the Boeing simulation that it relied on to tell it what had happened did not model FADEC. According to Tony Cable of the air accidents investigation branch, the Boeing simulation would have had "really quite different characteristics." It apparently did not know that the leading technical aircrew specialist on Chinooks, Squadron Leader Burke, had had recurring experience of engine problems with the Chinook, but he had been ordered—we do not know why—not to take any further part in the investigation, so he did not tell the board of inquiry about it.

All of that is new, but the Ministry of Defence has taken on itself the task of defining what is new, which it takes to exclude everything that I have just mentioned and everything that might make it change its mind. It is beginning to look stubborn and foolish. In any event, the Ministry of Defence's insistence on new evidence is wrong in principle. It is wrong to insist on new evidence or new considerations if that leaves in place a verdict that is manifestly not supported by the old evidence.

So why is the Ministry sticking to the verdict? Its next argument, strongly made over the past few years, is that the pilots should not have been where they were: they were flying too fast and too low for the weather conditions and the terrain. It is the Ministry's view that even if there were problems with the engine or FADEC, had the pilots turned earlier or slowed down or climbed they would have been able to deal with those problems and would not have hit the Mull of Kintyre.

All of that, of course, assumes that the pilots were in control of the aircraft and able to turn, slow down, or climb. The air marshals assert that they were. The Ministry's standard letter says:

> "they should by this time already have chosen an alternative course. But given that they had not done so, they could and should immediately then have either turned away from the Mull or slowed down and climbed to a safe altitude."

However, there is no evidence that they could have done that.

The report of the Select Committee in another place tears that theory to pieces. It states:

> "We consider that Sir John's conclusions on this matter must be weakened by his reliance on matters which he treated as facts but which had been demonstrated to our satisfaction to be not facts but merely hypotheses or assumptions."

The air marshals had no evidence about the course or speed of the aircraft at any time before the impact, nor of the time of the way-point change or the height of the aircraft at which the change was made.

In other words, we are awash with things we do not know, even now, and the board of inquiry did not know those things, but made the mistake of thinking it did. So in a case where there has to be absolutely no doubt whatever, there is masses of doubt. Even in the early stages, there was so much doubt that the investigating board and the station commanders at RAF Aldergrove and RAF Odiham did not find the pilots negligent.

The doubt is not confined to those matters raised in front of the Select Committee in another place. We do not know, for example, whether either of the pilots was ill. We do not know whether they had a disagreement between themselves about the course to take. There was no cockpit voice recorder and no black box. The fact that there is no evidence of illness or disagreement does not mean that it did not happen. The mistake that the air marshals made is that, because they thought they knew what had probably happened—although we now know that they did not—they translated that into absolutely no doubt whatever.

Mr. Joyce: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can enlighten me about something. My understanding is that, if the weather was bad, the helicopter should have been flying at about 10,000 ft, but it was not; it was flying too low. So regardless of any problems with equipment—FADEC or anything else—the helicopter should have been flying high. If it had a massive problem, it might have plummeted from the sky, but it would not have hit the Mull of Kintyre. That is the crux of the issue, not the technicalities that the right hon. Gentleman and the Select Committee in another place have mentioned. Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on that fact?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am happy to do so. The question of how bad the weather was is crucial to the board of inquiry's finding. Mr. Holbrook, the skipper of the yacht who saw the Chinook flying over and saw sunlight glinting on its side and guessed that it was flying at about 80 or 90 mph, said that he could see bits of the Mull from his yacht. He was asked three questions by the board of inquiry, and it constructed from his brief answers to those questions a view of the weather pattern, which, as the Select Committee report from another place shows, is simply not borne out by what was said then or by what Mr. Holbrook believed. I invite the hon. Gentleman please to read the Select Committee report from another place, which examines the evidence of the weather and what the pilots may or may not have been able to see from the height and at the speed at which we think they may have been flying.

I have just used the word "mistake". The air marshals made a mistake in thinking that they knew things that they did not know. I still believe that that was a mistake. I agree with the Public Accounts Committee report, which stated:

> "We believe that the reviewing officers in the case of ZD576 reached their conclusions in good faith".

In fact, I believe that I can even pinpoint where the mistake took place. In paragraph 2 of part 4 of the RAF board of inquiry's findings, Sir John Day says:

> "The Board and the Officer Commanding RAF Odiham postulate various factors and scenarios, including possible distraction or disorientation, in attempting to explain why the crew might have failed to make a safe transition to Instrument Flight Rules. In my judgement, none of the possible factors and scenarios are so strong that they would have been likely to prevent such an experienced crew from maintaining safe flight."

But, in using the word "likely", he is applying the wrong test. Because the pilots have died, the proper test is one not of the likelihood, but of having absolutely no doubt whatever. I do not attack or belittle Sir John Day for applying the wrong test—I merely point out that he has done so. He is not legally qualified and he did not have any legal advice.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I know that my right hon. Friend is coming to the end of his speech. Before he finishes it, will he comment on the fact that—I believe that I am correct—the RAF has now altered its rules so that, if anything similar were to happen again, deceased pilots could not be blamed in that way? If as a result of this case the RAF has decided that it is an injustice to blame deceased pilots in that way, surely it would only be justice to absolve those pilots?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I believe that that is so. My hon. Friend is right to say that the MOD has changed the rules and has decided to leave the attribution of blame for negligence to the civil courts, and it is right to have done that. I am aware of no other case in which deceased pilots have been found negligent. This is the only case in which that has happened.

Given that, as a result of the air marshals' remarks, the RAF board of inquiry applied the wrong test, what are we to do? The MOD says that it requires new evidence, but that is wrong. All we need is the new realisation that the old finding is unsafe and always has been because, while an evident injustice remains, to leave it in the records is a dishonourable thing to do. It no longer dishonours the pilots because the world now acknowledges that their reputations have been cleared. They have died in the service of their country, and we can be proud of them. The people whom the present situation dishonours are those who have stubbornly, foolishly and unfairly refused to do the right thing. This issue is never going to go away until it is put right.

4.7 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I want to speak about Britain's involvement in the United States national missile defence programme, particularly the work that is going ahead at Fylingdales, the satellite tracking station in Yorkshire, not far from my constituency. Fylingdales is integral to NMD, but I first want to consider the international framework in which Fylingdales operates.

President Bush's state of the union speech set a framework of permanent global military intervention by the United States. That should give us all reason for concern. He said:

> "far from ending"—

in Afghanistan—

> "our war against terror is only beginning."

It will encompass the whole world. He went on to say that, to handle the terrorist threat, we must

> "develop and deploy effective missile defences to protect America and our allies from sudden attack".

As has been said many times inside and outside the House, even if an NMD system had been in place, it would have contributed absolutely zero to stopping the terrible events of 11 September. The Bush Administration has never explained the logic of connecting 11 September to the star wars programme—quite simply, they are not connected. However, the emotions that that terrible terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre understandably evokes in ordinary Americans have been exploited by the Administration to push through the enormous increase in military spending that developing NMD requires. I shall come to that in a moment. By including North Korea as part of his so-called evil axis, President Bush is blatantly seeking to justify his harmful and destabilising star wars programme.

As many hon. Members are aware, much of Europe has reacted unfavourably to President Bush's speech. There are still considerable reservations worldwide about NMD. Hubert Vedrine, the French Foreign Minister, has described Bush's world view as simplistic and unilateralist, and I agree with him, as does European public opinion, as a growing number of polls in Europe show.

The permanent global intervention that President Bush's speech foreshadows will also include a new and even broader out-of-area role for NATO. It will therefore affect this country directly. Speaking at an international

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

conference in Germany last weekend, the US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said that NATO needed

"a military transformation agenda"

to develop

"its capacities in counter-terrorism".

He also warned European allies that, if America does not get its way on this issue, it is ready to act outside its traditional alliances. He said:

"The mission must determine the coalition, the coalition must not determine the mission."

That is an alarming development.

A report in *The Guardian* today should also cause us great concern:

"The Pentagon and the CIA have begun preparations for an assault on Iraq involving up to 200,000 US troops that is likely to be launched later this year with the aim of removing Saddam Hussein from power, US and diplomatic sources told the Guardian yesterday."

[Interruption.] I am glad that that prospect draws a cavalier response from Conservative Members. I hope that they will be just as happy if that scenario occurs and there are many deaths as a result. What concerns me is that, in spite of much opposition from the French, the Germans and other European allies, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have refused to join in the public outcry about such blatant warmongering. In fact, a Foreign Office official said yesterday that military action, although not imminent, could happen in "a question of months." A Foreign Office spokesman later added:

"The prime minister has made it clear from the outset that the campaign would have two phases: the first focusing on Afghanistan and the second looking at different aspects of international terrorism."

Will the Minister tell the House whether we will acquiesce in and support such a worldwide extension of warfare?

Mr. Gerald Howarth: If the hon. Lady were faced with overwhelming evidence to her satisfaction that countries such as Iraq or Iran not only had the capability to attack this country and her constituents but had every intention of doing so, would she be content to wait until they attacked her constituents, or would she support her Government if they decided to make a pre-emptive strike?

Mrs. Mahon: No evidence has ever been produced that Iraq wants to attack this country, although, as a matter of fact, we attack Iraq almost weekly. I shall raise that issue at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Brussels this weekend. If the Americans repeat their desire to extend the military action, the House should have further debates on the matter.

If we are America's best friends—we are the American people's best friends, as we share language and culture—as true friends, we should tell them that the escalation of military action will simply bring about another arms race, which will be devastating for the rest of the world.

I want to refer to the effect of national missile defence on military spending. As we know, the US military budget will climb to $360 billion this year and to $396 billion in 2003. US military spending already accounts for 17.8 per cent. of the Federal budget. By 2003, it is calculated that it will reach more than 30 per cent. in nominal terms—almost a quarter of the total budget in real terms. The United States already spends more than a third of the world's total military expenditure. That is more than the expenditure of the next nine biggest spenders combined and more than three times the amount spent by all its potential enemies. The budget increase is the biggest in military spending in two decades and military spending will rival that at the height of the cold war.

National missile defence accounts for a large chunk of Pentagon spending. A recent report by the Congressional Budget Office puts the cost of such spending at $238 billion over the next 15 years. We all know that such calculations—especially official calculations—are usually notorious for underestimating the eventual real cost. When I consider the poverty and despair in much of the developing world, I believe that such expenditure is an obscenity.

We have heard calls this afternoon for much more military spending. People say that there is no free lunch for Europe or for Britain. The Secretary-General of NATO is already calling for European allies to step up their military spending and he took what the BBC called the "unprecedented step" of declaring 11 September to be an assault on the alliance as a whole. He said that European forces would be unable to operate alongside United States forces unless budgets are massively increased.

I am also worried about the domestic programme. I want to defend our country, but I am not certain that spending billions and billions on star wars is the way to do that. A substantial increase in our budget would knock out our plans to improve health, education and to do something about the transport system. A serious debate about Britain's attitude to missile defence is long overdue. We need to consider the danger that it poses to Britain, which will become a target if we are involved, and the cost.

Patrick Mercer: Does the hon. Lady not agree that we are already a target and are extremely vulnerable? We suffered severe casualties on 11 September, albeit not within these shores. If the hon. Lady is content for defence expenditure to increase, in which areas does she want that to happen? More to the point, does she not understand that we must defend ourselves to prevent our hospitals and transport system from being overwhelmed by the number of casualties that the Americans suffered?

Mrs. Mahon: I am the product of a family in which every male member fought in the second world war, and with great honour in some cases—I refer particularly to my father—so I must tell the hon. Gentleman that I am in favour of strong defence. I am not in favour of anything that might make us more vulnerable. As I have already said, the attack on the World Trade Centre would not have been prevented by the most sophisticated national missile defence system in the world. Such a system would not prevent suitcase bombs, but diplomacy, conflict resolution, conflict prevention and feeding the starving just might have a chance of getting rid of the militants.

I refer again to Fylingdales and to the lack of parliamentary involvement in what is going on there. As colleagues know, Fylingdales is the missile tracking centre for the northern hemisphere and upgrading the facility is vital to the United States missile defence programme. I am informed by local sources, who are following the matter closely, that work has already begun on upgrading Fylingdales and doing what the Americans want us to do. That is taking place even before Parliament has had an opportunity to discuss the issue.

We know that plans are under way to improve security at the base, because it is known that Government support for national missile defence will generate much more protest than it is at the moment. Because military installations do not need to apply for planning permission, the work is going ahead without the local authority's involvement. There has been far too much silence, secrecy and evasion from those on the Govt Front Bench. It is ridiculous to keep saying that Britain will not adopt an attitude until we are asked.

The Government must come clean, because there is considerable unease among Labour Members and those of other parties. It is high time Parliament was allowed to debate the issue openly and transparently. Already, it is raised almost weekly in meetings of the parliamentary Labour party. The decision to support the Americans on national missile defence is far too important to the peace and stability of the whole world for one or two Ministers—however important—and their advisers to take in secret. We should debate it openly. I hope that the Minister will have some answers for us tonight.

4.20 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): There is so much on which I disagree with the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) that I shall not follow the path of her speech. However, I agree entirely that if one is a good friend of another country, one reserves the right to say, "Yes, but." Perhaps that is something that we need to do more often.

I congratulate the former Minister of State for Defence Procurement, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), with whom I was a close colleague at the Ministry of Defence, on a speech that I regard as outstandingly courageous and honourable. I do not think that I have heard anything like it in my 18 years in the House of Commons, and I commend him warmly on it. I do not agree with him on the question of Chinook, but I know that he holds the strongest and most detailed views and has gone into the matter with great clarity. Again, I commend him on his tremendous courage in the presentation of his case, which was not an easy thing to do. I entirely agree with the first part of his speech, about the absolute requirement for us to spend more money on conventional defence and on our armed forces generally.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on a wonderful speech delivered from the Dispatch Box. After finding that he had to open for the Opposition, he covered himself in glory. It is wonderful to hear such enthusiasm, pleasure and knowledge of the subject. I, too, spent a little time at the school in the Brecon Beacons; I did not enjoy it as much as he did, and I never want to repeat the experience. However, those who met him there will have been thrilled by his enthusiasm.

I wish to pay a handsome tribute to the men and women of our armed forces, and to their long-suffering families who put up with so much. We are truly proud of them, and we are extremely lucky to have such wonderful people. I am not sure that we still deserve them, but we have remarkable armed services. I am glad that this debate is taking place, and I congratulate the Government wholeheartedly on producing "A New Chapter". It is admirable of them to produce a discussion document of that type and to try to persuade more of the general public to take an interest in so fundamental an issue as defence policy.

There is no doubt that the SDR, which was in many ways a useful document, needed an additional chapter in the light of 11 September. Many would say that it needed an additional chapter in any event. It is almost as if the threat had not been properly analysed in the original SDR. We thought that we lived in a largely threatless world. How desperately wrong we were, and how very unprepared. It is extremely difficult to make sense of the threat and to manage it. In military, diplomatic and political terms, there are broad requirements to learn new skills, and a clear need to make new dispositions.

The war on terrorism has made a good start—a brilliantly executed military campaign with a well assembled and broad coalition put together with speed and great skill. Many important lessons will have been learned. However, a great deal remains to be done to track down the terrorist networks. I agree wholly with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), about the dangers that have to be faced and dealt with that lurk in this country and many others. We cannot pretend that they do not exist. I know that our country, the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office, and all the other agencies are playing an important role using some of our most special assets.

I pay in particular a handsome and generous tribute to our intelligence agencies, to which we owe a great debt, and to the soldiers, sailors and airmen involved in those operations. The Government, we must therefore hope, are constantly redefining the threat assessment as it is today. They must also ensure that our intelligence agencies are fully resourced, clearly and correctly tasked and, most important of all, that they unambiguously co-operate with each other. We need to continue the welcome work being done by the Ministry of Defence of redefining our conclusions as to the size and shape of our armed forces. Above all, our armed forces must be structured and resourced to meet the unpredictable, at short notice, when required.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) is no longer present. He always provided tremendous encouragement to those of us at the Ministry of Defence about the Territorial Army. I am not as well informed about the TA as I should be. When I was Minister of State for the Armed Forces, we went through some tremendous heart searching about the TA's future. I thought that we had arrived at a sensible and achievable number and role, but subsequently the Labour Government, in the light of the SDR, further substantially diminished the size of the TA, and by so doing gravely affected the TA's stability, its ability to deliver what it needed to deliver and, most important, the size of the already very small military footprint in the country.

Along comes a major new threat, and the TA is likely to be re-roled again. I agree with the right hon. Member for Walsall, South that merely to offer the TA the role of glorified military police is not right. The TA has far more

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

than that to contribute. Where our troops of all three services on deployment would be without the TA, I simply do not know. We need to maintain that good, specialist edge that delivers so much to our services, perhaps at the same time as reviewing whether there might be a category that could be cap-badged or assigned the task of guarding duties.

That would not be unwelcome, and I would be interested to hear the response of the TA and those who know about it. Whatever size the TA arrives at and whatever tasks it is assigned, it needs to be relevant, usable and, above all, fully integrated into the Army's readiness cycle.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): As an ex-TA officer, let me make the point that when the Government reduced the TA, the largest cut fell on the infantry battalions—they took a disproportionate hit. Bearing in mind my hon. Friend's comments, might it not be that the infantry battalions, if some of them were restored, would be well suited to playing a role in homeland defence, without taking away from the specialist nature of other elements of the TA?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend makes an extremely sensible point. I hope that the Minister of State for Defence heard it. It is always the poor bloody infantry who get it in the ear. They got it disgracefully badly under the Conservative Government. In fact, in my time as a sycophantic Back-Bench running-dog lackey of the Conservative Government, the only occasion on which I voted against them was on their decision, under "Options for Change", to cut savagely the number of infantry battalions, to the great disadvantage of the Army ever since. As a former TA officer, my hon. Friend clearly knows a great deal about the subject and his is a sensible idea.

Nothing I have to say reflects in any way on the Minister of State for Defence, and I dislike having to say this, but in my view the Government take the armed forces for granted. It is not possible for the Government to repeat endlessly how much they value the armed forces while simultaneously starving them of financial resources.

My Government had great difficulty in finding money for the armed forces. The Secretary of State will be in an impossible position; he will be in a state of naked, aggressive warfare with the Treasury, which, as I have always said to the right hon. Gentleman and the House, is well known to work for the Russians, and not for us. He will find it extremely difficult to get the money that he needs. We must remember, because we have all forgotten what happened, that we all took it as read that the SDR was a good thing and believed that the Government would fund it as they said they would, but they did not fund it properly. It has never been funded properly.

The most important warning that I can give the Government is that on the now sadly few occasions when I get to meet men and women serving in the armed forces, I feel that they feel that they are being taken for granted and that their quality, efficiency and effectiveness are appreciated only at moments of high drama and great crisis. I think, I am afraid to say, that there is an element of truth in that, although I do not assign responsibility for that to the Minister of State.

It all started rather well, but with the relentless, baleful and ignorant pressure from the Treasury, the Government soon reverted to serious underfunding. The consequences are that the armed forces need at least £500 million a year extra, without which further cuts will have to be made. I warn the Secretary of State that if undermanning and overstretch continue, not only will there be problems in maintaining the high morale and efficiency of the armed forces, but things will inevitably start to go wrong in the military field, and the Government will not be able to take for granted the effectiveness in the armed forces that is absolutely guaranteed at present. In light of recent events, it would be a great mistake for the Government not fully to fund this priceless and golden national asset.

The money needs to go towards not only filling the gaps, which certainly existed when the Opposition were in power, but dealing with those things that the forces are very good at and which are extremely relevant to the profession of arms and the use of our armed forces at the moment. There are five separate areas: command and mission command, information and intelligence, fightability, sustainability and trainability. Those are all areas in which we need to make significant investment to maintain and further the pre-eminence of the British skill at arms. There are real strengths that need continuously to be developed in light of the new strategic situation.

I endorse the point made by the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) about the two tiers of the armed forces. I cannot tell the Minister of State how damaging it is for high-profile operations always to be carried out by the Royal Marines and the Paras. Every regiment of the line should be capable of undertaking those operations.

If we make any pretence that we will go on spending money on training for high-intensity land battle, it is absolute nonsense if, throughout the training cycle, the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment, or any other regiment, comes to the peak of its fitness and operational effectiveness, having finished its medicine man training at the British Army training unit, Suffield, only to find again and again that it is not deemed suitable to undertake one of those operations.

Come an emergency, even a restricted one, such regiments would be shovelled out into the field as quickly as possible. Give them a chance, and let them show that regiments other than the Royal Marines and the Paras, both of which are remarkable and do a wonderful job, could do exactly the same job, given the chance.

Ever since the end of the cold war, NATO has been searching for a new role. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire and I were in the Ministry of Defence at a particularly fascinating time, with the Werner doctrine just coming in and the partnership for peace. We made thrilling visits to countries in eastern Europe which had been free from communist rule for only a few weeks or months. They were longing to learn how to run a proper army and a democratic system, and wanted people to come to the staff college and the Royal College of Defence Studies to take part in military training, so that they could eventually join NATO.

I hope that NATO will expand, but we need to be clear and confident that despite its limitations, which are many, it remains a formidable and hugely successful alliance. Unless it reforms itself, it will cease to be of real military importance and it will be merely politically important.

I applaud the work of our former colleague Lord Robertson, who clearly appreciates those difficulties and who must be driven mad by the failure of the defence capabilities initiative.

Many NATO forces are wholly inadequately funded; they are unco-ordinated and unprepared, and they are neither properly trained nor properly equipped. Most continental forces have only the most basic logistics and communications capabilities, and hardly any of them can operate at any distance from home. Few can sustain operations with any credibility, and in almost every respect those forces have to rely almost entirely on the United States for intelligence, strategic support and military muscle.

The really serious military questions have now got to be dealt with, and we must give a lead on that in NATO and elsewhere in Europe. NATO must chuck the rhetoric out of the window and deal with the questions of operational capacity and effectiveness within its force structures. Above all, it must address Europe's shameful dependence on United States forces. We Europeans really must do more and take more responsibility for our own security.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire said, that means seriously increasing defence spending and placing greater emphasis on rapidly deployable and, probably, special forces, intelligence, surveillance and precision weapons. NATO is still crucial to a stable world. It is the only organisation that binds the United States to Europe, and Europe to the United States. There is no need for it to have a collective nervous breakdown; rather, it can take a clear, rational look at what it must do, set out a sensible, pragmatic programme to do it and get on with it.

Finally, and I apologise for speaking for so long, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have on many occasions spoken in defence debates in the House on the question of military ethos. I accept that it is no longer a fashionable subject, but I want to make one serious point in conclusion. There is no other place in British life in which there is so much of human achievement in such small institutions as there is in the British armed forces.

I hope that the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and, above all, the Chancellor understand—and I really mean understand—that as Lord Wavell said in his lecture on generalship, in the last resort, the end of all military training, the settling of all policy, the ordering of all weaponry and all that goes into the makings of the armed forces is that the deciding factor in battle is this: sooner or later, Private So-and-so will, of his own free will and in the face of great danger and chaos, have to advance to his front in the face of the enemy. If all that goes wrong, after all the training, the intensive preparation and the provision of equipment and expenditure, the system has failed. But it has never failed in this country; the armed forces have never ever let us down. If the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Secretary of State let them down by failing to pay the debt that they owe them by properly resourcing them now, they will not be forgiven, and our wonderful armed forces will gradually diminish.

On 8 October 2001, the Prime Minister, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), said:

> "We have already made it clear—the Chancellor did so the other day—that the armed forces should have the resources necessary to do the job. It would not be fair or right to ask them to do it without them being properly resourced and they will be."—[*Official Report*, 8 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 819.]

The Government have not honoured that obligation, and the Prime Minister will be in breach of a fundamental and unconditional undertaking made in the House if he does not see to it that the matter is dealt with.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the next speaker, it is clear that a large number of Members are seeking to catch my eye. I appeal for speeches to be brief so that as many Members as possible can contribute to the debate.

4.41 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): The strategic defence review was foreign policy-led, and it is perfectly proper that the new chapter is foreign policy-led, particularly taking into account the events of 11 September, asymmetric threats, greater security concerns and, perhaps, the greater importance of United Nations peacekeeping and nation-building work.

As has been said, I believe that the first stage of the campaign against terror, our military campaign in Afghanistan, has been substantially successful. I back my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) in saying that whatever our reservations about aspects of the campaign, we must give credit to the United States particularly, but also to our armed forces and intelligence service for the part that they played. However, I am concerned that in the overall campaign against terror, there are a number of ways in which we could still snatch defeat from the jaws of victory; I shall talk about one or two of those.

I said that I wanted to concentrate on the foreign policy lead for defence. I should particularly like to concentrate on UK-US relations and the Foreign Secretary's speech last week, to which the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) referred. In that speech at King's college, the Foreign Secretary suggested that arms control had been substantially successful, and referred in particular to the success of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty; a number of countries have given up nuclear weapons and other countries, which at one stage were thought might develop such weapons, have refused to do so. However, it should not be forgotten how difficult it was to reach agreement at the review conference in 2000. The Foreign Office played a key role in that success. Everybody agreed, both then and subsequently at the United Nations, that all countries would seek to ratify the comprehensive test ban treaty as quickly as possible, and to maintain and strengthen the anti-ballistic missile treaty as a cornerstone of strategic stability.

The Foreign Secretary pointed out that the test ban treaty had not yet been broken by the United States, but did not refer to the fact that the US has clearly signalled that it has no intention of ratifying it and, in fact, is seeking to breach it as quickly as possible. It is always said that the ABM treaty is a bilateral treaty; in 2000, I repeat, all states made undertakings that were genuinely multilateral.

[Mr. Malcolm Savidge]

The hon. Member for New Forest, West referred to the fact that the Foreign Secretary said that there was "new thinking". Twenty years ago, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle et al said that the ABM treaty was out of date and that we must develop star wars. Now, they say that that treaty is 30 years out of date and that we must develop star wars. I know that some people argue that some members of the Bush Administration are reassuring us that the project is not really star wars as it will be limited and have a defensive aim. They do not often cite Richard Perle's argument that it will be inexpensive; I suppose that depends on how many hundreds of billions or trillions of dollars one regards as cheap. Those people tend not to refer to the fact that other members of the Bush Administration, as well as, very often, the members offering reassurance, have had comments published about full spectrum dominance. It is perfectly clear that if a country believes that it is totally defended, it is far more likely to be belligerent or engage in aggression.

It has been said that Russia is more friendly, but are we helping that situation, when the ABM treaty is to be abandoned rather than further negotiation taking place? Does that strengthen the position of Mr. Putin? China was already intending to expand its nuclear arsenals, but it has made it clear that it will expand them even more as a result. The Foreign Secretary expressed the hope that that would have no effect on the situation in India and Pakistan; I hope that his optimism is justified.

If the major superpower is in flagrant contempt of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, what effect does that have on the chances of proliferation? The Foreign Secretary suggested that perhaps star wars would help non-proliferation:

> "Those who seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction are not usually irrational".

Star wars would put them off, he suggested. I am sorry, but I seem to remember that the rationale for star wars was that there were some rogue state dictators who were so irrational that they would not be deterred, even by the threat of nuclear annihilation. Further, would they be put off proliferation? The recent national intelligence estimate to the United States Senate is far more correct. It suggests that, because of star wars, and for a range of other reasons, such dictators would be more likely to look at using smuggled weapons because they

> "are less expensive than . . . intercontinental ballistic missiles . . . can be covertly developed and employed"

and their source can be

> "masked in an attempt to evade retaliation."

Such weapons are more accurate and, I would add, have the advantage of total surprise; they can be used without warning.

Multilateral agreements are our best way of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, missiles and other weapons of mass destruction. My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) and the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot) spoke perceptively about the particular threat that could be posed if nuclear weapons fell into the hands of terrorists; we must prevent that by all means possible. What security can we possibly have even against small nuclear weapons, which could annihilate everything within a radius of half a mile or a mile? We cannot impose a ban on every vehicle coming within a mile of the House or any other place that we want to protect.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Savidge: No, I am sorry; I have been asked to be brief.

The present United States Administration are blocking or breaching nearly all the major treaties that we need for our safety. Of the biological weapons convention they say, "We need it relevant to today rather than yesterday." What on earth do they think other countries have been doing in the past six years of negotiation? The Foreign Secretary suggested that some people caricature members of the American Administration as unilateralists. In September 2000, I attended a Heritage Foundation seminar on star wars, which was addressed by leading right wingers from both sides of the Atlantic, including the Leader of the Opposition. One speaker said:

> "They call us unilateralists and isolationists just because we totally oppose arms control, treaties and the UN."

Since that seminar, there has been, I accept, some "new thinking". At the seminar, the republican right talked about a disparate group of people ganging together in "club mad". Now, they are talking about them ganging together in an "axis of evil". It is wrong to try to reduce a complex world to such simplicities. To suggest that Iraq, Iran and North Korea are all working together solely to produce weapons in order to attack the United States is to forget that Iraq and Iran built up their weapons largely to fight each other, that both were supplied by the United States among other countries and that North Korea, nasty and revolting as that regime is, has shown a readiness to negotiate.

Similarly, the Republican right seem to suffer amnesia as to exactly who first helped to arm the Taliban and al-Qaeda. I would follow the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) about Iraq. If there is no clear connection to 11 September, a unilateral declaration of war or a declaration following consultation of the sort that says, "This is what we are going to do whether you like it or not," by a country that refuses weapons inspections itself would be extremely dangerous. The United Kingdom must not permit mission creep from patrolling no-fly zones to involving ourselves in war in Iraq simply to ingratiate the Republican right rather than to defend British interests.

I have another concern. The campaign against terrorism has been abused as it has become an excuse for increased belligerence in some areas that present the greatest danger of world conflict; I am thinking particularly of Israel and Palestine and India and Pakistan. In the former case, it has not helped that Donald Rumsfeld positively encouraged that. I fully appreciate that British Ministers feel that they need to show the highest level of diplomacy in dealing with our American allies. However, it is appalling that the members of the US Defence Department show such an appalling lack of diplomacy.

If I may adapt the terminology used in an interesting article by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, I believe that we must show ourselves staunch allies of the US people, but we must not show ourselves as patsies for the present US Administration. I would repeat the phrase, "Yes, but", that was used by the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames). The Leader of the Opposition, with his close links to the US right, must not be allowed to lead us into a dutch auction to sell out British interests to the obsessions of the American right. We must not be allowed to let real threats to the British people be increased in order to reduce imagined or remote threats to the United States.

Reference has been made to the increase in the US defence budget, and it has been suggested that we should follow that in Britain and Europe, but there is another consideration. With the US now being in the position of outspending on defence the whole of the rest of NATO plus Russia and China, while spending one of the lowest percentages on diplomacy, aid and reconstruction for other countries, surely it is time that the US considered whether it should be putting more dollars and more effort into the State Department and into aid.

As it says in "A New Chapter", the United States will undoubtedly play a lead role in many things, but it should be under the United Nations, which should lead us. George Bush senior said that he believed in a new world order, but it cannot be a new world order where one country lays down the rules for all the rest while flouting them itself. It is dangerous to assume the supremacy of the west, but it is even more dangerous to have the supremacy of the wild west. For certain states that view the United States as their allies, members of the US Administration should recognise that, although we would not regard it as the rogue States, it is certainly becoming the States of concern.

4.54 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): It is a great honour to take part in this debate after the eloquent Front-Bench speech of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) and the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot) who are both former Ministers. In the aftermath of Afghanistan, I urge the House to think very carefully about whether we are providing the right kind of forces for the changing world and the many threats that we face.

The European Union is addressing part of that through the European Security and Defence Initiative whereby, in effect, an Army corps is to be projected up to 2,500 miles within 60 days and sustained for a whole year. After looking at the operations in Afghanistan, it is not clear to me whether continental Europeans at any rate have the required capabilities. A huge effort will have to be made to make good large deficiencies which were well summarised by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West.

First, there will have to be air superiority, and for that the Eurofighter is crucial. It is way behind schedule and well over budget, but it will have the great advantage of being a single-crew aeroplane so some of the manning problems that the Government face and which have led to the disbanding of 5 Squadron at Coningsby should not be such a difficulty. The whole range of air assets that we require—the airborne standoff radar system, the A400M, the new tankers, the Nimrod maritime reconnaissance aircraft mark 2 and a successor to the HC4 Sea Kings for a commando brigade, be that successor either Merlin helicopters or tilt-rotor aeroplanes—are all required in a much shorter time scale than had been originally envisaged. However, they will have the advantage, if the Government provide the necessary funding, of pump-priming the aerospace industry, which is facing a severe downturn in its civil business.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): The hon. Gentleman has gone through a long list of possible procurement items. Is he aware of the thinking behind Congressman Allen's Bill which sought to recoup the research and development costs of missile defence and which applied to any allies to whom this proposed defence concept would be extended? Where does the hon. Gentleman think the money will come from to meet the costs of missile defence, in addition to that long list of armaments that he has read to the House?

Mr. Wilkinson: The hon. Gentleman will note that I did not include any provision for ballistic missile defence. Important as it is, the Government are still evaluating whether we really need to spend significant moneys which developing such projects will require. The hon. Gentleman is anticipating things, but that is not to say that we should not examine them with the greatest care and seriousness.

The Royal Air Force will also need a new training aeroplane—I would suggest a new version of Hawk—as a matter of urgency. Proper training and operational standards constitute a vital aspect of intervention overseas that is all too readily neglected. In that regard I turn to the House of Lords Select Committee report on the tragic accident to the Chinook mark 2 at the Mull of Kintyre on 2 June 1994. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), who is a former Minister, said that the controversy over the causes of the accident and the decision of Air Marshals Sir William Wratten and Sir John Day to declare the pilots negligent had cast a dark cloud over the reputation of the Ministry of Defence that would inhibit recruiting. I do not believe it.

The Ministry of Defence has been open at all stages about the tragic accident, which occurred in the difficult circumstances of a special mission that flew VIPs to Scotland in an inappropriate aircraft. Comments from another place and even from former ministerial colleagues such as Sir Malcolm Rifkind do not help matters. Lives were tragically lost, and there are lessons to be learned about operational procedures and training. I shall consider some of them in detail.

First, I hope that an aircraft that has not had clearance from the Aircraft and Armament Experimental Establishment at Boscombe Down will never be allowed to perform such an important mission again. It was a fundamental mistake, and I am astonished that an aircraft with so many operational limitations was allowed to fly on the mission. It is noteworthy that the crew preferred a Chinook mark 1, perhaps partly because they were more familiar with the aircraft, but also because they knew the limitations of the Chinook mark 2, especially in icing conditions.

On 1 June, the day before the accident, the Aircraft and Armament Experimental Establishment suspended test flying of Chinook mark 2s because of problems with flight in icing conditions. Those briefing for the sortie knew that the aircraft would probably have to fly in icing

[Mr. Wilkinson]

conditions: in cloud, at a temperature below 4 deg C. The aircraft was not cleared for flight in icing conditions below that temperature.

If the eminent officers had to fly to Fort George, it would have been more appropriate and sensible for them to travel to Inverness airport in a Hercules or BAe 146. It is incomprehensible that they all flew in one aircraft, especially one that had so many limitations, in such unsuitable weather. Clearly, the weather was marginal for flight under visual flight rules. I shall say more about that anon.

The Chinook mark 2, especially the digital engine control system, had malfunctioned on several occasions. There had also been various spurious warnings, which made the aircraft notorious. One serious technical problem was reported on form 700 only three weeks before the accident. The history of technical problems should have led briefing officers to choose another aircraft, such as a fixed-wing aeroplane that could fly safely in such weather. The senior officers who permitted the sortie to go ahead in the helicopter, in the weather conditions that I outlined, are reprehensible.

Their Lordships are wise after the event. They can provide a panoply of legal wisdom, but they have not flown helicopters at low level in difficult weather conditions. There were some weather reports along the route; one was provided by a yachtsman. However, the perspective of a yachtsman is different from that of a pilot who flies an aircraft at low level above the sea in marginal visibility at 3 nautical miles a minute.

The Royal Air Force's investigation was thorough and carefully conducted. Appointing Sir John Day, AOC 1 Group, and Sir William Wratten, AOC and Commander-in-Chief Strike Command, to conduct the review was appropriate. As commanding officers, they had to do it. As Sir William pointed out, in some 38 per cent. of cases of Royal Air Force boards of inquiry, air officers commanding have overturned the findings. They were not acting against precedent. I do not therefore believe that they deserve such criticism for their conclusions. They will have understood their overriding responsibility as air officers commanding to ensure the highest standards of flight discipline and airmanship by their crews. Captains of aircraft, regardless of circumstances, mission, the importance of the passengers and the seniority of those who sent them, have a duty to abort the mission or change the flight profile if circumstances dictate it.

It is my belief—particularly after reading the exchange between the two Air Marshals and their Lordships during the cross-examination in the other place—that the Air Marshals were justified in their belief, with the wisdom of hindsight, that the crew, who were flying in very marginal weather with high ground ahead, and with the aircraft slightly off track to the right, probably ought to have aborted, or at least got well clear of the high ground with all speed.

It is sadly clear from the accident inquiry and the inspection of the wreckage that the aeroplane struck the ground while climbing. There had been a rapid flare in the last seconds before impact, which would be consistent with the pilots having seen the high ground just before the crash occurred. The height, speed and configuration of the aeroplane were consistent with a controlled flight into high ground.

That is not to say that there was not a malfunction. There could conceivably have been one, but if there was, how were the pilots able to tap in a new way point on the navigational computer less than one nautical mile before the high ground? If there had been a malfunction, they would have been highly preoccupied. A malfunction could conceivably have occurred when the pilots changed course towards the new way point, but such a small change of course would be unlikely to cause erratic behaviour leading to loss of control and a crash into high ground.

I conclude by justifying the decision of the Air Marshals. The House would be wise not to follow the path taken in the other place, or to try to second-guess investigations into military accidents, however tragic the circumstances and however much we sympathise with the grief of the parents of the service men who lost their lives. In an excellent letter to *The Times* on 9 February, the managing director of British International Helicopters, Mr. Stewart Birt, wrote:

> "'Good airmanship', an approach to flying promoted in both military and civil aviation, would have dictated a series of decisions that should have resulted in the aircraft not being at risk of a collision with the ground at the location of the accident or anywhere else."

The Air Marshals had a duty to ensure that the very best standards of airmanship were maintained, particularly for VIP flights in difficult circumstances. I do not think that the Air Marshals were in dereliction of their duty. I support their judgment, and I hope that the Ministry of Defence will as well, however tragic the circumstances were.

5.8 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): I shall keep my speech as short as I can; I know that we are short of time. It is a privilege to take part in this debate, as there are a lot of very knowledgeable Members on both sides of the House. Perhaps there has been an occasional hint of disingenuousness, however, in the comments of Opposition Members about the problems of overstretch in the Army. That problem has existed for many years. As the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) said, the figure for people on operational duties is about 27 per cent., which is about the same level that this Government inherited in 1997 from the Tory Government. That is pretty normal. The figure went up during Kosovo, and then went back down. This is still a problem, but it always was and, in many ways, it always will be, because we cannot solve problems of recruitment and retention overnight.

At least one of the Opposition Members present has greater expertise than I have in this matter. They may talk about hugely raising troops' pay, but that will not solve the problem, because troops are not all that pay-sensitive. They expect to be reasonably well paid and well accommodated but raising their pay hugely will not solve the problem of recruitment and retention in the services. The situation has been the same for a while and I suspect that, regrettably, it will be the same for some time to come. So when we talk about future defence policy, we have to assume that we will always have rather fewer soldiers, airmen and women, and sailors than we might wish to have.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), who is no longer in her place, repeatedly used the term "warmongering", but such language is unhelpful.

I appreciate that she does not like the Bush Administration—nor am I a great fan—but President Bush is the elected representative of some 250 million people. They have a right to elect whomever they want. There is a fine line between being anti-American and anti-Bush, and repeated use of the term "warmongering" is unhelpful.

I shall cut to the chase and deal with the discussion document that was issued today. It refers to preventing the conditions that allow international terrorist organisations to operate, and to our providing training assistance to the armed forces of other states, when we have the resources. It is worth noting that the service personnel who are sent on such duties are invariably highly skilled, and are often senior and near the end of their military careers.

In places such as Africa—I was in central Africa a few months ago—military assistance would be invaluable. However, we cannot necessarily provide British military advisory and training teams, either because we do not have enough highly skilled soldiers, or because the political conditions are not quite right. The Foreign Secretary's recent thought that well-regulated private companies could fill that breach is therefore worth extensive consideration.

Sometimes, hon. Members hear the term "mercenaries" used. The Prime Minister used it, presumably on advice, but it is an unfortunate word. It might be in vogue or even correct, but "mercenaries" makes me think of Richard Burton in the 1970s film "The Wild Geese". That is not the kind of role that we are talking about today, and it is an unhelpful image to place in people's minds. Well-regulated private companies could have a role to play in filling that breach. The issue is in the public domain and it needs to be discussed.

The right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot)—he is also not in his place—mentioned the Chinook issue, which has been taken up. Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the former Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands, is to discuss pragmatism in politics on Libby Purves', Radio 4 programme, "Midweek". His definition of pragmatism is likely to be a tiny bit too wide. I was disappointed to discover that, in effect, he blames his officials and officers for his wrong decision, as he now regards it, on the Chinook disaster on the Mull of Kintyre. He told a Scottish Sunday newspaper that, in those circumstances, politicians are at the mercy of their advisers. I believe that he made the correct decision, but to compound his misdemeanour he also cast personal aspersions on current Ministers for not overturning the original decision.

The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) referred to the speech of the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire as honourable, but I am not convinced. Both made fine speeches, but I am not convinced that it is honourable to describe as dishonourable current Ministers who are upholding the decision of a former Secretary of State. It is not right to throw around such a word, and its use was ill-considered.

Mr. Soames: I want to clarify the point. I was not suggesting that the Ministry of Defence or Ministers have acted in any way dishonourably, but it was extremely honourable of my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot) to speak as he did.

Mr. Joyce: I appreciate the distinction. Perhaps I should clarify my explanation, which may have been a little inelegant. I am slightly concerned about describing as honourable a speech that calls Ministers dishonourable simply for acting correctly. Essentially, that is what the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire did.

Mr. Gray: No, he did not.

Mr. Joyce: Yes, he did. He used that word.

Mr. Gray: My right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), who is not present, did not in any way imply that Ministers acted dishonourably in not overturning the finding. It is high time that Ministers did overturn it, but there is nothing dishonourable in their not doing so.

Mr. Joyce: The right hon. Gentleman chose to leave the Chamber, but he did use the word "dishonourable". He said that it was dishonourable for Ministers to uphold the current position.

Let me return to Sir Malcolm Rifkind. Sir Malcolm is a capable man. It cannot have escaped his attention that it is at best inconsistent for him to argue on the one hand that present Ministers must take full responsibility for such decisions, which indeed they must, and on the other hand that the principle should not extend to him.

That contortion may be an expression of Sir Malcolm's new doctrine of pragmatism, but I think that the lesson may go deeper. It seems to me that the Conservative party—which, after all, is full of knowledgeable experts—is struggling to come up with a critique of the Government's defence policies with an "oppositionist" resonance. I believe that the Conservatives agree with many of those policies, and are trying desperately to find some reason to oppose them.

In the Chinook case, Sir Malcolm has been pulled a bit too low in terms of the level of debate. There were a couple of glaring factual errors in his newspaper article. He said, for instance, that both the senior officers involved had retired. I do not think that Sir Malcolm himself would have made such a mistake; I suspect that the article was heavily drafted.

It would be a pity if a former Defence Secretary, who must be very frustrated and disappointed by his failure to be re-elected as a Member of Parliament, misjudged the tone and the effect of his own political comments. He may have chosen to continue in this way for all I know, but it would be disappointing to learn that he had.

On a lighter note, let me say a little about Scottish National party policy, as an SNP Member is present. This week the SNP leader attended a demonstration against Trident at Faslane, at which one of his MSPs was arrested while pursuing the party's anti-Trident policy. With astonishing hypocrisy, the SNP's 2001 manifesto stated:

> "We should get the benefits of jobs at Rosyth, and we will fight any government proposals to remove refitting work from Scotland".

That is remarkable.

With what would the SNP replace Trident? An assistant defence spokesman—a fine individual, actually; a former lieutenant-colonel who left the Army recently—said this.

Angus Robertson (Moray): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I raise a question regarding a

[Angus Robertson]

ruling by Mr. Speaker last week? As I understood it, Mr. Speaker deemed that Members should not question the policy of other parties, but should question only that of the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a much more general debate. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) is entirely in order.

Mr. Joyce: I was about to say—perhaps this is why the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) was beginning to get upset—that the SNP has made only one suggestion of a possible replacement for Trident. Two years ago, its assistant spokesperson said:

> "It is well worth considering the utility of ballistic missiles . . . They can carry a wide variety of warheads, including chemical and biological payloads, which can be seen as a cheap alternative to nuclear ones for deterrent purposes".

That is true, I would guess. The spokesperson continued:

> "Such attributes have made ballistic missiles the weapon of choice for many third world countries, but the Scottish Defence Force might also find them an important asset in its armoury."

Angus Robertson: Could the hon. Gentleman enlighten us about Scottish Labour policy on the stationing of nuclear weapons in Scotland?

Mr. Joyce: Labour party policy is Labour party policy. There is no different policy, as you should know.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must use correct parliamentary language. He must not use the word "you".

Mr. Joyce: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The SNP says that in an independent Scotland a new Scottish defence force would operate outside NATO, but would be configured for—wait for it—land, sea and air defence of Scotland. It would be capable of overseas operations including rapid deployment, and it would deploy on humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. According to the SNP, that dynamic defence force would consist of whatever Scottish personnel in the current UK armed services chose to transfer. They would be choosing to transfer from one of the finest armed forces in the world to a tin-pot group of people with no experience and no idea about how to run the defence of the country. There is nothing on the SNP website about defence policy. It has removed it because it is deeply embarrassed by it. That is why it has made a token appearance today.

I shall conclude because time is pressing. The document that has been issued today by the Ministry of Defence is a fine document. It raises a number of key issues. It is important that the public debate them in the coming weeks and months.

5.20 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Exactly 12 months ago, the MOD rather bravely published a document entitled, "The Future Strategic Context for Defence". In its introduction, it set out the problems with future thinking of that type:

> "We recognise that the paper will contain judgements about the future with which many will disagree. Inevitably events will prove some of our judgements to have been wrong (perhaps this is the only truly certain prediction which we can make).
>
> The nature of such analysis tends not to identify the possibility of 'shocks', low-probability events with a dramatic effect . . . It is in particular the potential negative impact of shocks that we need to be aware of for purposes of contingency planning. Across a 30 year period we must expect a number of such shocks, even if we can't predict their nature, which have the potential fundamentally to disrupt our carefully laid plans."

Those were indeed prophetic words because, not 30 years hence but only one year hence, here we are discussing primarily the aftermath of a particular shock: the event on 11 September last year.

We had sight for a rather brief period before the commencement of the debate of a new consultation document on how the strategic defence review should be updated in the aftermath of that atrocity—that outrageous mass murder that was nothing short of a declaration of war on the west. The document, which I have seen today for the first time, asks us to make our views known on no fewer than 11 different points. The questions are set out in a useful summary. In the limited time that I intend to confine myself to, I will work my way through as many of them as possible, so I may not give the most comprehensive response to the document that the MOD will receive, but I pride myself on giving the first response to it.

The first question is:

> "What should the international community do to address the key underlying causes of international terrorism? What specifically should the UK aim to do?"

There will always be a minority of fanatics in any society, no matter how liberal, civilised and enlightened, who are prepared to engage in totalitarian, murderous activities. The aim of that civilised society must be to keep them away from the levers of power. In particular, the elements that lead to terrorist events are the existence of such fanatics, their access to weapons and the availability to them of a protected base, usually supplied by a host country. When asked what we must do about that, I say in brief that we must identify, infiltrate and monitor such organisations, actively impede their acquisition of weapons and recover those that they have already managed to acquire, and destroy their bases, if necessary overthrowing the regimes that harbour those bases and decline to close them.

The second question is:

> "In the medium to long term, what balance should the UK seek to strike between contributing Armed Forces, on the one hand, to help address the symptoms of terrorism and, on the other, to assist in efforts to address the causes of terrorism?"

The symptoms that we may have to face in this country are three. The first, which has not materialised anywhere yet, is small-scale suicide terrorism carried out in large quantities. That was what I feared we would be facing early on when we met on 14 September for an emergency sitting. I contributed to that debate and talked about the grave and severe changes that there would have to be in national life to cope with that sort of threat.

So far, it appears, a few spectaculars rather than a large number of low-level operations have been planned. Large-scale, spectacular attacks on public buildings are the second category about which we must be concerned. The third, which has been alluded to briefly, is mass attacks on the civil population using methods such as those that Soviet spetznaz forces were discovered to have formulated in the early 1970s for use in the event of a war on this country. Hon. Members will remember from their history that that led to the expulsion of more than 100 so-called Soviet diplomats—a coup from which the Soviet intelligence service in this country never recovered.

On assessing the likelihood of such threats being carried out, I am grateful to a friend for drawing my attention to an article in *The Mail on Sunday* on 3 February, which purported to be an interview with someone out in Lahore near what was alleged to be an al-Qaeda training camp. He claimed to have been born in Britain, to have worked as a doctor in Britain and to retain British nationality.

That person, who used the name Dr. Hakani, said:

> "Our work has hardly started. America is still bombing Afghanistan, now we want to bring the war to Britain and America. We are waiting for the right time to return to our sleeper cells in the West and launch full-scale attacks.
>
> Unlike America, we do not want to harm civilians."

Tell that to the bereaved of the World Trade Centre victims. He continued:

> "We will be hitting public buildings, government and military targets and leading politicians like Tony Blair. All of us who have fought with Al Qaeda would welcome martyrdom. We can see spectacular results from another September 11. We could hit Tower Bridge, Buckingham Palace or the Houses of Parliament."

That threat is obviously worrying, but at least it is small in terms of the numbers involved. If it remains so, we are much more likely to be able to prevent it from being carried out. Let us remember this: at first, we were unsure of the extent to which the UK Muslim community might be a source for terrorists, but it now appears that it is barely a source, as the numbers involved are very small. We must consider using the UK Muslim community, with its consent, as a resource against terrorists.

In that connection, I cite the experience of the Jewish community. Since being allowed to develop at the turn of the last century, which is when my grandparents came here, it has played a full part in the defence of this country. Hon. Members with knowledge of military history will have been reminded of that by the recent death of Tommy Gould VC, the famous submariner.

I have already mentioned the major causes—the coincidence of the existence of terrorists and their ability to get their hands on weapons while enjoying a secure base—and we can no longer ignore the behaviour of dictatorial regimes that are determinedly pursuing the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. We must be careful of again burying our heads in the sand and saying, "Saddam Hussein may be acquiring nuclear, chemical or biological weapons of mass destruction for all we know." We do not know whether he has such weapons because he did not allow the inspection demanded by the international community.

We must not say, "We will deal with this as and when it manifests itself." We must not wait; and if regimes are trying to acquire such weapons, it is up to us to stop them doing so, having given them every opportunity to allow the inspections that would show that they are not engaged in such activity. We must not allow the clock to tick indefinitely, as we may eventually find that the ticking is that of a time bomb.

The third item on the list to which we have been asked to respond bears on what I have said:

> "How should we strike a balance between the defence role in helping to protect the UK, and contributing to operations against international terrorists and other asymmetric threats overseas?"

I believe that that is one of those occasions when the author of the document posing a question has answered it in the body of the document far more effectively than anyone else could. Thus, before I conclude, I wish to put on the record paragraph 27, which appears on page 7 and states:

> "it is usually better to seek to engage an enemy at longer range—before they are able to mount an assault on our interests. Not only is this more effective than waiting to be attacked at a point and timing of an enemy's choice, it can have a deterrent effect. We must therefore continue to be ready and willing to deploy significant forces overseas to act against terrorists and those who harbour them."

The document recommends a combination of prevention, deterrence, coercion, disruption and destruction, applicable in different degrees to different targets.

We can try to prevent terrorism by putting pressure on Governments willing to harbour terrorists to ensure that they no longer do so. We can try to deter terrorism by showing that those who wish to harbour terrorists, or to sympathise with them, will meet not a feeble response from the west, but a massive one.

We can try to coerce host regimes to ensure that they do not think that they can wage a sort of proxy warfare. That possibility resembles what happened in the cold war, when people who did not want to fight the west openly would push smaller so-called client states to wage guerrilla war on their behalf. If Afghanistan has taught people of that mindset anything, it should be that that approach will not work in this case.

Disruption can be of only limited effectiveness against specific operations. In the end, terrorism has to be destroyed, without mercy or limit, wherever it rears its head in the world. That is why we must not close our eyes to the fact that ruthless regimes exist that for years have sought to acquire weapons which, even if they did not want to use them themselves, they could pass to other groups that would have no compunction about doing so.

I am not sure that the Conservative Government of the time did themselves any favours when they left Saddam Hussein in power at the end of the Gulf war. The time may be coming to put right that mistake. If it is necessary for us to act, we must do so firmly, and in a way that means that we will never again see anything as terrible as what happened so disastrously on 11 September.

5.33 pm

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). His speech was typical of the high quality and breadth of knowledge that have characterised the debate. The hon. Gentleman clearly had much more to say, and I thank him for his courtesy in stopping when he did and allowing other hon. Members to contribute.

I shall not attempt to emulate the breadth of approach of the hon. Member for New Forest, East, as I intend to focus on one aspect of defence policy—the possible privatisation of the defence fire service. That would threaten the military ethos which, as the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) noted, is so strong and valuable.

[Mr. John Grogan]

As many hon. Members have said in this debate, politicians of all hues were quick, after 11 September, to praise the public-spiritedness, self-sacrifice and the ethos of brotherhood and sisterhood of the New York fire service. It is less well known that 100 members of the UK defence fire service volunteered on the day of the disaster to go to New York to help out, if required.

As far as I am aware, there is no threat to privatise the New York fire service, but there is a real threat to privatise our defence fire service. I became aware of that when a constituent of mine, a firefighter at RAF Church Fenton, came to see me last summer. In his hand he held a sheet of paper on which he told me a senior politician was quoted as saying that that was a privatisation too far.

I speculated as to who that senior politician might have been. Several of the contributors to this debate might have made such a remark; I thought that it might have been a Liberal Democrat Member. However, in fact it was the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), the Leader of the Opposition, who had said that it was a privatisation too far. I respectfully say to my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of State for Defence that if it is a privatisation too far for the Conservative party, we need to pause for thought.

How did that situation come about? Three thousand fire service and associated personnel support the armed forces at their bases. The associated staff carry out tasks such as refuelling, or are employed as vehicle technicians and so on. They work at about 100 bases, not only in this country but worldwide. All their jobs are at stake.

On 20 September last year, with impeccable timing, the Ministry of Defence—with no announcement to the House—invited tenders from three preferred bidders for that support work. The contracts could last from between 15 and 20 years and would ultimately be worth up to £4 billion.

During an Adjournment debate, the Minister of State assured me that no decision had been made and that the tender documents are not due to be returned until the end of this month. Apparently, no decision will be made until the end of the year. That is why I was rather surprised to read in *RAF News* a few weeks ago an advertisement headed "Career Opportunities in Airfield Support". It stated:

> "Logicair, a joint venture company formed by Ryder plc and Serco Group plc, is embarking on a major project with great future potential. This will create a dynamic organisation to provide a wide range of airfield support services to the MOD, at over 100 sites world-wide."

The advertisement noted that work was expected to start in early 2004. The closing date for expressions of interest has already passed: it was Friday 25 January.

Clearly, a great deal of forward planning is being carried out by one of the bidders. That company must think that it is in with a good chance of obtaining the contract.

I thought that perhaps the work force were recalcitrant and had been threatening the efficiency or even the security and safety of our armed forces. However, history reveals that the opposite is true. The defence fire service was reviewed for the first time in recent years in the mid-1980s. The Transport and General Workers Union co-operated with the MOD at that time—although it was probably not easy to do that then—and agreed on a common solution: the creation of a single defence fire service for all our armed forces.

That solution was accepted by the trade unions and the MOD, but it was not implemented; there was resistance from some of the defence fire service chiefs. The single service was created in name, but it had three separate managements. There were some common features such as training. The inefficiencies and duplications of effort continued, and in 1995 the then Government began to investigate whether there might be private sector interest. The Labour Government have let that process continue.

It is time to call a halt. We should consider what the trade unions have offered recently. In true stakeholder fashion—something of which new Labour should be proud—they are co-operating with defence service staff. Under the chairmanship of Wing Commander Bob Waldegrave—no less—they have come up with the "Defence Fire Study 2000". That is an in-house project and shows how the service can cut costs by 20 per cent. As there is limited time for the debate, I shall not go into detail. The project has been agreed by the military, the MOD and the TGWU.

It is a real tragedy in terms of best value that the project cannot be implemented at present because of the parallel process of tendering. Public money is being wasted because "Defence Fire Study 2000" is not being implemented. There seems to be a doubt that the public service comparator established by the study will ever be used directly with the private sector, as three elements have been put out to tender.

The first element is procurement—no one would argue about that. The second is the defence fire service and the third is the associated services. It looks as though they will all be lumped together and that our brave firefighters in the defence fire service may not have the chance to compare their work directly with the fire service support that would be provided by the private sector.

The military ethos and the public service ethos are closely allied. The security—the very lives—of our RAF pilots and many others depends on the sense of military ethos or of public service ethos of many of the people who serve in the defence fire service and associated services. It depends on their being prepared to go that extra mile to put aside their own interests. Even as a constituency MP, one is aware that the defence fire service has been prepared to contribute repeatedly to meeting the wider needs of the community—to fill in the gaps of our hard-pressed county fire services. In last year's floods in North Yorkshire, the defence fire service was there time and again. It has been deployed 100 times in the past two years, to places such as Kosovo.

I quote one defence fire service firefighter, Darren Gribben, who recently returned from several months' service in Kosovo:

> "I was proud to serve in the hostile conditions of war-torn Pristina, but I would be unsure of returning under a privatised service."

That military ethos applies not only to pilots, but to our defence fire service staff, and I do not believe that it would apply in the same way if they were merely working for a boss who was a contractor to the Ministry of Defence, or perhaps a subcontractor to a contractor.

That issue goes to the heart of the great debate about the proper role of the public and the private sectors. If we are prepared to privatise the defence fire service, what are we not prepared to privatise? Are we prepared one day to privatise our fire service generally? That is a fear of the Fire Brigades Union.

On this issue, the Ministry of Defence is playing with fire. It should kick the proposals into touch and accept the 20 per cent. efficiency savings that are on offer from our firefighters.

5.41 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to take part in this debate on a wide range of defence issues. We have discovered a certain amount of common ground on some issues, but a lot less in other areas.

To start with the common ground, all hon. Members who have spoken have expressed our gratitude to the members of the armed forces for the astonishing work that they do on our behalf, not least in the recent operations in the Balkans, Sierra Leone and—particularly perhaps—Afghanistan.

Several hon. Members have expressed concern about the Government's plans for the Territorial Army and a desire to ensure that the Territorial Army retains a flexible role; that it is able to support our troops in a variety of ways; and that it does not simply become a home guard that is relegated to lower-level and domestic duties.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), supported by the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), expressed concern about the dangers of ending up with a two-tier system in our armed forces, in which some units are regularly used for high-level and high-priority activities while other regiments are left on lower-level duties. That would be a great pity, especially as all units in our armed forces are trained to an extremely high level.

We found less common ground on other issues. The Chinook crash was discussed eloquently by several hon. Members with great experience in the matter, and I do not want to cover that ground in detail. I would only say that the fact that Members with as much experience as the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot) have very considerable concerns about this matter, adding their voices to the questions raised by the House of Lords report, suggests to Liberal Democrat Members that it is time to have the matter independently reviewed so that we may get as close as possible to the truth of what happened in that tragic accident.

The second issue on which there has perhaps been less agreement is funding, which was discussed by the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex and by the Chairman of Select Committee on Defence, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). I fear that the Chairman set a high hurdle for his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in terms of the up and coming spending round when he said that he thought that the Secretary of State should seek to achieve an increase of half a percentage point in the share of national income that goes into defence; that would involve an increase of £4 to £5 billion a year. If the Chairman of the Defence Committee is setting that hurdle for the Secretary of State, he may be disappointed by the outcome of the spending review. There will be a great deal of competition for resources, especially as funding for health, education and transport is growing above the rate of inflation. That puts pressure on many other sectors, including defence and social security, to grow at less than the growth rate of the economy so that not too much upward pressure is placed on the tax burden.

The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex was closer to the likely outcome when he referred to an increase of £500 million a year over and above inflation. According to my back-of-the-envelope calculations, that would be a 2 per cent. real increase each year. The Secretary of State will need to deploy a robust set of arguments in the face of Treasury scepticism if he is to gain the share of the cake that defence should be allocated. Not all his arguments should lean too heavily on the events of 11 September, however. As the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said, the nature of those events was such that they would not necessarily have been prevented by additional expenditure on the armed forces. It is significant that the attack took place in the country that dedicates the largest share of gross domestic product to national defence. The nature of the threats that we now face might be better dealt with by expenditure that is targeted into intelligence, for instance, as the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) suggested.

If there is an argument for increasing expenditure on the armed forces which goes beyond the pay and cost pressures, it is the low share of GDP that Europe invests in defence compared with the US, as the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex explained. Although many Conservative Members expressed a strong solidarity with America, I am pleased that some of them share the concern that we should not be too dependent on it or expect it to do all our work for us. That is one argument that the Secretary of State should deploy.

Another argument is that although there is no great need for defence expenditure to respond to the specific events of 11 September, they highlight what is important. We need to take out insurance against a series of risks. If the events of 11 September tell us anything, it is that there is a huge uncertainty about the risks that we face. Our armed forces need to be flexible enough to respond to those different risks, many of which we cannot anticipate now. We need to be aware of the fact that the military responds to the latest war and the latest risks, but we need to consider our ability to respond to new risks.

Despite the Secretary of State's best efforts, if he does not obtain the full funding that he requires from the Chancellor, he will have to consider what hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford, said about how we deploy the existing budget between competing uses. With today's news of the increase in the cost of Eurofighter, I hope that the Minister will tell us whether he can reduce some of those cost pressures and their effect on other aspects of the defence budget, including procurement. Are the Government thinking of reducing the number of Eurofighters that we purchase to reduce some of the pressure on the defence budget, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford suggested?

I agree with what the hon. Member for Halifax said about having a wider debate on national missile defence. Many of my hon. Friends who would in no way associate themselves with the arguments for unilateral nuclear disarmament in the early 1980s are none the less concerned about the NMD programme and the value for money that we may or may not derive from it. Inevitably, if we decide to go along with that programme, there will

[Mr. David Laws]

be a very significant impact on our defence budget and costs, as other hon. Members have suggested. If only for that reason, we ought to have an early opportunity to debate in detail the pros and cons of becoming involved in this very important initiative with which President Bush wishes to proceed, and which will have major implications for US defence expenditure.

I wish to keep my comments as brief as possible because I am aware of the pressure of time. I wish the Secretary of State good luck, especially in the next week or so, in his battles with the Treasury over the comprehensive spending review, whose outcome will be crucial to all the issues that we have debated today. I hope that the resources that the right hon. Gentleman is able to secure will allow our armed forces to continue to do the really superb work that they have done in recent years and to complete their role not only in securing the British national defence interest but in engaging in humanitarian operations such as those in Sierra Leone, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford said, have had such a dramatic effect on the quality of life and security of people in countries beyond our own.

5.51 pm

David Wright (Telford): It is a privilege to be able to contribute to the debate. In particular, I want to refer to the speech made by the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), which I thoroughly enjoyed. He has a knowledgeable perspective on such issues; his remarks were often humorous; and he made an important contribution. I concur with what he said about the way that the House was moved by the statement that the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot) made in his opening remarks. I may not agree with every part of his speech, but it takes courage to make such a statement in the Chamber, and I pay tribute to him.

This important debate has been wide ranging—from the Chinook crash to the deployment of front-line troops. My hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) has raised the issue of MOD fire services and I should like to broaden the debate even further to defence logistics. Often, defence debates focus on regiments such as the Parachute Regiment or the Royal Marines, and the superb job that they do. I should like to associate myself with the comments that other hon. Members have made about those forces. They do a fantastic job for our country, but we have to remember that their effectiveness in the field is very much dependent on defence logistics.

My constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) have long-standing traditions of defence logistics work. My constituency is well known in military circles as an effective location for the distribution of defence hardware, and the Equipment Support, Provision and Procurement Authority—otherwise known as ESPPA—is located there. My hon. Friend's constituency, which adjoins mine, contains the defence storage and distribution depot and ABRO, which was formerly called the Army base repair organisation, both of which are located at Donnington.

The significance of defence logistics to our national economy must not be forgotten. Some 31,800 people are employed in the United Kingdom on defence logistics work, 2,500 of them in Telford. It is a major employment asset for the west midlands economy. At times of conflict, those involved have responded superbly in the service of our country, from the Falklands war in the early 1980s to the current situation in which we find ourselves in Afghanistan. They do a tremendous job in ensuring that our armed forces are supported effectively in the field. I pay tribute to all the members of staff who work in those organisations.

The strategic defence review's effect on defence logistics will have a significant impact on my constituency. The principles of the strategic defence review and defence logistics policy are outlined in the MOD publication "Defence Policy 2001", from which I shall quote briefly. It states:

> "We need to deliver a step change in performance in all areas of logistics to deliver the Armed Forces' support and sustainability needs. In particular we need to optimise our stocks and fixed assets. This will require radical improvements in repair and maintenance, the exploitation of e-commerce, the creation of an integrated and responsive support chain effective across organisational boundaries and improved relationships with industry."

We can all sign up to that broad policy objective. Certainly, the people who work in defence logistics in Telford and The Wrekin have responded effectively to that agenda. ESPPA has introduced quality systems founded on ISO 9002. It is an exemplary organisation in terms of information technology provision. It has Investors in People status and it adds significant value to the work of the MOD. Donnington defence storage and distribution has merged with facilities at Stafford. Our armed forces are supported by some of the most technologically advanced warehousing in the western world.

ABRO at Donnington is moving towards a trading fund situation—it vests as a trading fund on 2 April. It uses partnering as a means of securing new materials and assets for the MOD and it uses some of the financial freedoms introduced by this Government to secure business fund reinvestment. A positive set of actions have therefore been taken in relation to the defence review agenda.

However, I urge caution on the Government. Since I became a Member of Parliament in June last year, I have already received four significant letters from the MOD about the restructuring and reorganisation of defence logistics. Constant upheaval and uncertainty in relation to defence logistics activity affects the morale of the people involved. That is a major concern in Telford and The Wrekin. The MOD publication "Defence Policy 2001" highlights the fact that

> "financial rewards, working conditions, training and career prospects which are sufficient to attract and retain innovative individuals with the skills we need"

are important to staff morale and recruitment in the MOD. The constant concern and upheaval of ongoing review does nothing to strengthen the morale of local people.

People in Telford and The Wrekin have the necessary skills and have proved, through the work that has been done in the organisations that I have mentioned, that they can build on those skills. We should let them flourish as far as possible. It is as important to support defence logistics as it is to support our front-line forces. Without an effective service in logistics, our armed forces cannot effectively serve the interests of this country with our partners.

Defence logistics also have a positive impact on our economy. We need to preserve the geographical spread of MOD interests throughout the UK. In security terms, that is a good principle anyway, but we must use the MOD to enhance local economies wherever we can.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that we need to ensure a defence presence throughout the country. However, does he agree that we must ensure that support units serve front-line units where they are? In particular, does he agree that defence medical services must support front-line units in Wiltshire and Hampshire rather than in Birmingham?

David Wright: I am sure that the Secretary of State has heard that comment. The hon. Gentleman clearly has more experience of those services than I do. I am talking about services provided directly by people in Telford and The Wrekin. On the basis of my visits to those establishments, I can report that the service is superb and of a high quality. People in Telford can demonstrate that such services can be delivered from across the UK in support of our armed forces.

I pay tribute once again to those who work in defence logistics. We must respect the commitment and flexibility shown by them and their trade union representatives, whom I have met regularly in recent months. We must protect their jobs and praise the work that they do in support of our front-line armed forces.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At business questions today, the House heard the Leader of the House, in response to a question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), issue an emphatic denial in respect of today's newspaper stories about Jo Moore and an e-mail that passed between Mr. Sixsmith and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The Leader of the House was totally emphatic on that point.

It is becoming clear from the Downing street 4 o'clock Lobby briefing that an e-mail does in fact exist. Those providing the briefing refuse to deny that the e-mail was copied to Jo Moore, or to release the wording of the e-mail. The Press Association is now reporting that this morning's stories are, in all important respects, accurate.

It is disgraceful that the media should have heard about the retraction before the House. Have you, Madam Deputy Speaker, had any information that the Leader of the House is to come here to put the record straight?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I have received no information from the Leader of the House or any other Minister that they are about to come here.

6.1 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): As we debate defence here tonight, we are extremely conscious that our forces are on active service almost all round the world. Great tributes have been paid to them, and I associate myself with those tributes, which apply as much to those working in supply organisations as to those members of the Parachute Regiment, whose regimental headquarters remains in Aldershot.

I am bound to say that I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) and others who have said that there is no point in other units being trained up to war fighting levels only to be stood down in favour of one or two units that are deployed every time. I hope that the Secretary of State has taken that important point on board.

I shall raise two specific issues: missile defence and expenditure. My remarks about both are informed in large measure by my visit to Washington last week. The Defence Committee spent the entire week in end-to-end meetings with officials and others in Washington.

First, I should like to say to the Secretary of State that everywhere we went, it was made absolutely explicit that the United States Administration greatly appreciate the support of the United Kingdom and its Government and the extraordinary qualities of our armed forces, who are in action and who have supported the United States' activities in Afghanistan. The united stand of the House and the support of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister standing shoulder to shoulder with our American partners have done the United Kingdom enormous good. I welcome that.

We Members of Parliament have to be clear that, whatever our individual views, the United States Administration are absolutely determined to proceed with missile defence. They greatly resent the suggestion that it is "star wars"—an expression that has been used repeatedly this afternoon. They are emphatic that it is neither "star wars" nor "national missile defence". They have changed the name of their organisation from the national missile defence organisation to the ballistic missile defence organisation, to make the point that they are not in the business of throwing up a curtain that protects the United States alone, as foreshadowed by the "star wars" concept of the 1980s.

It will be unfortunate if we fail to understand the United States' belief that it faces a real threat to its homeland, either from the axis of evil nations, or from other nations, or from terrorist organisations which might at some point in the relatively near future become capable of deploying missiles that could inflict damage on the United States. That is why the Americans are prepared to invest no less than $7.8 billion—£5 billion—next year in research to produce an answer to that problem.

If a missile is deployed, there are three stages at which it can be taken out: the launch phase, the mid-course phase and the terminal phase. That takes considerable technological achievement, and instead of criticising the United States, we should welcome the fact that a country that is richer than us is prepared to invest the necessary money.

It is significant that in the document that the Government published a year ago, Defence Policy 2000, they said:

> "We assess that, for the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that a direct threat to the UK could re-emerge on a scale sufficient to threaten our strategic security, whether through conventional means or weapons of mass destruction."

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

Of course, that has now changed because in the new document, which we received only this morning, the Government make a few tentative assumptions, one of which is that

> "the psychological threshold of shock may have been raised and other terrorists or possibly rogue states may in future seek to emulate the massive effect of the 11 September attacks. This might mean attempts to acquire and use chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear devices".

In light of the Government's acknowledgement that we face such a threat, I must ask why there is so much criticism of the United States for taking action, putting its dollars where its mouth is and trying to identify technical means by which that threat can be countered. What action are the British Government taking? On Monday, the Secretary of State, in answer to one of his colleagues, made it clear that this is not a national missile defence system designed only for the United States. He said:

> "President Bush has made it clear, for example, that he wants the United States friends and allies to be protected against the potential ballistic missile threat."—[*Official Report*, 11 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 9.]

Everywhere we went in Washington we heard the message that this system is not available only to the United States; it would like to be able to protect its friends and allies as well.

The Government might take a lead from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), who alerted the nation to the threat at least a year ago and suggested that we should co-operate with the United States to try to eliminate it. We face that threat more imminently than does the United States. Countries such as Iran, Iraq and Libya are closer to us than they are to the US, and it is incumbent on the Government to enable us to defend ourselves if those states develop the potential to hit this country.

When we met Mark Grossman, the Under-Secretary of State at the State Department who is responsible for political affairs, he said that the US would welcome support from its NATO allies. I understand that Italy and the Netherlands have said that they would like to support the United States. What, then, are the British Government doing? They must give us an answer.

My second point relates to expenditure. I draw to the attention of the House the penultimate paragraph of today's report which refers to

> "significant additional investment of £100 million to meet urgent operational requirements".

That is not additional investment. When the Secretary of State came to the Defence Committee in November, he made it clear that that £100 million is to meet the cost of prosecuting the war and is different from investment; it is not new money.

I hope that the Minister will take on board the many representations that have been made, because if we are to be able to meet the threat posed by terrorists and rogue states that can get their hands on intercontinental ballistic missiles, there will have to be significant increases in expenditure. The people of Britain have seen the damage that can be inflicted by those with a desire to inflict casualties on western countries; if they are told that insuring against such an eventuality carries a cost, I believe that they will be prepared to wear it.

I shall end with an ancillary point about additional expenditure. The Minister recently wrote to me about project Connaught Allenby in Aldershot. I wholly oppose any policy by Her Majesty's Government to sell off large tracts of land in the south to raise money to invest elsewhere, which would be at the expense of the garrison at Aldershot, a long-established garrison town with facilities for the armed forces, especially the Army, and a culture that welcomes the forces. I urge the Government not to sell off all that land to raise money for the Treasury, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex said, accounts more to Moscow than it does to the Ministry of Defence. Will they ensure that they do not divert such funding, which should be properly raised by taxation? I shall conclude on that note, and hope that the Minister will explain how those increases will be funded.

6.11 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): May I praise the brevity of many Members who have spoken? I, too, shall try to be as brief as possible, as I know that a number of other Members wish to speak.

I shall perhaps surprise the Minister by whole heartedly welcoming the discussion document, the announcement of a series of debates on the issues, which are important and deserve regular examination, and the detail of the Government's report. Like many others, I shall take the opportunity to praise our service personnel from Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, especially those stationed in my Moray constituency, which has two of the largest RAF bases in the UK—RAF Lossiemouth and RAF Kinloss. It will be no surprise to the Minister if I reiterate briefly the distinction that differentiates the defence policy of the Scottish National party from that of other parties in the House. We believe that defence policy should have a democratic basis. If we send someone into conflict, possibly to die for their country, that decision should be taken in the nation's Parliament which, for the SNP, is the Scottish Parliament. However, I do not expect the Minister to agree.

Moving on to the report, I support the emphasis on European security and defence policy and its headline goals, which are of great importance in the coming year. My party and I support that, as we do the partnership for peace programme. Sadly, the report omits mention of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which has an important part to play. That may be my oversight, but it does not appear to be mentioned, and no one else has talked about that important organisation today. It is an important element of peace policy in Europe. It is the only organisation on the continent that reaches as far as central Asia.

I shall not dwell on the partisan matters raised by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce). I was going to make the point that there is not a single Scottish Labour Back Bencher in the Chamber, but the hon. Gentleman has returned in time for the start of my speech. I congratulate him and thank him for making the effort. I wish to make specific points, first, about the Territorial Army, then about the defence fire service, which has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan).

The Minister will be aware that the SNP has consistently argued, since before publication of the strategic defence review, that there should not be a diminution of the Territorial Army. At about the time that the review was published, George Robertson said:

> "The TA should no longer be a force of last resort, held against a major threat . . . That means a shift in emphasis away from roles such as home defence."

After the events of 11 September, which Lord Robertson certainly could not have foreseen, it is absolutely right that the Territorial Army and other reserve forces should become more central to Government defence planning.

A number of issues need to be raised with regard to the Territorial Army. First, the fact that there are too few TA numbers means that the burden of disruption caused by TA obligations falls on a smaller number of businesses that have to release their staff, and not every business is prepared to do that. That is an important issue in respect of any rise in TA numbers. TA personnel who volunteer to reinforce the regulars in peacetime do not have the right to return to their jobs on return from their duties. That is only possible when they are mobilised, and it contrasts with the conditions of the National Guard in the United States.

Military observers in Scotland believe that there are simply too few trained personnel among the 4,500 TA credibly to defend key points. Does the Minister believe that there are sufficient to cover shifts at the gates or patrol inside installations? Perhaps he can say how many platoons were needed in the cold war for key point defence. How many key points are there in Scotland? I would not expect the Minister to name them; the numbers would suffice. It is important that we have an informed debate on the role of the Territorial Army as part of the ongoing consultation.

The SNP's position since 1996 is that there should be up to 8,000 part-time volunteer reservists in Scotland. That would thicken the volunteer reserve footprint in Scotland and bring more people into the TA and the reserve forces of the other services. It would create more trained personnel, spread more widely the burden on businesses that have part-time volunteers on their staff and encourage the recruitment of regular forces. In that respect, I fully support any efforts that the Government make in reaching that number.

Mindful of the time, I turn to the fire services at RAF bases, which, since my election in June, has been overwhelmingly the largest issue brought to me by service personnel from both bases. Only a few weeks ago there was a lobby of Parliament by more than 50 fire officers from throughout the United Kingdom, and those who travelled furthest of all came from RAF Lossiemouth in my constituency. The issue has been fully outlined by the hon. Member for Selby to whom I pay tribute for his work on this. I also thank hon. Members from both sides of the House who have signed early-day motion 853 on the subject and urge others to do so.

I have a number of questions for the Minister. I have asked them before, but received no answers. They concern RAF Lossiemouth where morale among staff is at rock bottom. They have raised the matter with me, with the Transport and General Workers Union and the Moray Trades Council and I hope that the Minister will be able to respond now. They are concerned about back-fill—the ability to bring in extra firefighters to cover extra changes in the category of planes that use those bases. As the Minister will be aware, in general Tornados operate from RAF Lossiemouth but an increasing number of VC10s and Tristars use it as well. Those planes are large and have heavy fuel loads and their status for firefighting goes from category 4 to category 7. The base also has squadrons on detachment and there is flying every day. Will the Minister confirm that squads at RAF Lossiemouth will be reduced from seven to six? I should be keen to hear his views on how airfield commitments can be met with fewer men. Morale is at rock bottom. Is the Minister not worried about the safety implications of that?

Specific measures were incorporated into the minutes of the local works Whitley, which met on 28 September 2001. It noted that RAF Lossiemouth is to be recategorised as a category 3 station and that its four firefighter crews will be

> "reduced from 7 to 6 . . . However, the Command Fire Officer at the time—who is named in the report—stated in writing that those figures did not include crew commanders, only the operational firefighters."

The report adds that the person in question has, however,

> "now retired and Command Fire has not subsequently substantiated his statement. It transpires that the revised manning figures do include crew commanders and are now enshrined in Joint Services Publication 426."

It adds:

> "the Trade Union side wished to record its dissent over the deceitful and underhanded way in which this issue has been handled."

This is matter of supreme interest to people at RAF Lossiemouth.

On 13 November 2001, the Minister said to me:

> "I will deal with the questions posed by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) in writing, because sufficient time is not available."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 13 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 234WH.]

He now has the time, and I should be grateful for the answers—if not when he sums up, in writing within the next few weeks.

6.21 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). I want to talk about morale—a crucial element of fighting power that is intangible but makes our soldiers, sailors and airmen do what they do so well.

The problems of a two-tier army may be just as applicable to a two-tier navy and a two-tier air force, but they are probably most obvious in the Army, and they are getting worse. I shall give the views of a company sergeant major of a Warrior battalion in Tidworth. The battalion has become part of the joint rapid reaction force and was alerted for action at short notice as its spearhead battalion. That means that, other than troops actually deployed on operations, no battalion anywhere else in the Army is on shorter notice to move. The sergeant major brought his company on parade, made sure that every last gaiter button was ready and every bootlace was tied, then said, "Boys, we are the leading edge—the spearhead—of the JRRF. That means we're going absolutely nowhere." In other words, the problem is that, as far as the troops are concerned, unless they are wearing a red hat or a green hat, they ain't moving.

In fact, that is not true. For example, 16 Air Assault Brigade contains elements of two fine battalions—the 1st Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment and the Royal Gurkha Rifles. The Commando Brigade contains men of the Royal Artillery, the Royal Signals, the Royal Engineers,

[Patrick Mercer]

and so on. It is a growing list. Too many of the line infantry see themselves as underemployed and undervalued. Will the Minister address that?

I ask the Minister carefully to consider the plans for 2 and 52 Brigades. I applaud the idea of creating infantry brigades, but they must be given organic sappers, gunners, signals and a headquarters if they are to become proper brigades. At the moment, they are only training brigades. Although the proposals are good for the morale of the battalions inside those brigades, they do not deal with the problem.

In my opinion—and, I humbly add, my experience—the factor that erodes morale more than anything else is under-recruiting and undermanning. Earlier this week, in Defence questions, the Minister said:

> "The figure for the Army is more than 100,000, which we hope to raise to 103,000 or 104,000 by 2005."

The add-back to the strategic defence review makes it 108,000. We now face the prospect of not approaching that figure until 2005. Why is manning so chronically unsatisfactory?

The Minister went on to say:

> "As for recruitment, I could spend the next hour describing in detail all the ways in which we have tried to tackle it . . . I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should begin to appreciate the complexities and difficulties, and support the Government's initiatives, rather than trying to talk down the armed forces."—[*Official Report*, 11 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 14-20.]

I am not trying to talk down the armed forces at all. The fact remains, however, that the examples are legion. The Omagh Battalion, which is the north-western battalion in Northern Ireland, as the Minister will appreciate, is a difficult and tough two-year posting. The battalions very rarely keep their numbers up to strength during that time; their numbers are always eroded.

The 1st Battalion, the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire has just deployed with one quarter of its combat power under strength. It is completely lacking one whole company. I hope that the Minister will forgive me if I appear to be teaching him to suck eggs when I tell him that the battalion has four operational tasks to do, for which it needs four companies; it has only three. What is the solution? A unit from the famous 16 Air Assault Brigade, a battalion of the Parachute Regiment, has to provide a company to make the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire up to strength. Not only do we have an ineffective battalion, but the precious resource of troops trained for airborne operations—part of 16 Air Assault Brigade—is being diverted towards relatively routine duties in Northern Ireland. It is extremely difficult for the commanding officer of that battalion to make it work properly and to maintain morale.

I tabled a written question about the number of troops leaving the Army, compared with the number entering it. The answer that I received was that the number entering is slightly higher than the number leaving. That is absolutely right, but those numbers do not shed the correct light on the problem. I spoke recently to the commanding officer of an Army training regiment. He expects to lose 20 per cent. of his recruits during phase one training. I do not take issue with that; it is probably reasonable, although unfortunate. During phase two training, he expects to lose a further 10 per cent.

We need to look at the numbers joining the battalions, and at the numbers leaving them. The former is chronically lower than the latter. There are one or two exceptions to that rule, however: the Light Dragoons, the Royal Welch Fusiliers, the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, the Sherwood Foresters and, most remarkably of all, the Coldstream Guards. Those battalions and regiments are consistently fully manned, or even over-manned. How do they do it?

The answer is that they conduct their own recruiting operations, because the resources of the recruiting group are seen to be inadequate. Soldiers are, therefore, mis-employed in what the Army refers to as the black economy. Mortarmen, machine-gunners and snipers are taken away from their tasks with their battalions and paid for, clothed, equipped and fed by their commanding officers while being deployed to Middlesbrough, Birkenhead or Clitheroe, for example, where they are told to go out and get recruits. If we ask how many men and women are recruited by regimental recruiting parties on the so-called black economy, and how many are recruited by the recruiting group, we are told that the figures are impossible to assess.

I maintain that that is the way to recruit successfully. It is not fussy or sophisticated, but it works, as it has worked down the centuries. I recommend that the Minister looks closely at this matter, and takes a spyglass to the operations of the recruiting group and to the budgets allocated to it. Interestingly, commanding officers of territorial battalions are given responsibility for their own recruiting. That would not wholly work in the regular Army, but there is merit in looking to see how it is done, and how those particular regiments approach the problem and—despite the economic climate—come out with the right answer time and again.

The Sherwood Foresters, based in Chester, will be 20 men over strength in six weeks' time. They have been told, "Do not recruit any more. You are over-bearing on salaries too much, so pack in your recruiting efforts." Why? Where is the logic? Surely, if they are recruiting, they should be allowed to do so. It is not a cap badge issue, as cap badges can be used elsewhere.

I have said enough and I am grateful to the House for its tolerance. It need not be reminded, I hope, of my undying admiration for our armed forces, but we are selling them short by treating them unfairly. Soldiers, sailors and airmen want to fight and to go on operations, and such opportunities should be given to them all. If units are to be effective, they need to be fully manned and morale must be kept high.

6.30 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I begin by paying tribute to the small but dedicated band of defence followers who have stayed until this late hour on a Thursday before a recess to discuss the important business before us. I refer to Members on both sides of the House, of course, but particularly to those on the Conservative Benches. Our interest in defence is well known and goes back a very long way indeed.

It has been a surprisingly worthwhile and heavyweight debate. I say "surprisingly" not to cast aspersions on the quality of any contribution from either side of the House, but because we made surprisingly good soup from the remarkably thin gruel that the Government served today in the form of the Green Paper. It amounts to very little and is unexpectedly thin, considering the heavyweight briefing of newspapers, television and radio in the past two or three weeks. Such briefing led us to believe that the Green Paper would contain all manner of interesting announcements about the Territorial Army. The reality is that there is a tiny paragraph on that subject that amounts to very little.

We were told that the Green Paper would mention special forces, but it says nothing, and that it would discuss various aspects of defence, but such references amount to questions rather than answers. It is a thin document, but it has taken five months since 11 September for it to appear. It bears striking similarities to the speech made in November by the Secretary of State for Defence at King's college, and I suspect that today's speech was the same one, given that he appeared to be reading large portions of the Green Paper verbatim. It is disappointing and surprising that, five months after the terrible events in New York, the Government's thinking has moved no further forward than the Green Paper suggests.

I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that there will be three further debates on defence issues and various other such topics, hopefully before the summer. I hope that we have more substantive issues to discuss by that time. Members on both sides of the House have struggled to find anything to say today on the Green Paper. There have been many interesting discussions on Chinooks and other such matters, but the Green Paper itself has not amounted to much.

In that context, I pay particular tribute to the Defence Committee, to the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who makes a huge contribution to defence matters, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), who is vice-chairman of the Committee and who speaks with great knowledge. They make a great contribution to defence thinking, and their report, which immediately followed the strategic defence review, seems a great deal weightier than the flimsy Green Paper.

I want to make one or two suggestions to the Minister, and to the Secretary of State in his absence—it is a shame that he was unable to stay for the rest of the debate—that they might consider before those more substantive debates. The first suggestion concerns the foreign policy baseline. The original strategic defence review made a reasonable stab at analysing our position on global defence requirements. Presumably, some foreign policy baseline underpins the new, post-11 September chapter.

However, the truth is that the baseline was not explained to us at the time of the strategic defence review, and it has not been explained to us today. We have not been told—except through speeches and so on—what the Government's foreign policy ambitions are. If we do not know what the job is, how can we assess whether the tools that the Government are giving our armed forces are suitable? I therefore call on the Government to publish the original baseline, and to update it and make it public. There is no reason why the people of Great Britain should not know what the Government's ambitions are in the world. Let the Secretary of State announce the foreign policy baseline and its update.

Of course, all that we get on that front is the Prime Minister rushing around the world grandstanding on a variety of important issues, with comments such as, "We must do something about it." He does that all the time, and most memorably in that foolishly grandiose speech at last year's Labour party conference. I recall his announcing, among other things, his intention of intervening in both Rwanda and the Congo.

If anything of the sort is likely—if that is indeed what the Labour party believes we should be doing in the world—the Prime Minister will have to discuss it with his Foreign Secretary, who seems to be rather out of the loop of late. Sadly, he did not manage to go to Africa with the Prime Minister last week. The Prime Minister will also have to discuss it with his Defence Secretary, who seems to have been ineffectual when it came to delivering the "overstretch" message at the door of No. 10. Above all, he must discuss it with his Chancellor, who will have to fork out for the realisation of his global ambitions.

I am delighted to see that the Secretary of State has at last returned. My second question is this: will he guarantee that he will properly fund the new chapter of the SDR? Most people agree that the original SDR was not at all well funded.

I must tell the Secretary of State that the runes in the papers are not at all encouraging. Over the past 12 months, it has been reported that the Treasury is demanding some £1.5 billion of defence cuts. Indeed, the Secretary of State came close to admitting as much in an interview with *The Daily Telegraph* last week. He said:

> "If we are going to engage more fully in the world"—

presumably along the lines described by the Prime Minister—

> "then obviously we will need the resources to achieve that".

He said in the same interview—or, at least, implied—that the defence budget was under threat. According to the newspaper,

> "senior defence sources said they were in the middle of a 'battle royal' with the Treasury which was questioning additional costs for operations in Afghanistan."

Perhaps the Minister will tell us how confident he is of persuading his Treasury colleagues that the proposals in the new chapter, and the defence changes necessitated by 11 September, should be properly funded. Will he give us an absolute assurance of decent funding? That did not happen after the SDR.

If the Green Paper is not properly funded, it will be like so much that the Labour party does—all smoke and mirrors. The Government seem to think that saying something is just as good as doing it. We do not want more questions, more national debate, and more mucking around with fancy bits of paper; we want to know what resources they will give our excellent defence forces to enable them to perform the ever more grandiose tasks with which, apparently, they are about to be confronted.

The main news that has been trailed this week—for instance, by the Secretary of State on the radio this morning—relates to changes in the Territorial Army. I declare an interest here: I served for seven years in the Honourable Artillery Company, and was recently appointed to the Court of Assistants.

In a strange intervention, the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) accused my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) of speaking out of turn because he was paid by the Territorial Army. He also accused my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), who spoke about the

[Mr. James Gray]

Chinook issue, of being dishonourable in some way. I did not entirely understand that, especially as it came from a gentleman who, I gather, was dismissed from the Army after a court martial. I thought it rather strange that he should call the honour of others into question.

Mr. Joyce: That is not the way it was. Moreover, the hon. Gentleman misunderstands what I said about the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot); I suggest that he read *Hansard.*

In a debate some years ago, the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) criticised me for being publicly political while serving as an officer. I accept that that was wrong at the time. He also stressed that there was effectively one Army—that the TA and the regular Army were one and the same. I was not criticising the hon. Gentleman today; I was drawing attention to an inconsistency.

Mr. Gray: I think that the hon. Gentleman has just apologised to both my colleagues, whom, in my view, he slandered. If so, I gladly accept his apology; if not, I think that he should have apologised.

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Let me try to defend the background of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce). I do not know all the details, but an interesting issue has been raised. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that no members of the armed forces should participate in any political discussion? I should be interested to learn his point of view, and the sources of some of his information. Should they all be court martialled?

Mr. Gray: I was making no such suggestion. I was trying to defend two of my colleagues whom the hon. Member for Falkirk, West had chosen to have a go at. That struck me as unreasonable, especially as his background in the armed forces is, to say the least, questionable. I leave it at that: I cast no aspersions on him. The way in which he behaved during his last couple of years in the Army is a strange old business, but that is not what today's debate is about. No doubt he will want to clear his name, and if I have misunderstood, I shall be the first to apologise, but my understanding is that he should be careful about throwing accusations across the Floor of the House.

The main thing that the Secretary of State talked about on the radio this morning was the TA. I know that the TA will diligently carry out whatever task he may throw at it. He says that the TA will guard key points. He must make it plain that it will not just guard key points but perform the tasks that it is already performing. Ten per cent. of troops in the Balkans are from the TA, which is also active in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. If guarding key points is an additional duty, what extra resources will he give the TA?

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), who was a distinguished Minister of State for the Armed Forces. He made particularly useful comments about the regular and Territorial Army. I take issue with him on just one point. He described himself as a sycophantic, running-dog lackey of the Government. That rang no bells with me. He makes a great contribution to defence.

The Green Paper hardly even mentioned the Secretary of State's plans with regard to the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force; there seems to be a large gap in the middle of it. I pose a few questions that he may like eventually to publish.

The Green Paper makes great play of defending homeland waters and airspace. I shall not intrude on the private grief raised by the hon. Members for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge), all of whom seem reluctant to support the Secretary of State's approach to ballistic missile defence, but there is a curiosity closer to home. The Green Paper says:

> "following 11 September, elements of the Armed Forces, including air defence fighters, were placed at increased readiness. They have been scrambled to monitor suspect aircraft on more than one occasion."

It says on page 5 that it is important to defend territorial waters and territorial airspace. In that case, will the Secretary of State confirm why he chose to take the opportunity to stand down 5 Tornado squadron, which I understand was responsible for the defence of London? That decision seems to conflict with what he says in the Green Paper.

Will the Secretary of State give some answers on the Royal Navy? Will he confirm how many type 45 destroyers he is ordering and when the first will be commissioned? The MOD constantly refers to "up to 12" but does he accept that if the Royal Navy is to continue its capability, it must be 12, not up to 12, ships? When will the first steel be cut on the first ship, and will she be delivered before 2008? Those are key questions that he needs to answer. It appears that the Navy will take delivery of a type 45 destroyer every six months from 2008 to 2014. Is BAE Barrow capable of delivering that?

The same applies to the number of frigates and destroyers, which seems significantly lower than that which Ministers have talked about. I think that I am right in saying that last year only 20 were available for use. Thirteen were on deployment. That means that there is no scope for royal naval deployments elsewhere. UK waters are not being patrolled by the Royal Navy at all. Since November 2001, for the first time ever, no royal naval ship has been deployed in the Caribbean.

I am glad that the Secretary of State has reconfirmed the carriers, but when does he intend to announce the decision on the planes that will be on them? Will he commit to three Astute class submarines, of which there is no mention in the Green Paper?

The same applies to the RAF. Pilot numbers are at a 10-year low. What a sign of the times it is that the Secretary of State has to offer fighter pilots £50,000 golden handcuffs to stay, just at the moment when he is closing 5 Tornado squadron.

The Eurofighter is late and badly over-budget, as we have heard. It seems to be being brought into question. Then we come to air transport and the A400M saga. Will the Minister confirm whether the A400M will definitely be delivered and if so when? From a constituency standpoint, will he ensure that it will be based at RAF Lyneham in my constituency, which I am straightforward about asking for? We cannot have all our transport eggs in one basket.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire, who raised the Chinook issue, spoke with passion. It seems that Ministers will have to explain why they are not ready to accept the outcome of the Select Committee in the other place. Will they be ready to appear before a recommissioned Select Committee to explain why not? They should accept the overwhelming evidence before them.

The shortages in the procurement and spending bow waves, which are creeping up on the Ministry of Defence, are becoming realities in the Green Paper. The services do not have the resources to deliver the ever increasing tasks that the Government are giving them and the new chapter of the SDR must not be used to camouflage procurement or operational budgetary shortfalls. The Government are simply asking our superb and ever willing armed forces to do too much with too little. Will the Minister commit himself to providing the resources that they need to carry out their ever more grandiose tasks?

6.45 pm

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): This defence policy debate comes at a particularly appropriate and important time. I welcome all the contributions—perhaps even that of the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray)—and pay particular thanks to the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) for his opening comments and his recognition of the role played in our defence by the armed forces, and the intelligence services in particular. Other Members referred to that, but the hon. Gentleman's comments hit the nail on the head.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed the House in opening the debate, our defence policy must be flexible and able to evolve and adapt as international circumstances change. The 1998 strategic defence review undertook an extremely important assessment of the post-cold war strategic environment. It is clear that the review, and the changes to our defence policies and structures that it has driven, remain relevant following 11 September. It provided the foundation on which real improvements to our defences, such as more rapidly deployable, sustainable, robust and versatile forces, have been based.

The review was widely welcomed in the defence community and beyond it, and it has become the framework for other nations as they examine their defence postures. However, as my right hon. Friend made clear to the House, it is vital that we consider what has changed and identify how we need to adapt to meet those new circumstances. It is important to stress that the work we are undertaking is not a new strategic defence review, no matter how others may want to portray it. It is a new chapter that builds on the review and develops our thinking in areas which, for reasons I hope we all understand, have assumed a new prominence. It will help to ensure that defence policy, which drives the military tasks that we ask our services to be able to carry out and the nature of the equipment that we procure, takes full account of the requirement to prevent and defend against terrorism in all its manifestations.

However, we are operating in a less certain context. The SDR recognised a time of more diffuse, less certain risks. Threats to the United States, our allies and our interests overseas are not always well advertised, but they are no less real. Our opponents may use terror and force to try to achieve impossible aims and objectives, and it is not always immediately obvious how our strengths, not least in military power through our armed forces, may be used to overcome those threats.

The work that the Secretary of State has put in hand seeks to identify what may need to be done differently, or additionally, as a result, but this is not a world turned upside down. As well as new dangers, old threats remain, and we must be ready to meet both. It may be argued that a new world exists post-11 September, but the old world has not been replaced. It continues to exist, and it is in that context that the debate is taking place.

The debate has been wide ranging and we have touched on a lot of subjects. I cannot take up every one, but let me deal with the Chinook issue. I am doubtful as to whether it touches on defence policy, but I take the point made by the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot) that the outcome could affect morale. I understand the depth of the right hon. Gentleman's feeling, but I am sure that, as an ex-Minister, he knows that it would be inappropriate to respond from the Dispatch Box to a detailed and rigorous report that requires intensive scrutiny by the Department. That is being undertaken. Useful contributions have been made, but I ask all Members to take their consideration beyond the technical aspects of the report and the terrible tragedy that occurred. We also have to examine the airmanship decisions taken by the pilots on the day. They have to be weighed in the balance.

The hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) tried to say that all members of our armed forces want to fight. I am not sure that he quite meant that. I remind him that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the Opposition Defence spokesman, said on Monday 11 February that the Government should reduce the number of military commitments. The Tories say that Britain's armed forces are involved in too many operations, but they refuse to say which commitments they would cut.

The hon. Member for Newark wants there to be more activity, but the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen say that there should be less, that every commitment suffers from mission creep, and that no mission will ever succeed. The Opposition never offer congratulations on success, just more criticism, because their approach is based on party politics.

Questions have been asked about the cost of Eurofighter. Those costs have not risen by £2.7 billion, as was claimed. The programme is subject to regular and rigorous scrutiny. Procurement costs are reported annually to the National Audit Office. In the major projects review of 2001, those costs were put at £18.8 billion. The media recently reported a figure of £21.5 billion, but that includes initial support costs that were not included in the MPR figure. The result is that like is not being compared with like.

It is true that Eurofighter procurement costs, year on year, have risen by £37 million. In a programme of such complexity, that is a modest increase of 0.2 per cent. The Comptroller and Auditor General has acknowledged that the Ministry of Defence is continuing to control costs better. In the last year, project costs overall have fallen by £100 million. Eleven projects are now below the costs specified when the decision to buy was taken.

Mr. Francois: The Minister mentioned the Eurofighter costs in MPR 2000, and compared that figure with what appeared in MPR 2001. What was the cost of the programme in MPR 1998?

Mr. Ingram: I do not carry all the relevant figures in my head. I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the

[Mr. Ingram]

figure, but my point is that the audited overrun in the project is very small. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will stop running scare stories on the matter. By concentrating on cost overruns, the implication is that we should not spend the money. If that is the logic of what people are advising, I hope they will say so. If they honestly believe that the cost overrun is becoming unsustainable, I hope that they will say so and make a decision accordingly. We remain committed to the Eurofighter aircraft.

The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) asked me to pass on his thanks for the opportunities that arose to visit so many units. I hope that more hon. Members will avail themselves of the opportunities to visit armed forces units. The armed forces parliamentary scheme is a good way for Members of Parliament to be aware of everything that is happening on the front line of military activities.

Several hon. Members spoke about the role of the Territorial Army and the reserves. If I heard him correctly, the hon. Member for New Forest, West said that he was opposed to the cuts in the TA that occurred at the time of the SDR. It is worth pointing out that the Tory Government cut TA numbers by 20,000 in the 10 years to 1997. When did the Tories become converts with regard to cuts in the TA? The SDR focused on the strategic needs of the Territorial Army and the reserves. Previously, cuts in the TA numbers had been driven exclusively by Treasury demands to save money.

I do not want to fall out with my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who is not in the Chamber at the moment—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is."] I apologise, my right hon. Friend is present. Our experience since the SDR has demonstrated the validity of its conclusions with regard to the TA. The specialist support units, such as signallers, logistic units and medical troops, were the focus of the TA restructuring. They have been in heavy demand for deployment in operations in places such as the Balkans.

Other hon. Members have noted that, since 1995, around 10 per cent. of our forces deployed in the Balkans have been made up of reservists. Currently, about 700 reservists are deployed for operational service, in the UK and overseas. More than 1,700 personnel are currently on full-time reserve service—almost 800 of them in the Army. That is a clear example of the utility and cost-effectiveness of our reserve forces.

Compulsory mobilisation of the reserves does not mean that we are short of volunteers; it means greater certainty that we have the right number of people with the right skills to meet emerging requirements. I am proud that we have both the courage and the honesty to make the call-out compulsory. It is always difficult to do that. Members of the TA welcome it as a demonstration of our confidence in them. We train the reserves to be indistinguishable from the regulars alongside whom they work. We expect nothing less from them and, inevitably, they respond to the trust placed in them.

In relation to UK home defence, we are considering whether we need to enhance the assistance we provide to build our civil defence. In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said that the leading role for domestic security remains with the civil authorities. That will always be the case. However, nowadays, the reservists form an integral part of our defence plans. They provide the well-trained, usable assets that we envisaged in the strategic defence review.

It was pointed out that we intend to turn the TA into a glorified security guard force. The point was well made, but the discussion paper poses questions as to whether the new situation suggests additional uses for the reserves, both abroad and at home. There are a range of possible roles at home. We have made it clear that we want to consult the current reservists and their employers before we take any decisions. We attach great importance and value to the volunteer ethos of the reserves and do not want to propose developments in their role that would undermine the enthusiasm and commitment that they bring to their work. We must have a balanced approach.

Overstretch has been raised by several Members. We take it very seriously indeed. We take it so seriously that we reduce the percentage of the Army committed to operations as soon as we possibly can—from the peak of 43 per cent. at the time of the Kosovo crisis to 27 per cent today, with most units well within the tour intervals envisaged in the SDR. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) made perceptive comments on overstretch, which has been a problem for a long time. The other comments in his all-too-brief contribution were also perceptive.

We fully recognise the depth of the undermanning problem. We have to try to find solutions. That is why we have embarked on an intensive programme of retention and recruitment measures to stimulate the willingness of members of our community to continue to serve in the armed forces. An operational welfare package was introduced in April last year. We recently announced a major aircrew retention review after a thorough analysis of the problem. We are dealing with the extensive problems of single living accommodation.

We inherited major difficulties, with total costs running into many billions of pounds for many years ahead, but they have to be tackled if we are serious about the issues. We have announced that the recommendations of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body will be implemented in full.

In 1999, the service families taskforce was set up as a central focus for family issues and to liaise with other Departments on matters that were outside the MOD's control. I chair that committee and senior Ministers from other Departments serve alongside me trying to find answers to the problems. A wide range of recruitment strategies accompany that work.

The hon. Members for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), for Mid-Sussex and for Newark made points about a two-tier Army. We do not have a two-tier Army. Units serving with distinction in a variety of operational circumstances—in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo and elsewhere—are not helped by suggestions that, if they are not at the sharp end, where the real fighting is going on, or if they are not engaged in major peacekeeping events, they are not serving their country. Of course they do: they serve this country with distinction.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) asked about the £100 million that was announced for immediate operational requirements in and around Afghanistan. That is indeed an additional investment. I shall write to him with more details about it.

I do not have time to mention the defence fire service other than to say that a major review is taking place on that, and that all the work that has been done for the fire study 2000 report will of course be—

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on 25th February, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Darling relating to the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2002 and the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2002 not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first Motion.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Planning (Historic Buildings)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

7 pm

Bob Russell (Colchester): Every week the Planning Inspectorate based in Bristol authorises the demolition or disfigurement of three listed buildings, contrary to the wishes of the local communities where those historic buildings are located. Sometimes those decisions, which are taken by a single inspector, are also against the recommendation of English Heritage, which is the official body appointed by the Government to safeguard our nation's historic built environment.

The loss of historic buildings and damage to others, allowed on appeal, are in addition to those authorised by local councils. A large part of our country's built heritage is being irretrievably destroyed. That loss is bad enough, but I submit that it is worse when the decision is taken contrary to the views of the local council. Today's custodians must have respect not only for the past but, perhaps more important, for future generations. It seems that the Planning Inspectorate pays scant regard to that.

Every decision to approve a planning appeal, made by a single person with no personal knowledge of the area, is done against the express wishes of that community as determined by locally elected councillors who are answerable to their electors. Planning inspectors are not elected. They are not accountable to the communities against whom they pass judgment. Local councillors on planning committees, taking account of all the facts before them, come to a decision. It is called democracy.

An applicant, unhappy with a decision, has the right to go to appeal. It is not unknown for wealthy owners to employ highly paid lawyers and so-called "experts" prepared to prostitute themselves for payment and to give evidence to suit the case and pocket of the owner. An easily swayed inspector—making a fleeting visit to a town which perhaps he has never been to before—overturns a decision that has been carefully arrived at by locally elected councillors. That is not democracy.

There is little point in Government complaining about people not voting in local elections when town halls increasingly have less power and influence over what happens in their community. When residents see planning decisions affecting their town or village reversed by anonymous inspectors from hundreds of miles away, the democratic process is brought further into contempt.

I should like to draw the Minister's attention to early-day motion 564, which I tabled on 12 December 2001. Headed "English Heritage", it states:

> "That this House expresses its appreciation to English Heritage for the vital work which it undertakes in seeking to preserve the best of our national heritage; believes that the views of English Heritage should not be overturned by a single Planning Inspector, and that in such instances where a contrary view is taken then the final decision should be referred to the Secretary of State for a second opinion to be sought; regrets that too many of the nation's historic and listed buildings have already been lost; and therefore urges the Secretary of State to investigate and take all the steps available to him to reverse the outcome of the planning appeal in respect of the Grade II Listed Jumbo Water Tower in Colchester, the largest surviving Victorian water tower in Britain, which a Planning Inspector has ruled can be destroyed, contrary to the wishes of the democratically elected local councillors."

[Bob Russell]

I am grateful to hon. Members, from different parties and from different parts of the country, who have signed that early-day motion. I suspect that they have knowledge of similar planning outrages in their areas.

The Library has kindly provided me with background information which states:

"English Heritage is the Government's statutory adviser on the historic environment."

The work of English Heritage is overseen by a board of up to 16 commissioners, selected by the Government.

English Heritage has powers set out in the National Heritage Act 1983, section 33 of which lays down its general functions, including a declaration that

"It shall be the duty of the Commission"

to undertake such tasks as

"to secure the preservation of ancient monuments and historic buildings"

and

"to promote the public's enjoyment of, and advance their knowledge of, ancient monuments and historic buildings situated in England and their preservation".

I can only conclude that the Planning Inspectorate at Bristol is oblivious to what is contained in the National Heritage Act 1983.

The debate is of national significance. By focusing on a controversial decision in my constituency, I want to illustrate something that happens throughout the country. By tabling parliamentary questions, I have discovered that planning inspectors reject the carefully considered decisions of local councillors every week. In many cases, such as the jumbo water tower in Colchester, those decisions are also contrary to the detailed consideration, conclusions and recommendations of English Heritage. What vote of confidence is it in English Heritage when a planning inspector, without the knowledge and background of the case in point, can breeze in and disregard the expert opinions of the Government's own watchdog for historic buildings?

Fortunately, the Minister has seen the jumbo water tower before it is destroyed. I pointed it out to her from the high street and on the returning train to London when she made a ministerial visit to Colchester last year on matters that had nothing to do with this planning issue. She is aware of the significant impact that the historic tower has on the skyline. It is on top of a hill in the centre of Britain's oldest recorded town, next to the ancient monument of the Roman wall and within a conservation area.

I do not hold the Minister or her Department responsible for the planning disaster that confronts us; I only wish that they had been part of the decision-making process, in which case I believe that the wrong decision would not have been made. After all, the Department's own buildings watchdog, English Heritage, made it clear that the proposals, which will destroy the architectural integrity of the tower by removing its cast-iron tank, should be refused.

Regrettably, the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol decided that a single planning inspector should be given delegated powers to determine the appeal. The fact that English Heritage opposed the proposal should have given a warning signal that the decision was too serious to be left to one individual if he had a different view. There is no equivalent of a court of appeal when an inspector finds against a local council and English Heritage on planning matters. The owner of a property, however, can have as many goes as he likes using—some would say abusing and misusing—the planning system to get his way. If an application is refused, he can try again; if he is unhappy with the decision, he can go to appeal; if he loses that, he can start all over again.

In contrast, however, those who truly cherish our historic past have to win every time: if a council says "yes", then that is it; if a council says "no" but an inspector at a planning appeal says "yes", then that is it. The system is clearly loaded in favour of those who have the time and money to try and try again until they get their own way. As my early-day motion proposes, there should be a mechanism for a Minister to call for a second opinion to be sought when English Heritage opposes a proposal and an inspector thinks differently.

I recognise that in the case of the jumbo water tower the decision—a very bad one at that, with national ramifications—has been made. The only hope is that the owner will realise that his eccentric desire to spend the best part of £2 million to build a glazed residential box high in the sky is a folly—as in a foolish act, not an ornamental building. The house will be a goldfish bowl by day and a Chinese lantern by night. If the owner wishes to be remembered with gratitude by present and future generations he will, even at this stage, acknowledge that retaining all the features of the largest surviving Victorian water tower in Britain is more important to our national heritage than disfigurement.

It would be nice if the Government acknowledged that the planning inspector has blundered and that ways should be found to accommodate the recommendations of English Heritage. I invite the Minister to see what she, her ministerial colleagues and English Heritage can collectively do to retrieve the situation.

I am sure that the highly respected "Piloti" of *Private Eye* fame, who has twice in that esteemed organ featured the jumbo water tower controversy and regularly exposed the fate of so many of our nation's historic buildings, would welcome—along with many others—greater protection.

I also invite the Minister to give an assurance that, if the owner of the jumbo water tower seeks to undo the conditions that have been imposed by the inspector, that will not be permitted, and that any future planning applications will be called in for determination. In granting the appeal, the inspector did not give the owner all that he wanted—perhaps 75 per cent. of the loaf, but by no means all of it.

It should be remembered that we are dealing with an owner and his paid professionals who have used every means that they can think of to secure a planning consent that had been denied them by councillors. In total, over several years, they rejected 16 applications to remove the tank and replace it with a 100 per cent. glazed residential box, towering 100 feet or so above the town centre.

It is to the credit of Colchester borough councillors—the majority of them at any rate—that they refused to buckle. That is more than can be said of council planning officers, who were such enthusiastic supporters of what the owner and previous owners wanted that the views of councillors and English Heritage were brushed aside. Fortunately, English Heritage was made of sterner stuff and refused to budge, unlike the Victorian Society, which was initially opposed to the loss of the tank, but which, in due course, demonstrated what a spineless organisation it is by caving in and meekly agreeing to what the owner wanted to do. Why did it do that, I wonder?

An attempt was also made to get English Heritage to drop its opposition. The owner wrote to the then chief executive in a manner that was clearly designed to put pressure on officers further down the line. I am relieved to say that that tactic did not work.

The Minister may care to observe that party politics became involved. Councillors in all parties were initially opposed to what the owner wanted, but an astonishing about-turn then occurred, when Conservative councillors on the planning committee switched to supporting the owner. Later, in what I am sure was purely an amazing coincidence, in the opening leaflet of the general election campaign, the Conservative candidate made the jumbo water tower an election issue, supporting what the owner wanted. Any suggestion of financial support by the owner in return would, of course, be unthinkable in a democracy, particularly when planning applications are involved. It is certainly the case, however, that the owner's plan for the jumbo water tower was the subject of vocal support by the Conservative party's then shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on a visit to Colchester.

The Labour candidate and I supported the borough council's opposition to the owner's plans. On polling day, our combined votes were two to one to the Conservative candidate, whose share of the vote fell, while my majority was trebled. The people of Colchester spoke. Alas, the planning inspector subsequently approved what the defeated Conservative candidate wanted—another bad day for democracy.

As an aside, the Minister may care to ponder the fact that the jumbo water tower was built by the visionary city fathers of Colchester corporation in the last quarter of the 19th century. It was funded by local ratepayers. In 1974, as a result of local government reorganisation, the tower and all other water assets were taken from the borough council and handed to the new publicly owned Anglian water authority.

Years later, the water industry was privatised by the Conservative Government and, in due course, the now redundant jumbo water tower was sold to property speculators. At no time did the people of Colchester receive a single penny in compensation for the public asset that was taken from them. It would be justice if the building was returned to public ownership, restored as a monument to Victorian civic pride and civil engineering excellence and turned into a tourist attraction and viewing platform, which is what local campaigners advocate.

The Minister will, of course, be aware of the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers. Its chairman wrote to me last month and said that the association's strategy, endorsed by the Local Government Association, had among its specific objectives the need to

> "raise awareness of the value of the historic environment and the role of local authorities in its management, and improving access to the historic environment for the general public."

In its "Strategy 2001–2006", in the section headed "Historic Buildings", the association states:

> "ALGAO promotes the understanding and the conservation of all built historic structures. Historic landscape characterisation provides the broad context for individual buildings, establishing their contribution to local distinctiveness and supporting the sustainable management of all historic structures."

ALGAO also calls for an

> "extension of control over the demolition of historic structures"

and seeks to

> "promote conservation of the built heritage in the context of sustainable development through retention and sympathetic adaptation."

The ALGAO historic buildings committee says that it

> "is working in partnership with English Heritage, the Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation, the Royal Town Planning Institute and others to achieve these objectives."

Perhaps the Minister can state whether the Government also are seeking to achieve the objectives of conserving our built heritage. In my opinion, the Planning Inspectorate is not.

I sought this debate because I feel that the House should be made aware of the inadequacies of the present planning appeal system and, in particular, how even the excellent work of English Heritage can be dismissed by a single planning inspector. There must be a better system for determining cases when the overwhelming evidence of opponents of a development, the local democratically elected councillors and the expert recommendations of English Heritage all come to one conclusion only for a single inspector to overturn that conclusion in favour of an appellant who has, in effect, bought a permission through buying a listed building at a cost that reflects the planning constraints on it and then uses the planning system to obtain a consent against all the informed evidence and opinion.

I invite the Minister to consider carefully the need to improve the planning appeal system, particularly where it relates to listed buildings on which English Heritage has expressed views. Existing legislation is weak. It needs strengthening, otherwise even more of our nation's historic buildings will be lost.

7.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) on his success in securing this debate on an important aspect of the Government's planning policy. I also congratulate him on the way in which he has presented his case. He has given a clear impression to the House of the importance of the preservation of historic buildings and of the strength of views in Colchester about this particular building. He is right: I have seen the water tower and remember it well as an outstanding and notable building.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that I cannot comment on the merits of this specific case because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has a formal role and responsibilities in the planning appeals process. However, it might be helpful if I set out the

[Ms Sally Keeble]

general legislative position and describe the policy pressures that come to bear on such matters. I shall also try to deal with some of the more general points that the hon. Gentleman has raised. He referred to the different positions that the political parties on the local authority took, and he will know that such decisions are bound by codes of conduct and suchlike.

I echo what the hon. Gentleman said about the important role played by the historic environment in so many areas of our lives and about the importance of protecting our built environment and heritage buildings. There are about 500,000 listed buildings in this country and we are incredibly lucky to have some of the most beautiful historic buildings in the world. From the Royal crescent in Bath to Liverpool's Liver building, from St Paul's cathedral in London to towns such as St. Albans and Saffron Walden, we have an architectural heritage of which we can be proud. Indeed, people from all round the world come to see it.

In Colchester, the community has its fair share of excellent buildings, with fine examples from Roman times through to the present day. The hon. Gentleman represents the town that can make the enviable claim to be Britain's oldest, so I need hardly tell him how important historic buildings are to the quality of our national life and to our sense of identity as a nation. In Colchester, they form part of its sense of being an important and thriving town. They also play a vital part in helping to make our towns and cities more vibrant and successful places in which to work and live.

"A Force for Our Future", which the Government published in December, sets out a wide-ranging vision that shows how we recognise fully the importance of the built heritage in our national life and the obligation to care for it for our own benefit and that of future generations. It stresses that the historic environment can improve the quality of life for all of us through the regeneration of our towns, cities and countryside, encouraging a greater sense of community and greater prosperity.

However, preservation need not mean fossilising buildings. Our planning policy guidance note 15, "Planning and the historic environment", recognises that generally the best way to secure the upkeep of historic buildings and areas is to keep them in active use. The restoration of historic buildings can play a major role in urban renewal by promoting confidence in the future of an area and by serving as a catalyst for stimulating regeneration, bringing together communities and tackling social exclusion.

In recent years we have seen the practice of adapting old buildings to make them available for the way we live now become more widespread, with loft apartments in warehouses, fashion designers working in old textile mills, offices in former factories, and shops and bars on canal wharves. I noted with some amusement the hon. Gentleman's description of what the building concerned would look like afterwards, but it is an example of another way in which a beautiful historic building can be preserved, and illustrates what can be achieved through a combination of innovation, commitment and enthusiasm.

At the same time, judging the best use for an historic building is one of the most important and sensitive assessments that local planning authorities and other bodies involved in conservation have to make. That is the nub of the hon. Gentleman's argument, and it might help if I broadly describe the planning system—not only what happens, but why it happens.

We need to have an effective framework of statutory protection for all elements of the historic environment. That is where the planning system has a key part to play. When applications involve works to listed buildings, decision makers must have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest that the building possesses.

Central to the decision-making process are our planning policy guidance notes, which must be taken into account where relevant in decisions on planning and listed building consent applications. PPG 15 provides a full statement of Government policies for the identification and protection of historic buildings, conservation areas and other elements of the historic environment. It complements the guidance on archaeology and planning given in PPG 16.

It is important that those with particular expertise have their say before decisions are made, and it is clear that the process of consultation can enhance the quality of the end product. However, planning is not an exact science and cases vary widely. Decision makers are required to balance a range of factors—social, economic and environmental—when deciding whether or not to grant planning permission. Similarly, the weight that should be attached to the views of consultees and to other material considerations will vary according to the circumstances of the particular case.

I recognise that some people—the hon. Gentleman puts himself fair and square among them—are not happy that developers can appeal against a local council planning decision. However, that right of appeal is a long-established part of the planning system. When comprehensive planning controls were first introduced in 1947, Parliament decided that developers should have a right of appeal to the Secretary of State against a decision that prevented them from developing their land and property as they wished. That right has remained an integral part of the system. More recently, a review in 2000 of the Planning Inspectorate executive agency concluded that it remained the right body to handle appeals cases.

The hon. Gentleman will know that a review of the planning process is ongoing. I am sure that he will take the opportunity to make his views known. I assure him that no decision to overrule the judgment of a local planning authority is ever taken lightly. In all cases planning inspectors are fully briefed on the circumstances of the appeal proposal, and they will visit the site to familiarise themselves with its location and surroundings. The Planning Inspectorate has an impressive reputation in its handling of planning appeals. Each planning inspector acts in a quasi-judicial role as a mini-tribunal. The integrity, impartiality and fairness with which each appeal is handled is widely acknowledged. I am satisfied that inspectors are equipped to consider all relevant aspects of appeal cases.

The new appeals procedures that we introduced in 2000 are designed to balance the desire for timely decisions with the need to ensure that the public have sufficient time to participate fully in the appeals process.

Under the new rules, the local planning authority must notify people that an appeal has been made within two weeks from the starting date. Everyone consulted on the original application and anyone else who made representations at the application stage should be included. The process ensures that people have at least four weeks in which to make their comments known.

The vast majority of planning appeals in England are determined by planning inspectors. Typically, out of around 14,000 planning appeals each year, between 100 and 150 cases have been recovered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his own determination. We have set out guidelines for recovering cases. These include appeals involving proposals for large-scale retail or leisure development, significant development in the green belt and major proposals of more than local significance.

However, in recognition of their outstanding architectural or historic interest, my right hon. Friend automatically recovers appeals concerned with grade I and grade II* listed buildings. He may also recover other appeals involving listed buildings at his own discretion. The figure of 100 to 150 cases that I mentioned includes around 40 recovered appeals concerning listed buildings. That gives an indication of the thorough and detailed care and attention that is given to decisions on appeals.

If the hon. Gentleman would like some more information about the review of the planning process, I should be happy to ensure that he receives [illegible], so that he can have an input. There is not enough time [illegible] the debate to go through all of that process.

Our historic buildings and sites are a great source of pleasure, as the hon. Gentleman said. They stand as a record of artistic and technical achievement and are an inspiration for creativity in our own age and for the future. They are a highly regarded and valuable focus for the life of many communities, as indeed is the building in Colchester to which the hon. Gentleman referred. As we said in "A Force for Our Future", there are already many good things happening, including greater access and more community involvement, but a great deal more remains to be done if the historic environment's full potential is to be realised. Good planning provides an essential underpinning to the success of our economy, our communities and our environment, not least our historic environment.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall take into account the views that he has expressed today in taking forward the various initiatives arising from "A Force for Our Future" and the planning Green Paper. I am grateful to him for bringing these issues to my attention today, and I am sure that he will continue vigorously to represent the views of his constituents on these matters.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 25 February 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Tourism (Kent)

1. **Dr. Howard Stoate** (Dartford): What steps the Government are taking to promote tourism and support the tourist industry in Kent Thames-side. [34227]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): With the agreement of the Chief Secretary, I am delighted to inform the House that we will make available up to £20 million of additional public funds to promote Britain abroad as a tourist destination. This campaign will benefit Kent Thames-side. It will be targeted at our seven key markets, including the United States as well as France, Germany and the Netherlands.

This is the first time that the Government have created such a powerful public-private coalition with industry organisations. The industry has already committed about £5 million in cash, and we will match industry funds pound for pound. It is a fantastic opportunity for recovery from the blows of foot and mouth and the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York on 11 September. It is also a model for the overdue modernisation of the industry as a whole. I hope that the House will welcome that announcement.

Dr. Stoate: I thank my right hon. Friend for that news, which my constituents will welcome.

As my right hon. Friend will know, Kent Thames-side is one of the most rapidly developing economic-regeneration areas in Europe. It is struggling hard to shake off its old industrial image and become a vibrant, modern, forward-looking region. What can the Government do to ensure that Kent Thames-side—particularly my constituency—is put on the tourist map, so that those who do visit this country can benefit from its many charms?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend is himself a powerful advocate of those charms. Moreover, as he will know, the successful investment of lottery funds has brought about the regeneration of Chatham dockyard, and the Channel tunnel international railway station at Ebbsfleet, which will attract more visitors to the area, will be completed in 2003. An industry that already brings £195 million into Kent is set to grow.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I hope that my question will not be misconstrued as unparliamentary language.

Has the Secretary of State received the same response as me when raising the subject of the British Tourist Authority's new tourism promotion campaign, especially from Americans—not so much "UK OK!" as a bemused "UKOK?"? How does she think that will help to promote tourism in Kent Thames-side and the rest of Britain? Does she consider it a worthy successor to Cool Britannia?

Tessa Jowell: Let me deal with that question as constructively as I can. The slogan "UKOK" and the marketing that accompanied it were subjected to the usual rigorous testing. There are decisions that professionals make about marketing slogans and marketing content; I am prepared to accept the judgment of those professionals, and then to reach conclusions about effectiveness judging by results. All the feedback that we have received from the United States suggests that the "UKOK" campaign has been marketed very well there, but proof will be provided by the number of additional visitors that it brings to Britain.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Given the British Tourist Authority's commitment to promoting the whole of Britain overseas, does my right hon. Friend share my concern at the opinions attributed to Mr. Philip Riddell of VisitScotland, who says that this year the American market should be regarded as a lost cause for Scotland? Will she join me and the people of Scotland in disagreeing profoundly with that view and encouraging the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting—who I understand is going to America this week—to promote Scotland as well as the rest of the United Kingdom this year? We want to make a new start in presenting a new Britain to the Americans.

Tessa Jowell: I unreservedly oppose the view taken by VisitScotland. It is a dismal, pessimistic view that is simply not borne out by the evidence of an increasing number of American visitors who want to visit Europe. We particularly want to persuade them to visit Britain in this jubilee year to celebrate the Commonwealth games. There is always a good reason to visit Britain; this year, being American is a particularly good reason.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Does the Secretary of State agree that the most effective form of marketing is the press and public relations, which are more cost-effective than advertising? This year, do we not have the greatest news peg in the Queen's golden jubilee? Will the right hon. Lady try to persuade the marketing experts and gurus—who have not been very impressive up to now—to use it to bring tourists into England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—indeed the whole of the British Isles? Will she also make representations to the palace to the effect that all members of the royal family should act as ambassadors this year, especially in the United States and the Commonwealth, and encourage tourism into the United Kingdom?

Tessa Jowell: Marketing and press coverage go together. The funding that I have announced today will do just that. The jubilee year is a great opportunity to increase the number of tourists from America, which is particularly important because on average for every £1 a domestic tourist spends, an American visitor spends £6. It is important for the economy. We want tourists to visit the whole of the United Kingdom. Prince Charles has already signalled his support by writing a foreword to the heritage map in support of the marketing campaign to bring people to Britain.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I know that most hon. Members feel that they are national treasures, but may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to north Kent again? My constituency has the largest wetland in Britain, yet we do not market it at all. We are struggling to understand how best to work with the tourist authorities to obtain the full value of tourism. The White Paper did not explain whether we needed more museums, art galleries or whatever else we have in our constituencies. Will she comment on that?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend is right. In his constituency and throughout the UK there are unexplored and hidden treasures. I hope that a more aggressive approach to marketing, more streamlined communications and putting more information on line will help to deal with that, but the regional development agencies have a tremendously important part to play. Their performance in this area is somewhat variable, but he should urge his RDA to conduct an audit of unrecorded visitor attractions in his constituency and beyond to ensure that they are part of the marketing information that is developed.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): We warmly welcome the Secretary of State's announcement of matched funding for the BTA, which we advocated more than two years ago, although it has taken two major crises to persuade the Government to take an interest in tourism. Does she recognise that 80 per cent. of visitors to English regions, such as Kent Thames-side with its unique facilities, are domestic tourists, and that there is nothing in the announcement to encourage people in England to take holidays and short breaks at home? When will the Government put tourism in England on the same footing as tourism in Scotland and Wales by restoring the marketing role to the English Tourism Council, which the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting has acknowledged should never have been taken away by the Government?

Tessa Jowell: I am delighted that today's announcement has attracted such strong cross-party support. It is a pity that the Opposition did not invest in tourism when they were in government. However, the hon. Gentleman has been generous in support of the announcement. I and my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting agree that we need a more vigorous and focused marketing organisation for England. We are discussing with the various organisations how that will be achieved.

Museums (Nottingham)

2. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): When she plans to meet the Council for Museums and Libraries to discuss the funding of regional museums in Nottingham. [34228]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts regularly meets Lord Evans of Temple Guiting, the chairman of resource, the Council for Museums and Libraries, to discuss the funding of museums in all the English regions, including the east midlands.

Mr. Allen: My hon. Friend will be aware of the rich diversity of museums in Nottingham: there is not just the traditional Robin Hood, Nottingham castle, Newstead abbey and Wollaton hall, but contemporary shows such as the Warhol exhibition and very good outreach work by the city council in the education sector. Will he take the opportunity to visit Nottingham in the near future, above all to discuss the co-ordination between the four counties of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire on the renaissance in the regions fund? There is £267 million in that fund, and I assure my hon. Friend that if he comes to Nottingham we will make a good case as to why we should have at least our fair share of that.

Dr. Howells: I look forward to that visit, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will make a good case; he always does.

Sports Arenas

3. **Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater): If she will provide grants to local authorities specifically for sports arenas and multi-use arenas in rural areas. [34229]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): May I crave your indulgence at the start of my response, Mr. Speaker, and ask the House to join me in congratulating the athletes and coaches and rest of the staff of Team GB, including the people in the British Olympic Association, on such a successful and professional performance at the winter Olympics. I know that the whole nation and everybody in the House feel proud of their achievements—the best since 1934. Even "Question Time" was moved so that people could see the curling final.

All local authorities are eligible to apply to the lottery sports fund for grants for the development of sports facilities, including sports arenas. In administering the fund, Sport England recognises the need to provide sports facilities in rural areas, particularly those that are deprived, and addresses that need through its priority area and sport action zone initiatives.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Is the Minister aware that Sedgemoor district council, which is not one of the largest in the country, is trying to build a multi-sports arena? The problem is that Sport England has to cover an enormous area of the west country, and has not enough resources. Sedgemoor is not in a position to fund it either, and is therefore looking for external money. As it is a very rural area, has the Minister any other ideas about where it could raise the money?

Mr. Caborn: I do not know about that specific scheme, but I do know that in rural areas, about a quarter of the lottery money—about £1.2 billion since 1994—has gone into sports facilities, of which £40 million has gone to rural areas. If the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me, I will consider what he says and speak to the Sport England officials about it.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I join the Minister in warmly congratulating the winter Olympics team on its performance in Salt Lake City, which is a cause of celebration for the whole country. However, is he aware that on 13 February 2002 a written answer from him showed that lottery-funded spending on sport had fallen by one third since 1997—a drop of more than £100 million a year? When more than £3 billion in unspent lottery funds is sitting unused, the rejection of proposals, such as that by the university of Hertfordshire to build an olympic swimming pool, is profoundly discouraging for budding sportsmen and sports fans. It also undermines the chances of future British Olympic success.

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are dealing with the question of the uncommitted funds—as the hon. Gentleman knows, those funds are allocated—through the lottery distributers. We are having separate meetings with the chief executives and chairs of the distributing bodies to see how we can use the funds more effectively. I remind the hon. Gentleman that during the next two years, the overall Exchequer contribution to sport will more than double. He will know that because of the reduction in participation in the lottery, all lottery funding streams have been reduced. I was speaking to Camelot only last week, and it now hopes that the relaunch will bring the lottery receipts back to what it was envisaged they would be when the licence was applied for.

Wembley Stadium

4. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If she will report progress on the redevelopment proposals for the Wembley stadium site. [34230]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I made clear to the House on 19 December 2001 the Government's commitment to support the Football Association's national stadium project, subject to the FA meeting a number of conditions that I set out at the time. The Government fully recognise that—as Patrick Carter made clear in his interim report published on 19 December—the project will not be delivered without Government support. The project is now in a process of due diligence with the FA and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. undertaking the necessary work to fulfil the Government's conditions and working with the lead bank on financing the project. Sport England is progressing the study on athletics in consultation with UK Athletics, the British Olympic Association and the International Association of Athletics Federations. I expect the FA's work to be completed in April.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for that comprehensive reply. On reflection, does she agree that the decision to exclude athletics from a rebuilt Wembley stadium has turned out to be a disastrous misjudgment? Will she confirm beyond any doubt that when the stadium is rebuilt it will have athletics facilities? Does she agree that the delay in coming to a conclusion about the form that the stadium should take means that football will not have been played at Wembley stadium for five years?

Tessa Jowell: The design of the stadium is athletics capable. The FA is now acting on that and Sport England is in the lead. I made it clear in December that there is a difference between being athletics capable and actually being able to host athletics events. The important fact is that money was awarded as part of the lottery grant, which, if the stadium cannot host athletics events, would have to be returned; so in order to complete the negotiations and settle the future of the national stadium project once and for all, discussions are under way. I have made it clear that a condition of finalising the Government's support for the national stadium project is that the position in relation to athletics be clarified. If athletics events are not to be hosted at the stadium, the money—as the FA has always made clear—would be returned. If, however, the stadium is capable of hosting athletics events—because of the improved technology of a more easily dismantled platform—obviously the money would be retained. That is part of ensuring that the project makes progress and that by the end of April we know once and for all whether the national stadium will be built at Wembley.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will my right hon. Friend give the House a categorical assurance that she will not repeat the blunders of her predecessor by getting ensnarled in this such that the Government will not be able to evade responsibility for the culpability of Wembley National Stadium Ltd. and the Football Association? Will she give the House an absolute assurance that not a penny of Government money will go directly or indirectly into subsidising the FA and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. and that the Government will not support any effort by the FA and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. to raise money in the markets? The organisation should do that on its own credit and in no other way. Will she make it clear that, if the stadium does not go ahead by April at the latest, legal action will be taken to recover the £120 million to which the FA is clinging like a leech and which it will have no possible legal right to retain?

Tessa Jowell: A number of my predecessors have concerned themselves with the national stadium project. At various times, each of them took decisions on the basis of the best advice and consideration available to them.

On my right hon. Friend's second point, there is absolutely no question of any further Government contribution to the financing of the national stadium.

As I have made clear and will continue to make clear, the additional Government support is limited to a further sum of up to £20 million to meet infrastructure costs.

Thirdly, there is no question of the Government bearing any of the risk in relation to the borrowing. The full risk will be borne by the FA.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am afraid that the Secretary of State's answers will have raised more doubts in the minds of most listeners in the past few minutes than she perhaps wished. Anxieties already exist about the progress of this project and the achievement of the timetable in April to which she referred. Will she say categorically whether the Government are still committed to rebuilding Wembley stadium and to incorporating an athletics facility? Will she also say whether she is completely happy with the proposed roles of Multiplex, IMG and the FA in this project? Will she confirm that the infrastructure spending that she mentioned involves the rebuilding, not just the upgrading, of Wembley Park tube station? If she is in doubt about whether that is needed, I invite her to do as I did last Tuesday and pay a visit by tube to Wembley.

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman's contribution makes it clear why the second world war was won in about the same time that it has taken to achieve no progress at all on Wembley. This project was initiated in 1996 by the last Conservative Government, who began with a catalogue of errors.

I set out clearly to the House on 19 December the four conditions that the FA had to meet, in the light of the David James report on the procurement of the stadium, in order for Government support to be settled with a further investment of £20 million. That has been clearly established. Brent council gave planning permission to the stadium in 2000 without any precondition requiring an increase in the capacity of Wembley Park tube station. If new conditions are to be introduced by Brent or, rhetorically, by the hon. Gentleman, they should realise that they are once again putting the national stadium project at risk.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Wembley was very prematurely closed by the FA? Does she also agree that the FA is still prevaricating about a national stadium for one of our most popular games, association football? While prevarication about Wembley continues, there are two excellent sites in the west midlands, at Coventry and at Birmingham, which are less expensive than the Wembley alternative.

Tessa Jowell: In fairness to the FA, there is no prevarication. It is now engaged with the lending banks in the process of due diligence and is proceeding to meet the four conditions that I set out to the House before Christmas. That process will conclude with the signing or not of binding contracts by the end of April. Work is in progress, and my job—and the Government's job—is to provide every possible support to ensure that the national stadium is realised.

Golden Jubilee

5. **Mr. Gregory Barker** (Bexhill and Battle): What progress has been made in the Government's plans to celebrate the golden jubilee in London. [34231]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): London will be the focus of the national events during the golden jubilee weekend. Full details of the programme have not yet been published, but events will include concerts in the grounds of Buckingham palace; the lighting of the jubilee beacon and a fireworks display; the state procession to St Paul's cathedral for the national service of thanksgiving; a lunch at Guildhall; and a carnival pageant in the Mall.

Mr. Barker: All Conservative Members hope and believe that Her Majesty's golden jubilee will be a great success. I welcome the extensive programme of activities that has been arranged for the jubilee bank holiday weekend, but will she assure us that the main celebrations will be a Cool Britannia-free zone, and that the military bayonets-drawn and breastplate-shining pageantry for which this country is world-renowned, and in which our service men and women excel, will be in pride of place? Can she further assure us that there will be no fewer armed service participants in the parade than there were in the silver jubilee celebrations in 1977? If not, will she lobby her colleagues at the Ministry of Defence to invite Commonwealth troops to come to London and fill the gap?

Tessa Jowell: The Conservatives say one thing and do another. It is not for the Government to tell people how to enjoy themselves during the jubilee; people will decide that for themselves. It is the Government's role, however, to support the palace and the public so that the many ideas and ambitions that communities throughout the country have to celebrate the jubilee can flourish. All the signs are that people are engaging with the prospect of organising jubilee events. For instance, the number of hits on the golden jubilee office website tripled in the past two months, more than 500 beacons are planned and street parties are being organised. Events are being organised despite the best efforts of the Opposition to talk down the jubilee.

Film Production (UK)

6. **Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of grants made by the Film Council in increasing UK-based film production. [34233]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): The Film Council has been awarding lottery funds for only a relatively short time but it has already produced a notable success in "Gosford Park", which received a British Academy of Film and Television Arts award last night after being released to critical acclaim. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree that the main criterion is not the number of films that are backed, but that those that are supported are of a much higher quality and reach an appreciative audience.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. I enjoyed seeing "Gosford Park" and wish it well in the, I think, five Oscar nominations that it received. Does the Minister agree, however, that there is no evidence of an increase in the number of UK-based productions as a result of the Film Council's support? Does he also agree that the training fund and the development of scripts in the UK is one of the best long-term investments and possibly the most cost-effective way to secure not only UK productions, but United States investment in UK productions, which of course makes up the largest part of our film production?

Dr. Howells: Yes, I agree entirely. The basis of all good films is a good script. Support for scriptwriters to develop films in that way has been sadly lacking. That is why we have made money available to develop scripts.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Does the Minister agree that as well as supporting the commercial infrastructure, it is important that the Film Council supports the more risk-taking innovative cultural films that are part of its mandate? Will he do everything that he can to encourage it to put money not merely into developing those films for production, but into ensuring that they are distributed as well?

Dr. Howells: It is not easy to get such films distributed, and that is one of the main tasks that the Film Council faces. We do not have production companies like we used to have; nor do we have the integrated organisations that Hollywood has, not only to make films but to ensure that films are properly distributed, which has always been a great weakness.

My hon. Friend puts his finger on an important weakness in the British system. Banks and other financial agencies are unwilling to realise that films are a good investment, although they are willing to put their money into far riskier investments. Witness, for example, the dot.com crashes and problems with bonds—ventures that the banks were eager to pour their money into. They do not invest in films in the same way, which is a great shame.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I am glad that the Minister shares my concern about lack of British investment in what are essentially British films. He will be aware that "Gosford Park", which I saw last night, was essentially an American production and that "The Lord of the Rings", which starred British people, sadly had to be shot in New Zealand and was also funded by the United States of America. What steps can the Government and the Department take to ensure tax breaks to enable people to invest in the United Kingdom in British films, to promote not only the British film industry but the generation of money to be ploughed back into the industry, creating an ever-increasing growth of British films in both the UK and worldwide?

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman makes a good case for investing in British films. We have great actors and scriptwriters and very good directors. A large amount of Film Council money was put into "Gosford Park", and he should not underrate that. Very often, such seedcorn money can be used to develop a good idea and attract capital. After all, film draws its investment funding from all over the world, whether the films are made in this country, New Zealand or anywhere else. This is a great country in which to make films. We have some of the best post-production facilities anywhere in the world and, as I say, some of the best actors, scriptwriters and directors. I urge everybody on both sides of the House to talk up the British film industry, not to talk it down or to try to smear its good name.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Does the Minister believe that the process by which projects are selected for cash help by the Film Council is entirely objective? Does he think it right that a very high proportion of the lottery money distributed by the Film Council goes to projects in which the directors of the Film Council have an interest? Will he confirm that several of the Film Council directors whose projects have been helped in that way have also been appointed to advise Ministers about film policy?

Dr. Howells: I was expecting that question from the hon. Gentleman because I had heard that he had visited the Film Council, where I understand that he was as nice as pie to everyone. He did not tell them that he would be dragging the good name of British film through his manufactured mud. All the mechanisms are in place to ensure objectivity when it comes to deciding which projects should get the money that the Film Council is there to distribute.

It is a great shame that BAFTA did not have an award for the hon. Gentleman last night. The trouble is, of course, that it could not have presented one of those faces; it would have had to have presented a two-faced award.

Theatres (London)

7. **Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): What action she is taking to support the development of theatre with specific reference to London theatres outside the west end. [34234]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): This is a matter for London Arts. Following the 2000–01 theatre review, London Arts' annual support for the independent theatre sector in London will rise to more than £15 million by 2003–04, which represents an increase of 88 per cent. over last year's figure.

Mr. Gerrard: My right hon. Friend obviously recognises the work of London theatres outside the west end, such as the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, which is based in Newham and serves a lot of east London, but does she agree that such theatres, which aim to do innovative work and to develop new productions, must take greater risks, and greater financial risks, than those that rely purely on touring productions and revivals, and that that is not always sufficiently recognised by the current funding systems? Will she consider what specifically can be done to help producer theatres?

Tessa Jowell: The answer to my hon. Friend is yes, we recognise that producer theatres take greater risks and yes, we want to support them in doing that. That is precisely why an additional £25 million per year will be available from 2003–04. That is a fund of money from which Stratford East will rightly benefit, and it will benefit theatre throughout the country in pursuing the important objectives that he outlines: innovation, promoting excellence and risk taking.

Amateur Sports Clubs

8. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): What measures she will take to assist amateur sports clubs through tax allowances. [34235]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Proposals for easing the financial burdens on clubs were included in the consultation paper "Promoting Sport in the Community", published in November 2001. As well as setting out a possible tax exemption regime, the paper included revised Charity Commission guidance which should allow many clubs to take advantage of the tax and other benefits of charitable status. That consultation ended on 1 February and the Treasury is reflecting on the responses.

Mr. Hoyle: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I am sure that he is aware that the Treasury may need some assistance. I hope he will use his good offices to work with the Treasury to ensure that that relief is given to the amateur sporting clubs which are home to the country's future stars.

Mr. Caborn: I will use my good offices. A tax working party has been set up, with representatives from the Central Council of Physical Recreation, my Department and the Treasury. If charitable status was granted to more amateur clubs, they would benefit from exemption from inheritance tax, reclaiming basic rate tax on monetary gifts from gift aid—a very important institution—and payroll giving, in addition to mandatory rate relief. There are many other advantages in achieving charitable status. To that end, on 12 February I met the Chief Commissioner of the Charity Commission, John Stoker, to see whether we could work out a formula that would allow more amateur clubs to have charitable status.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the one and a half million volunteers who are the backbone of amateur sports clubs up and down the country are spending a disproportionate amount of time raising the funds for those clubs to pay their tax bills? Can it be right that they should have to do that when they should be organising sports? Is he aware that giving the mandatory 80 per cent. rate relief would cost only £28 million? He talks about the Charity Commission and about making these clubs charities. Are sports club really charities, or will it become a bureaucratic nightmare? Can he grant the clubs what they want, which is parity with charity, but not the bureaucracy that goes with it?

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. That is why I am talking with the CCPR and Sport England about a regional structure that will allow sports an easy passage and a less bureaucratic way of achieving charitable status. If charitable status had been offered two or three years ago, it would have been accepted. It is my intention to ensure that where charitable status is offered to small clubs, they are given as much assistance as possible. John Stoker and I agree that this needs to be looked at, and I hope that we bring amateur clubs nearer to that position than they are at present.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I welcome everything that my right hon. Friend has said. At a time when diabetes is recognised as a problem among young children, does he agree that it is ever more important to ensure that increasing numbers of young people take part in sport? However, that will be impossible, especially in poor areas such as my constituency, where many people find it difficult to make ends meet, let alone find additional funding for rugby boots or sports equipment, which is why it is so important to make sure that organisations such as the Rhondda Rebels or the Ferndale rugby football club attract support.

Does my right hon. Friend also agree that if we are to make progress in providing charitable status for amateur sporting clubs, it is not helpful when local authorities such as Rhondda Cynon Taff, which is run by the nationalists, increase the amount of money that clubs have to pay just to play on the football pitches?

Mr. Caborn: I cannot comment on my hon. Friend's last point, as I do not know about that particular local authority. On the wider issues of sport and health, however, he is absolutely right. The National Audit Office report that came out only a few weeks ago showed that obesity in this country costs the economy something like £2 billion and that the financial burden on the health service is about half a billion pounds. A cost-benefit analysis would clearly show that investment into sport would address health and education issues. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made it a point in the last Budget statement about looking at bringing financial relief and support to amateur clubs and volunteers up and down the country. They do a sterling job and without them, the sports infrastructure would not exist.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Does the Minister agree that amateur sports clubs are important to the very fabric of our society? Will he come to Castle Point and join me in a visit to Benfleet cricket club? It is one of many amateur sports clubs around the country that are suffering at the hands of councils that, under best value, are doubling, trebling or quadrupling ground rents and other charges. Those charges are putting such clubs at risk, and it would be a great shame if we threw the baby out with the bath water in that regard.

Mr. Caborn: If the previous Administration had done a little more for amateur clubs, we would probably not be in this position, but I should make it clear that we will do something about the cricket club to which the hon. Gentleman refers. If we can secure charitable status and the type of tax regime to which I have referred, that club will probably be much better off than it was under his party's administration.

Arts (North-east Essex)

9. **Mr. Ivan Henderson** (Harwich): What steps the Government are taking to support regional theatres and arts organisations within north-east Essex. [34236]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): That is a matter for East England Arts, as the regional body for north-east Essex. By 2003–04, East England Arts' budget, including the regional arts lottery programme, will rise to £12.4 million. That is an increase of 18 per cent. on its current level.

Mr. Henderson: I welcome the Minister's comments and I note the level of Government investment in the Mercury theatre in Colchester, to which many of my constituents enjoy going. However, what support have the Government given to theatres in seaside resorts? Clacton-on-sea has two such theatres: the West Cliff theatre, which is run by the West Cliff theatre trust—a volunteer group that does an excellent job—and the Prince's theatre, the budget for which the local, Tory-led authority has just cut. What support and encouragement will the Minister give to such theatres, which play a major part in the tourism and leisure industry in seaside resorts?

Dr. Howells: I think that an 18 per cent. rise in East England Arts' budget should guarantee the future of perfectly good theatres such as those. If it does not, that will smack of the usual incompetence and heartlessness of Tory-led local authorities.

Bob Russell (Colchester): I advise the Minister that the cultural capital of Essex appreciates all the support for live theatre in Britain's oldest recorded town. Will he join me in welcoming the imminent opening in Colchester of the Headgate theatre, an amateur theatre that will occupy the premises previously occupied by a failed Labour club?

Dr. Howells: I bet there were some great actors there, as well.

Community Sport (North-west)

11. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): What plans she has to assist the development of sport at community level in the north-west. [34239]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The Government are committed to increasing opportunities for participation in sport in every part of the country. The strategy for sport—"A Sporting Future for All"—and the Government's plan for sport set out an action plan on how we intend to achieve those objectives. We also plan to restructure Sport England to improve the delivery of sport at the regional level.

Mr. Miller: My right hon. Friend will know that, despite the latent talent that exists in the north-west, we face an acute shortage of decent facilities for many of our young people. Will he look carefully at projects such as that proposed for Stanney high school—a partnership involving education, the single regeneration budget, West Cheshire amateur athletics club and the private sector—which will provide a new, purpose-built athletics track? Such partnerships, making best use of the money available, are surely the way forward in helping our young people.

Mr. Caborn: I could not agree more. Indeed, as my hon. Friend knows, the project at Stanney high school has been given stage 1 approval by the Sport England lottery panel, and work is moving ahead. Sport England believes that that project is important; it is working with the partners to which my hon. Friend referred to try to make sure that the plan is realised, as it will be a major asset to that part of the north-west.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister will be aware of concern across Greater Manchester and Cheshire about the proposed closure of the ice rink in Altrincham. Will he take a personal interest in what might be done to ensure that funds are made available for a replacement regional facility somewhere in Greater Manchester or Cheshire, which is important for ice skating, ice hockey and other sports?

Hon. Members: Including curling.

Mr. Caborn: I think that the hon. Gentleman could have mentioned curling; I gather that 6 million people up and down the country now want curling lanes, which is to be welcomed.

I do not know all the details of the case to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but if he writes to me I will make sure that it is looked into. However, I can assure him that as a result of our investment in the Commonwealth games, Manchester and the north-west are regarded as a priority for sports facilities; indeed, a tremendous legacy will be left after we have had a successful games later this year.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Investments

33. **Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): What the impact on their investment returns of their investment in *(a)* property and *(b)* equities has been, in the last five years. [34263]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Over the five years from 1996 to 2000, the commissioners' UK equities portfolio achieved a return of 17.2 per cent. per annum. Their overseas equities achieved 15 per cent. per annum, and the commissioners' commercial, residential and agricultural property holdings contributed to the outperformance, achieving returns of 15.1 per cent., 28.4 per cent. and 10.9 per cent. per annum respectively over the five years.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his reply. In assessing the return on equities to the Church Commissioners, can he tell the House what is the loss resulting from the Government's change to advance corporation tax in the first Budget after the 1997 general election? How does it compare with the cash value of any reductions in the obligations which the Church Commissioners are taking on in the years ahead and transferring to the dioceses?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. I should add that the total return from our stock exchange and property investments over the five-year period was 15.9 per cent. As for the advance corporation tax, matters relating to it were discussed with the actuary. I am happy to make a study for the hon. Gentleman and let him have a copy.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the serious upset in the dioceses, especially the large rural ones, that any reduction, however small, in the support that the Church Commissioners can give the dioceses is passed straight on to the parishes, which not only have the burden of maintaining the fabric of ancient parish churches, but are now faced with the distinct possibility of not being able to afford a priest?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He should know that our legal duties are numerous; our commitments are to clergy and bishops, both in cathedrals and areas of need. We have a policy on areas of need and opportunity. If the hon. Gentleman has a particular case in mind, I should be glad to look at it and give him a response.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Compulsory Voting

34. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): If the Electoral Commission will review compulsory voting in parliamentary elections. [34264]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): I understand from the chairman of the Electoral Commission that it believes that there is merit in opening up the question of compulsory voting for wider debate and that it should be examined in more detail as one of a series of options that may help to contribute to higher rates of participation in elections.

Mr. Thomas: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his response. Does he recognise that compulsory voting works perfectly well in Australia, Belgium and many other countries? Is it not time to recognise that compulsory voting, albeit with the opportunity to register an abstention, would not put an onerous burden on our citizens, as some would have us believe?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman must not infer from my reply any enthusiasm on my part for compulsory voting. The commission has decided, as the Select Committee on Home Affairs recommended, to open the matter up for debate, in which the hon. Gentleman has already participated extensively. One of the first steps is to look at the operation of compulsory voting in other countries.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Is it not fundamental in a free society that people should not be forced to the polling booths if they do not want to vote?

Mr. Beith: That is a view which a number of us hold, and I am sure that it will be one of the views that the Commission considers. In the end, of course, it would be a matter for legislation if compulsory voting were introduced.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Housing (Retired Clergy)

35. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): If the Church Commissioners will take measures to assist retired clergy with housing provision. [34265]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Church Commissioners already do so. Housing in retirement is the responsibility of individual clergy, and the level of pension allows for that, but it is the Church Commissioners who provide most of the capital for the Church's scheme of housing assistance for retired clergy, which aims to widen the choice available to them.

Mr. Hoyle: That is an interesting answer. Is my hon. Friend aware of the plight of someone who comes late into the clergy, does not build up a pension fund and does not get assistance? Local authorities have to help with accommodation for retired clergy. I do not think that that is the right way forward. There ought to be a rethink by the Church Commissioners, and more assistance ought to be given.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He ought to know that clergy stipends and housing for retired clergy are very much on the mind of the Church. Wide-ranging recommendations were made in a report on clergy remuneration, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library. Those were considered by the General Synod in November 2001 and are now with the dioceses for further discussion. The comments made by my hon. Friend today will be sent to the appropriate quarter and will become part of the consultation process.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I support the suggestion of the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle). Will the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) ask his friends the Church Commissioners to consider how they could use their funds to assist clergy who need help with housing after retirement, and also lay people who are paid by the Church and who often find themselves in similar difficulties when they come to the end of their careers? If the Church Commissioners assessed the position nationally, they could make a positive decision about whether they could help, and that would be very welcome.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He widens the question somewhat to include those who are lay persons within the Church. As I mentioned earlier, there is a study going on which will be read by the

General Synod. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion that it should be widened to cover the persons to whom he referred will also be considered.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend accept that many of the retired clergy play an ever-increasing role in enabling the Church to provide services on Sunday and cover for absences for various reasons? Is it not therefore important that we ensure that wherever possible, instead of having to move to different areas, they can continue to live in the area that they know well and which they may have served well for a number of years?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out the work that many retired clergy do after their retirement. The recommendations to which I referred include the one that there ought to be the possibility of providing capital to help clergy with the cost of a deposit payment on the purchase of a house, which they could let before retirement and later occupy themselves. If such a recommendation were accepted, they could live in the community, probably better. I should say, however, that by that response I have not in any way committed the Church Commissioners.

Church Maintenance

36. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): If he will make a statement on the programme of church maintenance and improvement. [34266]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Programmes of maintenance and improvement to Church of England churches are matters for individual parochial church councils.

Bob Spink: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that answer. Does he agree that we owe it to future generations to maintain our historic and beautiful churches and, if possible, to improve the facilities, such as toilets, in those churches? Could not the Church Commissioners devise a scheme for the future to provide help with maintenance and improvements?

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman is of course aware of the listed places of worship grant scheme recently launched by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which allows listed churches to apply for a grant equivalent to a reduction in VAT to 5 per cent. That was a measure introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer last year. It has been acted upon and I am hopeful that it will address the kind of situation to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Is my hon. Friend aware that many churches in my constituency have needed a great deal of work and maintenance in the past and will do so in the future, especially St. Nicholas church in Elm Park, which had the roof burned off? The rate of VAT that he mentioned has obviously had implications. Is there any chance of further action on that, or a wider scheme to institute church repairs on a national basis, which would help the churches in my area?

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend should be aware that in addition to the listed places of worship grant scheme, English Heritage and the heritage lottery fund have each contributed grant aid of about £10 million per annum. Clearly that and the relief of VAT on church affairs are not sufficient, but the Church of England, along with other faiths, is continuing to work on this problem. I hope that we will even make some progress within the European Union.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission was asked—

Sharman Report

37. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): What proposals he has to request an increase in the budget of the National Audit Office to take account of the recommendations of the Sharman report. [34267]

Mr. Alan Williams (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The extent of any increase in the budget of the National Audit Office to take account of the Sharman report will depend on the Government's response to the recommendations. It is now 12 months since Lord Sharman reported. I understand that the Government have been in extensive discussions with the NAO about the practical arrangements that the Government believe are needed to accompany Lord Sharman's recommendations. Any cost implications will be reflected in the annual corporate plan that will be submitted by the Comptroller and Auditor General in the summer. The Commission will consider that report before the summer recess.

Mr. Rendel: Does the Chairman agree with me that 12 months is an intolerably long time to wait for these recommendations to be put into place? They should have been put into place before now. What assurances does the right hon. Gentleman have that they will be put into place in the near future?

Mr. Williams: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that 12 months seems to be an abnormally long time. We must hope that it is justified by a favourable reception. If it is, we would want that accompanied by a guarantee of early implementation.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Does the Chairman agree that it is vital that the Government accept all the recommendations of the Sharman report? In particular, it is important that we make progress to ensure that the BBC comes under full audit by the House. After all, the BBC effectively imposes a poll tax on virtually every member of the population. The House should have the right to hold the BBC to account.

Mr. Williams: I agree with the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. There are many extremely important elements in the Sharman report, which would extend considerably Parliament's power of scrutiny. We want full implementation and early implementation. I hope that we may get a response from the Government in March.

Yarl's Wood Fire

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the fire at Yarl's Wood removal centre.

Before setting out what happened on the night of Thursday 14 February, I want to make my position absolutely clear. I am not prepared to let Government policy be determined by those intent on creating disorder and destruction. Having removed asylum seekers from prison, we now find that our reward is the burning down of a substantial part of the facility. This is deplorable.

The new nationality, immigration and asylum policy, which I set out on 7 February, remains unchanged. In particular, I intend to press ahead with expanding the number of places in secure removal centres to 4,000. There will be no uncertainty and no misunderstanding. We will implement our comprehensive policy as set out to the House on 7 February.

I shall set out the facts as we know them. The unrest, involving a number of detainees, started on the evening of 14 February. At that stage the sequence of events is not entirely clear. However, it has been established that during the disturbance control of the centre was wrested from the staff, allowing detainees to gain keys providing access to restricted areas, including a property store. At the same time, damage was being caused inside the centre, including to the operation of CCTV. The detention contractors, Group 4, faced with substantial disorder, called for assistance from public services.

A number of detainees moved outside the accommodation blocks and a smaller number of these breached the perimeter security round the site. The earliest police units to arrive worked to restore perimeter security, and a number of detainees were apprehended at this stage. Further detainees were taken into custody later in the night in the Bedford area. Our latest estimate is that 22 remain at large.

An initial fire in the reception area was extinguished, but fires were started in separate blocks and in more than one location. The fire service was unable to tackle these blazes because detainees prevented it from gaining access to the buildings. By the time order had been restored on the compound, the fire had taken significant hold in one part of the centre and it proved impossible to save those buildings. I am pleased to tell the House that despite speculation to the contrary, we do not believe that there were any fatalities. However, I have authorised continuing investigation to be undertaken until we are absolutely certain that that is correct. I should tell the House that we still have dogs inside the site this afternoon.

In the appalling circumstances of that evening, the men and women of the Bedfordshire police and fire service acquitted themselves with dedication and courage. So too did members of the Prison Service and the Yarl's Wood operators. I know that the whole House will want to express its gratitude to them.

Since the events of 14 February, I have taken a number of immediate steps to strengthen security and protection in the service. First, I have sought advice from the chief inspector of fire services on safety at Yarl's Wood and other removal centres. Subject to immediate remedial action, the undamaged sections at Yarl's Wood have been declared safe. I therefore intend to continue their use. Similar advice has been given in respect of Harmondsworth, and other removal centres are also being assessed. Secondly, as a further precaution, detainees with a history of violent or criminal behaviour and those considered a danger to safety have been transferred to prison. Detailed contingency plans have been put in place should further disorder arise, and I have given direct instructions to improve both staffing and security.

Bedfordshire police and fire rescue services have begun investigations into the events of that night—they will take some weeks to complete—and Group 4 has instituted an internal investigation. I have also initiated a Home Office overarching investigation to inquire into the causes of the events and draw together the other reports, which will include recommendations on design and future fire and security measures. The investigation will, of course, be conducted in a manner that does not impede any criminal investigation. It will be headed by Stephen Moore, a senior and experienced Prison Service official. I would encourage hon. Members to make any observations directly to that inquiry.

I know that the House would want me to deal with the issue of the absence of sprinklers at Yarl's Wood. The decision not to fit sprinklers was informed by advice from a number of different expert sources. Sprinklers have not been used in other similar establishments, owing to operational and practical issues associated with managing sprinkler systems in such an environment. Nevertheless, a review into their use was already ongoing.

The review and recent events have led me to believe that increased precautionary measures are necessary. I have therefore taken a preliminary decision to install sprinklers in all new removal centres and will take the necessary steps to install them at Yarl's Wood, as well as Harmondsworth and other facilities.

It is now clear that a small number of people will take any step to prevent their removal from this country. We therefore have no option but to toughen the regime and instruct the immigration and nationality directorate further to speed up removal of those in the centres to their country of origin.

It would be unthinkable to allow violent and disruptive behaviour to put the safety of staff, other detainees or the public at risk. I shall also consider the criteria for allocating particular individuals to specific removal centres. That will entail considering different levels of security appropriate to the individuals who are held.

Although I take my obligations under the 1951 convention seriously, many claimants fail to meet the standards required. Those with no right to remain must be removed if our overall policy is to stand any chance of success. I therefore reiterate my determination to provide a coherent and seamless process in which rapid removal, and thereby prevention of absconding, must play an essential part.

The lessons of 14 February will be learned, but the message must also be clear. No one will be permitted to engage in behaviour that puts lives at risk and destroys first-class facilities, built at public expense and created as an alternative to prison. That is the message that I intend to convey this afternoon. I know that the House will back that stance.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for early notification of his statement.

The event that we are considering is exceptionally serious, and the House's sympathy goes to those who were injured and to local residents who may be living in fear.

The event has an unhappy background. It occurred in a recess during which an appalling rise in street crime was announced and the Home Secretary's relationship with the police at all levels virtually collapsed.

I have repeatedly made it clear that I agree with the Home Secretary about the need for an asylum regime that is much more effective than the system that his predecessor, the current Foreign Secretary, bequeathed him. However, the disaster at Yarl's Wood raises fundamental questions about the effectiveness of the new strategy.

The new strategy contains three critical elements: reception centres, accommodation centres and removal centres. However, we must ask whether removal centres are being managed in a way that will make sense of the rest of the process. Questions fall into three straightforward categories: why, who and when?

Why were there no sprinklers? In the light of Lord Rooker's comment that their absence was extraordinary, and warnings by Labour Members 15 months ago, which experts, to whom the Home Secretary referred, disagreed with the Bedfordshire fire service? Why was there so little co-ordination with the police? Is it true that they had no immediate access when they arrived? Given the new tightening of security, which we welcome, why did the Home Secretary not authorise further tightening? Why did a break-out occur at Harmondsworth? Why was no heed paid to anxieties that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) and unions raised about pressures and tensions in Yarl's Wood? Why was there no adequate response to rioting in Yarl's Wood?

Let us consider the "who" questions. Who was in Yarl's Wood? Were repeated reassurances to the local populace that everyone there was low risk correct? How many had exhausted the appeals process and were due to be removed? How many were still engaged in the appeals process? Were legal advisers and other facilities available for the latter? How many of those who remain at large were due for removal and how many were engaged in the appeals process? What are the Home Secretary's intentions for those who are apprehended?

Let us examine the "when" questions. How long was it taking to remove those who were due for removal from Yarl's Wood? Were there any whom it took more than a few days to remove once the appeals process had been exhausted? Was the local population misled about the average length of time people would stay? What was about to be done to enable an institution that turns out to be incapable of dealing appropriately with 380 inhabitants to deal appropriately with its full capacity of 900? Is the Home Secretary's policy of building a small number of large centres still the right one? When will Yarl's Wood be operational again? Has the Home Secretary now revised his target of 30,000 removals a year? If not, how is he going to achieve it with Yarl's Wood non-operational or partly non-operational?

Perhaps the Home Secretary—who is amazingly good at this task—will answer some of those questions today in the House. I cannot see, however, how even he can possibly be expected to answer them all in full today. It seems clear that only a proper, comprehensive, public inquiry can be expected to provide the answers that can teach us the comprehensive lessons that we will need to learn if there is to be any realistic chance of putting back together the pieces of the Home Secretary's removal policy. Will he now assure the House that he will hold such an inquiry without delay?

Mr. Blunkett: First of all, I shall entirely ignore the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks, which were not worthy of him. We all know that, when we are taking difficult decisions in difficult circumstances, people will be aggravated about them. That has nothing to do with the issue that we are dealing with this afternoon. It is also important, in addressing the hon. Gentleman's perfectly reasonable questions, that we should be aware that the Conservatives' previous policy was that all asylum seekers would be held in centres similar to Yarl's Wood. I am glad that they have now abandoned that policy, because it was never viable or practical. I have said—I am prepared to acknowledge it again this afternoon—that holding people outside prison in secure circumstances is a difficult task, but a necessary one if we are to have any semblance of a removals policy.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a number of questions about who was there. I have said that there needs to be a review of the way in which those who are put into centres are assessed in terms of their suitability for the particular centre. I implicitly acknowledge, therefore, that some people who are violent should remain in prison rather than in a removal centre. Some people who are still going through the fast-track appeals process should be placed separately from those about to be removed from country; and when we are about to remove people from the country—I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's question on this point—it should be done very speedily indeed, to minimise the organisational capacity of those who wish to create havoc and to minimise the difficulty for those with children.

The hon. Gentleman's "when" questions will form part of the review that will be undertaken, but I acknowledge with hindsight that if people had been able to act more speedily and access had been more readily available—even though the detainees were responsible for preventing access—the fire could have been minimised. That is self-evident. It is also self-evident, however, that to blame the police, the fire service or the operators for what was started by detainees would be to blame those trying to get a grip on the situation rather than those who caused it.

I also want to acknowledge—in relation to the "who" and the "when" and the "why" questions—that local people's interests need to be safeguarded, and that when statements are made to reassure them, they are honest, open and transparent. It is my intention to go to Yarl's Wood in the next month with the local Members of Parliament who have an interest in this issue, to talk to local people, to get feedback from them and to ensure that reassurances that are given are fulfilled.

I say again that, if we are to learn the lessons and do the job well, we need to ensure that the inquiries that have been started can be properly co-ordinated. The reason I am not establishing a long-term public inquiry is that many of the facts can be quickly and easily ascertained. The need for greater security can and will be acknowledged by me. The staffing improvements which had already been set in train not just at Yarl's Wood but at Harmondsworth by the operators, UK Detention Services, have now been put in place. Given that Yarl's Wood

[Mr. Blunkett]

opened only in November and that we were piloting the way in which it operated, it is a tragedy of the first order that this incident should happen within three months of that opening.

With hindsight, I fully acknowledge that some of those issues might have been resolved, but I want to make one other point clear. Those who try to remove their own responsibility, including insurers and underwriters, do no one a service by passing the buck—in this case to the public purse—for the liability. They were happy enough to carry it when making a profit, but are not happy to do so when making a loss.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The fire at Yarl's Wood endangered the lives of hundreds of people, including hundreds of innocent detainees. The Home Secretary refers to hindsight, but the question of sprinklers is not one of hindsight. The relevant fire authorities advised at the time that sprinklers should be installed at such a facility. He says that it will be relatively easy to ascertain the facts of that issue. Can he tell the House whose advice the authorities took over and above that of the fire service in not installing sprinklers?

Mr. Blunkett: The Minister responsible took advice not only internally, but from a number of fire services, given the different locations of the centres. There was conflicting advice from different fire services about the likelihood of such an outbreak. Again with hindsight, and given the particular fabrics of Yarl's Wood—this is true of Harmondsworth, but not of other centres, which are built on a different model and do not rely on wood—I believe that my predecessors would have installed sprinklers. That is what I am intent on doing, but no individual placed in such circumstances—outside prison in centres built to provide not prison conditions, but comfortable living conditions—is in any way exonerated from choosing to burn it down.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I join the Home Secretary in condemning the criminal activity that occurred in the centre and thanking and paying tribute to the public servants, particularly the fire and police services, who came to do their work immediately, without thought for their own safety.

On the events of 14 February specifically, has the Home Secretary decided the terms of reference of the inquiry that he has announced? If so, will he publish them? May I urge on him what I accept is a halfway house between his proposals and those of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin)—an inquiry chaired or led by somebody independent of the Prison Service that does not necessarily take as much time as a full-scale public inquiry, for reasons that I entirely understand, would take?

In that context, I follow the question of the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott): will the Home Secretary publish as soon as possible all the advice and correspondence on sprinklers? That clearly ought to be in the public domain. Will he ensure that the terms of reference include the reasons for and the allegations about the delayed entry of the fire and police services, and the allegations about handcuffing and detention before any fire broke out in the centre?

In relation to individuals, the Home Secretary has rightly said that he cannot yet give the House a final indication of whether there have been any fatalities. What is he being told as to when the police and fire services expect to be able to reach a final decision on whether anybody has lost their life?

Were the only records of who was in Yarl's Wood kept in Yarl's Wood? If so, will the Home Secretary give the House an undertaking that, although institutions may hold their own records, from today onwards there will be a centrally held record for every single reception, detention and removal centre and prison, so that people know from day to day who is in those places? If nobody outside knew who was there, that is scandalous.

The Home Secretary said that he wanted to review allocation between centres, and I agree that that seems to be necessary. Can it be made clear that those who are returned to prison will be only those with either a criminal conviction or something else that justifies their imprisonment? Will the Home Secretary also tell us how many people he has decided should go back to prison?

Does the Home Secretary accept that there is a clear psychological difference between those who are in the process of putting their case, and are therefore far less likely to prove troublesome and try to find ways of escaping, and those who have already had their last opportunity to appeal? If any categories are to be separated, it should be those. In that context, will the Home Secretary review his decision—it is the only decision that I ask him to go back on—to remove the right to an automatic bail application? People who know that their cases will be reviewed regularly are much less likely to cause trouble in the system.

I stand to be corrected, but I gather that Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons now has authority to inspect detention and removal centres. Will the Home Secretary ask the inspector, as a matter of priority, to authorise an inspection of the whole detention and removal estate, and also to give advice on the way in which such inspections will be planned and carried out in future?

Mr. Blunkett: The inspector is independent, and will undoubtedly undertake that task with the vigour that she has demonstrated since taking over last year.

It is not true that the only records that existed were in Yarl's Wood. It is true, however, that the records are held on paper and not computerised. That is why it took a few days to ascertain their coherence in terms of what was known at Yarl's Wood itself. Investment is needed to update the information held and exchanged in the immigration and nationality directorate.

I am prepared to publish the criteria for the reviews. I am prepared to consider allowing an independent member to work with Stephen Moore, who does not have responsibility for or run the immigration and nationality directorate estate but is from the Prison Service. I am not prepared to publish private advice and material given to my predecessors, any more than any other Minister has been or would be; but I am prepared to ensure that Members are updated regularly on what we are doing and on how quickly we can secure the necessary protection.

Only those who warrant being in prison will be transferred to prison accommodation. So far, 25 of those who sought to abscond have been removed to prison. I have already acknowledged that those who are still at the appeal stage should be considered differently from those who have been demonstrably willing to abscond, and who therefore find themselves in secure removal centres.

That, I think, answers a great many of the hon. Gentleman's questions, but I will write to him, and to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), about the questions with which I have not dealt.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for making a statement to the House at the earliest opportunity. Let me associate North-East Bedfordshire with his thanks to all who put their lives at risk in dealing with the criminal, deplorable and potentially lethal incident the other week, including my constituents who work at Yarl's Wood.

In view of what the Home Secretary said about insurance, is he not startled by the fact that the firm of loss adjusters Capita McLaren, acting for the insurance syndicate D.J. Pye, has been able to express its thanks to Bedfordshire police by announcing its intention to proceed against them to the tune of £43 million? Surely those who have had a facility like Yarl's Wood imposed on them with no opportunity to object should not run the further risk of having most of their police budget stripped away the following year? Will the Home Secretary go further than he did a moment ago, and condemn that sharp practice as deeply offensive? Will he ensure that it will not succeed in bankrupting Bedfordshire police or council tax payers?

Will the Home Secretary reconsider the timing of his visit to North-East Bedfordshire? Could he visit as soon as possible, in order to meet constituents who, through the Yarl's Wood liaison committee, worked hard and openly with the Home Office and Group 4 to ensure the success of Yarl's Wood? They had to endure the disruption caused by the building of the facility in a rural area, and they now feel rather slapped in the face by a situation which, it turns out, they predicted rather more accurately and confidently than those whose salaries they pay so that they can advise the nation.

Mr. Blunkett: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he dealt with and handled the situation before the events of 14 February and the way in which he has done so since. I will try to come to the area as quickly as possible. I take entirely his last point about drawing on the wisdom, knowledge and intelligence of those at local level and heeding it more closely.

I thought that I had gone quite a long way in relation to the insurers and their underwriters. All I can say is that I share entirely the hon. Gentleman's views about protecting the police and those whom they serve from the impact. Like him, I was astonished.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I thank my right hon. Friend for the measured and positive attitude that he is adopting today and for his robust support for the excellent work of Bedfordshire police and fire services, which acted superbly under extremely difficult circumstances. It is important that we all adopt a measured and positive approach, because there is much anger, disbelief and concern across the country, including in the Bedford area, and because some people may have lost their lives—although I am delighted to hear that that is unlikely.

That brings me to the question of sprinklers, which is a serious concern. My right hon. Friend will be aware that I wrote to the Home Office a year ago asking that sprinklers be installed at Yarl's Wood. He will know that the reply acknowledged the importance of the issue but said that it would be decided only following the outcome of the review of fire safety protocols across the detention and prison estate.

May I ask my right hon. Friend to think again with regard to releasing the review documents? I would like the opportunity to see the experts' reasoned justification that led to the conclusion that sprinklers should not be installed. It is important that these matters be out in the open so that we can learn. That does not detract from his welcome and commonsense announcement regarding the installation of sprinklers as soon as possible at Yarl's Wood.

I thank my right hon. Friend for his announcement that he will come to Bedfordshire to meet local people who have legitimate concerns about Yarl's Wood and indeed about the implementation of the Government's detention policy. I have also called for a public inquiry at the appropriate time so that all these matters can be examined in depth and public confidence can be restored.

Mr. Blunkett: I thank my hon. Friend for his questions and the way in which he has dealt with the situation since 14 February. I make it clear that restoring public confidence, particularly in the locality, is a priority—hence the wish to come to talk to local people and to ensure that we provide not just verbal reassurance, but visible reassurance of the changes and improvements that have been made and the lessons that have been learned.

I believe that the review that was initiated in spring last year—of fire safety and the role of sprinklers—should inform the overarching inquiry, and that we should publish the inquiry so that people can see the determination and the facts as they have been laid out. I would like to see how we can draw those various elements together before determining the form in which that should be done.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Does the Home Secretary accept that the preface to his statement has got to be right and commands support on both sides of the House? He referred to being in touch with the immigration and nationality directorate to speed up the process.

He will know that most people think that those processes take far too long and that lawyers do well out of them, but virtually nobody else does. What specific steps does he intend to take to speed the process up, bearing in mind the fact that the longer people are in the process and are detained, the more likely it is that there will be more disorder, regrettable though that would be?

Mr. Blunkett: Despite the fact that the process here is speedier than that in most other parts of Europe, I agree that most people expect it to be faster than it is at the moment. The comprehensive programme laid out in the White Paper three weeks ago is intended to make a contribution in that respect. The right hon. Gentleman asked a specific question about the speed of operation within the removal centres, and again, that comes down to the avoidance not only of prevarication with administration and bureaucracy but of legal prevarication, which is why I doubt whether not the entitlement to claim bail, but the automatic right of lawyers to intervene at

[Mr. Blunkett]

every stage, even when removal has been determined and appeals have been turned down, is right. We are bedevilled by a process that, although it is transparent, fair and open, allows someone to make money at every stage out of preventing this country from removing from its borders those who are not entitled to be here.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): First, I add my support to that of my fellow Bedfordshire Members for the police and fire services of Bedfordshire—I hold them in the highest regard—but my question is about sprinklers. It is an irony, or possibly a coincidence, that about three years ago the senior fire officers of Bedfordshire, who were seriously concerned, asked me to lobby the Government to press for sprinklers to be installed in public, commercial and industrial buildings throughout the country. I was one of the Members who lobbied Ministers at that time, and had action been taken then we might have saved millions of pounds at Yarl's Wood, and in other circumstances lives might have been saved. That is as may be, and perhaps we are closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. None the less, there are lessons for the future. Many other buildings in the private and public sectors throughout Britain need sprinklers, and I hope that the Government will give urgent consideration to what needs to be done. In my meeting with the fire officers three years ago, they made a specific point about the density of sprinklers. In some buildings, although sprinklers are fitted, there are too few of them to do the job properly. The fire officers emphasised strongly that for sprinklers to be effective, the density needs to be sufficient, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will take note of what they said.

Mr. Blunkett: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his foresight. However, an assessment is made for each particular facility not simply because of the cost of sprinklers but to determine their appropriateness. Obviously, where there is open accommodation and it is unlikely that people will deliberately commit arson, the need for a universal sprinkler system is reduced. I have acknowledged this afternoon that I believe that it was a mistake not to understand the nature of the secure removal centre facility, and the likelihood that people would behave as they did on 14 February, so the lesson has been well learned.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I echo the Home Secretary's congratulations to the public services involved in coping with the situation, and also his statement that the blame lies fairly and squarely with those who started the fire and behaved as they did. Nevertheless, the way in which he is operating his detention policy means that he is gathering together in one place several hundred people who are without hope, because they are at the end of the process. A high degree of volatility is built in; he is dealing with desperate people. I entirely understand and echo his wish that such centres should not be run as prisons, but given the nature of the population that they are holding, may I ask him to tell the House what the ratio of staff to prisoners is at those centres in comparison with category C prisons, and what degree of supervision was being exercised within the perimeters when the outbreak took place?

Mr. Blunkett: I thank the right hon. Lady for her opening remarks.

The size of Yarl's Wood is slightly misleading, in the sense that it is, and will be again, two 450-bed units. In other words, two centres are on one site, rather than 900 detainees being held in one substantial centre—hence the ability to have saved part of it. In fact, as of this morning, 143 detainees are in the unaffected block.

I do not accept that we could have expected the behaviour of the detainees, even though their hope of remaining had been removed; but I accept that more could have been done—not least in relation to the latter point made by the right hon. Lady about the area between the perimeter fence and the buildings. That is something that I will take on board and will ask Stephen Moore to investigate particularly.

I shall write to the right hon. Lady about the ratio of staff and the comparison with category C prisons.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Most people in my constituency would accept the need to detain people whose applications for asylum have been refused and who are awaiting deportation, but there are persistent rumours that not everybody in Yarl's Wood was in that category. Will the Home Secretary confirm that all the people in Yarl's Wood had at least had their initial application for asylum refused?

Mr. Blunkett: I must be extremely careful not to give an answer that may prove misleading to the House.

I am aware that there were people in Yarl's Wood who had not completed their appeals process. As my hon. Friend will have heard, I dealt earlier with the issue of ensuring that we get that right in future, so that there is different security and accommodation for people who are being fast-tracked but have not completed the process. However, it is my belief that all those who were there had completed the first stage of their application process, but I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy in the Library if what I have said proves incorrect.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): May I also add my tribute to the men and women of the Bedfordshire police service and fire authority who handled the tragedy last week so expertly?

May I press the Home Secretary once more on the question of insurance? Has he taken any advice as to whether he or the House need to do anything to ensure that the insurers cannot be successful in recouping the £43 million from Bedfordshire police? Will he give the House an assurance that Bedfordshire county council and the other local authorities involved will not have to foot any of the bill for rebuilding Yarl's Wood?

Mr. Blunkett: For legal reasons I cannot give the assurances for which the hon. Gentleman asks. However, I can say that it is my intention—as I have made clear—that we should take whatever advice is necessary, and that we should work with the police, who are, of course, operationally independent, to protect their interests and those of the people they serve in the county. We must ensure that the police do not find themselves liable for that bill. At this stage, we must be very careful not to address the need to amend the Riot (Damages) Act 1886 in these circumstances, as no doubt the clever lawyers for the underwriters would use such indications as vindication of their stance.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is already a busy induction centre in my Dover constituency and that the Dover young offenders institute is being converted to a removal centre. Can he assure me that that facility will not open until he is completely confident as to the security of people both inside the centre and in the locality? Does he share my relief that the centre in Dover will be fully staffed by highly experienced prison officers rather than private security guards?

Mr. Blunkett: The answer to my hon. Friend's first question is, unequivocally, yes. On the second question, I expect operators, whether the Prison Service or independent operators such as Group 4 or UK Detention Services, to display the important levels of training and professionalism needed to undertake that difficult task.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): First, like other speakers this afternoon, I unreservedly condemn the violence and destruction at Yarl's Wood. I note that the Home Secretary referred in his statement to a small number of people who will take any step to prevent removal from the country. He went on to talk about toughening the regime. Will he tell us this afternoon what steps he has in mind for toughening the regime? I appeal to him not to be pushed down a route whereby the majority will suffer because of the action of an irresponsible few.

Mr. Blunkett: I look to the inquiries to indicate the particular changes that will be required. I have already said in response to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) that we will need to consider external security in terms of what is available immediately outside the centre. All of us would agree that we need to clarify the nature of what happens at the centres in the evening and at night. The need to increase surveillance and staffing is now self-evident. Until we are satisfied that we have introduced the kind of security that will prevent incidents of that sort occurring again, there will inevitably be a greater degree of security and surveillance than would otherwise be necessary. While that is unfortunate for other residents and detainees, albeit for a shorter and shorter period before removal, they have made it inevitable.

Martin Linton (Battersea): Does my right hon. Friend agree that while detention places are needed for those awaiting deportation, those who still await a decision or an appeal need a system that affords them dignity and respect? What progress is he making on the reforms already announced for a changeover from vouchers to cash?

Mr. Blunkett: I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to say something cheery. I desperately need that opportunity, as the shadow Home Secretary sought to point out at the beginning of his contribution. I still retain a sense of humour somewhere deep inside.

I have laid proposals before the House that, subject to parliamentary approval, under section 96(5) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 will accelerate the removal of vouchers. Consequently, instead of being removed in the autumn, the voucher system will be replaced by a cash system on 8 April this year. That will ensure a sensible, speedy and effective administrative changeover.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): In the course of his statement, the Home Secretary referred to the review of fire safety in the removal centres. Will he confirm that he will also examine fire safety arrangements in Oakington as a detention centre? Will he also report on that to the House in due course? When he is considering the changes that he must make, he will be aware that, as a reception centre, Oakington has had a low level of people absconding up to now. However, if the regime is to consist of fast removals for those who are refused on the initial decision, which is followed by a fast-track appeal while they are housed in a removal centre, the pressure on the security of a place such as Oakington may increase. Will he also undertake to consider the appropriate level of security there?

Mr. Blunkett: On the hon. Gentleman's primary concern, I am prepared to consider security at Oakington. However, it is worth pointing out that anyone who behaved in a fashion that gave rise to danger to others or insecurity at Oakington would, prima facie, damage severely their case for advancing further in the process on which they have embarked. It is in the best interests of those in Oakington to display their desire to remain in this country through behaviour that would allow us to want them in our country.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Will my right hon. Friend add to the comments that he has already made about the general opinion that property insurance policies are nullified by a riot? My concern is for Bradford, West Yorkshire police and West Yorkshire council tax payers in the wake of last year's riots in Bradford.

Mr. Blunkett: I know that my hon. Friend and other hon. Members are deeply concerned about the impact of such events on insurance and liability. I want to make it absolutely clear that no one declared a riot at Yarl's Wood; it is important that people understand that, and those who choose to use quite different circumstances in public places as a benchmark would be wise to think again. The issue that my hon. Friend raises is valid, and outside the context of what happened at Yarl's Wood we will need to examine it very rapidly.

Points of Order

4.21 pm

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. One of the most serious allegations that can be levelled against a Member of this House, Back Bencher or Minister, is that we are lying; indeed, it is so serious that you would not permit us to personalise it in this Chamber. I cannot remember in my service in this House a weekend during which more people have alleged that a right hon. Member has been telling untruths than the weekend through which we have just lived. Can you tell the House whether the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has sought to make a personal statement to the House today or indicated to you that he may seek to do so later this week?

Mr. Speaker: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I am bound by the rules of the House. What happens outside the House is not a matter for me. I say to the right hon. Gentleman that no one has sought to make a statement or approached me about making a statement.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given you notice of this matter. You will have seen the many reports in the press this weekend and today that the Prime Minister is to attend a summit in America with President Bush to plan a new military onslaught on Iraq. Given the growing unease in Britain and the uncritical support that our Prime Minister seems to be giving to President Bush's military adventure, surely the British people have the right to know if the Prime Minister is about to commit us to yet another war. May I ask you, therefore, whether the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will come to the House and make a statement about the reports that we have been reading?

Mr. Speaker: I can inform the hon. Lady that neither the Prime Minister nor the Foreign Secretary has approached me on this matter.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday 14 February, the last day on which the House was sitting before the recess, the Leader of the House said in reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth):

> "He asked for a denial of the story in *The Mirror*. I am pleased to give him the categorical denial that the e-mail that appears in *The Mirror* today is a fabrication; there was no such e-mail; there was no suggestion that the report should come out on Friday; and there was no disagreement on the matter between Mr. Sixsmith and Jo Moore".—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 314.]

That afternoon, as it became clear that this story was unravelling, and following the Lobby briefing from No. 10 to the press, the Press Association carried stories that the position had materially changed from that of which the Leader of the House had advised the House at business questions. I raised the matter as a point of order with the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, asking whether she knew whether the Leader of the House was coming to the House to correct the record, so it cannot come as a surprise to the right hon. Gentleman that I am raising this point of order.

"Erskine May" says, on page 63, that

> "it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity. Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the Prime Minister".

I am not suggesting that the Leader of the House has advertently misled Parliament, but plainly he has inadvertently misled Parliament, having been drawn into this tangled mess by the nonsense between No. 10 and the shambles in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Plainly he has to come to the House to correct the record of Thursday 14 February. Has he given you any indication that he will do so, and if not, why not?

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for the words of a Minister. However, the hon. Gentleman has put the matter on the record and I am sure that the Leader of the House will take note of his comments.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Are you aware that it is well known in the House that the Secretary of State for Transport behaves like a total cad towards his officials? Are you also aware that he has traduced the reputation of his permanent secretary, Sir Richard Mottram, who was permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence when I was a Minister and is a man of the highest integrity and probity? Are you further aware, as I am sure you are, that outside the House it is generally held that the right hon. Gentleman is a stranger to the truth? In the light of those circumstances—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is using another term for liar and he must withdraw that remark.

Mr. Soames: If that is your wish, Mr. Speaker, of course I withdraw it.

May I conclude by endorsing the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney), who asked why you are not able to insist that someone who has dragged his Department into utter chaos and public contempt is called before the high court of Parliament to give account of himself.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is well aware of the rules of the House. I do not have that power.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your guidance on what mechanisms are available to hon. Members when there is clear evidence of confusion and questionable statements being made by a senior Member of the House? What can we do to seek the presence of that Member to address those issues?

Mr. Speaker: There are many mechanisms but, as I have said before, a question raised during points of order is not the time for me to give such advice. However, I am willing to give advice in a more private situation.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Rather than seeking advice, I seek your guidance. Would you look kindly on a request by an hon. Member who has an Adjournment debate, however brief, scheduled for this week for its title to be changed so that the House can reflect on the actions of the Secretary of State for Transport? That would allow the Chamber to call the right hon. Gentleman to account for his shameless actions of the past week.

Mr. Speaker: On Adjournment debates, I am guided by certain rules. If the hon. Gentleman is referring to an Adjournment debate in his name, he can apply to my office for guidance.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Regardless of what you can insist on, will you confirm that in any circumstances in which a Minister faces serious questions about his conduct and the general situation in his Department, you would expect such a Minister to give an account of himself to the House at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Minister.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Has the Minister for the Cabinet Office indicated that he wants to make a statement in the House on the unprecedented situation of a senior serving civil servant giving a press conference this very day to explain away the disastrous mishmash that has resulted from shenanigans in the Transport Department?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no such approach.

Orders of the Day

Homelessness Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 5

PROVISION OF ACCOMMODATION FOR PERSONS NOT IN PRIORITY NEED WHO ARE NOT HOMELESS INTENTIONALLY

Lords amendment: No. 1.

4.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 9 to 11.

Ms Keeble: The amendments were tabled in response to concerns raised during the Bill's consideration in another place and in this House on Second Reading and Report. The concerns centred on the fact that not all local housing authorities deliver a good service when discharging their duties to provide assistance and advice to homeless applicants who have been found not to have priority need for accommodation or to be intentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Government believe that it is extremely important that local housing authorities provide a good service and ensure that they meet their statutory obligations under homelessness legislation. I am mindful, however, that much of the concern expressed stemmed from the perception that some authorities are not doing what they are already required to do by statute.

The Bill strengthens the duties to provide advice and assistance, but the amendments will take that further. They will require an assessment of the applicant's housing need before any advice and assistance is provided, with a clear inference that the assessment must be taken into account in the advice and assistance proffered.

The amendments will also require that the advice and assistance given include information about the type of accommodation that would be appropriate for applicants. That in turn must include information about the likely availability of accommodation in the local authority area, where applicants should go and to whom they should apply in order best to locate it. I must emphasise that those requirements will not be exhaustive and will not mean that advice and assistance is confined to such matters. Examples of other issues on which applicants may need advice and assistance will of course be covered in guidance.

Amendment No. 1 is minor and consequential to amendments Nos. 11 and 12, which insert new subsections (6), (7) and (8) in section 195 of the Housing Act 1996. One effect will be to displace what would have been new subsection 195(6), as inserted by clause 5(2), and to renumber it as new subsection 195(8).

The Government feel strongly that there must be increased emphasis on the provision of good quality, properly tailored and timely advice for those experiencing

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or facing homelessness. Those issues were raised, among others, by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). The amendments will help to focus local housing authority minds on what must be done. Clearly, placing statutory duties on local authorities may not always be sufficient to ensure that good quality and consistent results are delivered on the ground, so we shall reinforce our message through clear statutory guidance. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): This is the last opportunity that the House will have to discuss the Homelessness Bill. The Bill started its life under the guise of the Homes Bill, which included provision for the seller's pack—the controversial part 1 of the Bill. Part 2 of that Bill, which has become the Homelessness Bill, was uncontentious and, had it been a Bill on its own, would have become law before the election. So, in a sense, the huge number of hours that both Houses have spent debating these matters has been unnecessary. Nevertheless, Her Majesty's official Opposition welcome the Bill—although we also welcome the opportunity to discuss the amendments.

The amendments will strengthen the duties on local authorities to assist homeless people who are not in priority need. When providing advice and assistance, an authority will have to assess the applicant's need and provide information about the availability, location and sources of accommodation appropriate to the applicant's needs. As well as applying to those who are unintentionally homeless but not in priority need, the amendments apply to people who are intentionally homeless and to those who are threatened with homelessness but not in priority need.

On Second Reading, I asked the Minister when she would publish the list of those in priority need. We were assured, in this House and in another place, that it would be published by Third Reading—yet here we are, considering complicated Lords amendments, which is difficult to do without having seen the list of priority homeless. We think that we know what will be on it, but it would have been helpful to see it.

Before the election, the Prime Minister promised everyone the chance of a decent home, and we all say amen to that. He also vowed:

> "Our approach will be founded on the basic aim of ensuring that everyone has a chance to a decent home".

[Interruption.] Whatever Labour Members are saying, the Government's own statistics show that homelessness in England has increased by almost 12,000 in the past four years. The number of priority homeless has risen from 102,650 in 1997–98 to 114,350 in 2000–01—an increase of 11,700 or 11 per cent. under the Government's stewardship.

The Lords amendments are welcome, but the number of homeless is going up, the number of social housing units being built is going down and the number of empty homes is going up. The situation is getting worse and may be appreciably worse than the Government's official statistics indicate. Crisis—the charity formerly known as Crisis at Christmas—estimates that there might be up to 400,000 hidden homeless. The Government are aware of those figures, and I ask the Minister to instigate some proper research so that we can find out the true situation.

The number of people in bed and breakfast accommodation has soared. Since the election, it has increased by 9 per cent., from 11,340 to 12,290. It is all very well Lords amendments Nos. 1, 9, 10 and 11 requiring guidance to be given, but if the Government do not know the true state of homelessness it will be difficult for local authorities to give guidance and come up with strategies. A huge amount of money is wasted on short-term bed and breakfast accommodation. If a proper capital budget could be formulated so that private rented leased accommodation could be purchased, we could begin to get some people into long-term, decent homes, which was the Prime Minister's aspiration before the election.

Shelter strongly supports the Lords amendments. Throughout the Bill's passage, and that of its predecessor, the Homes Bill, it raised concerns about the quality of advice and assistance given to non-priority homeless applicants. Some local authorities are very good at providing such advice, but some—the laggards—are pretty poor, which is why we welcome the Lords amendments.

Shelter's concerns were highlighted in its report "Singles Barred" and were taken up by right hon. and hon. Members. Under current arrangements, it is common for applicants simply to be given a list of bed and breakfast hotels, irrespective of their needs. Given the deteriorating homeless situation and the fact that the number of people in bed and breakfast accommodation is rising alarmingly, there is an even greater need for the amendments. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us an idea of the true situation and what the Government are doing about it.

The bed and breakfast unit is trying to reduce the number of homeless people, but without the proper budget to do so. The rough sleepers unit has reduced the figures, but in a similar count of rough sleepers the Simon Community found the same number in just a few streets rather than the whole capital. The accusation is that, to get the count down, the rough sleepers unit has been deliberately massaging those people who are sleeping rough. That is a pretty serious accusation, and we want to ensure that we know the true number of hidden homeless.

In mentioning the hidden homeless, perhaps I should take a minute or two of the House's time to describe what Crisis and other organisations are getting at when they refer to the estimated 400,000 people who, despite the Prime Minister's aspirations, have no proper roof over their heads. They include all those who sleep anywhere—rough, in bed and breakfast accommodation, or on somebody else's floor or sofa—other than in a permanent house of their own. The number of such homeless is rising all the time because more and more people are not in a stable marriage, because they aspire to own a home at a younger age, because they are living longer and because a certain number of legal and illegal immigrants are taking up houses that would otherwise be used to accommodate the homeless.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): Shame!

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Lady says "shame", but it is a fact of life that people are coming into this country and taking up houses that would otherwise be used for the homeless. Until the Government recognise that fact—

Ms Taylor: Disgraceful!

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It is not disgraceful. It is a fact of life, and if the Government do not recognise it, how will they provide a proper policy for the homeless?

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Is it not true that there are two other factors that the hon. Gentleman has not mentioned: house prices rising beyond the pocket of most people, and the failure to use funds derived from the sale of council houses to provide replacement social housing? They are much more significant factors than the ones that he mentions.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I am afraid that we are engaged not in a general debate on homelessness, but in a discussion of the amendment, to which we must revert.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are discussing amendments that will give powers to, and impose duties on, local authorities, against the background of a general deterioration in the homelessness situation. Given that the Government have not provided the list of priority homeless that they promised, it is a little difficult—

Ms Keeble: Did the hon. Gentleman look at the draft order that was consulted on between August and October? If he did, what does he think of the different categories that it sets out, which are exactly those proposed?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Exactly what I said—we have a good idea of what is in those categories because the Government published a consultation paper. Having consulted, the Government ought now to be able to tell us the results and publish the order. That is what we asked for on Second Reading, but we still have not been given it. To ask us to discuss the amendments when we do not know what the order will contain is a pretty shoddy way to treat the House. A statutory instrument could easily have been tabled and the matter could have been discussed upstairs before dealing with the amendments.

The amendments build on an earlier Government amendment, tabled during the passage of the Homes Bill, to strengthen the current duty to provide advice and assistance. Taken together, they should ensure that the quality of advice and assistance provided to non-priority homeless applicants will meet the basic minimum standards. We will all agree that that is a worthy aspiration, and I should like to hear what the Minister has to say before deciding how to proceed.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) says that he supports the Bill, but proceeds to rubbish it, which will come as no surprise to anyone in this House. If we have heard anything shoddy this afternoon, it is his level of debate. In so many such areas, a corporate amnesia strikes all members of the Conservative party. The concern that the hon. Gentleman expressed for those categories of people in inadequate housing or without a home comes as something of a surprise. I cannot remember him ever voicing his concerns when the Conservative Government were in power and laid the foundations for the housing crisis that we undoubtedly now have in London.

4.45 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): If the hon. Lady believes that the record of the previous Government was so bad, will she explain why we maintained a substantial level of new build in social housing, a total that has almost halved—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already reminded all hon. Members that the debate is on the amendment.

Glenda Jackson: I will, of course, abide by your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it breaks my heart because I have the figures at the tip of my tongue to show just what damage was inflicted on affordable house building, not least in London.

I most earnestly support the Government's clear commitment to making a sizeable part of housing socially affordable, and the amendments are therefore welcome, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to answer some of my questions on these amendments. The provision of advice is essential in preventing homelessness and in assisting those people, of whatever category, who face the fact that they are or will soon become homeless. A properly integrated advice service is necessary to all local authorities. We have many good examples in some London boroughs of how such an integrated service can work. It requires integration not only by local authority housing departments but by social services and health departments.

Given the categorisation that is increasingly used in order to try to identify the most vulnerable in terms of housing need, local authorities need to be able to incorporate those advice centres that deal specifically with one category of person, be it the single homeless, women or the elderly. In future, local authorities should not automatically refer someone seeking advice to one of those single category advice centres, because there must be some way to integrate the advice provided, especially as local knowledge is so important to the issue.

The central point that I wish to make is that we are asking local authorities to take on a greater and more complex burden than the one with which they currently attempt to cope. I hope that the Government will consider providing the additional resources for local authorities that will undoubtedly be needed, not least to train their front-line staff once the strategy has been introduced and the advice service has been finalised and defined. In that way, the staff—who, day in and day out, will meet desperate and distressed people—will be able to provide the quality of service that will be essential to the strategy.

We should also have some way in which to monitor whether advice services are up to date with the most recent advice and statutory changes—

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Glenda Jackson: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Such advice and statutory changes may impact on people who face the possibility of homelessness or who are already homeless. The most obvious example for those of us who represent London constituencies is the changes that have been made to the housing benefit system. It is not unusual for someone giving advice to be unaware of

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the changes that have been made, but advice must be accurate and up to the minute. Therefore, while I welcome the amendments, I strongly urge that the Government consider the issue carefully, especially the need for additional support and resources for local authorities.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I agree with the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) that we are now putting great pressure on local authority housing departments. The Bill will place significant additional burdens on the housing departments of local councils, so extra resources, were they to be made available by the Government, would be most welcome. I entirely agree with the hon. Lady that advice must be up to the minute, comprehensive and accurate; many housing departments will be required to improve significantly the range of training opportunities for their staff so that they can provide that advice.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his generosity in giving way early in his speech. Is he aware that the Bill's money resolution provided £8 million, which has already been used up? The Association of London Government reckons that £20 million is required to implement the Bill, including the Lords amendments, in London alone? The cost for the entire country is therefore likely to be £40 million, which will largely be borne by local authorities up and down the land.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point, as it is the next point that is logical for me to make. He will be well aware that the Government have accepted the new burdens principle: if additional burdens are placed on other bodies, the Government will make funds available to meet those requirements. There is growing concern in local government, not just in London but across the country, that the new burdens placed on it by the legislation, welcome as it is, will not be sufficiently met by the sums currently allocated in the money resolution, as the hon. Gentleman said.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about that, but there is an area of disagreement between us. In his opening remarks, he said that had the homelessness provisions of the Homes Bill been dealt with separately, the measure would have gone through the House and another place very quickly indeed, and that there would have been no need for our subsequent lengthy debate. I fundamentally disagree; one of the great merits of that debate is that it enabled a large number of amendments to be tabled by parties on both sides of the House and considered by the Government.

The Government have considered many proposals and accepted some of them, sometimes reluctantly. As a result, the Bill has been significantly strengthened in a number of areas. The issue of the advice and guidance to homeless people was first raised in early discussions of the Bill; initially, proposals by Members on both sides of the House were rejected by the Government. I am delighted that at long last we are considering those proposals in the Lords amendments, because they strengthen the Bill significantly. As the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) pointed out, although many councils and their housing departments provide an excellent service in delivering clear, timely, up-to-date and comprehensive advice and guidance to homeless and potentially homeless people, sadly, as the Shelter report points out, a number of local authorities are not in the same league; some of them have not been providing particularly helpful advice and guidance. The Lords amendments strengthen the legislation, making it a requirement for all local authorities to provide high-quality advice and guidance, so I very much welcome them.

Like the hon. Member for Cotswold, I am concerned that providing advice and guidance to homeless people will be of minor assistance in tackling the problem, unless there is a significant increase in the availability of affordable housing for the many people who are either homeless or who have an unacceptable standard of housing.

Like many other Members, I am concerned about the availability of affordable housing. A small step that the Government sensibly took was the new deal for communities plan, which was designed to help to improve the quality of the housing stock. Unfortunately, although the Government made a commitment that £240 million would be available for the current financial year, the amount spent under the scheme, as a result of a range of difficulties that were apparently unforeseen by the Government, will probably be less than half the money allocated. There is a real problem, and the Government may fail to achieve their sensible target of bringing all housing up to a decent standard by 2010. I shall be grateful if the Minister comments on that issue.

The Minister will be well aware of some of the commitments that Lord Falconer made in another place. I know that the Government are keen on recycling. Part of the Minister's speech today is word for word the speech given by her noble Friend, although there is nothing wrong with that. She told us that the Government feel strongly that there must be increased emphasis on the provision of good quality, properly tailored and timely advice to those who are experiencing or facing homelessness. I suspect that she carries the entire House with her in that regard.

In another place, my noble Friend Lady Maddock asked Lord Falconer to give assurances that there would be clear indications of how local authorities' work in this area and their performance would be monitored. In response, Lord Falconer referred to plans to introduce a homelessness directorate within the Department. He said that part of the directorate's job would be to monitor the advice and guidance given by local authorities. When the Minister responds, I hope that she will say how that work is progressing.

The Minister in another place referred to existing inspection arrangements for local authorities as a second strand of monitoring. He referred specifically to the Government's plans for a national homelessness strategy and the relevance of that to the inspection of local councils' work. I shall be grateful if the Minister is able to give us any more up-to-date information about that work.

The amendments refer only to the advice and guidance that is to be given by local authorities. The House will be aware, however, that an increasing proportion of affordable housing is no longer in the hands of local authorities. We know that within the next three or four years more than 50 per cent. of affordable housing will be in the hands of registered social landlords.

The Minister will be well aware that throughout our deliberations on the Bill I have stressed the importance of close co-operation between local authority housing departments and registered social landlords. What thought have the Government given to ensuring that registered social landlords will be helped and enabled to increase the quality of advice and support that they are able to offer, preferably in conjunction with local authority housing departments? I hope that the Minister will be able to comment on that and on whether advice and guidance will form part of the Housing Corporation's guidance to registered social landlords.

I know that the Minister believes that the link between registered social landlords and housing departments is an important one, for she has said so on several occasions. I hope that we can have her assurance that the issue of advice and guidance will form part of a close working relationship.

We listened with interest to the hon. Member for Cotswold. I suspect that some of us disagreed with some of his remarks. Perhaps some of us strongly disagreed with his remarks about people who come in from outside this country and take the homes of the people already here. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect on whether those were wise remarks for him to make. He might also wish to reflect on the wisdom of his reference to the massaging of people sleeping rough. Many of those people need a great deal of help and support. Massaging may be a small part of their requirements, but they need far more.

5 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman is quoting me out of context. He knows very well that Crisis used similar language when the counts were made. It implies no lack of caring for those people; quite the reverse. We want to know accurately how many there are, so that we can take the appropriate action.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is compounding his earlier error. There is a reasonable debate to be had about the massaging of the figures in relation to the number of people sleeping rough. That is not precisely what he said.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): On the point raised by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), does the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) agree that although housing asylum seekers is a factor, it is by no means the main factor? Is it not right to reflect on the impact of the right to buy?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interesting though that may be, I remind hon. Members once again that they must confine their remarks to the amendment under discussion.

Mr. Foster: I accept, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I am not allowed to say anything in response, other than that I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King).

I have made it clear that my party and I support the amendments. The record will show that they were originally introduced by Liberal Democrats in both Houses of Parliament. We are therefore delighted that they are to form part of important legislation, which I hope will be on the statute book in a very short time.

Chris Grayling: I give the amendments a cautionary welcome. I have no doubt that the Minister's words and those of Lord Falconer in the other place about the aspiration underlying the amendments are well founded, but the Government need to be mindful of the consequences of such legislation, not because its motives are wrong, but because if it is implemented thoughtlessly, it could add considerably to the burden faced by local authority officers who are already hard pressed. It is difficult to legislate best practice into existence, which I assume is the aim of the amendments.

Speaking about the amendments in the other place, Lord Falconer said, and the Minister said similarly this afternoon:

> "The concerns centred on the fact that not all local housing authorities deliver a good service when discharging their duties to provide advice and assistance to homeless applicants who have been found not to have a priority need for accommodation or to be intentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 January 2002; Vol. 631, c. 994.]

The key words are

> "not all local housing authorities".

Around the country there are many well-run local authorities and housing departments, with first class officers who do as effective a job as they can in extremely difficult circumstances. There is a danger that in the detailed way in which the Government choose to implement the amendments, they risk imposing an undue extra burden on local authorities that are doing a good job. I seek the Minister's reassurance this afternoon that she will endeavour to ensure that that does not happen.

Problems of poor management can never be solved by legislation, but it is all too easy to place an additional burden on a hard-working officer who is already having difficulty getting the job done in the hours available, not because of anything to do with that person's job, but because of a small minority of problem cases in individual authorities.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): The hon. Gentleman will be aware of reports suggesting that, to date, the advice and assistance of some local authorities has been merely to refer people to Shelterline. Is he suggesting that we do not need the amendments? Clearly, the facts deny that view.

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I am not for a moment suggesting that we do not need the amendments. However, if the Government get the practicality of their implementation wrong, they could place an undue burden on housing officers who are doing a first-rate job. I am sure that he would agree that first-rate authorities are doing a first-rate job in many parts of the country. Such authorities would not countenance delivering an inadequate response to somebody who approached them with genuine need, but would do their best to deliver a practical, effective and

[Chris Grayling]

proper solution. We need to support such people and guide towards better practice the authorities that take the actions that he describes.

Mr. Love: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. Does he accept that we legislate and provide guidance on best practice not for those who achieve it, but for those who do not?

Chris Grayling: I fully accept that the role of such legislation and of the amendments is to set a clear signpost for local authorities about what is expected of them. However, difficulties can arise in terms of the minutiae of implementation and how the provisions are put into practice. Many local authorities are delivering best practice. I spoke to a local authority officer today who said, "We are doing these things already; the first thing that we do when somebody comes to us with a problem is sit down, talk through their needs and work out their individual situation, so we can look at the options that are available to them." There is no doubt that that is already happening in many local authorities, although as the hon. Gentleman said, some do not follow such procedures.

Will the Minister explain what local authorities will have to do differently as a result of the amendments? Will they have to follow new procedures and check what they do against new guidelines as they work through the process of greeting somebody? How will the process differ from the way in which they currently handle such matters? Will their work in this area be subject to additional scrutiny? That point is significant, because if officers need to spend more time preparing paperwork for inspection, an additional burden will inevitably be imposed upon them. Thus, the detail of how the Government implement the provisions is extremely important. It is all too easy for a zealous project team to impose on authority officers a pile of paperwork and a process that is vastly too onerous and represents overkill rather than an effective solution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) mentioned cost and highlighted the situation in London. The process has cost implications, and the Government always need to be mindful that every step they take potentially has such an implication. Costs may arise in terms of man hours rather than direct cash investment, but none the less, the Government need carefully to consider the matter when they think through implementation. In addition, if a case is simple—housing officers deal with some simple and straightforward cases—will the process create much more complexity for applicants? They also need to be mindful of that issue. Furthermore, as hon. Members have mentioned, it is all well and good having an excellent advice process for applicants with genuine needs, but in many parts of the country—my local boroughs of Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead and Mole Valley certainly fit the bill—the housing options do not necessarily exist to enable officers to deal with the problems that arrive on their doorsteps, even if advice processes are excellent. Regrettably, in the past four or five years, the number of new social houses built in this country has fallen dramatically.

My message to the Minister—I hope that she will respond to some of the points that I have made—is that the Government have a habit of imposing extra work on local authorities. I am still a councillor in the London borough of Merton and I have seen directly that that is the case. It is all too easy for 15 different small initiatives to create a significant block of extra work load for a local authority, especially when they come from different parts of Government. I seek the Minister's assurance that the legislation provides a signpost and will be handled lightly, except in the most pressing cases, and not impose huge amounts of unnecessary bureaucracy and time-consuming work on good, effective and hard-working local authority officers. I seek her assurance that it will be not an imposition on the best, but a route to tackle the worst.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I, too, will speak briefly, because hon. Members have covered several of the main points.

I share some of the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) as regards the implementation of the provisions. The issue of London, where homelessness is a massive problem, was powerfully discussed by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson). The burden falls occasionally on the shoulders of London Members of Parliament, but most often, unfortunately, on locally elected councillors who do not necessarily have the wherewithal or the time to deal with such a large number of cases. I am worried that the provisions have been insufficiently thought through, and I hope that the Minister will be able to pacify my fears. I agree with the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate that we in London require considerably more resources. I represent a central London seat. Asylum seekers place a great burden on the city of Westminster in relation to housing.

As a quick aside, I want to say that the rough sleepers unit has been a great success during the past three or four years. Although concerns have been expressed about the massaging of figures, that should not detract from its achievements. Ms Casey and the Metropolitan police have played an important role in helping to clear up the streets in central London. I hope that they have done so in an effective and long-term way. I shall move off that subject, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I can see that your tolerance has been taken almost to breaking point.

There is a particularly acute homelessness problem here in London. I hope that consideration will be given to increasing central Government resources or to targeting one or two experimental schemes to ensure that the right policy is put in place, not one that will cost a lot of money and create more bureaucracy further down the line.

The homelessness problem in London turns not only on asylum seekers. Many young people see London as a honeypot—an exciting area to live. They take casual labouring jobs, working initially on a part-time basis, and are then unable to afford to pay rent, start to sleep rough and spiral downwards. That leads to problems deeper than those that are dealt with by housing departments.

Will the Minister provide for an opportunity within a fairly short time—say, two or three years—to judge whether the provisions are working correctly? Will she ensure, through the new burdens principle, that, notwithstanding the remarks of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), any ongoing problems do not place undue burdens on local council taxpayers here in London?

Ms Keeble: Opposition Members' explanation of their position on the Bill was more than a little bogus. It was always a good Bill that advanced the rights of homeless people, which is why it met with such strong support on both sides of the House. We must all recognise that a Bill can be improved in the course of its progress through Parliament; that is what this process is about.

This is an example of a good Bill having been made better by careful scrutiny during its passage. The amendments are a case in point. The issues that they deal with have been argued about right from the start, and we have tabled amendments that address some of the concerns that have been raised. This must be about the fifth or sixth time that we have debated the Bill, but hon. Members are still expressing those concerns. That makes me think that if we went through it another a half a dozen times we would still go on producing refinement after refinement.

5.15 pm

This group of amendments is important because it deals with those who are homeless but who do not have priority needs. We all know that the homelessness figures, and those for people living in bed and breakfast accommodation, have been going up. The Government are extremely conscious of those figures, and of the fact that hon. Members on both sides have constantly raised them, and we have taken action to deal with them. I shall not go into the details of that action, because I might be ruled out of order. We have, however, taken action very quickly, and the numbers—hard and sad though they are—are not a patch on those of 10 years ago.

In response to the points made by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) about the priority needs order, I would expect there to be a likelihood that some of the figures could get worse once such orders are in place. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is asking questions about the orders, because draft provisions have been consulted on and were widely known. He must know about the different categories involved, which include homeless 16 and 17-year-olds, care leavers who are vulnerable as a result of having been in care, people who are vulnerable as a result of institutionalisation—including those who have been in custody, about whom some Conservative Members were concerned—and those who are vulnerable as a result of fleeing domestic violence.

Mr. Don Foster: I am sure that the Minister will understand that, following the draft provisions and the consultation, the House is still waiting for the Government's response to the consultation. Is the list of categories that she has just outlined to be the final list? If it is, I welcome it warmly—as, I suspect, will the vast majority of those who responded to the consultation—but we have not heard that officially yet.

Ms Keeble: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. We have a very good working idea, if I can put it that way, of the categories of people involved in these provisions.

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) illustrates why these amendments are so important. The advice will be available not only to people with priority needs, which is why it is so important that we improve the quality of this service, and I understand why the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) and others pressed so hard to table amendments of this kind.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) asked a question about the nature of the advice and what exactly it would mean. The amendments represent progress because they would enshrine in the legislation the processes that should be gone through in giving advice to people who do not have priority needs. That would include making an assessment of their needs, and providing information on the location and sources of certain types of accommodation. The proposals would be effective because they set out the processes that those without priority needs need to go through to get the right quality of advice.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister has admitted that, when these categories of priority needs are published, the amount of homeless people with those priority needs will rise. I have told the House today how the figures have risen in the last three years. Is the Minister able to give the House any clear guidance on how far the homelessness figures will rise further as a result of these specific amendments?

Ms Keeble: No, that is not possible. The hon. Gentleman will see what I said when he reads *Hansard*, but what I think I said was that the figures would rise in some areas. It is possible that the work that needs to be done to get the homelessness figures down will produce rapid results, and that by the time the priority needs orders come into effect the figures will have gone down, so that there will be a slight increase at that point from a lower base. It is impossible, however, to give an accurate estimate of the numbers, largely because this involves categories of people who have not been recognised under previous legislation. Therefore, we obviously do not know how many are involved, but common sense tells us that if more people are regarded as homeless and given rights to housing, the numbers are likely to go up. We shall look closely to see what happens in terms of those figures.

Chris Grayling: To pick up the Minister's point relating to my comments, will she reassure me that any new process will not require all those authorities that are doing the job properly to make changes, but will set an alternative benchmark for those that are not?

Ms Keeble: That depends on whether they are going through the process as it is now. The proposal sets out the procedures that should be gone through to ensure that people who are homeless but not in priority need get the advice and help that they require to secure accommodation. Local authorities will be able to decide quickly as to whether they already go through such a process—the matter is for them to judge—but the proposal represents an effective way to specify outcomes and ensure that people know what they have to do to provide an effective service. More detail will be given in guidance.

On monitoring, as has been said in another place, housing departments undergo best value inspections and work will be done through the new homelessness unit. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate asked about money. Already, £8 million has been allocated to local authorities to administer the new legislation and I understand that discussions are taking place around the possibilities of making additional

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provision. The spending review process is also in place. That, I hope, deals with the points raised by the hon. Member for Bath.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Ms Keeble: I hear the voice of my hon. Friend behind me. I give way to him.

Dr. Iddon: Does my hon. Friend find it staggering, as we on these Benches do, that the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) is whingeing about the extra burden that may be placed on his public sector housing authority? The City of Westminster did everything possible to flog off every council house there. Should not we also remind him that there is the matter of £48 million outstanding? Will the City of Westminster chase—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Keeble: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I must say that I cannot help agreeing with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Mr. Mark Field *rose—*

Ms Keeble: I give way to the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field).

Mr. Field: On the basis of that brief exchange, may I point out that the sum concerned is about £24 million?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but that is not germane to the debate.

Ms Keeble: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Ms Keeble: I want to make progress, but I shall come back to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Bath was right to refer to the Shelter report, which highlights the need to give extra thought to advice for non-priority people. I am pleased that it has been possible to introduce what I think are simple and workable amendments that will improve the quality of service for those groups. He also asked about the decent housing target. The Government have made a huge commitment to that challenge and we are assured through all the local authority returns that we are still on target to meet it.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the relationship between the housing associations and the local authorities and, in particular, responsibility for advice in areas where large-scale stock transfers take place. I have two points to make. First, the Department continues to work closely with the Housing Corporation, at both official and ministerial levels, to ensure that those in social housing are given a good service—a seamless robe, as it were—when that it is humanly possible. Secondly, a number of local authorities do not always appreciate that they will not lose all responsibility for housing functions in their areas just because they have transferred their stock. They will still be responsible for procurement.

I take the point of the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell about the need to have aspirations, while ensuring that they are practical. As I have said, the amendment would guarantee—without giving rise to a great pile of bureaucracy—that those needing advice received it, and that the advice was of a uniform standard throughout the country.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: May I return the Minister to an issue that was raised before she was interrupted by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) and ruled out of order? She said that the Government had provided £8 million in compliance costs. Can she confirm that the money has already been used up in preparations for the Bill? Does she agree with the Association of London Government, which estimates the compliance cost for London alone at £20 million? By extrapolation, we can expect the Bill to cost authorities in England and Wales some £40 million. Are the Government likely to give that amount to local authorities, or will it be yet another of the burdens on authorities that the council tax payer will have to fund?

Ms Keeble: As I have said, £8 million has been allowed for and allocated, but I understand that it has not been used up. Obviously, officials are constantly discussing the costs of implementing this and other legislation with local authorities, and we continue to keep the matter under review; but we are committed to funding new burdens, and that commitment has been recognised in this Bill as in others.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) thought that the implications of the amendments had not been thought through properly. Some of us may think that they were thought through for rather too long. Certainly it took an inordinately long time for the proposals in the Bill to be accepted. The hon. Member for Bath laughs, probably because he knows how long the discussions have taken.

I realise that Westminster is experiencing serious difficulties—some caused by the disposal of council houses mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon)—relating to homelessness and bed and breakfast accommodation. That is one reason why measures of this kind are so important. Hard though it may be to provide permanent accommodation for homeless people, and to deal with the awfulness of being housed in bed and breakfast accommodation, there is also the category of people who have no housing, who have no priority under the legislation, and who are finding it extremely difficult to find somewhere to live. Those are the people who should benefit from measures such as this, which will enable them to receive advice and be pointed towards accommodation.

5.30 pm

I hope that that deals with hon. Members' queries. It is a small, practical but important provision which will go a long way towards improving what is an already good Bill. I commend the amendment to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 7

EVENTS WHICH CAUSE THE DUTY TO CEASE

Lords amendment: No. 2.

Ms Keeble: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may also consider amendment (a) in lieu of the Lords amendment.

Ms Keeble: Again, this is a small but important amendment that ensures that people understand the consequences when they are offered accommodation.

At Committee stage in another place, concern was expressed that local housing authorities should not be able to bring the main homelessness duty to an end with a qualifying offer of an assured shorthold tenancy with a private landlord before it was absolutely clear that the applicant had understood the written statement that explains that that person has no obligation to accept the offer and that, if they do accept it, the homelessness duty will end.

The Government had a lot of sympathy with that concern. I think that hon. Members will agree that the crucial point is that the applicant must confirm that he or she has understood the statement. That may involve the person reading the statement themselves or someone else reading it to them. However, it may involve translating the statement into another language, or explaining to the applicant step by step what the effect of accepting an offer would be.

The Government are therefore of the view that it is unnecessary for the Bill to refer to the means by which an applicant must come to understand the content of the statement. All that is needed is the central requirement that the person has understood it.

Amendment No. 2 would achieve that and simplify the Bill. It would have the benefit of emphasising the key requirement that the applicant has understood the statement. I therefore commend amendment No. 2 to the House.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I suspect that we all agree with the Government's aspiration. It is a question of how it is done and what may happen if it is not done correctly, which is why we have tabled an amendment in lieu.

The to-ing and fro-ing that took place in the Lords is very interesting but perhaps I should explain what is in the Government's mind and what is in our mind. New subsection (7B) in clause 7 states:

> "The authority shall also cease to be subject to the duty under this section if the applicant accepts a qualifying offer of an assured shorthold tenancy",

It is an important part of the Bill's operation. The moment the applicant has accepted the offer, the local authority will not be under any of the obligations that we have talked about: to give advice, assistance and everything else. So it is important that the applicant has read and understood it. For some reason the Government want to take out the words in new subsection (7E) "read and understood". To the contrary, we would like to strengthen this whole matter and insert the words:

> "the statement mentioned in subsection (7D), or that it has been read to him, and that he understands it."

We want to be crystal clear that, in accepting the offer, the applicant, who may not be able to read or may be of limited learning, understands what is being put in front of him. We all have constituents who come to our surgeries and articulate what their fear or their particular problem is, but who, if we asked them to put it down in a letter, would not be able to do it. It is thus an important matter.

In supporting the amendment in another place, my noble Friend Baroness Hanham said:

> "On amendment No. 15, as my noble friend Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville has already said, there should be no question that somebody has understood the words relating to the qualifying offer."

Those are important words. My noble Friend continued:

> "I know it is common practice in Parliament to suggest that somebody should sign in relation to what they have read and understood. In relation to the world in which we are trespassing at the moment—those who are homeless and many of whom are vulnerable—it would be correct not to assume that they could have read. Indeed, somebody should have ensured that they understood the matter and that, if they could not read, it was read to them".

We all agree with that, and our fear is that it will not happen.

I do not understand why the Government want to take the words out. One would expect that when an offer was put in front of somebody, he would be asked—in a non-intimidatory way—whether he could read it and understand it. If there was any doubt whatever about whether he could read or understand it, he should have it explained to him—with patience, and for as long as it took.

In replying to my noble Friend Baroness Hanham, the Minister, Lord Falconer, said:

> "Finally, Amendment No. 15 seeks to protect the position of applicants who, for whatever reason, would be unable to read a statement from the local housing authority about the qualifying offer. I am grateful to the noble Baroness for raising this point. I give an undertaking to consider it and come back with some form of solution to the problem at Report stage because a solution is clearly required."—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 10 December 2001; Vol. 629, c. 30-32.]

What is the Government's solution? To take out the words "read and"—in other words, to weaken the provisions. Later, on Report in the House of Lords, Lord Falconer moved amendment No. 12, to leave out the words "read and", so the amendment was agreed to in another place. I cannot understand why the Government want to take those words out. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) or the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) wish to intervene? Apparently not.

It is extraordinary that the Government now want to weaken the clause. It is a serious matter when a qualifying person is made such an offer, because he could lose all his existing rights. If he has not properly understood that, the situation is serious. I look to the Minister to provide us with a real explanation of why the Government are doing this, so that we can consider whether we want to vote on the amendment.

Mr. Don Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) for having spent a few

[Mr. Don Foster]

minutes with me before our deliberations explaining his and his party's thinking on this issue. I listened with great care to what he said, and I note with considerable interest that he shares my concern that the important factor is the understanding. It is vital that the person concerned has understood the question on which he has to make a decision.

I also note, however, that the hon. Gentleman's proposed amendment in lieu would make no change whatever concerning understanding. The words

"and that he understands it"

appear in his amendment, just as the words "and understood" appear in the wording proposed by the Minister. Although I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the crucial word is "understands", neither his amendment nor the Minister's proposed wording gives full details of how it is to be checked that the person has understood, so that is the issue that the Minister must deal with in responding to the debate. I shall listen with great interest to the assurances that she can give the hon. Gentleman and me that procedures will be in place to ensure that the applicant has understood the issue before him.

Inevitably, as one might expect, I have had discussions with Shelter. As I am sure that the whole House is aware, Shelter has played a valuable role in determining on and proposing amendments. I am delighted that on many occasions—sometimes after a lot of to-ing and fro-ing—those amendments have been accepted by the Government.

There is no doubt whatever of Shelter's view: "understanding" is the crucial word. Shelter's briefing makes the point succinctly and clearly:

"By omitting the requirement to read the statement, the amendment will ensure that those who are unable to read it are given a proper opportunity to fully understand it by having it translated or read to them."

Those are almost the same words as the Minister used in her introductory remarks, so it is clearly the Government's intention that alternative procedures will be set up to ensure that translation is available and that there are opportunities for someone to read the documentation to the applicant.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I should be most grateful if the hon. Gentleman explained one simple point: how is a person supposed to understand the offer if he has not read it? Without the amendment, the Bill makes it clear that he has both to read and understand the offer. He should then be asked whether he has read and understood it.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman and I agree that the crucial issue is understanding. Various mechanisms can help someone to understand: the individual could read the document himself; a translation could be prepared for him to read; or the document could be read to him. The amendment proposed by the hon. Gentleman suggests that the person would have read the offer or would have had it read to him.

The Minister went further. She said that a translation would be made available and that there would be an explanatory discussion. That strikes me as a better way of proceeding. All those points will pale into insignificance, however, unless we make it clear that a variety of strategies will be offered to ensure that the person has understood.

The hon. Gentleman asks me how we shall know for certain that a person really has understood. His amendment does not address that question any more than the Government's proposals. Let us hear what the Minister has to say to reassure us. If we can be assured that there will be strategies to ensure that people understand, we may be able to make some progress.

Chris Grayling: I want to say a few words in support of the amendment proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). He has articulately set out the problems as regards literacy and the implications for someone who is illiterate or not fully literate in understanding often complex matters. Two further points need to be addressed. Before I do so, I should point out that—as we have been discussing private lettings—I am a small-scale private landlord, as listed in the Register of Members' Interests, although that is not specifically relevant to the detail of this debate.

In the few months I have been a Member of Parliament, my experience—like that of many hon. Members—is that at constituency level housing issues are much more complex to deal with than they first appear. There are always two sides to every argument, debate and discussion: for example, whether someone was allocated an appropriate property; or whether a housing application has been dealt with appropriately.

A stipulation that relies entirely on the use of the word "understand" leaves open a broad area for debate and discussion if things go wrong. Who said what to whom? Was something fully explained? Did the person read the documentation or not? If something goes wrong with a private letting after a few months and the tenant seeks additional help from the authority, matters of dispute in the initial discussion—for example, what was communicated to whom and when, or what was read or not read—could have significant implications for future housing. The Lords amendment, residing as it does entirely in the word "understood", leaves too much room for dispute at a later stage. It would not be prudent or sensible for the House to go forward on that basis.

5.45 pm

The second point is fundamentally important. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) touched on it. It relates to the ethnic community, either people already in this country or those who come to the UK seeking accommodation. Anyone who has been involved with local authorities knows that nowadays they often have to produce documentation in a considerable number of languages.

As many people with housing problems have little or no knowledge of English, how can we be sure that an applicant who does not have a first-rate command of English and is dealing with an English-speaking housing officer is able fully to understand the legal implications of what they are doing? In those circumstances, if the legislation relies only on the use of the word "understood", it will open up a mine field at a later date.

Mr. Don Foster: The hon. Gentleman may have a valid point about relying only on the word "understood", but his amendment relies entirely on the use of that word. He rightly stresses the importance of translation for ethnic minority groups. Incidentally, such groups include not only people who come to this country from elsewhere, but many people born in this country for whom English is not their first language. That is crucial. After further reflection on that point, does he want to say anything about the new burdens principle and the cost of that translation service to some authorities, including his own?

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those comments. Perhaps he did not hear me say that I was not talking only about those people who come to this country but also about people who are English nationals. There is no automatic assumption that people who are either naturalised Britons or who were born in this country have an excellent understanding, knowledge and use of the English language.

It is entirely appropriate for the hon. Gentleman to refer to the new burdens principle. As I said during our discussion of the previous group of amendments, the Government need constantly to be mindful of new burdens. Whether we like it or not, it is certainly true that local authorities already carry a burden of translation as regards vast amounts, if not all, of their official documentation. There would be no exception in the circumstances that we are discussing.

I would like to correct the hon. Gentleman in his remarks on the use of the word "understand". Understanding is part of the amendment proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold and his colleagues. The amendment still specifically provides either for someone to read or to have read to them, the documentation relating to their case. There are thus three dimensions, not one.

The Government's amendment relies specifically on understanding alone and casts aside the issue of reading. Surely it is right and proper that anyone entering into a legal agreement should have read it or have had it read to them, and should have clearly understood it. If that is not the case, far too many grey areas will be left open.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: No doubt my hon. Friend, with his local government experience, knows what will happen. Some of the most vulnerable people in our society will be wheeled in and given an offer. According to the terms of the Bill, they will have to sign a statement acknowledging that they have read and understood the offer. By its nature, that whole process is intimidatory. Housing officers are busy people. They are not likely to give the applicant much time, so we need to take the greatest possible care in respect of these provisions.

Chris Grayling: I thank my hon. Friend for that cogent point on which the Minister would do well to reflect.

There are important issues as regards literacy and the grey areas that frequently exist in debates over individual housing problems.

Mr. Love: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is the second Member to speak in favour of the amendment, but unfortunately I am still having some difficulty in understanding it. Even if I asked him to read it out, I am not sure whether that would help me to understand it any better.

Surely the crucial point is whether the person has understood the contents of the letter. It is not explanation that is important, as has been suggested. The issue is not about reading but about understanding. If people understand the letter, surely they will be able to make a decision.

Chris Grayling: I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that in the vast majority of cases in our daily lives when we encounter a terms and conditions document, we are supposed to tick a box to indicate that we have read and understood it. I suspect that, like me, he probably never bothers to read the terms and conditions document, and checks the box at the bottom of the page to move on. However, that document has legal force. If it says that one has no right to expect any service whatever from the person with whom one contracts, the law will fall on the side of that person. That is a fundamental issue in relation to the housing of people who are homeless or who are on the verge of becoming homeless. Very often, such people will not have a full grasp of the legal and regulatory issues, and it is surely right and proper that the law should at least ensure that they have read the terms and conditions document, or that it has been read to them, so that they know exactly what they are letting themselves in for.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): The Government have spent a huge amount of money on promoting adult literacy—indeed, there are radio advertisements about literacy gremlins. It is therefore tremendously important that terms and conditions should be read to people with literacy problems. I hope that my hon. Friend will continue to support that approach.

Chris Grayling: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. Literacy is one of the three fundamental points, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold outlined, which means that to rely simply on the word "understanding" is, legally, too grey. Knowledge of the English language or lack of it affects many of the people who have come to this country or who live in this country, besides many of our ethnic minority groups, which includes many of those who are most affected by the issues in this Bill. There are also those cases that present a potential for a dispute between an applicant and an authority. All those are realities.

The amendment in lieu goes some way to addressing pitfalls down the road for local authorities—pitfalls that are not addressed by the Lords amendment. I hope that the Minister will change her mind and allow the amendment in lieu to be made.

Mr. Mark Field: I support my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). This amendment represents a belt and braces approach. Perhaps I would understand if the Minister read the whole Bill out to me, but I still do not understand and appreciate her statement that the Lords amendment, which deletes two words, improves matters. I cannot see how that can be the case. However, I appreciate entirely that there is a thought in the Minister's mind that there may be a correct process to

[Mr. Mark Field]

follow, particularly in London, where many people speak English not even as a second but as a third or fourth language.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is extraordinary that the Lords accepted precisely the amendment that we are now being asked to reverse?

Mr. Field: That was going to be my second point. It concerns me not least because the Conservative spokesmen in the Lords have local government experience in London, where there are clear and understandable concerns that people who do not speak English as a first language need to have such a statement read to them as a belt and braces approach to make sure that they understand it. Such people must understand the implications for their housing situation of declining an offer. I am perplexed about how the Minister can come to the view that by removing two words the rights of the most vulnerable in our society—who are homeless—will be safeguarded. I also share the constitutional concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold. If the Lords discussed and proposed the amendment that we are suggesting in lieu, why was the deletion made in amendment No. 2 accepted?

Ms Keeble: There has been a lot of discussion about not very much, and hon. Members will need to read and understand the *Hansard* record of the debate. I shall not deal in turn with each of the hon. Members who has spoken because they all said similar things, and they all agreed with what I said previously, which is that people should understand their position, what it means for them to get an offer and, more importantly, what will happen when they accept or refuse the offer.

It was originally proposed that people should read and understand the statement. Lords amendment No. 2 simply requires them to understand the statement, and the means by which they come to understand it should be left to the judgment of local authorities. Both the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) and the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) said that the Government should come up with strategies to ensure that people understand the statement and they helpfully suggested some, including the use of an appropriate language. The hon. Member for Cotswold also said, with menace, that the statement should be explained to people very nicely until they understand it. Both hon. Members made it clear that they understand completely what it means to take people through the terms of a document so that they understand it.

The amendment in lieu, tabled by Conservative Members, would mean that the statement must be read by the person concerned or read to him, and understood. The Government believe that that would restrict the strategies that could be adopted to ensure that people understand the statement.

Mr. Mark Field: Does the hon. Lady appreciate that the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 contains similar safeguards, which ensure that any statement made by a defendant is not only understood by him but read out to him before he signs it?

Ms Keeble: We are discussing how to ensure that someone understands what is meant by a housing offer. As several Conservative Members and the hon. Member for Bath have said, these are complex issues that people need to discuss in detail. That is why we proposed that there should be a burden on the local authority to ensure that people understand the housing offer and the consequences of their decision to accept or reject it. It should be left to the local authority to make arrangements as to the methods by which people acquire that understanding, whether it be by reading the statement themselves, having it read to them in English or, if different, their mother tongue or having it explained to them gently step by step as the hon. Member for Cotswold recommended.

Although some Conservative Members keep saying that they have been in the House only a short time, they show every sign of understanding that it is a big issue to take a person through the process of receiving a housing offer and making a decision. That is why we tabled the amendment in the other place. It arose from debate in the other place, and had not been raised earlier in this place. It is an improvement because it will not restrict housing officers to one or other means of making sure that people understand the process; it will place on local authorities the burden of ensuring that understanding.

Chris Grayling: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Keeble: Yes, but we have gone over the issue a few times and I have set out clearly the available choices.

6 pm

Chris Grayling: Does the Minister realise that her approach places the burden of responsibility for explanation entirely on the shoulders of the housing officer without requiring applicants to take responsibility for themselves? Amendment (a) would provide an appropriate balance of responsibility between the two.

Ms Keeble: The burden of responsibility lies with the people concerned because they have to decide what to do about an offer. Their choice has to be informed, however, and on that basis it is important that people understand the process, what is happening and the consequences. That is why the Lords amendment No. 2 has been couched in terms that place a duty on local authorities to ensure that people understand. My winding-up note merely repeats that.

Mr. Don Foster: Perhaps I can help the Minister with her winding-up speech. Will she give a categorical assurance that the burden of responsibility will be on the local authority housing department to ensure that applicants fully understand what is put before them? Will she also assure us that guidance will be provided to each local authority on a range of strategies that they are expected to use in different circumstances to ensure that that happens, including reading the document to applicants, translating it to their mother tongue, having an independent expert explain it to them or, as the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said, taking them through it step by step?

Ms Keeble: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the purpose of Lords amendment No. 2 is to place a duty on the local authority housing officer to ensure that applicants understand what is happening. I also assure him that guidance will be introduced. However, I cannot give a date for that or be specific about the range options that it will include because that would be restrictive.

We have had a good discussion on the different methods available to ensure that someone understands the process. It is in everyone's interest, including that of the local authority, to ensure that applicants understand what they are doing and the consequences of their decisions. As all hon. Members know, if someone does not understand what is happening, they complain or appeal.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We have had a—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I did not realise that the hon. Gentleman had spoken. He cannot speak again.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of clarification, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order either to oppose the amendments or to agree to them?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am advised that the hon. Gentleman has spoken to this group of amendments so he does not have the right to speak again. The debate has come to its conclusion.

Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 97.

Division No. 168] **[6.4 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Har[illegible]
Barnett, Joh[illegible]
Barron, Ke[illegible]
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Rendel, David
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Rooney, Terry

Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthin*[illegible]
Brady, Graham
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

After clause 11

A NEW CLAUSE

Lords amendment: No. 3.

Ms Keeble: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The issue of accommodation for children in need and their families under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 has arisen repeatedly during the consideration of this Bill, both in this House and in another place. It is an important issue—probably the most important that we will discuss this evening—and will also be considered in relation to the Adoption and Children Bill. Lords amendment No. 3 will address the central concern—namely, it must be clear that social services authorities have the power to provide accommodation for children and their families under section 17 of the 1989 Act. There is also the separate question of ensuring good co-operation between the housing and social service departments in working to meet the needs of such children and their families.

The Minister for Housing and Planning, my noble Friend Lord Falconer, has met a number of social services directors and was impressed by their arrangements to ensure that their department works together with the housing authority—or housing department, in the case of unitary authorities—to find an appropriate solution for the whole family when dealing with families with children who are intentionally homeless or ineligible for housing assistance.

Lords amendment No. 3 would ensure that all local authorities adopt similar co-operative arrangements. The amendment, which would insert a new section, 213A, in the Housing Act 1996, would require housing authorities to have arrangements in place to ensure that social services authorities were made aware when a housing authority was dealing with an applicant whose household included a child under age the age of 18 and had reason to believe that the applicant might be homeless—or threatened with homelessness—intentionally, or might be ineligible for housing assistance. The housing authority would also have to inform the social services department of the decision taken on the homelessness application. These requirements would be subject to the applicant's consent, although withholding consent would not affect the housing authority's ability to alert the social services authority in any case when it was concerned that a child might be at risk of suffering significant harm.

Lords amendment No. 3 would also place a new duty on housing authorities. They would have to provide advice and assistance to the social services authorities where the latter were aware of a decision by a housing authority that a household that includes a child under 18 was unintentionally homeless, or threatened with homelessness, or ineligible for housing assistance and the social services authority asked for assistance in the exercise of its functions under part III of the Children Act 1989. That new duty would not prejudice the current provisions on co-operation between authorities in section 27 of the 1989 Act.

Lords amendment No. 3 would also place a requirement on unitary authorities to have similar arrangements in place. They would have to ensure that, subject to the applicant's consent, the facts of such cases and the decision on the homelessness application were referred to the social services department by the housing department. They would also have to ensure that the housing department provided advice and assistance, such as is reasonable in the circumstances, to the social services department on request.

As my noble Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning undertook to do in another place, my Department and the Department of Health propose to issue joint guidance to housing and social services departments about co-operative working in the context of the new provisions. The provisions should ensure greater safeguards for families with children and address some of the issues that were debated at some length on Second Reading and Report. I am sure that hon. Members will have no hesitation in endorsing these actions, and I urge them to support Lords amendment No. 3.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Lords amendment No. 3 is a new clause, to be inserted in the Bill after clause 11. On a minor administrative note, I am not sure why it has been inserted after clause 11, which deals with appeals, when it would have been better placed after clause 8 on the review of decisions as to suitability of accommodation. Such an administrative problem arises because this is a new area that was not discussed when the Bill was previously debated on the Floor of the House or in Committee. This provision has been debated in the House of Lords and is now inserted in the Bill in the form of a new clause. Having said that, we broadly welcome the new clause, although we have a number of reservations that I should like to raise with the Minister.

The new clause would strengthen the current duty on housing and social services authorities—housing and social services departments in unitary authorities—to co-operate when a family will not be provided with accommodation under the main homelessness duty and children are involved. Such a situation most commonly occurs when a family is found to be intentionally homeless or when they are ineligible for assistance due to their immigration status.

The new clause specifies that the housing authority must, with the applicant's consent, inform the social services authority about the facts of the case and, at an early opportunity, notify it of its subsequent decision. The new clause also requires the housing authority to provide such advice and assistance as is reasonable in the circumstances in helping the social services authority exercise its function to children in need under the provisions of the Children Act 1989 when requested to do so.

Such a power already exists in the 1989 Act. Section 20(1) provides:

> "Every local authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who appears to them to require accommodation as a result of"

certain reasons. Subsection (3) provides:

> "Every local authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who has reached the age of sixteen and whose welfare the authority consider is likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide him with accommodation."

Section 22(1) states:

> "In this Act, any reference to a child who is looked after by a local authority is a reference to a child who is
>
> (a) in their care; or
>
> (b) provided with accommodation by the authority in the exercise of any functions".

Given that such a power is already enshrined in law, why is the new clause necessary? It will ensure that social services co-operate with housing authorities, but they already have to do so under the 1989 Act.

Mr. Don Foster: The hon. Gentleman may be able to help me. My understanding is that the Children Act 1989 requires social services to provide housing for the children, not the entire family. That is the nature of the amendment that I understand the Government intend to make.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: That is precisely the point—the new clause deals with the children. As the duties of the local authority are already enshrined in the Children Act, I cannot see the necessity of the new clause. The only reason for it that I can see is that it will make social services and housing departments work more closely together. Perhaps the Minister will confirm that.

It is relatively easy for social services and housing departments to work together closely in a unitary authority. However, when a county authority provides the social services and a borough or district council provides housing functions, two councils will have to have mechanisms for dealing with each other. There will be an awful lot of people producing bits of paper and watching their back in case one or other council are sued.

Something might be fine as an ideal, but once it is enshrined in law, the compliance cost can be significant. We do not think that the Government will allocate sufficient funds to local authorities to enable them to implement the provisions properly and that the burden will fall on council tax payers. Can the Minister give us an idea of the compliance cost of implementing the new clause? What mechanisms will need to be put in place in district and borough council housing authorities and county council social services authorities? What protocols and disciplines will need to be put in place to make the new clause work?

6.30 pm

Having said that, we welcome the Government's recognition of the need to protect children, particularly those intentionally made homeless, and often through no fault of their own. Excellent work is being done by some housing associations in dealing specifically with vulnerable children. I visited the Cirencester young person's housing association the other day, and met a young constituent of mine who had been abused by his

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

parents. Through a friend, he secured a place in a little house provided by that association, which is divided into several separate bedrooms for such children. He is obviously flourishing and will eventually be able to move to a flat of his own. Housing authorities are becoming cleverer at dealing with such people, and we need to provide them with more support.

We need to be clear about where the Government will place such people in their list of priority needs. How will that list dovetail with local housing authorities' strategy on homelessness?

Mr. Love: The philosophy at the centre of the Children Act 1989 is that the child should be the first priority. Everyone would assume that, in most cases, the best way for such children to be brought up is for them to remain with their natural parents. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that bringing together social services and housing is the best way to ensure that housing authorities are aware of that priority?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I accept the thrust of what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I am probing the Minister as to how that will work in practice. We have all heard of shocking cases of children falling through the net and being abused. The West case, which occurred in my constituency, was one of the worst in history. Obvious mistakes were made, but having discussed the matter in detail with Gloucestershire social services, I am sure that such a thing is unlikely to happen today. Let us all hope and pray that it cannot. We welcome the amendment in principle, but we want to see how it will work.

The amendment makes it clear that social services can act only with the consent of the applicant. Again, the question is one of understanding and of who said what at a particular time. For example, what will happen if a child, for whatever reason—they might be fearful or might not understand what is going on—does not give consent for social services to act on their behalf? The child could still be vulnerable, but the import of the amendment will be circumvented if they do not wish to give consent. What will happen in such situations?

If local government is to be reorganised along more regional lines, will regional assemblies have a role in this matter? The sharing of such responsibilities between a plethora of local government tiers would lead to increasing difficulties. I ask the Minister to explain, when she winds up the debate, how the amendment will work in practice.

Glenda Jackson: I seem to be speaking to an entirely different amendment from the one that the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) has just defined. My hon. Friend the Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I understand that the amendment will ensure that a child cannot be taken away from its family under the current statutory requirements of the Children Act 1989. If, for a variety of reasons, a family is deemed intentionally homeless, it will be the duty of the housing authority, working closely with social services, to ensure that the family can be kept together. The hon. Gentleman seems to think that the amendment deals with abused children, but I suspect that they are already protected under the 1989 Act. I am aware of only one instance in which someone who was in desperate need of housing refused to approach the local housing authority because that person had been told that its response would be to place the children in care. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware of a growing belief—I speak from my direct experience in London—that if a family with children are deemed to have become intentionally homeless, the housing authority's first step will be to contact social services to take the children into care. I understand that the amendment would prevent that.

Close working between the social services and housing departments—I am happy to say that such a relationship between the departments already exists in Camden—that will have a responsibility to assist such families means that the family will not be marooned and left to attempt to find their own housing and that children will not be taken into care. Children should be taken into care if there is clear evidence that they are being abused or are in danger within the family, but they should not be put into care simply because of a shortage of housing.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady will realise that no hon. Member would wish to see children taken into care purely for housing reasons, but surely she recognises that in some cases—happily small in number—a social issue that could lead to a child being taken into care comes to light only because of a housing issue. The housing department may be the first to get wind of a problem.

Glenda Jackson: I have already told the House that I have had only one direct experience of someone who refused to approach their local authority because they believed that their children would be taken into care. I am not clear about the case that the hon. Gentleman makes. I have already said that if clear evidence shows that a child—whether homeless or not—is in danger from their family, for whatever reason, social services have a responsibility to act. However, if the hon. Gentleman was suggesting that the danger to the child was the fact that the family had nowhere to live and that the child should be taken from an otherwise caring family and put into care, I would strongly disagree. It is my perception that the amendment would ensure that that could not happen.

Chris Grayling: I do not wish to describe the case I mentioned in detail, for obvious reasons, but a social issue that should have led social services to question whether to take a child into care arose only because of a housing-related matter being dealt with by the housing department. That is a very specific example.

Glenda Jackson: The hon. Gentleman makes the case for much closer working between housing and social services departments. I know from my experience of my local authority that such close working already takes place. When housing families, local authorities should work more closely not only with the Department of Health—as my hon. Friend the Minister said—but with education departments. It is almost impossible for local authorities in Greater London to rehouse every family within their own borders, so they must work closely with all the boroughs within the London conurbation.

I welcome the amendment. It will do much to allay the genuine or perceived fears of family members—not all local authorities have Camden's excellent record—and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to disseminate its contents, even before the Bill receives Royal Assent, to local authorities that have not yet introduced closer working between social services and housing departments. Families should not fear that if they present themselves their children will be taken from them and put into care, and they will still be homeless. That can create enormous tensions and strains in a family and, inevitably, it is the children who suffer.

Mr. Don Foster: The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) is right that there has been relatively little discussion during the passage of the Bill of children and homelessness. Today, we have already heard about the many homeless households, and recognise that a large proportion of them live in inappropriate temporary accommodation. Indeed, many homeless households live in extremely inappropriate bed and breakfast accommodation. We must recognise that those households include many children. The recently published Shelter report "No Room to Play: Children and Homelessness" states:

> "More than 100,000 children in England become homeless every year."

It is therefore right that the House should address concerns about the support that legislation can provide for such children.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) rightly hoped that the Lords amendment would go a long way towards addressing some of the current problems. We must recognise that there are already many examples of good practice, whereby local authority housing departments and social services departments work together to meet the needs of homeless children and their families. However, that is not true of all local authorities, so we should include in the Bill a requirement that all local authority housing and social services departments co-operate in a way already practised by the very best departments.

I therefore welcome the Lords amendment, but I am conscious that it will not solve all the problems. During deliberation on the amendments in another place, reference was made to difficulties resulting from the Children Act 1989 and a number of court cases and judgments that have led to homeless families being under threat of their children being taken into care. I understand that the Government have made a clear commitment to reverse the effect of those judgments by amending the Children Act through an amendment to the Adoption and Children Bill. I should be grateful for an assurance from the Minister that that remains the Government's intention and an explanation of the way in which the change will be introduced.

I am conscious that the Lords amendment will require sensitive handling by social services departments. If a local authority social services department is to become involved, the agreement of the family concerned will be required, so sensitivity is essential. In another place, Lord Falconer said on 24 January at column 152 that he fully accepted the need for sensitivity and gave an assurance that appropriate guidance would be issued on the way in which that sensitivity would be exercised by local authorities. I should be grateful if the Minister told the House a little more about Government intentions on that guidance.

6.45 pm

The issue is important, but it is wrong of the hon. Member for Cotswold to suggest that there has been no deliberation on it during the Bill's passage. I am sure that the Minister will confirm that on a number of occasions in Committee I spoke to amendments I had tabled, expressing considerable concern about, for example, a parent's behaviour leading to a family being refused priority housing. Lord Falconer and the Minister expressed concern about that, and promised to amend the Bill. I am delighted that as a result of subsequent deliberation, Lords amendment No. 3 was tabled, but by itself it will not be sufficient to meet all the concerns of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate. I hope that the Minister will give us assurances and guarantees that the amendments to which I have already referred will be made.

Chris Grayling: I should like to raise three issues, the first of which relates to the concerns that I outlined in relation to the first group of Lords amendments.

The new clause proposed in Lords amendment No. 3 has the admirable aspiration of providing protection for children in families who become intentionally homeless. I very much agree with many of the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), who spoke about the importance of protecting children in such circumstances. However, there will be times when the reasons for a family becoming intentionally homeless lead to significant attention from social services departments regarding the nature of the family and their suitability to care for their children. God forbid that that should happen frequently, but it should necessarily involve close collaboration between social services departments and housing departments.

The essence of what the new clause proposes already occurs in the vast majority of local authorities as a matter of course. Undoubtedly, some local authorities do not come up to scratch but, as one of my local authorities says, "We do it anyway as a matter of course." If there is a problem case, the authority always talks to social services about the issues surrounding it. I should hate an admirable provision to impose an unnecessary bureaucratic burden on the best authorities. I therefore repeat my question to the Minister: what processes will be imposed on housing officers and social services departments to deliver the requirements of the new clause? What specific requirements will she place on officers, and what additional paperwork will they have to deal with? In particular, what burden of regulation, supervision and assessment will be placed on authorities as a result of the new clause?

When the Minister responds to our debate, will she give an assurance that she will not allow the imposition of new processes to make the life of the better local authority officers more difficult than it is at the moment? As we all know, anyone who has any contact with, or knowledge of, local government knows how hard-pressed many of our local government officers are. I should hate a well meaning and well thought-out new clause to be implemented in a way that made matters much worse for them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) rightly said, there are resource implications, which often involve time rather than money. The Government need to be mindful of them as they set about implementing the Lords amendment, particularly in

[Chris Grayling]

areas not covered by unitary authorities, where the social services department and the housing authority are miles apart and it is not simply a question of having a conversation down the corridor. Those organisations have contact points, but they lack the benefit afforded by unitary authorities of sitting within the same management structure in the same building.

There are two other specific issues that I would like the Minister to address when she replies, one of which involves the use of the word "assistance". A local housing officer has expressed concern to me. What does the word mean in this context? There is some concern within the profession that in reality social services will be given the right to resubmit an application to the housing department with a heavy lean in favour of it being accepted. That led to the comment, "If that is to be the case, if social services will become the arbiter in these matters, we will not bother to declare anyone intentionally homeless in the first place."

What are the requirements for the housing department in providing not only advice but practical assistance to the social services department in the implementation of these provisions? I focus on that point because it has a resource implication for many small district councils. If a county council's social services department is able to say, "No, these decisions are not right, you need to house these people", when the district council has decreed that the people concerned are intentionally homeless, the district council will end up in some instances funding accommodation, when under current legislation it would not be doing so. The Government should be mindful of that as they push through the amendment.

Secondly, I ask the Minister to be watchful of unitary authorities. The division between unitary and non-unitary authorities is not quite as clear cut as it would seem. An example within my constituency highlights that point. The Preston estate in Tadworth is one of the problem areas of Surrey. It is an area of some deprivation and there are significant social problems. The estate is divided between three different housing authorities. It is covered by a fourth authority, which provides the social services input. The estate itself is controlled one third by the London borough of Sutton, one third by Merton and one third by Reigate and Banstead. Surrey county council provides social services at present.

London boroughs such as Sutton or Merton have the vast majority of their housing stock within their own borders. The small offshoots that for historical reasons they control can often be easily forgotten. I suspect that the Minister would find quite a significant number of unitary authorities that have social services and housing under one roof but which have some property outside their boundaries. As she proceeds to implement this legislation, she will find that there is not always a split between the unitary authority and the non-unitary authority, which is articulated in the new clause. The clause suggests that for a unitary authority everything is under the same roof, but that is not the case.

The Government must be careful about the way in which they frame regulations and guidance notes. They must ensure that areas that do not fall within the boundaries of unitary authorities do not slip through the net because no one thinks clearly about their presence. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind as the Bill becomes law and as the Department begins to implement it.

I welcome the principle behind the amendment. It is admirable that we should provide proper protection for children. However, I hope that the Minister will take care to ensure that implementation works with rather than against local authorities.

Ms Keeble: I shall try to answer all the queries that have been raised. However, some of them involve quite detailed, complex legal issues. If hon. Members still have concerns after my response, I shall ensure that they are dealt with in writing. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) raised a particular case, and it should be considered in some detail outside this general discussion.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) is not right when he says that the issue before us has not been discussed clearly. The general principles and concerns that underpin the discussion have been some of the most hotly contested points in our discussions as the Bill has passed through its various stages.

The central issue is the welfare of families with children, not children on their own. It is about the interrelationship between homelessness legislation and legislation that affects children. At the same time, there is a series of complex issues. The issue was probably first raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) and by Shelter, which held out the prospect that if we got things wrong, or if we got the relationship wrong between responsibility under the Children Act 1989 and homelessness legislation, we would see a return to the days of "Cathy Come Home", when families were split up. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said, homelessness would be a recipe for children ending up in care in those circumstances. We must deal with the issues that revolve round the family.

The hon. Member for Cotswold and others will remember that we had much discussion on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report about the possibility of amending in part the Children Act 1989. There was also much discussion about the fact that despite the test cases—the ones to which I think my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate was referring—and despite various assertions to the contrary, the power remained for social services, in considering the welfare of the family or of the child, also to promote the upbringing of the child by his or her family. During these discussions arguments were advanced by myself and by my noble Friend Lord Falconer in another place.

That was one of the key responsibilities. The knock-on effect of that was that of providing housing for a family, and not only for the individual child. It was the families with children who were intentionally homeless under the Act that did not qualify under housing legislation and homelessness legislation.

We are dealing with one of the most important amendments that we will consider this evening. It puts in place arrangements to make existing powers work properly. It is right that such powers are in place. It is also correct that some local authorities are already doing what we would wish. I stressed in my opening remarks that we have examined best practice and what local authorities are doing when they have to deal with these matters. The amendment has been tabled to ensure that other authorities act in the same way. I hope that explains from where the amendment has come.

Families that might be affected by the intentionality rules will be, for example, those who have been evicted for rent arrears or antisocial behaviour. The children of such families are vulnerable. I am sure that there are hon. Members who are familiar with such cases from their advice surgeries.

The hon. Member for Cotswold asked about consent and the consent of the child. That is not the issue that is before us. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate was right when she said that we are not talking about specific issues that involve children being taken into care and housed. We are talking about the housing of families with children, and that is made clear in the amendment. If the hon. Gentleman reads the proposed section 213A(1), he will see that it refers to

"where a local housing authority have reason to believe that an applicant with whom a person under the age of 18 normally resides".

That is basically a family with children.

The issue of consent involves the exchange of information between two different departments or two different local authorities. The new clause deals with that and with the specific circumstances in which the social services or housing department makes an exemption where a child may be at risk. That is perfectly proper and in line with all the standard procedures and legislation affecting local authorities. I hope that that deals with the concerns of the hon. Member for Cotswold.

7 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate spoke about the dissemination of information to local authorities. My noble Friend Lord Falconer and I have repeatedly discussed the powers of local authorities and their responsibilities under the existing legislation, which have not changed, despite the test cases known to my hon. Friend. I hope that we have already clarified the position, but steps will be taken to ensure that the information is properly disseminated. A further issue is the extent to which people know their rights. That comes down to advice and assistance, which we have discussed.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) spoke about an amendment under the Adoption and Children Bill. That is a matter for my colleagues in the Department of Health, and I shall not tread on their toes. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there has been a great deal of discussion about the matter. I pay tribute to his own role, and to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North, who has pursued the issue vociferously, because of its importance for her constituency and also because of her concerns about child welfare in general.

Mr. Don Foster: The Minister said that she did not wish to tread on other people's toes, and I understand that. Will she confirm that she agrees with her noble Friend Lord Falconer, who said that

"the critical issue is to ensure that the social services directorate has power, when appropriate, to house the family and not only the children. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Department of Health said in the Commons, on 17th January, and to which I referred on Report, we"—

presumably meaning the Government—

"have undertaken to bring forward amendments to the Adoption and Children Bill to address that issue"?—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 24 January 2002; Vol. 631, c. 152.]

Can the Minister confirm to the House that it is still the Government's intention to do that?

Ms Keeble: My noble Friend and I have spoken repeatedly about the matter, on which we agree completely. We are as one. We have discussed in detail the complexities of this part of the legislation.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell spoke again about aspirations and what the process would be. The new clause is all about process. It is all about making sure that the families do not slip between two departments or two local authorities, as often happens. The new clause will make sure that the two departments or the two local authorities communicate. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are some local authorities that do that extremely well, there are cases in which it will require something of a culture change to get two local authorities to talk to each other. The new clause will ensure that that happens, in the best interests of the families and the children concerned.

The hon. Gentleman says that that happens in his local authority, which is excellent, but it clearly does not happen in every local authority, given the anxieties that have been raised by Shelter, voluntary organisations and hon. Members about what happens to children or families when they are batted about between pillar and post. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate said, such families are often afraid that the children will be taken into care, so they are unable to access the kind of housing that is their right.

It would be worth the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell and other hon. Members checking the procedures and protocols in their own local authorities or between the local authorities in their areas, to make sure that such cases are dealt with. There is a small number of cases, but they are difficult.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell also asked about assistance. That relates to the various bits of legislation to which I referred earlier. We are not discussing the ability of a social services department to reverse a housing department's decision. The decision taken by the housing department involves intentionality, vulnerability, priority needs and so on, under the housing legislation. There is no question of the social services department saying that the housing department has got it wrong, if the family is intentionally homeless.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Keeble: No. I am in the middle of replying, and I might forget what I intended to say.

Responsibility for housing in that instance rests with social services. Different legislation applies, so the provision for assistance and advice does not mean that the clients get passed from one department to the other. The social services department exercises its powers under the relevant legislation. The issue is how different departments or local authorities work together to realise that. Having completed my reply, I give way to the hon. Member for Cotswold.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the Minister. Can she say how the new clause will work in practice? It deals

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

with those who are intentionally homeless and have children under the age of 18. The hon. Lady gave the example of people who are grossly in arrears of rent or who are subject to antisocial behaviour problems. Given the scarcity of housing resources, will such people have priority over people in a similar situation or people who are unintentionally homeless, but who have otherwise behaved perfectly properly?

Ms Keeble: We are discussing a small group of people, who are not being housed under the homelessness legislation. Because they are intentionally homeless, the powers rest with social services, which wants to promote the upbringing of the child by his family. The aim is therefore to keep the family together. I thought that I had explained that. The new clause sets out in detail how that will be achieved. It specifies the joint protocols and the level of contact and liaison that is necessary between the different departments or local authorities to make sure that that happens. The process is exactly what the new clause is about. It does not mean that one group of people leapfrogs over another on the housing list because it is being catered for by social services.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I apologise to my hon. Friend for not being in the Chamber earlier. I warmly welcome the new clause. Subject to the further underpinning of it, as we have discussed, it shows that the Government have listened and taken note of the problem. One of the ways in which the new clause may be implemented by local authorities is that it will allow a social services department to put time and sometimes a small sum of money into accessing a private tenancy for families who do not have the resources or the ability to access their own accommodation. In that way, social services departments may be able to help, as my hon. Friend said, without such families going back into the housing department system that has already failed them.

Ms Keeble: There are a number of ways in which the powers can be exercised. The main point that I was making to the Opposition is that the powers are exercised by social services, not by the housing department. The procedure is slightly different because it is not under housing legislation. As the housing department and the authority will have responsibility for the homelessness strategy and will know where the housing is, they will be in a position to assist. I am told that they will be able to provide assistance, within the normal meaning of the word, to social services in exercising their powers. I take the point about properties that are located in other areas. Clearly, the issue will have to be taken into account. Of course, when families enter the system, they will be dealt with by social services, as their position will be considered under the Children Act 1989.

Chris Grayling: In a borough that has a housing block in another area, it is conceivable that the natural instinct of the unitary authority will be to turn to its own social services department when a particular problem arises, even though the department covering the geographic area containing the block may have a much greater knowledge of local circumstances and about how to deal with the issue.

Ms Keeble: I take that point and I shall ensure that it is addressed.

I think that I have dealt with the details and technicalities of this difficult but extremely important area. I am absolutely sure that the amendment will improve the Bill and the safeguards that are provided. In particular, it will improve the safeguards for one of our most vulnerable groups—families who are intentionally homeless, in relation to whom the interests of the child must be carefully considered and proper arrangements made. I am very pleased indeed that it has been possible to bring the amendment from the other place and I urge all hon. Members to support it.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 15

ALLOCATION SCHEMES

Lords amendment: No. 4.

Ms Keeble: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 5 to 7.

Ms Keeble: Amendment No. 4 is a minor drafting amendment. The Bill gives local housing authorities powers to take account of unacceptable behaviour when making decisions about applicants for the allocation of housing. Clause 13 constructs a test of unacceptable behaviour that is serious enough to make the applicant unsuitable to be a tenant of the authority. Where an authority has decided that an applicant is guilty of such behaviour, it will either have power under clause 13 to decide to treat them as ineligible for an allocation altogether, or it may decide to treat them as eligible but not to give them any preference under clause 15.

The policy intention is that the test of unacceptable behaviour should be exactly the same whether it is a basis for treating a person as ineligible or for deciding that he or she does not deserve to be given any preference. The test is deliberately constructed to be a very high one and it incorporates two main elements: first, the authority must be satisfied that the applicant or a member of his household has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour; and secondly, in the circumstances when the case is considered, it must be satisfied either that the applicant is unsuitable to be a tenant or that he deserves not to be given reasonable preference by reason of that unacceptable behaviour.

The qualification

"by reason of that behaviour",

which the amendment inserts in the clause, is essential to ensure that authorities do not have a broad power to decide to treat applicants as ineligible or not to give preference for reasons that are not linked to the unacceptable behaviour. The qualification appears in clause 13 in new section 160A(7)(b) to the Housing Act 1996. The provision deals with the treatment of an applicant as ineligible for an allocation, but was omitted from clause 15, which deals with the treatment of an applicant as deserving not to be given any preference. The amendment would merely insert that qualification in the clause and ensure that the provisions on unacceptable behaviour are clear and symmetrical.

As I said, clause 13 allows an authority to decide to treat an applicant as ineligible for an allocation because it is satisfied that he is guilty of unacceptable behaviour that is serious enough to make him unsuitable to be a tenant of the authority. When an authority is satisfied that an applicant is unsuitable to be its tenant, it may decide to treat him as ineligible or instead to consider his application but not give any preference for an allocation. As the Bill stands, the authority must notify the applicant of a decision to treat him as ineligible and of the grounds on which it has been made. With regard to a decision not to give preference, applicants have the right to ask to be informed, but the authority is not required to notify them unless it is requested to do so.

7.15 pm

In another place—and, indeed, in this place at an earlier stage—there was pressure for an amendment to require authorities to notify applicants about such decisions. Unfortunately—this is where the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) was misguided—the proposal's construction meant that it would also have required authorities to notify applicants about routine decisions taken about the facts of their application. *[Interruption.]* I know that the hon. Gentleman is very entertained and is about to say that he was right all along. That is not the case. The Government reflected on the points that were raised in debate about his amendment. We saw the force of the argument that in areas where pressure on housing is high a decision not to give preference could have the same practical effect as a decision to treat an applicant as ineligible; that is to say, it could remove any realistic opportunity of his being allocated accommodation. *[Interruption.]* Again, the hon. Gentleman indicates that he is right. We have shown simply that the Government are prepared to listen and cherry-pick his amendments so as to take the good bits while still rejecting the wider and totally impractical elements.

The additional requirement should not add significantly to authorities' work load. We anticipate that, overall, only a small proportion of applicants will receive such decisions and our understanding is that the local authority associations support this proposal. The Government have therefore decided that authorities should be required to notify the applicant when they decide not to give any preference because of unacceptable behaviour, but they will not be required to deal with the confetti of decision papers that the amendment of the hon. Member for Bath would have required. Amendments Nos. 5, 6 and 7 will help to achieve those effects. I urge hon. Members to support the amendment.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We heard a lot in Committee about the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) sending his wife postcards when his amendments succeeded. I have no doubt that his wife will be receiving a postcard in the morning. Tribute where tribute is due: he pushed the matter in Committee and it is now being dealt with.

The official Opposition broadly welcome the amendments. For too long, tenants who have exhibited patterns of unacceptable behaviour have been given preference when other people who have behaved perfectly properly are disadvantaged thereby. We welcome the amendments and the fact that the inconsistency between clauses 13 and 15 is being done away with, and the requirement for the local authority to notify people for whom preference has been withdrawn because of unacceptable behaviour.

I have one question for the Minister: what will happen in relation to the Data Protection Act 1998? Will one authority be able to give information on unacceptable behaviour to another authority so that it can judge how to treat people when handling preference?

Mr. Don Foster: May I thank the Minister for accepting at long last the amendments that I tabled many months ago and tidying them up in the way that she has described? I am sure that honour is now satisfied and that at least a brief postcard can now go to Mrs. Foster.

Ms Keeble: I shall be brief, so perhaps it will be just half a postcard. *[Interruption.]* That is for the hon. Member for Bath and his wife to settle between them.

In relation to data protection, I was trying to envisage the circumstances in which such a situation would arise. As people would normally make applications to separate housing authorities, I cannot seriously think that it is an issue, but I shall check to make sure.

I urge hon. Members to support the amendment.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 5 to 7 agreed to.

Schedule 1

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Lords amendment: No. 8.

Ms Keeble: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 12 to 14.

Ms Keeble: The amendments are complex, so I shall introduce them with some care. I hope that hon. Members will bear with me.

During consideration in another place, attention was drawn to gaps in the existing provisions, which give the local authority the power to accommodate certain applicants pending a review by the authority of its homelessness decision and pending an appeal to the county court on a point of law.

The policy that underlies the current provisions is that pending a review by the local authority or an appeal to the county court, the authority should have the power to accommodate applicants who have a priority need for accommodation—that is, those who are most vulnerable. We think that that is the right policy, and it accords with the central thrust of the Bill; that only this group are owed the main homelessness duty to secure accommodation.

An assessment of the current provisions reveals two main gaps in the achievement of that policy, however. The first applies in respect of those applicants who have a priority need, but are considered by the authority to have become homeless, or be threatened with homelessness,

[Ms Keeble]

intentionally and who, for whatever reason, were not provided with accommodation under the section 188 interim duty pending inquiries. That will include, for example, priority need applicants who were threatened with homelessness pending the inquiries and so did not need to be provided with accommodation. Where the authority finds that they became threatened with homelessness intentionally, the applicant may request a review of that decision and may become homeless during the course of the review. However, at present the authority has no power to accommodate in such circumstances.

The second gap applies more broadly to applicants who are pursuing an appeal to the county court. The current provisions—namely, those in section 204 of the Housing Act 1996—leave some doubt as to whether there is a power to accommodate applicants if the authority has not already exercised its power to accommodate pending the review.

Amendment No. 12 will close the first gap and provide authorities with a specific power to assist applicants who the authority have decided have priority needs but have become threatened with homelessness intentionally. The power will allow the authority to take steps to prevent homelessness or, if the applicant actually becomes homeless, to secure accommodation, pending a review of the homelessness decision.

Amendment No. 14 amends section 204 of the 1996 Act and makes it clear that, pending an appeal to the county court, the authority has a power to accommodate the same categories of applicant as it has a power to accommodate pending a review. It includes a specific reference to the new power provided by amendment No. 12. Amendment No. 14 also makes it clear that the power to accommodate an applicant pending an appeal to the county court applies whether or not the power to accommodate pending a review had been exercised.

Amendments Nos. 8 and 13 amend sections 188(3) and 200(5) respectively. Those provisions give authorities the power to continue to secure accommodation for certain applicants pending a review. The concept of being able to continue to secure accommodation limits the scope of power and is unduly restrictive. Amendments Nos. 8 and 13 therefore change that to a freestanding power to secure accommodation.

The change to section 188(3) will clarify in particular that, pending a review, authorities have the power to accommodate applicants who have priority need but have been found to be intentionally homeless. Under section 190(2)(a), such applicants must be secured accommodation for such a period as will give them a reasonable opportunity to find accommodation themselves, but that duty may end before a review of the homelessness decision has been completed. There is currently some uncertainty as to whether authorities have a power to accommodate that category of applicant during the period after the section 190(2)(a) duty has ended and until the review is completed. That is because there is no explicit provision giving a power to continue to accommodate under section 190, and it is questionable whether the power to continue to accommodate under section 188 should apply in a case where the applicant is being accommodated under section 190.

I should add that the local authority representative bodies were consulted and are content with the thrust of the amendments. They do not add new burdens or provisions, but largely clarify, rationalise and consolidate powers that currently exist in a variety of different places.

I hope that hon. Members agree that the amendments close the current gaps and achieve the right policy, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I challenge the Minister to repeat what she just said without notes.

Ms Keeble *indicated assent.*

Mr. Clifton-Brown: As she says, these are technical amendments. Although they are complex, we broadly welcome them. They clarify the powers that are available to local authorities to accommodate applicants pending review or appeal of the homeless decision, and they respond to concerns raised by the Housing Law Practitioners Association.

As this is the last time we will be able to speak on the Bill, I crave your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to say that the official Opposition wish the Bill good speed and hope that it will be placed on the statute book with all possible alacrity. It is needed, because homelessness is a pressing problem that affects people in the greatest need of help in our society.

I press the Government to bring forward their homelessness strategy and to introduce the statutory instrument on priority need and a Bill licensing houses in multiple occupation. Those are all essential strands of the Government's strategy for dealing with this ever-increasing problem.

Finally, I pay tribute to all those who have provided the Opposition with assistance and advice, especially Shelter, which has provided invaluable advice and has made our debate much better informed—which has, I hope, contributed to a much better Bill.

Mr. Don Foster: I, too, welcome the amendments, which plug several gaps that were identified by the Housing Law Practitioners Association and others.

It was perhaps slightly unwise of the Minister to nod her agreement that she would be prepared to repeat everything that she said without reference to notes. I say that not least because when Lord Falconer was similarly challenged, he said that it would not be possible, because

> "For this, one would need a wet towel and every section of the Bill in front of one."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 January 2002; Vol. 630, c. 1022.]

The amendments do not entirely close all the loopholes that have been identified. Nevertheless, most people are prepared to accept that they go a long way towards doing so and are therefore welcome.

Like the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), I pay tribute to the many organisations that have done the House a great service by providing briefings to all parties during our lengthy deliberations on this important Bill. I, too, wish the Bill a speedy progress to the statute book. It is much needed and many people have been arguing for it for a long time. I am delighted that it can now move rapidly to Royal Assent, and rightly so.

7.30 pm

Ms Keeble: When I nodded in response to what the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) was saying, I was suggesting that he was making a good joke, rather than that I could repeat all that I had said without notes. He asked about the homelessness strategy; it will be out very soon. Following on from that will be the priority needs order, setting out the new categories of people who will be entitled to housing, and other broad strategies to improve the provision of social housing and the position of people in the private sector.

People have repeatedly stated—as did the hon. Member for Bath just now—that this is the last time we shall debate this Bill, but there has been a continuous process of improving the Bill in all our discussions and debates, which shows that scrutiny in this place works. It has worked to great effect, even at this late stage, to improve the position of homeless families, children and people who are not in priority need, and of groups who previously had no help from the state with their housing.

I echo what other hon. Members have said about the enormous service that all the Officers of the House have given to us. I also echo what they have said about the importance of the Bill; it will lead to a dramatic improvement in the rights of people to housing and to housing advice. Despite some of the things that have been said, there has been all-party support for the Bill, and I look forward to seeing those rights in action out in the community.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 9 to 14 agreed to.

Social Security

7.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): I beg to move,

> That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 6th February, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2002.

Mr. Darling: These orders will uprate most benefits in the normal way, but, as in every year since 1998, this year I am able to increase some benefits by more than the rate of inflation. We are able to do that because of our success in helping people into work. By making work pay and by making work possible, we now have the lowest unemployment rate of any of the major industrialised countries for the first time in more than half a century.

Since 1997, claimant unemployment has fallen by over a third, and long-term unemployment is down by more than two thirds. As a result of that, we have saved £4 billion on the cost of unemployment and £0.5 billion has been saved by getting more lone parents into work, thanks, to a large extent, to the new deal. We have also started to bear down on fraud. All that has meant more money to invest in front-line public services, and more money to provide extra help where it is needed.

Our objective is to ensure that we do everything that we can to help all those who can work to do so and provide greater security for those who are unable to work or who are retired. I shall set out briefly how we are able to do more in line with our priorities. First, we want to do more to help families with children, and to enable parents to balance their work and home lives. So, from this April, we are raising the standard rate of maternity allowance and statutory maternity pay from £62.20 to £75 a week. As I told the House in November, that is the largest increase in maternity benefit since 1958.

Next year, we will raise maternity benefit again, to £100 a week, and at the same time we will also increase the payment period from 18 to 26 weeks, and increase the ordinary maternity leave to 26 weeks followed by the option of a further 26 weeks unpaid. That will allow women to take up to a year off work when their children are born. At the same time, we shall introduce a new right to two weeks paid paternity leave, and a new right to 26 weeks paid adoption leave plus a further 26 weeks unpaid leave.

We want to do more for families with children, as we have done in each of the last four years. Our objective is to end child poverty in a generation, and to halve it in 10 years. That is why we have increased child benefit by 25 per cent. more than inflation since 1997, and it will rise again this year. We have also increased the income support allowances for children under the age of 11 by 80 per cent. in real terms, which provides real help to families on low incomes.

As a result of these and other tax and benefit measures, along with policies that are helping more parents into work, we have started to make significant inroads into tackling child poverty. Next year, in addition to further measures, the child tax credit will also help us move along

[Mr. Darling]

the road to eradicating child poverty. This year—as I said to the House last November—I want to do more to help parents who are bringing up children with disabilities, and who face considerable extra costs.

We have already extended benefits for severely disabled three and four-year-olds. Some 6,000 children and their families are now better off by more than £38 a week. But we want to do more than that to help those on the lowest incomes. When we came to office, the extra money paid to low-income families with a disabled child was just £21 a week. Last year, we increased that by more than £7 a week. This year, we intend to increase it by a further £5 on top of the normal uprating to a new rate of £35.50, which will benefit about 80,000 children. Next year, it will rise again by a further £5 more than inflation, to more than £40 a week, benefiting a large number of children who need that help. That will help families on low incomes, both in and out of work, and provide greater security where it is most needed.

I can also confirm that the orders include the provision to remove barriers to work for severely disabled people, by making sure that work pays. From April we will no longer take into account the earnings of disabled people, or their partners, in the independent living fund. For the small number of families affected, that will be worth an average of £130 a week. We have also set out plans substantially to increase the capital limits, by extending help to people with savings of up to £18,500.

There is one new measure that I would like to draw to the attention of the House, which we propose to introduce alongside the pension credit. Members on all sides have argued that the hospital downrating rules can cause difficulties and distress for those affected, and for their families. Indeed, I am sure that most of us have come across cases in our constituencies in which that has happened. We said that we would review the rules, and we have. Amendments to the State Pension Credit Bill in another place urged us to change the rules for pensioners, and we have decided to go further and include other benefits paid to help people with the cost of everyday living.

The principle of avoiding double payment, which has been a feature of the welfare system since 1948, is important, and I do not intend to undermine that principle. But we recognise that people have continuing financial commitments when they go into hospital. I have therefore decided to change the rules, so that no reduction in pensions occurs until someone has been in hospital for 13 weeks, rather than the current six weeks. An estimated 26,000 people will benefit from this measure, at a cost of around £40 million a year.

On pensions, it is important to look at the uprating measures as part of the wider pensions strategy. The basic state pension is, and will remain, the foundation of pensioner incomes, and this year it will rise again in real terms by £3 for single pensioners and £4.80 for couples, on top of the last year's increases, which makes a total rise of 7 per cent. above inflation. We have also guaranteed that future rises in the basic state pension will be at least £100 a year for single pensioners and at least £160 a year for couples, and I can confirm that today.

Increases to the basic state pension alone would not be sufficient to tackle the pensioner poverty that we inherited. That is why we have radically improved the minimum income guarantee, benefiting more than 2 million pensioners. It is worth reminding the House that in 1997, the poorest pensioners were expected to live on just £68.80 a week. From April this year, the guarantee for a single pensioner will rise by £6 to £98.15. That is £30 a week more than it was in cash terms five years ago.

Next year, the minimum income guarantee will rise again to at least £100, and it will rise in line with earnings for the rest of this Parliament. That represents real progress towards ending pensioner poverty. Around £2.5 billion of the cost of this uprating will go to the poorest third of pensioners, which is three times more than an earnings link would have given them. Since 1997, 98 per cent. of pensioners are better off than they would have been if we had returned to an earnings link.

The House will shortly debate the principles and details of the State Pension Credit Bill, which has now passed through all its stages in another place. That will, of course, remove the disincentives inherent in the system that we inherited, because it addresses the long-standing tension between providing a floor below which pensioner incomes should not fall and encouraging people to save for retirement. It will also reward thrift and about 5 million pensioners on low or modest incomes will gain, on average, £400 a year. More than half the beneficiaries are women. Those who oppose the pension credit might want to reflect on what a difference its success would make. The pension credit will rectify a long-standing anomaly in the social security system and benefit a large number of pensioners.

The state second pension will also be introduced in April, which will benefit some 18 million people—2 million disabled people, 2 million carers and 14 million people on low earnings. A combination of what we have done on the basic state pension; the minimum income guarantee, which will rise again; the pension credit, which will reward savings; and the state second pension means that we can do far more than ever to ensure that we help all pensioners, but especially those facing poverty and those living on modest savings and modest incomes, who ought to be helped for their efforts rather than held back by the system that we inherited.

The measures before the House will be welcomed by a large number of people of working and of pension age as well as by families with children. They mark another stage in our reforms of the welfare state. We have been able to release funds by getting more people into work and by cutting fraud. We are able to spend more money where it is needed most. I commend the orders to the House.

7.41 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his crisp and short speech—I shall do my best to be almost as brief—and I assure him that we shall not divide the House. We shall not make the Liberal Democrats' famous mistake of trying to prevent the uprating of the basic pension, so, if there is to be any drama in the debate, it will not be a knife-edge vote initiated by us. Instead, we shall press the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues for information on various aspects of the social security system, as the debate presents an opportunity to achieve clarification.

First, let us consider some measures that the Secretary of State did not refer to. We have been waiting for the package to help new carers, which he announced on

3 October 2000 by saying that new carers over the age of 65 would be eligible for invalid care allowance and the carer's premium in income support. That seems to be slowly making its way through the Whitehall machine, so we are interested to hear from the Minister when new carers might receive those higher benefits, which the Government announced to a general welcome.

I should apologise to the Minister, because I may have to leave to catch the train to my constituency before the debate ends, but my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who will make the Opposition winding-up speech, is looking forward to hearing the answer to that question.

The Secretary of State also omitted any reference to housing benefit. I remember the days, only a couple of years ago, when it was to be the next big welfare reform target. On 29 June 1999, he said that

> "the present Housing Benefit can't continue . . . So whether it is tax credits wholly or partly . . . people who need help with housing costs will get help".

He was clearly expecting housing benefit reform to be part of the wider tax credit reform to which he referred, but it is clearly not to be. We and many outside the House are interested to know whether the Government intend to announce any housing benefit reform. Instead of that, we have had this evening's announcement on the hospital downrating rules in response to a campaign pressed by Age Concern in particular and by many Members on both sides of the House over the past few months.

We welcome the change, which is not a U-turn, but, perhaps, a J-turn that tackles a genuine concern for many pensioners. *[Interruption.]* A J-turn is shorter than a U-turn, because it runs to only 13 weeks. We have to be Kremlinologists with this Department, because the quality of its parliamentary answers is, sadly, so low that we cannot always get the information to which we are entitled. We have been following its answers on this subject with great care over the past few months. First, we had one from the previous Minister of State, now Lord Rooker, who said:

> "We have no plans at present to revise the rules regarding the payment of Retirement Pension to people who remain in NHS hospitals for longer than six weeks."—*[Official Report*, 22 March 2000; Vol. 346, c. 600W.]

That was the original position, but then we had the review, which involved an answer from the Minister for Pensions, who said:

> "The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, is looking at issues affecting hospital in-patients, including the rules governing the downrating of benefits."—*[Official Report*, 11 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 781W.]

Everybody followed the review with great interest.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Will the hon. Gentleman remind the House of his position on that policy when he was in government?

Mr. Willetts: Since 1948, the position has been that, in principle, people should not receive two separate benefits in respect of the same need. Conservative Members, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry, have drawn the House's attention to practical proposals for tackling that problem. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps I should explain to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg). A significant part of the problem has been not just the rules, but the way in which they are administered. The distress among pensioners has been greater because they were not confident that, if and when they left hospital, their benefits would be reinstated as promptly and efficiently as they ought to be.

The Minister for Pensions made another response:

> "The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, has looked at issues affecting hospital in-patients, including rules governing the downrating of benefits.
>
> This rule prevents double provision from public funds as the publicly funded NHS maintains people while they stay in hospital as well as providing free treatment. Social security maintenance benefits are also paid from state funds. They are therefore not paid in full indefinitely . . .
>
> The double provision principle is a key cornerstone of the system of national insurance introduced over 50 years ago."—*[Official Report*, 8 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 699W.]

The review seems to have been concluded with a decision against doing anything, which is why today's announcement is such a pleasant surprise. We welcome it, but may I ask the Minister how it compares with the regime for pensioners in care homes?

Bed blocking is a significant problem in the NHS, so I would be grateful for clarification of the rules as they now apply. My understanding is that a pensioner or, as we know from what the Secretary of State said, any person in hospital will receive for up to 13 weeks their full basic state pension and their full income support. How does that compare with the position of a pensioner in a care home, who will receive £16.80 a week pocket money, as it is called, but who will not receive the full basic pension or the full value of income support?

In the process of tackling a grievance, the Secretary of State may have created another and different one—a wider gap between the treatment of people in hospitals and people in care homes. One problem for Ministers is their care homes blind spot, which is apparent in their winter fuel payment proposals. They still say that every pensioner gets a winter fuel payment. That is not true. Pensioners on income support in care homes do not get winter fuel payments.

There is the same problem with the pension credit. The Secretary of State referred to it, but we know that local authorities will take account of pension credit income in setting the income of pensioners in care homes. They will not get the benefit of the pension credit, which will be absorbed in higher charges from local authorities with hard-pressed social services departments. The contrast between today's announcement on hospital downrating and the wider care homes regime is striking.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): The hon. Gentleman may have a point, but the Secretary of State's announcement on pensioners in hospital is very welcome, certainly on the Labour Benches. Why were the Conservative Government so adamant up to 1997 that under no circumstances should pensioners receive any assistance on winter heating, apart from the cold weather payments, which were limited to those on income support and had several disadvantages? The issue was raised time and again from the Opposition Benches, and not just by me. Why was there no shift? Of course, we know what happened the moment that Labour came to office.

Mr. Willetts: I know that the hon. Gentleman has pressed for such measures for a long time. In developing

[Mr. Willetts]

our philosophy, we learned much from the Christmas bonus, an attempt to achieve a similar result nearly 30 years ago. We thought it better for such payments to be part of the overall pension, rather than being special payments separate from the wider rules on indexation.

I do not wish to detain the House, but one striking feature of what we have heard today is the absence of an uprating of the winter fuel payment. I suspect that in 30 years it will be as the Christmas bonus is today. We will see whether I am wrong—but who knows whether either the hon. Gentleman or I will still be in the House then? It is one of those forecasts that can be made confidently by those who may not be around to see what happens. I think, however, that whether the winter fuel payment is an important and continuing part of pensioners' incomes or goes the way of the Christmas bonus is open to debate, and I remain sceptical.

David Winnick: Do I take it that, despite all the hon. Gentleman has said in comparing the winter fuel payment to the Christmas bonus, he now accepts the former?

Mr. Willetts: We believed all along that it would have b[illegible] far better to consolidate the winter fuel payment in the basic state pension.

David Winnick: Subject to tax.

Mr. Willetts: We are revisiting old arguments. The Conservative party said from the start that there would be no tax increase for pensioners as a result of consolidation. We now live in a world in which the winter fuel payment is widely received by pensioners, and, recognising that, we have no plans to take it from them.

I hoped that we would hear rather more from the Secretary of State about the decline of pensions. We did not hear a word about what is perhaps the most significant change that will affect benefits, benefit expenditure and the incomes of those who retire, although it is taking place dramatically day by day. Two measures in the uprating order show that we are heading in the wrong direction. The minimum income guarantee is rising in line with prices, which will extend means-testing, and the pension credit will take it further up the income scale.

At the same time, we have contracted out rebates that create a significant risk of companies' re-entering the second state pension, because the value of the rebates is unlikely to match the cost of the liabilities from which they are escaping. I shall not detain the House with all the arguments, but I was struck by information from William Mercer, a leading firm of actuaries, which said only recently that it did not believe the contracted-out rebates would be adequate.

Companies may well end their current contracting-out arrangements, and enter the state second pension instead. We shall also have more means-tested benefits. Those two developments will mean that we shall not move into a world in which—this being the Secretary of State's own aim—60 per cent. of pensioners' incomes come from genuinely funded savings and 40 per cent. come from the state. Conservative Members entirely support that aim, but we are heading in the opposite direction.

A stream of companies are now announcing that they are closing occupational pension funds to new members: Alliance and Leicester, AstraZeneca, Barclays, BT Group, British Airways, Boots, Cable and Wireless, Capita, GlaxoSmith-Kline, HSBC, ICI—I could go on. Many companies now say that their final salary schemes will not be available to people joining them.

I was disappointed not to hear from the Secretary of State any recognition of the significance of the change that is taking place around him. What it means is that many people will retire with pension incomes much below what they expect, and will depend on means-tested benefits. Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a problem, when so many companies are announcing closure of their occupational pension schemes to new members? Do the Government recognise that there is an issue, or are they going to bury their head in the sand? We have heard nothing from the Secretary of State about the subject today, or over the past weeks and months during which it has become a matter of public concern.

I know that there are many factors behind the change, which pre-date 1997. Not just one factor but the burden of regulation, the burden of taxation and the impact of FRS17 led to it. Clearly, however, the consequence of a combination of ever-heavier regulation, ever-heavier taxation and, now, the new accountancy rules is that those who retire cannot expect to enjoy the incomes for which they hoped. Instead, they will depend on means-tested benefits. The pension credit about which the Secretary of State boasted will embrace more and more people as a substitute for what Conservative Members want them to enjoy—a more valuable funded occupational pension.

Rather than providing more generous occupational pensions and less dependence on means-tested benefits, we are heading in the opposite direction. We have yet to hear anything from the Government that shows that they recognise the scale of the problem, or can produce any measures demonstrating their willingness to tackle it. I am sorry that the Secretary of State has not intervened; we hoped that we might at least hear some reflection from him on the significance of the change that is taking place.

We need to hear more about credits and tax credits, which the Secretary of State did mention. His speech will have been the last to cover some of the benefits that are being uprated, and I think it important for those in all parts of the House to understand how measures for parliamentary scrutiny and parliamentary debate will function in future. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, there has been a

"lamentable lack of public discussion and openness"

in regard to the Government's proposals for credits and tax credits. What will be the arrangements for scrutiny of the value of such credits in future? What will be the parliamentary procedures? My understanding is that, unfortunately, we will not have the procedures that we have for the uprating of benefits.

At present, social security benefits are uprated by Standing Orders that are subject to the affirmative procedure. That includes the working families tax credit. Now, the new tax credits in the Tax Credits Bill will be subject to the negative procedure, and debated only if they are prayed against. It looks as if there will be similar arrangements for pension credits. The level of parliamentary scrutiny of the value of those credits will be much lower than the level of parliamentary scrutiny of the value of the benefits they are replacing.

I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). He chairs a Select Committee that has already done useful work on pension credits, and we hope that it will be able to perform a role in the absence of full parliamentary scrutiny.

How will the credits be treated in the public accounts? We know from the Office for National Statistics that there will be a move towards the European and OECD conventions, but does the Secretary of State seriously claim—I am thinking here of the working families tax credit conventions—that, for example, child premium and income support, with which all Members have been familiar for a long time, will miraculously become a tax cut? Will it appear in Government expenditure figures? Will it disappear from expenditure figures, and appear on the other side of the balance sheet as a tax reduction? Is that what will happen to the benefits whose uprating we are discussing? It seems an extraordinary proposal, but if working families tax credit is anything to go by it is what the Government envisage. Miraculously, the Secretary of State will be able to claim that he has saved money on the social security budget and that the Government are cutting taxes. It will have been done entirely with smoke and mirrors.

What about the other features of the system? Will the benefits be available, have the circumstances changed, what constitutes a significant change in circumstances, will people who may be on modest incomes lose as a result of a change in their finances of which the Inland Revenue will not take account until the end of the year? Those are important questions that will affect people who currently receive the benefits we are discussing, but we have had no clear explanation from Ministers.

I hope that Labour Members will pursue the issues as strongly as we have, because it is important to consider what happens in future years to people on modest incomes who experience a change in circumstances with no matching adjustment of what was their benefit entitlement. That is what happens if one tries to make a benefit into a tax. It does not work. Many people, including some of the most vulnerable members of society, will lose as a result.

This may be the last uprating statement on some of the benefits, which are going to disappear into the Treasury and become tax reductions. I hope that the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who will take responsibility for these measures, will ensure that they at least apply the level of scrutiny and sensitivity to the needs of our constituents that has been displayed over the years by the social security system.

8 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) and wish him well if he is off to spend an evening in a council house. I hope that he will report back to the House on that.

The orders deal with the benefits for the coming financial year and the guaranteed minimum pension. With one or two exceptions, they involve indexation in line with inflation and some above-inflation increases in the retirement pension, which we welcome. However, the House will be aware that, alongside the order, the Government Actuary prepares a report on the state of the national insurance fund. I listened carefully to the Secretary of State; I do not recall him mentioning the fund once. The document makes interesting reading. It shows what money the Government had available when they sat down to decide what to do with benefits this coming year.

I was startled to read—perhaps I should have been aware of it beforehand—that when the Government Actuary sat down in November 2000 to forecast national insurance revenue for the current financial year, he estimated that it would total £55.5 billion. The outturn is more likely to be £57.9 billion, or £2.5 billion of extra revenue in a year. Therefore, we must set some of the Secretary of State's announcements in the context of a £2.5 billion overshoot of revenue to the national insurance fund.

The Government Actuary indicates that the balance of that fund in the year ending 2001 was 41 per cent. of benefit expenditure and payment; in 2002, it will be 47 per cent; and in 2003, it will be 52 per cent. Therefore, the balance in the national insurance fund is substantial and growing. Set against those huge sums and the fact that there is £2.5 billion more than was budgeted for, do we judge this as a generous or a mean settlement?

We must look at the welcome announcement of the relaxation of the hospital downrating rules. Perhaps I am not the only hon. Member who discovered that—as usual, not in the form of a statement from the Secretary of State but about four hours earlier through a press release that mysteriously appeared on my fax machine, which said:

> "McCartney acts to help those on benefits".

[Interruption.] The Secretary of State says from a sedentary position that we were sent it by the Department. We were not. We never are. We were sent it by a newspaper. That is the way in which we get information. He should check with his officials to find out why hon. Members find these things out from the press rather than in the House.

Mr. Darling: On that point, the announcement was made in another place properly by one of my ministerial colleagues.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful for that confirmation. I am rather confused as to why the Secretary of State does not feel able to ensure that Members of this House are notified at the same time.

Hospital downrating rules have been relaxed somewhat, so instead of pension being cut after spending six weeks in hospital, it is cut after 13 weeks in hospital. Clearly, that is a step in the right direction. The Secretary of State said that that would cost £40 million a year. The overall cost of the pension downrating is about £60 million a year. When we set that against the £2,500 million that the Government had not expected a year ago, we start to see how parsimonious the concession is. The Government could have paid for the abolition of the downrating of pensions over the next 40 years but they chose not to go the extra mile; they have moved barely an extra inch.

Although a few pensioners will welcome the announcement, when they read the small print they will discover that if they go into hospital this week they will still have their pension downrated after six weeks. Next month—indeed, this time next year—they will still have it downrated after six weeks.

According to the press release, the changes coincide with the introduction of the pension credit in autumn 2003, so although we have had the announcement today

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the Government will continue to take money off pensioners who have spent six weeks in hospital. We will hear the same announcement several times in the meantime, yet the measure will be implemented fully only in October 2003. I hope that the Minister who responds to the debate will tell the House why the change has been introduced in this way. It has nothing to do with the pension credit. It could have been brought in quickly. Could it not have been brought in sooner, sparing some pensioners the misery of having pension taken away from them?

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the possibility that, unless the transitional rules are very carefully scoped, a pensioner who falls within the six-week period before the operating date in April 2003 may have benefit withdrawn, but a pensioner who falls after that time may not? That could create a further anomaly.

Mr. Webb: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right. I understand that the changes come into force in October 2003 when the pension credit is introduced. The argument in principle is simply not there. People have paid for their pensions all their lives. If they have paid for a private pension they are allowed to keep it, but if they get a state pension some of it is taken away from them.

The Government say that there is double provision, but where is the evidence? What studies—I hope that the Minister will tell us when he responds—has the Department done of the costs that people incur as a hospital in-patient? The Department may say that they save money on food, but what about the extra costs that they incur? What about when a spouse comes to visit and pays for hospital car parking or for transport? What about the other costs, regardless of whether someone is in hospital? Has the Department any evidence that people are better off during a hospital stay? I suspect that it has no evidence whatever, and until it produces such evidence there should be no hospital downrating, not merely the half-hearted concession that we have heard about.

I mentioned that not all the rates in the orders have been uprated in line with inflation. I looked long and hard, and there it was on page 16 of the order: the age addition to the pension mysteriously remains at 25p. Year after year Ministers acknowledge that it is absurd and an insult to pay people 25p, yet they do nothing about it. Is not it clear that the poorest pensioners in the land are not merely the oldest but the oldest who fail to claim their minimum income guarantee? They do not get the MIG. They do get their pension. Twenty-five pence is all they get on top of their basic pension.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as several pensioners in my constituency have pointed out, the cost to them merely of updating their pension book will be more than that pathetic 25p?

Mr. Webb: It is absurd. The fact that the cost of a first-class stamp exceeds that amount highlights how absurd it is, yet it is a perfectly good mechanism for delivering guaranteed cash to poor pensioners. In fact, it is the only genuine guarantee. When I take over from the Secretary of State, I shall rename it the guaranteed age addition. It is the only feature of the system that is truly guaranteed. *[Interruption.]* I should have added hastily that I shall be deputy to my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood).

The Government Actuary's report on the orders highlights another worrying factor that the Secretary of State again glossed over. It refers to the lack of information before the House about some key elements of the pension and benefit system because of national insurance recording system 2. Page 10 of the report says:

> "The introduction of NIRS2 has meant that there is a lack of data showing current numbers contracted out . . . there is, at present, uncertainty about the numbers of people contracting-out."

Therefore, the House does not have information, despite the fact that we are always assured that the computer system is sorted, there is nothing to worry about, and it is so good that the same people will be given the contract. Years after the system was introduced we still cannot obtain the basic information that we require to assess what the Government are doing.

Likewise, the information is uncertain about statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay. Page 27 of the report states:

> "Estimates of both SSP and SMP have suffered greatly from a lack of reliable data since the transfer . . . to the NIRS2 computer system. It has been some years since the data on SSP and SMP has been free of problems and there may be substantial revisions to estimates . . . once sufficient reliable data on amounts of SSP and SMP recovered . . . is available."

When will we know? Perhaps the Minister can tell us. When will this be sorted out? When will the House have reliable information from that multi-million pound computer system? When will it work properly? That is what the House wants to know. Will the Minister tell us?

All the benefits in the orders are fine if people receive them. However, far too many of our constituents fail to get the benefits that they are being promised today. The Secretary of State has had his advertising campaigns, and Thora Hird, and people ringing up—but how many people, especially pensioners, are still not getting the money that they are entitled to? That number is still nearly half a million for the minimum income guarantee—*[Interruption.]* Does the Secretary of State question that number? I do not know why he is shaking his head.

Nearly half a million people are not getting their minimum income guarantee, and probably double that number are not claiming their council tax benefit. Year on year, successive Governments have used council tax to bring in extra cash through a mechanism of taxation for which they do not get the blame, so that has become an increasingly heavy burden for pensioners in all parts of the country. The fact that council tax benefit misses so many pensioners is an increasing source of concern.

What plans do the Government have to get the council tax benefit to pensioners? It has one of the lowest take-up rates of any benefit, yet it can be critical for pensioners just beyond the reach of the other means-tested benefits. What is the Government's strategy?

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) *rose—*

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North) *rose—*

Mr. Webb: I shall give way first to the hon. Gentleman, and then to the hon. Lady.

Vernon Coaker: Has the hon. Gentleman considered whether part of the problem with the take-up of benefits may be that—for perfectly understandable political reasons—both he as a Liberal Democrat spokesman and the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who speaks for the Conservatives, always use the term "means-tested" in a derogatory way? Does he not think that that might sometimes influence pensioners, for whom, rightly, means-testing has certain connotations? Does he not think that if he talked instead about "targeting" benefits, that might encourage people to take up those benefits?

Mr. Webb: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making, but I have some doubts about whether even my oratorical powers could affect benefit take-up rates. The key point is that resistance to means-tested benefits does not come from me. Actually, I am moderately comfortable with filling in long complicated forms—it is the sort of thing I do in my spare time—but that is probably not the sort of thing that many older folk want to do. They regard such questions as intrusive.

I freely accept that means-testing every five years is better than means-testing every week. Clearly, that change has the potential to be a step in the right direction. However, the principle that we all want for our old age is to know what our income will be, rather than depending on the whim of a Minister. We want to know with certainty, and that is possible only with a definite firm foundation from the state, reliable indexation rules and a good second pension on top to get us clear of means-testing altogether. We do not want to have to rely every year on documents such as those before us now, which nobody really understands, yet which can have a dramatic effect on people's living standards.

Vernon Coaker: If the hon. Gentleman were Secretary of State for Social Security, would his Liberal Democrat Government do no targeting at all?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman has heard me speak before on such subjects, so he probably knows that we do not regard targeting as synonymous with means-testing—*[Interruption.]* There are perfectly good reasons for that, as I shall explain.

There is a strong relationship between poverty and old age, especially advanced old age. Our ideas may not be perfect, but neither is targeting through means-testing, because of all the people who miss out, and the disincentive effect on savings. We are talking about not a choice between a perfect system and an imperfect system, but a choice between two imperfect systems.

We say that if we target primarily by age, while keeping a safety net for the recently retired poor, we cover most of the poor, including many of those who do not get their means-tested benefits—that is, half a million on one count alone. We would get through to those people with a guaranteed take-up, no administrative cost, and no disincentive to save—indeed, quite the contrary, because people's savings build on their guaranteed state pension. That seems to us a better trade off than mass means-testing—

Miss Begg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: I shall, but first I shall finish the point that I was making—and then I must give way to the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), because I have already said that I would.

To give an idea of the scale of the failure that the Government are building into the proposals, I must remind the House that Baroness Hollis said that one in three of the people entitled to the proposed pension credit would not claim it in the first year. She said that take-up would build up as people became familiar with the credit, and I hope that she is right—but that still means that one in three of the 5.5 million pensioners will miss out on what they are entitled to. That is planning for failure, and it is no way to guarantee pensioners a decent standard of living in old age.

Ms Buck: Will the hon. Gentleman cost the proposal to provide an income at the level of the minimum income guarantee for all pensioner households, which is effectively the corollary of what he suggests when he says that the entitlement should be available to everybody?

Mr. Webb: The gap between the pension proposed in the regulations before us—£75.50—and the MIG figure, which is more than £90, is not very different from the pension rises that we proposed in our costed manifesto, which contained a £3 billion package of increases in pensions financed by the proceeds of the 50p rate of income tax on incomes over £100,000 a year. We asked the Treasury what money would be raised by such a rate of income tax, and were told that it would be well in excess of £3 billion. Our political choice would be that those most able to do so should pay for pension rises, which would go predominantly to older pensioners. That would enable us to fill the gap between the basic pension and the means-tested pension.

We do not propose that the pension rate would be the same for every pensioner at every age. We are saying that we want to get as many pensioners as we can clear of the MIG level, starting with the oldest pensioners. That is our strategy.

Mr. Darling: How does the hon. Gentleman square that with the fact that his party leader recently said that he hoped to go into the next election as a low-tax party?

Mr. Webb: As the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, that is not what my party leader said—[Hon. Members: "Oh!"] He may be aware that we have set up a review commission, of which I am a member, to consider the future of the public services, with a broad remit to examine both the role of the public and private sectors, and funding levels. That remit is wide, and there is an open debate going on within the party. The options of higher spending, lower spending, and a greater role for the public or the private sector, are all on the table at the start; otherwise, why bother with the review? However, our policy stance is that we are clearly committed to higher pensions across the board, particularly for older pensioners. That remains our position.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is not in a position to make a promise that his party would increase pensions, either for pensioners as a whole or for some pensioners, at the same time as saying that all those promises are up for grabs. Even the Liberals cannot get away with going into the next election saying that they will increase spending here, there and everywhere, yet also cut taxes for everybody else. That does not make any sense; it has no credibility.

Mr. Webb: The right hon. Gentleman seems to have forgotten the fact that we have in front of us a document

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written by the Government Actuary showing that the Government have just found £2.5 billion—probably a recurrent £2.5 billion—in addition to what they expected. That would cover the vast bulk of what I am saying that we would do, even if nothing else, with no additional 50p tax rate. The suggestion that we could not do more for older pensioners is absurd.

Miss Begg: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that the national insurance fund funds not only pensions but unemployment benefits and a range of other contributory benefits. At the moment unemployment is very low; more people are working, so more people are paying into the fund. However, although I hope that that will remain the case, it may not. In five years' time the position might be reversed. Is the hon. Gentleman really saying that we should spend all that money today and have nothing to spare in the piggy bank for tomorrow? I do not think that that would do great things for pensioners tomorrow, when the fund will have been spent.

Mr. Webb: If we were suggesting blowing the entire national insurance fund I should agree with the hon. Lady—*[Interruption.]* No, I did not suggest that. The £2.5 billion that I am talking about is excess revenue—the amount above which the Government budgeted, presumably on the sober, cautious basis to which the hon. Lady referred. As I pointed out earlier, at the year ending March 2001 the national insurance fund was already 40 per cent. of the annual benefit expenditure. Next year, that figure is set to rise to 52 per cent. How high are we going to let that amount rise? The proportion of benefit expenditure is constantly increasing. It would be irresponsible to blow the lot, but at some point we might say that national insurance revenues are going well and they should be spent on pensioners.

Mr. Willetts: I was struck by the fact that the Secretary of State, who does not feel able to intervene on the subject of the current state of occupational pensions, intervened twice on the subject of Liberal Democrat tax plans. It is a pity that he devoted more effort to intervening on that subject than on the most important social change currently taking place.

I do not agree with the figures given by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) but I support his philosophy. As he knows, we have in common the view that there is a difference between means-testing and targeting. Does he agree that when he pointed out that difference it was disappointing that so many Labour Members laughed as though they thought that. was manifest rubbish? In fact, the crucial insight of Beveridge—the most important single insight in the Beveridge report, about which at least one Minister sitting on the Treasury Bench has written eloquently—is precisely that under a smart social security policy we can target without means-testing, if we identify categories of claimant carefully enough. That is a powerful point and it is a pity that the Government do not recognise it.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those comments. He is right. I should acknowledge his parentage of that idea—I do not always manage to do so. As an impressionable early twenty-something, I studied one of his pamphlets for a little bedtime reading. It was called "The Age of Entitlement", and seemed like a good idea at the time, although the Conservatives never adopted it with any gusto, but I welcome the hon. Gentleman's reconversion. Perhaps that will give us the basis for consensus on both sides of the House. One of the things that has bedevilled pensions policy is the constant to-ing and fro-ing and the ripping up of previous promises. If we can find a basis for agreement—I know that some Labour Members are sympathetic on that point—it would be a step in the right direction.

I have been greatly heartened by the careful attention accorded to Liberal Democrat proposals as an alternative to those of the Government. The serious scrutiny that they have been given reflects our position as a Government in waiting, so I very much welcome that attention. We assure the House that we shall not oppose the regulations, but we feel that the measure on hospital downrating is a grudging concession made to deal with what was going to be a rebellion in this place. The Government had the money to go further; they should have had the grace to go further.

8.21 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I have a few comments on the uprating statement and want to draw attention to a few points. When we consider the amount of spending proposed under the orders, it is extraordinary that the Chamber is not packed. Furthermore, these are social security orders, so whatever the rights and wrongs of the proposed measures, when we consider the thousands and thousands of people in each of our constituencies who are affected by the scale, uprating and receipt of benefits, the debate is hugely important.

Something must be happening to me because this is the third debate on this subject that I have attended and I actually enjoy them. The reason is that although there are differences between the Opposition and the Government and indeed between the Opposition parties, we none the less hold careful, intelligent debates—as we have just heard—on the fundamental issues that affect us.

Although I do not agree with everything that was said by the hon. Members for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and for Havant (Mr. Willetts), there are aspects with which I agree and which challenge us all. If we were all to be honest, I suspect that Opposition Members would say that some of the Government's views challenge them to reconsider their position. I make these points because we need to remember how fundamental this subject is and that our debate is important.

I want to make a couple of points about the minimum income guarantee for pensioners. Whatever the furore about the rate of the basic state pension—which, as we have heard, is to be uprated again in April—I know that the minimum income guarantee has meant that about 2,000 pensioners in my constituency have received a considerable addition to their income.

When we talk to people about the minimum income guarantee and pensions, for obvious reasons they do not put up their hands and say "I get the minimum income guarantee and what the Government have done means a significant increase in my income". In each and every one of our constituencies, a considerable number of pensioners will have benefited from the introduction of the minimum income guarantee. The hon. Member for Northavon was right to draw attention to the problem with take-up. However, if we can ensure that people take it up when they meet the rules—the capital savings rules have been relaxed—a single person will receive £98.15 and a couple will receive £149.70 from next April, which is a considerable improvement on the income that they would have had before the minimum income guarantee existed.

We can debate the difference between means-testing and targeting, but the word "means-testing" has a particular connotation for the pensioner age group. In a few years, when people who are now in their 50s and 60s become pensioners, it may not have the same connotation. However, the continual discussion in the House about means-testing being bad does not help to encourage people to claim means-tested benefits. It merely reinforces people's feeling that those on means-tested benefits have something wrong with them, are not the sort of people to whom others will look up, and have failed. Although the hon. Member for Northavon mocks his own oratorical skills, I was not saying that he was speaking passionately about the evils of means-testing all over the country. However, he consistently points out that means-testing is wrong, which, I believe, impacts on the number of people who claim the minimum income guarantee.

Through the minimum income guarantee, the Government have targeted support on thousands of the poorest pensioners in our constituencies. We can debate the basic state pension and take-up, but the Government deserve a great deal of credit for not taking the easy option of putting a few pounds on the basic state pension for everyone. Instead, the minimum income guarantee has added a considerable amount by targeting help on the poorest pensioners in the community, many of whom are older pensioners who do not have an occupational pension, or are older women. Far from being critical of the Government for doing that, we should credit them with a great deal of courage for saying that their policy will be to try to ensure that money goes to the poorest pensioners in our community. Through targeting, we can ensure that those pensioners receive a considerable amount of money. Of course, the problem of take-up remains, and hon. Members will need to continue to raise that issue.

The pension credit, to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred, was designed to tackle one of the real problems of the minimum income guarantee—a small amount of savings, a small income or a modest occupational pension might take people just above the level at which they could receive the minimum income guarantee. That caused a considerable feeling of injustice and unfairness. The hon. Member for Havant mentioned the genuine concern about occupational and private pensions. In discussing reform, a judgment must be made on pensions and social security uprating. The Government have said that their policy is to target resources on the poorest pensioners through the minimum income guarantee—Opposition Members will say that that is flawed—and that the next group that they shall try to help is those pensioners who feel left out because of the minimum income guarantee rules, on whom they will target resources through the pension credit.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Gentleman is making a careful and sensible speech, and I agree with much of it. Given that hon. Members on both sides of the House share some of the same objectives, our argument centres on the delivery system. At what point will the hon. Gentleman accept that we are not delivering the benefit to the poorest pensioners? At what point will he accept that an alternative delivery system might achieve the same objective more effectively and efficiently so that we reach the pensioners whom we want to support?

Vernon Coaker: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I do not think that we have reached that stage. In general, the policy has been effective for a considerable number of pensioners in our constituencies. It is clear that there is a problem with take-up, but that does not mean that the policy has failed. The problem is the way in which we talk about means-testing—to be frank, it is sometimes used for political reasons as an easy way to attack the Government—and how it is perceived. That does not help the take-up of the minimum income guarantee. The targeting of resources to ensure that the poorest members of our community are supported does not have the same stigma attached to it and commands much greater support.

Ms Buck: I share the concerns of hon. Members about take-up and we need to address that problem. However, there is evidence—anecdotal in my experience—that a substantial number of the people who could claim for income-based benefits are eligible for only small amounts. The case remains to be proven that a large number, let alone all, of the people who are missing out on the minimum income guarantee or the working families tax credit would be entitled to a substantial amount or all of the sum that would make up the difference. We have to weigh that up. Many people are on the margins of a claim that would not necessarily give them a large amount of additional income.

Vernon Coaker: My hon. Friend's intervention needs no comment from me: she proves the standard of the debate by making an important and fair point that is probably true. However, it is difficult to ascertain how many people do not take up the minimum income guarantee for that reason.

I am pleased that the Government have announced a change to the rule on the downrating of benefits when people are in hospital. Many hon. Members have been contacted by people who think that it is unfair that their benefits are reduced when they are in hospital for longer than six weeks. I am pleased that the Government have increased that to 13 weeks. A constituent who was in Nottingham City hospital recently contacted me about that. I am sure that all hon. Members have similar constituency examples.

We often talk about the minimum income guarantee in terms of pensioners and the take-up of benefit, but the attendance allowance is one of the most important benefits for pensioners. In my experience, not everyone is fully cognisant of the fact that it is possible to claim attendance allowance to cover care needs. The higher rate for that will be £56.25 from next week and it enables people to get help so that they are looked after in their own homes. I cannot stress how crucial that allowance is for pensioners.

Mr. Flight: I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman, but is he aware of one of the resulting problems? People who may be old and not that mentally clear go into nursing homes, the costs of which have risen dramatically particularly in the southern half of the country, without

[Mr. Flight]

realising that they will lose their attendance allowance. I have had many constituency cases of people who thought that they had done their arithmetic, settled in a nursing home and then found that they could not afford the care. Relatives had to be dug out to try to help. Therefore, such a worthy benefit illustrates one of the problems of means-testing.

Vernon Coaker: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point about attendance allowance and nursing homes. As I said, points about various benefits can always be made, and that argument has been put to me and no doubt to many hon. Members. We often talk about the fact that many pensioners and others who are entitled to the minimum income guarantee do not claim it. Indeed, I have tabled a question on the matter for Monday's Question Time. My point is that a substantial number of elderly people who live in their own home do not claim the non-means-tested attendance allowance available—or claim the allowance at the lower rate when they are entitled to the higher rate. That benefit is hugely important and should be mentioned when discussing benefits and supports available.

I broadly welcome the social security uprating order, and I am to a certain extent pleased with the way in which the Government are trying to integrate the tax and benefits systems and with the work that has been done on tax credits. I say that because one important thing that a Department for Work and Pensions should do is to try to address a problem that we all recognise: the need for the social security system to avoid creating a culture of dependency. It should create a culture that not only, of course, supports people when they are out of work or in need, but encourages people back into work, because that is the best form of welfare.

One of the most depressing things which I am sure we all experience when we visit some houses, estates, streets and parts of our cities—as well as, indeed, some rural areas; the problem is not just in cities—is seeing generations of people who have become dependent on benefit. Entire families have become dependent on benefit and have been workless for a considerable time. Indeed, whole communities have been workless.

The Government are trying more effectively to integrate the tax and benefits systems, so that work truly pays. One problem with the benefits system is that when people return to work and gain pay, they lose benefits, which means that it is not worth their going to work—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The debate is about increases in social security benefits and pensions rather than the wider points that the hon. Member is making.

Vernon Coaker: Thank you for bringing me back to the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In the context of wider Government policy, I support the orders.

8.39 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I am disappointed by the uprating order. First, it illustrates, as my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said, that the Government have given up tackling the more difficult areas such as housing benefit. Secondly, although no doubt with the best will in the world the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) would rather means-tested benefits were called something else, the reality is that the hassle of filling out forms means that individuals perceive them as means-tested benefits. There is a major difference between targeting and means-testing. The order shows the Government going further in reshaping the welfare state into one that is means-tested. The children's tax credit and working tax credit yet to come increase that likelihood.

In addition, it is clear, as the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said, that the Government view national insurance merely as an alternative tax source. The Government should be more honest—if they want to take welfare in that direction, people should be aware of it. Many elderly people still believe that national insurance is national insurance. That is the system under which they paid, and their children are now doing the same to pay for broadly universal entitlements to benefits in their later years.

I want to focus particularly on pensions, the pensions credit and the minimum income guarantee. This is a serious mess—if Ministers had set out to smash private pensions, they could not have done it better. It is worrying that on several occasions when the Secretary of State has had the opportunity to express his concerns or thoughts about the major rundown in occupational pensions and final salary schemes, he has apparently not done so, although admittedly we await the findings of the Pickering report. Candidly, the alleged target of provision for pensions coming from private pensions savings—increasing from 40 per cent. to 60 per cent.—is becoming a farce.

There are many good things in the stakeholder arrangement. However, the minimum income guarantee and pension guarantee mean that for more than half the people for whom stakeholders were intended, there is no point in saving for one. As has been demonstrated in Canada, people do not want to be forced to sink their precious pension savings in an annuity where the real returns are nearly halved.

Many people have not realised that the shift from final salary to money purchase pension savings—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman of my earlier comment. We are debating the increases in social security benefits and pensions.

Mr. Flight: I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, the point that I am coming on to is that the Government's response to what is happening in private sector pension provisioning is shown in the increases to the minimum income guarantee made in the order. That takes us, as a nation, in the opposite direction from the one that I think right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House want to go in.

The Government looked to stakeholder pensions to boost private sector pension saving, but that is not happening. Instead, we are seeing a very generous increase in the minimum income guarantee. It is well intended because it is designed to deal with the problem now. However, what worries me is that it leads to behaviour that is simply not sustainable. On the assumption that the minimum income guarantee continues as it is, the reaction of the public to perceiving that they will have a very adequate income in retirement is, if anything, not to bother with private sector pension saving, or to do less of it.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) has said that, by 2005, the costs of such an approach would be the equivalent of something like 5p on income tax, rising to about 11p by 2050. It would cost about £26 billion in today's money. Some 65 per cent. of the population would be dependent on a means-tested pension. Surely that is the exact opposite of the Government's intended pensions policy. I am particularly worried that, economically, it will take us into the very territory that has proved so problematic for continental Europe. Employment taxes are high, growth is relatively disappointing and overall taxation is higher than continental Europe would wish because pensions have to be financed on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Is the hon. Gentleman's basic thesis that it is wrong to give the poor more because it encourages them to be poor?

Mr. Flight: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should make such a crass observation. My point is essentially the same as that made by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead. The policy that addresses the immediate issue of providing an adequate income in old age for those with inadequate private sector pension provision is shaping the future. It will affect behaviour and take us down a relatively unsustainable path. There are other ways to address the issue.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is going rather wide of the scope of this debate.

Mr. Flight: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was endeavouring to deal with the intervention from the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies).

Some Conservatives have welcomed the minimum income guarantee and pension credit increases as a well intentioned attempt to address a current problem. However, targeting would be much more appropriate than means-testing, and we should consider treating older pensioners as a block, which would be better than giving them the ridiculous 25p increase that many of them regarded as a joke. I fear that, unknowingly and with good intent, the Government are presiding over what will become a major problem in the area of pensions. They are adopting an approach that, economically and in terms of the effect on private sector pension saving in particular, is the very opposite of their alleged policy, which we all want: healthy and rising private sector pension saving.

8.48 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I wish to look at some of the order's consequences for couples, families and the care of children in particular, and to consider the philosophy and structure that underpins the uprated benefits.

I welcome the increases in individual benefits, but I want to draw the House's attention to the overall collective impact of such benefits, particularly on couples and children. I ask the House to focus on the reason why a quarter of dependent children in the UK live in households headed by a single adult. The European Union average is 14 per cent., and even in northern European nations such as the Netherlands and Luxembourg, the figure is only 10 per cent. One main reason for that difference is the structure of our tax and benefits system.

Britain bases tax on an individual assessment, with no allowance for the number of dependants whom one income must sustain. The benefits system that we are looking at is based on joint assessment, which carries penalties for marriage or stable cohabitation. Remaining in an undeclared or informal partnership means that each partner is assessed separately for benefits. I shall come on to a couple of examples in a moment, but generally it is the case that openly cohabiting couples have a reduction in their welfare entitlements of about £70 a week. Although the Government, and, indeed, all parties talk about supporting family life and stable relationships, they must realise the penalties in the current system of which the benefits are part.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should relate his remarks to the order, which is about increases.

Andrew Selous: I shall do so, Madam Deputy Speaker. If I may, I would like to come to two examples relating to the benefits.

Madam Deputy Speaker: If the examples are germane to this debate, that would be appropriate.

Andrew Selous: With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall deal with those examples relating to the benefits, increases to which we are discussing tonight.

A lone mother living with a one-year-old child in local authority housing and not in paid work would currently qualify for child benefit, housing benefit, council tax benefit and income support of £157.80. The father of her child who is living on his own in a local authority flat and not in paid work would qualify separately for benefits of £103.97, which means that the two of them have a combined weekly income, before paying rent and council tax, of £261.77. If the couple married or established a stable cohabitation, their income under the current system would fall by £70.47, and they would have a joint income of only £191.30, which is a considerable disincentive.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman has done his research, looked at the figures and thought this through. However, if those two people were living together, the second rent would not have to be paid at all, so the difference in their disposable income is not £70, but probably £20 or £30. A couple with any commitment is not going to live apart for £30, although it is fair to say that they may try not to disclose the fact that they are living together. Surely, the only alternative is for the rates we are discussing today to be not 160 per cent. for a couple but 200 per cent. That would be a huge increase in expenditure which I do not suppose the hon. Gentleman's Front Benchers would allow him.

Andrew Selous: I accept that the hon. Gentleman made a relevant point about the costs of second property. However, in the figures I looked at, £70 a week is significantly more than the cost of renting an additional

[Andrew Selous]

property. We have a problem with the fact that the household's taxation is based on an individual, but assessment of the benefits whose uprating we are discussing tonight is based on the whole household. I am trying to illustrate the fact that that fundamental mismatch is the nub of the problem. My thesis is that that is the core reason why a quarter of children in this country—

Mr. Webb *indicated dissent.*

Andrew Selous: The hon. Gentleman may shake his head, but he needs to explain why 25 per cent. of children in this country live in households headed by a single adult; the European average is 14 per cent, and in the Netherlands and Luxembourg it is only 10 per cent.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I once again remind the hon. Gentleman that the scope of this debate is quite narrow; it is about the increase in the levels of benefit, not eligibility criteria?

Andrew Selous: I willingly accept your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was merely responding to the intervention of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb).

The policies that I have been talking about and the perverse incentives that are their result are responsible for tying up unnecessarily a large amount of our housing stock. There is the cost to the Government in terms of council tax and housing benefit. I am aware in my constituency, as are other Members who represent other constituencies, of extreme pressure on housing. The motions that we are considering are in part responsible for tying up housing stock.

8.56 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): As the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) said, in the only Back-Bench contribution made by a Labour Member, this has been an enjoyable debate. It has also been an interesting debate, if one that has not as yet extended itself as far as it might.

The debate was introduced by the Secretary of State in a terse, though not perhaps peremptory, manner. He had some good news to bring to the House about increases in benefit, which are always welcome where they are obtainable, although they were somewhat rubbished by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), who made a characteristically interesting speech. I did not agree with much of the detail, but I did agree with some of the broad sweep.

We have had some heavyweight contributions from those on the Opposition Benches. The first was from my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who has apologised for having to leave the Chamber early to fulfil another engagement. He made a powerful speech of analysis of what was wrong with benefits and the present structure.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) prevented me from speaking even more discursively than I might have been minded to. Indeed, he even lifted one of the quotations that I was about to share with the House. I shall not repeat it.

With characteristic concerns, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) referred to some of the moral hazards within the present system, while not perhaps having yet reached a completely watertight solution that would resolve the situation.

All this suggests that there is much life in what most of us have learned to call social security, which we must now learn to call work and pensions. This is a worthwhile and important debate. The Government have lessons to learn; indeed, they have been taught some sharp lessons in the past, and they would be well advised to keep their ears and eyes open to the changing tides of opinion.

I am conscious that there is a fine line to draw. You have already rightly reminded the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we are discussing uprating motions that are about mathematical adjustments to benefits that have not broadly been changed in scope on this occasion. They may have been altered in their sweep and their effect by substantial changes in one or two instances, but the structure remains largely unchanged.

It is very much within the sweep of Government policies that there should be a parallel consideration of the current state of the private sector in terms of the provision of retirement incomes. I shall have occasion to refer to the Government's objective to rebalance the financing of people's income in retirement between state provision and private sector provision. All of us on both sides of the House agree that those should operate like two blades of the scissors. We will not immediately remove one blade; we may just put one blade on top, instead of underneath.

There are genuine concerns, which is hardly surprising. The right spirit, especially when the Government have a reasonable amount of time to respond to the debate, is that they should take seriously the points that are being made and answer them.

The House would not expect me to be over-solicitous of the interests of Ministers. It must be extraordinarily distasteful for any Work and Pensions Minister to have to read the recent press, particularly the weekend press, with the cornflakes.

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Porridge.

Mr. Boswell: Indeed. The right hon. Gentleman rightly reproves me. There is nothing wrong with porridge. It no doubt accounts for his achievements today in the hospital downrating issue, to which I shall return.

At the beginning of our constituency week of absence, under the rather terse headline "Pensions crisis deepens", *The Sunday Telegraph* reported:

> "Stakeholders have bombed, annuity rates are tumbling and companies are ditching final salary schemes".

More pointedly, in an article to which my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs referred, in *The Times* last Saturday, under the heading, "Poor get poorer as Whitehall meddles with retirement", Graham Searjeant posed the simple question:

> "How did it all go wrong?"

Tonight's debate is about the uprating of the state side of retirement income through the benefit system. The relevance of the general torrent of concern that has built up in the past few weeks is that it exposes the huge difficulties that Ministers face in their avowed—and perfectly sensible—objective of rebalancing the mix, which is currently 60 per cent. state-provided and 40 per cent. private-provided, so that the percentages are broadly reversed.

I have no quarrel with that objective of the Government's, but along with the authorities whom I have already mentioned, there is the palpable fact that companies are bailing out of defined benefits schemes and replacing them with defined contributions, with generally less generous employer contributions to pensions. That means that any realistic prospect of achieving that objective is fast receding. The reliance on state benefits may well increase, not diminish, in future.

I toss in two other points. The first is that a major culprit in all this was that disastrous decision in Government's very first Budget in 1997 to remove payable tax credits from dividends, at a cost of some £5 billion a year to pension schemes alone. I happened to be serving on our Treasury team at the time and alongside my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), we fought hard in Committee to explain the dangers, though perhaps not many were listening at the time. They are now. The Government were then prepared to rejoice in what they felt was an entirely painless stealth tax. Now they are living to regret it.

My second point, to which we shall properly return in another context shortly, when the State Pension Credit Bill reaches the House, is that the Government's vaunted pension credit legislation will make matters worse, by both increasing complexity and providing direct disincentives to long-term saving.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is an unusual absentee from tonight's debate, was quoted in the article in *The Sunday Telegraph* to which I referred as saying that

> "it would be madness for anyone in Labour's target stakeholder group to even think of buying one."

He was reported as saying:

> "There's no way they can save enough to provide a better pension than they'd get from the minimum income guarantee."

Very well then—what of the state pension itself? Of course, the current situation is a bit better for Ministers than their somewhat scarring experience with regard to the April 2000 uprating of 75p. There is a school of thought that goes under the simple caption "Never again 75p." One assumes that that experience will not recur. As a matter of fact, the Secretary of State said that it was the right thing to do and that he did not argue for more. However, he is arguing for more tonight, so we will not blame him for that. The change in retirement benefits comes alongside a number of changes that I personally welcome, including those affecting disabled people, not least in relation to independent living funds, for example.

This year—let us make no bones about it—the basic pension will increase by £3 for single pensioners and by £4.80 for couples. Effectively, the Government have committed themselves to a 2.5 per cent. minimum increase in future years, regardless of the rate of inflation. At the same time, however, the risk remains that the minimum income guarantee, which is tied to earnings, certainly for the remainder of this Parliament, may outstrip even the ratcheted-up basic pension increase. I notice that the Institute for Fiscal Studies has suggested that by 2038, the MIG could be worth twice the value of the basic pension. To put it another way, the value of the MIG at that time would be equivalent to an implied pension pot that would, if converted into an annuity, approach a six-figure sum. People would have to save at least that sum to get more than they would have done from the minimum income guarantee.

The first result is more means-testing, however it is described. I accept that there is a difference between careful targeting and means-testing. The issue has to be handled with very great sensitivity and, dare I say it, a degree of scepticism. The second consequence is a downgrading of the value of the basic pension, so that it becomes a mere supplement to other sorts of income, including those generated by the minimum income guarantee. We must also consider poor take-up—perhaps only two thirds of the MIG target group. The Secretary of State referred to a figure of 2 million, but I understand that some previous official take-up figures have suggested a level of 1.7 million. If he has improved take-up, that is welcome. It has also been suggested that, as pension credits develop, about two thirds of all pensioners could be sucked into what is a means test by any standards. A final concern, which was raised by the hon. Member for Northavon, is that all these arrangements still give very little acknowledgement to the growing number of elderly patients, with their distinctive needs and characteristically high poverty.

It is interesting to contrast what is happening now with the long-term figures, which suggest that one third of all benefits are means-tested—I refer not only to pensions—compared with only 8.5 per cent. of total benefit spending at the initiation of the modern scheme under the Attlee Government. Today, one modestly encouraging concession has been given: extension of the qualifying period for hospital downrating to 13 weeks. However, I have never seen a concession so rushed out, having been so unexplained, by any Department at any time.

The Minister for Pensions will have some time for his reply. Perhaps he can clarify the figures that the Secretary of State gave earlier and confirm the maths. There is a confusion between pensioners and other beneficiaries, but can he tell us the number of people who will benefit and at what cost in terms of the £60 million that is currently raised through hospital downrating? How many will remain in the scheme and at what cost to them? When we prepared our case on hospital downrating, I did some figure work. The total disallowance could be £2,000 a head. That means a sharp descent when benefit is withdrawn.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Havant said, restoring benefit remains a genuine administrative problem, to which Ministers need to pay more attention. For example, they should consider what are technically called the outliers in distributing the restored benefit. It is all very well saying that the average time taken to restore benefit is three or four days, but reapplying for benefit is not the first matter that a pensioner leaving hospital considers. Uneven distribution may mean that some pensioners lose out for an inordinate length of time.

Although the Government's concession is welcome, they should explore further with representative organisations whether flaws, especially administrative flaws, remain in the system. Now that they have taken the heart out of the system in terms of cost, they should consider how much benefit and revenue they continue to get from it.

[Mr. Boswell]

Our emphasis tonight has been on the pension increase above inflation, but we should not overlook some of the wider implications. Everyone knows the financial strains of the current system: they will not go away. They were well set out in the context not only of this country but of the world in a recent survey in *The Economist*. If all hon. Members studied the table that shows the change in distribution of pensioner numbers in Japan between 1950 and today, they would understand why Secretaries of State will always have a problem of containment.

Of course the Government want to relieve some of the burden of dependency. I doubt whether they will admit to wanting to adopt the method of increasing the retirement age, or, to put it more positively, removing some of the disincentives to continuing to work. We may have further comments to make about ageism and age discrimination. Employers' simple acceptance of continuing to employ fit and able employees will be an important social change. It matches the wider objective of encouraging people to stay on at work while they feel able to do that and thus enhance their pension. They may need to do that.

Some unfairness and potential policy hazard is buried in uprating. Although the basic pension is increasing by more than 4 per cent., the extra components such as the additional pension and the graduated pension allowance continue to increase by 1.7 per cent. If the Government are prepared to be generous on the one hand, the imbalance will increase and convey the worst possible signal to those who contemplate staying on at work.

No one has commented on the new pension service that will come into play in only a few weeks and provide the benefits. Ministers may choose to reflect and, indeed, comment on the fact that, now that we have had the press release and the characteristic flood of adjectives about the new service—it is "modern", it is "high quality", et cetera; that is all I get in written answers on the subject—they now have to provide the service for pensioners.

I am a keen reader—and, dare I say it, a modest advocate—of the Department for Work and Pensions newsletter for advisers, intermediaries and other professionals. I am not sure whether I qualify as one of those, but I do my best. The newsletter is known as *Touchbase*, and we can all get it if we ask for it. The edition that has just reached me is the winter 2001–02 edition, so it is a bit late, rather like the winter fuel payments—but we will leave that aside. An article in the newsletter makes it clear that 26 new centres are to be provided for the pension service. These centres are only just getting under way, and claims will not, in the rather charming phrase of the article, even begin to "migrate from local offices" to the pioneering centre in Burnley until mid-April.

By 2005, however, everything will be all right, because the article concludes that all sites should be operating the optimum best-practice model, and that the policy of the Government is clearly one of continuous improvement. Of course, that will be the case only if one happens to be a pensioner who can send an e-mail or succeed in getting through to the centre by phone.

More seriously, perhaps, there are genuine concerns among the retirement associations and those representing older people about the division of departmental responsibilities implicit in the division between the pension service and Jobcentre Plus. Pensioners have an interest not only in pensions. For example, they may well have dependents, and some might still be in receipt of child benefit. Others might be at work, or might need to access disability services.

Vernon Coaker: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that a pension service dedicated to pensioners is more likely to attract them to contact it when they need to than is the current arrangement? Is this not a good change that is taking place?

Mr. Boswell: I hope that I can agree with the hon. Gentleman, but Ministers must handle this matter with more attention than we have publicly been aware of, or at least allow us to have a debate about the issues. If this service works seamlessly as a one-stop shop, and if people in the service are capable of answering questions on child benefit, for example, or of getting a prompt answer delivered to a pensioner, that will be fine. If it does not work properly, however, and pensioners are shuffled from, say, Burnley to Bootle, it will be very bad news.

Implicit in this debate has been a concern on both sides of the House about take-up, and the way in which the system works in practice. It will be great if it works, but it is quite clear to all of us that it does not work as it is intended to. It may even be clear to some of us that if it did work as it was supposed to, take-up would increase to a level that might give rise to concern for the Chancellor in relation to some of the benefits being paid. However, that is perhaps an argument for another day.

More attention should be paid to the delivery of the pension service than it has hitherto received. Let me be positive, however, and say that I am pleased that Ministers propose to involve the voluntary sector in the delivery of services, but that must be genuinely bureaucracy-free and comprehensive. That is my response to the point made by the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker).

The Minister has ample time to reply and I shall be friendly to him, as I hope I always am, by reminding him that the late Iain Macleod—a great fellow Scot, though a Conservative, whom I admired immensely—always advised young politicians against shooting Santa Claus even when Santa Claus was one legged. I do not suggest that Ministers have been tremendously generous, but they have made advances and a further concession has been wrung out of them today.

Although there are matters that can be welcomed—we shall not divide the House on the orders—it is clear from the tone of the debate that there are serious questions to be answered by Ministers. Frankly, the climate for pensions generally and for the income of pensioners, whatever its level and whatever their status and way of life, is deteriorating. If Ministers remain in denial and do not address that, we could all end up losers.

9.21 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): I thank hon. Members for what has been, for the most part, a useful and interesting debate—it says here. Before proceeding, I must tell Opposition Members and my colleagues that I shall answer the points made tonight, so I give the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) a word of caution. I do not intend to go over the ground covered in our previous two pensions debates in the past few weeks.

I do not say that as a criticism, but much of the hon. Gentleman's contribution and of his hon. Friends' speeches was about general pension issues, which I am more than happy to debate on Second Reading and in Committee when we discuss the State Pension Credit Bill and when we examine over the coming months a range of issues, such as the simplification review, the Sandler review and the rest of it.

Mr. Boswell: I feel particularly generous tonight and I am also conscious of the rather tight nature of the orders and the debate that flows from them. I am content for the Minister to reserve his responses on the wider matters for other and perhaps more appropriate occasions, but will he at least undertake to consider seriously the points made by a number of colleagues about the current situation, which genuinely concerns us? Ministers must not resort to denial.

Mr. McCartney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks and reassure him that my colleagues and I always take the comments of hon. Members seriously, even when they do not deserve the seriousness that we attach to them. A number of specific points have been raised and I shall try to answer them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) raised issues about attendance allowance, and I am happy to meet him to discuss them. His point was about take-up, which relates to the pension service, and I shall write to colleagues about the next stage of its development. I remind the hon. Member for Daventry that at each stage we have written either directly to the Members of Parliament for the constituencies concerned or to Members generally.

I have no problem with maintaining a close working relationship with colleagues during the delivery of the pension service in a rolling programme over the next few years. I want Members on both sides of the House and their staff to be involved proactively so that we are as one on that. This Government are not a secret society, believe it or not, and we want to engage with colleagues in respect of development and delivery of the service.

The orders confirm our conviction that it is essential to provide effective support for those who cannot work or are retired, while promoting the principle of work for those who can. We are continuing to put right the wrongs of the past. Over the 18 years before we came to power, millions were discarded to a life of poverty. Listening to the hon. Member for Daventry, I would never have thought that the Conservatives were in government for 35 of the past 50 years. In government, we have done something about hospital downrating, we have done something about means-testing and we have done something about pensioner poverty—to cut it rather than to create it. That is an aside. I shall not get partisan. *[Laughter.]* I shall try my best not to be too partisan.

There are some key figures. The estimated cost of the uprating for 2002-03 is £2.985 billion: £2.06 billion for the elderly, £480 million for the sick and people with disabilities, £330 million for families, £65 million for the unemployed, and £50 million for widows and others with special needs. We are taking action to cut the costs of economic and social failure with a combination of sound economic management and policies to increase employment. We are investing in public services to tackle issues such as health inequalities and poor housing, and to get extra help to priority groups.

We were not prepared to allow generation after generation to suffer the indignity of poverty, be it relative, absolute or persistent. We have addressed the legacy of pensioner poverty head-on, introducing the minimum income guarantee so that poorest pensioners will be at least £15 a week better off. Rough and ready the guarantee may have been, but we were the first Government ever to challenge pensioner poverty. From a standing start, 1.7 million pensioner households and 2 million individual pensioners are now receiving the minimum income guarantee. We are the first Government to intervene in the cycle of pensioner poverty—a cycle for which I refuse to apologise. The Conservative party created it; the Liberal Democrats talk about it; at least this Government are doing something about it.

We have made significant progress towards reaching our long-term objective of ending child poverty within a generation, and halving it within 10 years. We have introduced a range of tax and benefit reforms to give help at the time when families need it most. We have made record increases in child benefit, extended the mobility component of disability living allowance to three and four-year-olds, and delivered wide-ranging reforms to ensure that work pays and to make work possible. Measures such as the national minimum wage and working families tax credit have helped to ensure that people are better off in work.

The history pages will make clear the Tories' legacy. They failed to provide help for those who needed help most; it is now up to us to do so.

We know that it is particularly hard for families on low incomes to bring up children with disabilities, so we are again providing substantial extra help for disabled children. The order gives an additional £5, on top of normal uprating, for the poorest families, bringing the disabled child premium to £35.50 a week. There has been an increase of more than £15 a week since 1996. That will benefit about 80,000 children.

To help remove the barriers to work from people with severe disabilities and to make sure that work pays for them, their earnings or their partners' earnings will no longer be taken into account for independent living fund assessments. The hon. Member for Daventry acknowledged that. The change will be worth an average of £130 a week to those families. We will also extend help to people with savings of up to £18,500 by increasing capital limits in relation to the fund. That is in addition to the increase in the independent living fund from £109.6 million in 1996–97 to £131.3 million in 2000–01.

We are doing more than ever to help families balance their work and home lives. That was raised by the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), although I think he took a somewhat different line. We actually believe in helping families. It does not matter to us whether they are single-parent families, or whether a parent is absent; children are the most important aspect. They are our future, and every child in the country counts.

The standard rate of maternity allowance and statutory maternity pay will rise from £62.20 to £75 a week. That will benefit about 340,000 families a year, and is the largest weekly increase in the benefit since February 1958. The sure start maternity grant will rise from £300 to £500, giving a further substantial increase to mothers on low incomes. The new deal and other measures have already helped 100,000 single parents into employment and out of poverty.

[Mr. McCartney]

We are again giving significant help to the elderly. We are committed to the demise of pensioner poverty. We will, as promised, increase the minimum income guarantee in line with earnings, to £98.15 for a single person and £149.80 for a couple. That shows our continuing commitment to ensuring that our pensioners benefit directly from the growing prosperity of this country. As a direct result of the minimum income guarantee, a single person will be at least £15 per week better off and a pensioner couple £23 per week better off than in 1997. In conjunction with winter fuel payments and free television licences, that will make a single pensioner at least £18 per week better off, while a pensioner couple will have gained more than £27 per week.

We shall debate pension credit soon. That is another significant measure in the modernisation of the welfare state, giving positive support to more than 5 million pensioners.

Between now and the introduction of the credit, we will continue to ensure that those on low and modest incomes can share in the growing prosperity. The transitional arrangements introduced in last year's order and continued in this year's order allow for that. As promised, the basic state pension will be increased by £3 to £75.50 a week in April 2002 for single pensioners and by £4.80 to £120.70 for couples.

The state second pension that is being introduced this April will, as it builds, give more help to those on lower earnings or with broken work records such as carers and people with disabilities. That will mean additional help to 18 million people who are left out of the current system because of the modernisation of the pension system through the introduction of the state second pension.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced earlier, we have reviewed the rules governing the reduction in benefit when one of our clients goes into hospital. Put simply, we will no longer downrate benefit, whether it be for pensioners or other customers, after the recipient has been in hospital for six weeks. In effect we have doubled the six-week rule so that benefit will continue to be paid in full for 13 weeks. As most hospital stays, including those of pensioners, are shorter than 13 weeks, most people will not see a reduction in their weekly income. An estimated 26,000 people will benefit at a cost of around £40 million. Approximately 20,000 of those beneficiaries will be pensioners.

One would have thought from the churlish response of Opposition Members, whether Liberal Democrat or Conservative, that they had debated the matter, done something about it, or even spoken about it. The truth is that they said nothing and did nothing until a public statement only a few months ago by organisations representing older people.

However, we had already made it clear in the public domain that we were reviewing the matter. We have not responded to older people's organisations. Their contribution to the debate came after I had made it clear that we were going to look at the matter with the Department of Health. We have done that. We have been honest and loyal to that pledge. Having done it, we have come forward with proposals.

The hon. Member for Daventry asked what other beneficiaries were affected. This has been a comprehensive statement by the Government. It has related not just to the retirement pension but to bereavement allowance, widow parents' allowance, widow mothers' allowance, widow's pension, age-related widow's pension, incapacity benefit, severe disablement benefit, unemployment supplement, industrial death benefit, income support, the minimum income guarantee, pension credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit. I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be less churlish.

Mr. Boswell: We will not debate the tone of our response, but the Minister of State has given information that was not in his press release. I ask him to go back to the organisations representing older people and look with them long and hard at whether he can to some extent either ease the requirements or improve the performance of the Department in ensuring that benefit is restored quickly where it is withdrawn. That is the major outstanding concern. It would help everyone if he gave an assurance that he will at least look at that.

Mr. McCartney: We have a common approach in our Department. We work with all the stakeholders regularly. That work is about not just policy but how we can manage the service better. If the hon. Gentleman wants an assurance, that is exactly what we are doing. We are involving stakeholders in the design of the pension service locally. There is potential for them to be involved in our outreach work in the community with older people. It is part of the Government's strategy of engaging with older people: not just providing services passively but being proactive and involved where pensioners are based—in their local community—working with pensioner organisations and stakeholders. It has been an ongoing policy of the Government since we won the general election in 1997.

We have created the better government for older people project and a Cabinet sub-Committee on older people. We are the first Government ever to have a strategy for people over 50, working across Government to introduce better services, to develop policy and initiatives. This Government are alive to the needs of pensioners—unlike the previous Government, who ignored them.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) asked about long-term care and hospital downrating. Those in long-term care are generally left with a personal expenses allowance after paying their care home fees. That is intended to strike a fair balance between financial help and state providers, and avoid double provision.

In addition, a great deal of work has been done in connection with residential care in nursing homes. The abolition of preserved rights gives registered protection for local authorities' contractual arrangements for the first time. The phasing out of residential and part III accommodation rates will provide a fairer system of funding for long-term care. At the moment, about half of all preserved rights customers do not have enough public support to cover their fees. Many have to pay some of their personal allowance towards the fees. The new arrangements will mean that those customers no longer have to do that.

Some questions were asked about the uprating of disability and carers benefits in connection with invalid care allowance. The regulatory reform order currently before the deregulation Committees of the House of Lords and the House of Commons will provide for the removal of the upper age limit for claims for invalid care allowance, and the introduction of a caring entitlement condition for people over 65. We have said that, with parliamentary approval, we want to introduce that by autumn 2002.

The hon. Gentleman also asked what had happened to housing benefit reform. The strategy for housing benefit was set out in response to the consultation on the housing Green Paper in December 2000. First, we are working with local authorities to drive up standards of service, tackle fraud and error and reduce barriers to work. Secondly, we have begun rent restructuring in the social rented sector. We believe that it is essential to level those two stages before considering more fundamental structural reform.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) asked about improving the take-up of housing benefits. Local authorities have been given a legal duty to encourage take-up of housing benefit and council tax benefit. Much of that is achieved in day-to-day business rather than through special campaigns—but we are not complacent, and we support local campaigns when they take place.

We do a lot of campaigning about entitlements—but when we do, the Opposition usually complain that we are spending money. What is wrong with giving people an entitlement and then telling them about it? When we do that the Opposition complain, but when they come to a debate here, they complain that we are not doing enough of it. What do they want? Do they want us to let people know or not? My colleagues and I are prepared to work with the stakeholders to produce effective innovative approaches to campaigning on take-up, and we continue to do that on a regular basis—and when we do, the Opposition spokesman complains.

I think that on pensions strategy we agree that there must be partnership, but I must make one point about the scaremongering that we have heard: 66 per cent. of large employers still have some form of pension provision. We have introduced the simplification review, the Myners review, the minimum funding requirement and the Sandler review. We are the first Government in history to take seriously the need to carry out a fundamental review of ways to help the providers of pensions to continue to provide them on a basis of partnership.

I think that we will come back to this debate when the Sandler review is in the public domain. There is also the simplification review, and the implementation of the minimum funding requirement arrangements following the Myners report, to which we are already committed.

Let us be clear: the Government support and are alert to the need to increase the pool of employees who have a vehicle for their pension, whether that be a stakeholder pension, a defined benefit, a defined contribution or some other form. It is important to work with employers to continue that provision.

It is interesting to note that contributions to non-state pensions are at their highest ever—£19 billion up in real terms since the 1997 election. We are not complacent, but we are the first Government ever to participate effectively with the industry on an ongoing basis to find ways of improving and maintaining pension funds and access to pensions. For those who did not have access, we have created the stakeholder pension to give them access for the first time. Six hundred thousand people who this time last year had no access to a pension fund now have access because of the stakeholder system—and that will continue to grow. More than 80 per cent. of the targeted employers who last year had no vehicle to create a pension fund for their employees now have one.

That is progress. This is the first Government in a generation to make progress and benefit large numbers of people who were abandoned by the Conservatives with no hope of a pension—and the Liberals had no view about that at all.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): On defined benefit pensions and final salary pensions, some companies are saying that times are hard and that they are going to get rid of the schemes—as a constituent who visited my surgery on Friday has been told—so will the Minister point out to those companies that when times were good they took a contributions holiday? The Government will have to work with such companies to honour the moral contract. At present, employers are saying, "I wasn't around then so I don't have to pay the consequences".

Mr. McCartney: Another Liberal Democrat campaign tactic! We have held Adjournment debates on those issues recently and the hon. Gentleman's party did not participate. If the hon. Gentleman had serious points to make, he should have listened to his hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) who spoke earlier and whose pensions policy was economic illiteracy. The Liberals' pensions policy is economic illiteracy. The problem for the Liberals is that the hon. Member for Northavon cannot agree with the leader of his party on their policy for the next election. He came to plead for support from the House because he cannot get it from the leader of the Liberal Democrat party.

I ask my hon. Friends to support both orders. I commend the orders to the House. We are the first Government in more than a generation with a strategy to end poverty among children, a strategy to tackle and end poverty among older people and a strategy to make work pay. At last, we have a Government who are on the side of all the citizens of this country—not like the last Government, who abandoned them.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 6th February, be approved.

PENSIONS

Resolved,

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 6th February, be approved.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

EQUAL TREATMENT DIRECTIVE

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 14492/01, the Opinion of the European Commission on the European Parliament's amendments to the Council's common position regarding the draft Directive amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions; and supports the Government's aim of maintaining the Council's common position which updates the Equal Treatment Directive in line with case law and developments in European law.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on 5th March, paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) shall apply to proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Elfyn Llwyd and Mr. Alex Salmond as if that day were one of the Opposition Days allotted under paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business).—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Agriculture (West Dorset)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

9.42 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am grateful to the Minister for Rural Affairs for spending time late in the evening listening, yet again—as has been the custom once a year—to the condition of agriculture in West Dorset. I wish that I could say that there would be a shorter list of problems than in previous years and that I could signal an end to this series of debates, but that is not so.

I am sure that these facts will be entirely familiar to the Minister. Farm profitability in West Dorset remains—without hyperbole—abysmal. Smaller farmers continue to leave in droves. As the older farmers leave their family farms their children do not take over. More worryingly, even in our mid-sized farms—of between 200 and 500 acres—where considerable value-added is going on, trading is at close to break even.

Production looks set to reduce further. As the Minister knows well, beef self-sufficiency in the United Kingdom has fallen generally by about 25 percentage points. That is reflected in what is going on in West Dorset beef farming. My pig farmers remain hugely concerned that they are at the tail end of an international price war and that Danish and Dutch pigs will see them out.

Underneath all that lies a severe set of price pressures—again, the Minister is well aware of them. The price of milk heading downwards—from about 19.5p a litre to about 18p—puts most of my dairy producers at severe risk of unprofitability next year. Pigs are now at 89p a kilo and the price may be headed down. Cereal prices are tumbling out of bed.

Some of that is entirely beyond the Minister's control: the temporary high level of the pound versus the euro—a frequent lament during recent years. Some of it is also certainly due to the demoralisation that attended foot and mouth disease. My farmers join the rest of the farmers in the UK in hoping that there will be—as there certainly should have been—a public inquiry.

A great part of the problem remains structural. It is structurally impossible for my livestock producers to manage to be profitable in circumstances in which there is a huge differential in animal welfare standards and in the costs imposed by those standards between them and their competitors on the mainland. There is also a huge and similar difference in environmental regulations that affect cereal production.

That is the lament. Although I suppose that I would have sought this debate to make that lament alone, I could have spared the Minister a few more minutes and ended there, were there only that bad news. So far, the picture has been similar to last year, and the year before that and the year before that. However, there is a further reason for requesting this debate tonight.

As any Member representing a rural area will have done in the past months, I have met a range of farmers, including, most recently, the National Farmers Union representatives in my area.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): That is no surprise.

Mr. Letwin: Indeed, it is no surprise.

The good news is that the prominent farmers in my area see a ray of hope and believe that the Curry commission report points the way to a future for them. I want to draw out the critical elements of a way forward in the light of Curry, which might prevent me, many other Members and the Minister from having to have such debates on many occasions in the coming years. More importantly, the recipe, if adopted, might prevent the destruction of farming as we know it in West Dorset and similar areas.

The first point that I want to draw out from Curry is an observation that almost merits the term "profound". He has given us a different picture of the way in which we ought to regard agriculture in the UK. Until now, romantics have seen UK agriculture as a nostalgic and delightful business, and have argued the case for subsidising it without regard to profitability, whereas those who have thought of themselves as realists have seen agriculture as much the same as any other competitive industry. By and large, as an economic realist about a wide range of industries, I would say, as the agricultural realists have been prone to say, that it does not matter too much whether Britain produces one kind of widget or not, or whether some widgets are imported and others produced locally.

What we want, by and large, across industries, is an efficient, well-functioning economy that is open and competitive—one in which competitive advantage dictates whether we produce a given good or service or somebody else does. The realists have argued that the same applies to British agriculture. If British pig farmers, dairy farmers or other kinds of British farmer cannot compete with an outsider on the same rules of open markets obtaining in the UK, so be it—let our agriculture disappear. That struggle between the romantics and realists has pervaded the scene over many years.

Curry offers us a way out of the morass of unproductive debate between an unsustainable nostalgia and a crypto-economic realism that is also unsustainable because there is no prospect of continued farming in the UK on the basis of sheer open markets with no subsidies and no national defence mechanisms. Curry offers us the possibility that we might regard farming in the UK, particularly in a place such as West Dorset, as a national environmental asset that can be sustained only if we treat it in a certain way and make it profitable on a long-term basis. Curry makes us consider the sustainability of farming in a place such as West Dorset as part of a UK-wide approach to a regulated industry, parallel in many respects to the utility industries.

The best way to conceptualise that is to imagine the dreadful moment when the whole nation is turned into a park that is cared for by paid park keepers who are the minions of the Minister. In that scenario, Sir Humphrey presents the Minister with the wonderful prospect of diminishing the costs of keeping the park by allowing the keepers to keep animals and grow things. If we see farming on a regulated basis, as a United Kingdom-protected industry that is sustained as a single national enterprise over and against competitors on the continent and elsewhere, there is a hope of putting the fragmented pieces together into a coherent strategy that makes sense only because farming is the cheapest and most sensible way to preserve the rural character and the environmental advantages of our countryside.

What elements does Curry identify that need to be put in place and that my farmers have alighted on to construct such a coherent national strategy? First, there needs to be a serious approach to research and development and to model farms—the New Zealand approach. New Zealand understands that it is a small country battling against the odds of the deficiencies of being far removed from most of its markets. The economy is in every other respect open.

In the case of agriculture, New Zealand has expended huge efforts on enabling its farmers to learn from models and research and development, and to benefit from national direction and strategy, so that ordinary farmers can see how to go about their business in a way that is coherent with what is going on elsewhere in the country.

The second element, which is allied to the first, is the need to develop the home market for home produce by producing high-value-added local niche products—to put it parochially, Dorset cheeses and Dorset hams in Dorset. Other counties would have their own products.

The third element, which is perhaps more important than the other two, is a changed attitude to regulation. The comparison and contrast with the utility industries is constructive in this regard. Almost every utility regulation Bill has imposed a duty on the regulator to consider the interests of consumers and producers. He has to balance one against the other and to consider the return on assets that is achieved by the regulated entity. If a new regulation—be it environmental, health and safety or whatever—is imposed on the regulated utility, it becomes the duty of the economic regulator to assess the cost of that extraneous regulation on the industry that he is regulating and to allow it to recoup the cost as a return in its charging structure.

No such system is in effect for British farming. I am not making a partisan attack; that has been true under Labour and Conservative Administrations alike for many years. If well intentioned Members introduce Bills and persuade Governments to impose a new regulation on my farmers in West Dorset, there is no corresponding allowance for that in any feature of the subsidy regime, the crypto-price control regimes or the tax regime. The farmers bear the double cost—the direct cost and the competitive cost.

Economic impact assessments are febrile documents, as the Minister and I know. My farmers estimate that the figures in the impact assessment for the recent imposition of nitrate vulnerable zones are wrong by a factor of broadly four. That is typical. It has been the case over the years in many domains outside agriculture that the economic impact assessments presented to the House are the ludicrous fictions of optimistic officials who are guided by intense Ministers. Again, that is not a partisan remark. I regret to say that it has been true under regime after regime.

If our regulatory arrangements for farming were so designed that the Treasury had to buy increases in exogenous regulation of our farmers by paying specific subsidies to the value of that regulation, the battle royal between the Treasury and DEFRA or other Ministers taking up an environmentalist or animal welfare standard on behalf of members of the ruling party's parliamentary party would be huge. The Treasury would then demand to understand whether the regulation in question was worth buying and the farmer would be recompensed. The likelihood is that, on both competitive and direct-subsidy grounds, a plethora of animal welfare and environmental

[Mr. Letwin]

regulation that is not matched by parallel regulation in our competing markets and unmatched by subsidy would no longer be imposed on our farmers.

Fourthly, there must be a serious attitude on the part of the nation as a whole to animal health. At the moment, we have no serious, single national body responsible for policing animal health standards at our ports. The evidence from everyone who has ever visited a UK port or airport in pursuit of the agency or agencies that are controlling the import of dangerous substances is that there is no such single agency and that there are indeed no such agencies effectively policing those frontiers. I have wandered fruitlessly around both ports and airports attempting to find the agencies seriously involved.

I do not say that efforts are not being made—they are—but by comparison with the scale of the problem, as recent reports have made clear, they are pathetically inadequate. The problem will not be solved until there is a single agency of government, rather than one of the seven or eight currently partially responsible, that becomes alone responsible for policing the frontiers.

While we are at it, we need an agency specifically charged with the remit of producing contingency plans for disasters that occur as a result, as there always will be, of imperfections in border controls, even where those have been improved. The fact of the matter, as the Minister will very well be aware, is that whereas the Ministry of Defence has typically had contingency plans for hundreds of kinds of events that are unlikely ever to occur, MAFF and its successor DEFRA have traditionally—I fear that it is still so—had no contingency plans for many events that are almost certain to occur. We saw that most recently with foot and mouth, and we shall see it again in other spheres. Indeed, we shall see it until we have a single agency, whether the Food Standards Agency or another, charged with the business of contingency planning.

Finally, if we are to see a changed attitude and to offer a prospect of sustainability, we must, as the Curry report clearly indicates, have a serious attitude to replacement of old farmers by young. There must be a serious effort to replace manpower. At the moment, there is no strategy for that, but until there is, we cannot expect a sustainable industry.

Those five themes are small but crucial. My farmers see this as a decisive moment—not in the sense that it is noticeably worse than in years past. They have been so bad that this year is no worse. Rather, my farmers see this as a decisive moment in the sense that there is now a ray of hope in the shape of the Curry report. There is a way forward for the industry which has not previously been part of the political currency. It is up to the Government whether they will grasp that challenge or evade it.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Mr. Letwin: Only a minute more, Mr. Speaker.

If the response of the Minister's Department at this juncture is to evade the challenge by doing what the rumour mill has it the Secretary of State has in mind and inaugurating that wonderful Sir Humphreyesque device of a report on the report, my farmers will go into a state of despondency akin to despair. This is the moment at which the new Department needs to show that it is a new Department—that it has a new attitude, that it is willing to take the challenge of the Curry report and willing to offer my farmers, for the first time in many years, a realistic prospect of a sustainable future which will be to the huge advantage of our environment and our society.

10.1 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I thank the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) for managing to surprise us. He said that this was his annual debate, so that was not the surprise. He said that he had not come simply to lament, and that was true, given the nature of his contribution. He did not just repeat himself; in general, he gave what I can only describe as an endorsement of the Government's approach.

In his initial remarks, the hon. Gentleman was right to say that we could hardly be totally positive about farming, given the horrendous time that farmers and the non-farming members of rural communities have experienced over the past 12 months. I am glad that he acknowledged that not all is within the power of the Government to change, and certainly not an individual Minister. He then gave a dutiful nod in the direction of a public inquiry. Without the Government's decision to have three specific inquiries—one dealing with the lessons to be learned, one dealing with the science in a searching way, using some of our most senior scientists, and one that establishes the commission on farming and food to look at the way forward for the industry—the hon. Gentleman could not have been as positive as he was in responding to the outcomes of the Curry commission's report.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of meeting farmers who are still positive, despite their horrendous experience and the reasons they have to feel damaged and depressed—the months of foot and mouth disease and the difficulties faced by the industry. I have had the same experience in recent weeks. When I met farmers at a conference organised by the Bishop of Hereford, I expected a negative response. Instead, they were exchanging views on how to make themselves more competitive and how to bring more of the end-shelf price back to the farm and into the local community. In many ways their arguments were the same as those of us who argued for fair trade on the international scene. They want the opportunity to get a fair return; they are not looking for feather bedding.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there are some rays of hope. That is not to be over-optimistic, because we face a challenging period over the coming months and years in moving to a sustainable farming and food industry for the long term. The hon. Gentleman is right that the Curry commission report points to the way forward. I assure him that the Government's response to the report will be thoughtful, as it should be. It will engage the stakeholders—the farmers and others—in designing the response, as it should do. It will also be practical and positive about the future.

I liked the hon. Gentleman's description of romantics and realists, although I think that it should be romantics and pessimists, because the realists are now winning. Those who want a bright future for the farming and food industries, enormously important though they are, recognise that it must be achieved in the context of the world as it is, rather than as it was or as we wish it to be. That involves the ability to be competitive and imaginative, to provide quality and to market goods produced through a quality process.

There are good examples of such initiatives in the hon. Gentleman's area. The local action group and partnership for rural economic development, "Dorset chalk and cheese", is aiming to add value to local products and to develop local employment opportunities. It is bringing together diverse stakeholders such as the Prince's Trust, the National Farmers Union and Weymouth college. In many ways, the west country as a whole has shown the way by branding the region through the "taste of the west" initiative, while retaining the personalities of individual local products, be they from Dorset, Cornwall or Devon. I am impressed by that approach.

The hon. Gentleman considered different ways in which we might deal with the countryside, but let us be absolutely clear: we do not want to turn the countryside into a museum. The whole point of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is sustainable development. Sustainability means getting matters right environmentally, economically, and socially in the local communities. In our view, those three objectives—environmental, economic and social—are not alternatives. They are not options to be chosen from, but targets to be pursued in harmony with each other.

That process needs the engagement of the whole community—the farming community and, indeed, the urban community. We should aspire to a better understanding between the urban and rural communities, and the hon. Gentleman certainly did not speak as if there are worlds between them. I hope that he agrees that we should remind both that they need each other, or that we need each other, depending on how one wants to put it. We should therefore see the positives in the countryside.

The hon. Gentleman may be aware of our response to the recommendation of the rural taskforce, which was established at the height of the foot and mouth disease, and which I have had the honour to chair since the general election. The taskforce recommended taking action to attract people back to the countryside, but we recognised fairly quickly that people were indeed returning. In many cases, the tourism industry—which includes many farmers who have diversified—is experiencing stronger advance bookings than for a number of years.

However, it was necessary to remind people of the benefits that the countryside provides. I am proud of the way in which the "Your Countryside, You're Welcome" campaign has developed. It is not a top-down Government publicity campaign but a Government-backed initiative—involving some 50 organisations such as the NFU and the Country Landowners Association—to remind people of the countryside's attractions. In doing so, it offers a positive image for farming and countryside communities, rather than simply being critical or looking on the downside. In many ways, that reflects the ray of realism but optimism that the hon. Gentleman has brought to the debate.

The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the example of New Zealand and a move away from dependence on subsidy. It is a different country with different pressures, but our need to move from production-related subsidy to an effective and competitive farming industry is at the heart of the Curry commission's recommendations. The report conveys realism and the fact that there are many environmental benefits, which are not financially productive as they do not pay the farmer for his work. It is right that those public benefits should be paid for by the public purse. There are increasing moves towards reform, both in the common agricultural policy and the England rural development programme. The Curry commission's proposals mapped out the more distant future, and we should respond to that.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the problem of imports, which of course is divided into two; large imports—we need to make sure that regulations on them are properly observed—and small quantities that are brought into the country for personal consumption. Both kinds of import involve problems. We recognise the strength of concern about illegal imports and action is being taken. A high-level imports forum has been convened for next month to discuss what action, in addition to that which has already been taken, can be taken to detect and prevent illegal imports. However, the United Kingdom can never reduce the risk of importing disease to zero, so we must be prepared to deal with any outbreaks.

The hon. Gentleman was a little unfair to suggest that there were no contingency plans, because there were. The lessons learned from the foot and mouth outbreak of the 1960s led to plans being drawn up and visited from time to time. However, no one anticipated the speed and virulence of the foot and mouth outbreak that we experienced last year. One positive was that it led many people and organisations to look afresh at the way we do things. Supermarkets, for instance, have looked at the way in which they procure their foodstuffs, which is extremely positive.

The hon. Gentleman rightly referred to the problem of low farm incomes and pointed to the way forward. We need to help farmers, as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is doing, to reach a position in which their farm business is viable. For some people, that means organic conversion and being able to compete in a market with a large of proportion of imports; there is a market to be won back for British producers.

Some people may have to get involved in a niche market, producing and marketing things so that more comes back to the primary producer; other people may have to look at the expansion of farmers markets, which we are strongly encouraging. Farmers markets come in many shapes and sizes, and I have seen a number of them around the country in recent months. There is a good example in Bristol; in the heart of the city, foodstuffs from the surrounding area are being marketed to people, who benefit from high-quality foodstuffs being brought into the city in an attractive way. There is also a benefit for the hinterland of the city. Sometimes an individual opens a shop, developing something on behalf of the wider community of farmers and their families.

There are therefore a number of approaches to the problem; it is not just a question of farmers diversifying and everybody having one or two bed and breakfast rooms. Each business must find the right solution and choose the right options, given the support available through the England rural development programme, the rural enterprise scheme and other available options. We must encourage and help farmers to take those options. Recently, we have had a positive announcement from my noble Friend Lord Whitty, who has ministerial

[Alun Michael]

responsibility for farming, about increased optimism among farmers, who are restocking and going back to business now that they can see an end to foot and mouth.

I have responded mainly to the tenor of the hon. Gentleman's speech, which was about looking forward, not backwards. It would be wrong not to acknowledge the fact that farmers have experienced a devastating period.

There was the impact of foot and mouth disease, even in areas such as the one that the hon. Gentleman represents where there were few immediate cases, although the disease was not too far away. The farming community as a whole has been enormously damaged. In many instances, as we have seen through the excellent work of the rural stress network, individuals were traumatised by their experience. It is greatly to the credit of farming communities that they are responding positively to the recommendations that we have seen in the Curry commission's report. They are responding often not with over-optimism, but with a gritty determination to succeed in the business that they have chosen, and to meet the challenges of the future.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on making his points in a positive way. I am certain that that is the best way to represent the interests of the farming community. We should take forward the ideas that have been outlined in the policy commission's report. We should consider issues of efficiency and recommendations such as the establishment of a food chain centre to improve efficiency. For instance, we should consider ways of developing the red meat sector. We should examine demonstration farms so that lessons can be learned and carried forward in a more positive way.

The hon. Gentleman referred to adding value, and I agree with him. It is not a matter of competing only for the market that is there, but developing markets for local and regional foods and engaging, for example, the regional development agencies, which have responded extremely positively to the challenge of helping rural communities and the rural economy cope with the results of foot and mouth disease. It is difficult to believe that we would have been able to respond so quickly and effectively without the work of the RDAs.

We must examine diversification. That includes non-food crops, an integrated approach to businesses and the support of farmers through business advice that is effective and co-ordinated. We are considering how the inward rural development programme can be simplified and made easier to access. That is not without its problems, but we intend to do all that we can in that direction.

Finally, there is the road, which the commission stressed, of supporting reform of the common agricultural policy. I know that the hon. Gentleman has taken an interest in the shifting of priorities away from the first pillar subsidy to the second pillar, and that is something that we shall pursue actively through the CAP's mid-term review.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on initiating the debate and on discussing some of the issues that are for the future and how we implement the Curry commission's findings. These are issues on which the Government will report before long. We shall respond positively. I hope that from both sides of the Chamber we shall receive encouragement to help the farming community to develop, stand on its own feet and be successful for the future. That is the best way to have a thriving and living countryside that all can enjoy, and a successful farming industry. That is in the interests of everyone in this country, whether they live in rural or urban communities.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 26 February 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 5 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

NHS Dentistry (Yeovil)

1. **Mr. David Laws** (Yeovil): What plans he has to improve access to NHS dentistry in the Yeovil constituency. [34700]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The Government are committed to improving access to NHS dentistry and are working closely with the profession to ensure that that happens. We have allocated £57 million to be spent on dental access centres and other personal dental services pilots over the current financial year. We will have 49 pilots running dental access centres from over 100 sites by the end of this financial year. Over £1.4 million of this funding has been invested to enable the opening of dental access centres throughout the Taunton and south Somerset area. Last February, a new centre was opened in the centre of Yeovil, and it has already provided NHS treatment to more than 1,200 local patients.

Mr. Laws: Does the Under-Secretary remember the Prime Minister's commitment at the Labour party conference in 1999 that everyone would have access to an NHS dentist by September 2001? Is she aware that none of my constituents has had access to such dentists for the past three years, and that new adult patients have not been able to see NHS dentists? What is she doing to put that right?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken; his constituents have had access to NHS dentists. They may have had some difficulty with registration, but they certainly have had access to treatment. I understand that the hon. Gentleman personally opened the Yeovil dental access centre. He went there, he saw it and he opened it. The centre is treating 1,200 patients—1,200 people who have had access to NHS dentistry. Every week, 10,000 people are ringing up NHS Direct, 99 per cent. of whom are getting access to NHS dentists. Our pledge is being met; people can get access to NHS dentists up and down the country. Under the Conservatives, there was an onslaught on NHS dentistry. This Government are committed to improving access, in Yeovil and in the rest of the country.

Primary Care (South Derbyshire)

2. **Mr. Mark Todd** (South Derbyshire): What steps he is taking to secure improved provision of primary health care in south Derbyshire. [34701]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): The Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire primary care trust will become operational on 1 April. Already, it is developing proposals to provide for the increasing population in that part of Derbyshire, to increase the number of GPs, to improve and extend practice premises and to increase access to NHS dentistry.

Mr. Todd: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, which summarises the improvement in the prospects for primary health care within south Derbyshire. I should like to refer to the difficulties in accessing NHS dentistry within the area—which are now being addressed—and to the extreme pressure on GPs' lists in the area because of the rising population of what is a very attractive and popular place to live. Will my hon. Friend comment on the support that the Government will give to the primary care group and the new primary care trust, when it becomes operational, in any project that it proposes to improve the situation?

Yvette Cooper: The primary care trust locally is trying to increase the capacity of primary care locally, including increasing the number of GPs. I am advised that the rate of increase in GP numbers in southern Derbyshire is faster than the average increase across the country as a whole. Clearly, we need to increase capacity in primary care.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Can the Under-Secretary give any comfort to my 18-year-old constituent from Parwich—which was covered by the South Derbyshire health authority—who was refused beta interferon treatment, but desperately needs that drug? Will the new arrangements give any comfort or hope to her?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman knows that beta interferon has been extensively looked at by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. It is right that we take seriously its recommendations to the NHS across the country.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Will the Under-Secretary welcome the newly formed group of the mental health charity MIND in Swadlincote, south Derbyshire? Those involved will want to know whether she supports MIND's campaign "My Choice", to be launched tomorrow, which emphasises the need for a real choice of primary care treatments for those with mental health problems. What progress has been made in south Derbyshire in meeting the Government's mental health targets? In particular, what progress has been made in employing extra primary care staff to increase breaks for carers, employing new graduate primary care mental health workers and reducing suicide? We believe that in south Derbyshire—as in the rest of the country—the answer is that no progress has been made at all.

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, for the first time ever, the Government have developed a national service framework for mental health. We are substantially increasing the capacity of primary care across the country. If the hon. Gentleman wants further increases in the capacity of primary care—including additional mental health workers in primary care, which the Government want and have set out targets to achieve—he has to say where he will get the money from. The Government have said where we will get the money from. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should ask his party's Front-Bench spokesperson whether he agrees with the shadow Chancellor on whether taxes would rise under a Conservative Government to pay for that.

Beta Interferon

3. **Charlotte Atkins** (Staffordshire, Moorlands): If he will make a statement on the availability of beta interferon to multiple sclerosis sufferers. [34702]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Following advice from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, we have agreed a scheme with pharmaceutical companies for all multiple sclerosis patients meeting the criteria agreed by the Association of British Neurologists to receive beta interferon and glatiramer on the national health service. The scheme will begin on 6 May 2002. The cost will be about £50 million a year.

Charlotte Atkins: I am extremely grateful for that reply, which will certainly bring much relief to many of my constituents. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that those patients who currently have to pay privately for beta interferon, as well as those on health authority waiting lists, will benefit from the scheme? Does this mean that postcode prescribing—a legacy from the previous Government—has now gone?

Mr. Hutton: I thank my hon. Friend for her support for the scheme. She is right: it will mark the end of postcode prescribing for beta interferon and glatiramer, and that is a hugely important step forward. I can confirm that, as we announced the details of the scheme to the national health service in a circular on 4 February, patients will be eligible for free prescriptions of beta interferon from that date.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): Why has it taken more than two years to reach a decision on this issue? If the Secretary of State is able to overrule the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and ignore its advice, what is the point of having NICE?

Mr. Hutton: It is rather sad that the hon. Lady could not welcome our announcement. The drug will now be available to NHS patients. It is true that NICE has been considering issues concerning beta interferon for some time, but it was a genuinely difficult decision for it to make. One of the benefits of the agreement is that it will now provide longer-term evidence of the benefits to MS patients of beta interferon and glatiramer—evidence that has not previously been available. It is an important step forward.

If the hon. Lady is bemoaning the fact that the Government have taken two years to get to this point, perhaps she will reflect on how long it took the Conservative Government to make no progress whatever on the issue.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The Government deserve the congratulations of everyone in the House on the decision and on the ground-breaking agreement linking payment for the drugs with their efficacy. I see that my right hon. Friend is smiling. I think that the Government have done a great job here.

Mr. Hutton *rose—*

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Hutton: Well, that's a tricky one. I was smiling because I was expecting a "but" halfway through my hon. Friend's point. I genuinely welcome his support and appreciate everything that he has said. There are some more general lessons to be learned, and I will ensure that I keep him informed of progress on not only this scheme but other relevant matters.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will the Minister accept that it is not only beta interferon that can help MS sufferers, and that much pain relief is available from acupuncture, as practised at the George Eliot hospital in Warwickshire, for example? Will he also confirm that acupuncture is much cheaper and should be widely available in the health service?

Mr. Hutton: I genuinely do not know whether acupuncture treatment is cheaper, over the course of a year or longer. On the hon. Gentleman's wider point about the availability of complementary medicine, as long as there is a strong evidence base for a treatment, we will consider making it available on the national health service.

NHS Hospitals (Private Sector Management)

4. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): What representations he has received on his proposals to involve the private sector in the management of NHS hospitals. [34703]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I have received a number of representations, and announced earlier this month the establishment of a register of interested organisations and individuals who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and are capable of turning around performance in the small minority of the worst-performing local health services.

David Taylor: Is not the theory that the private sector can successfully manage large acute NHS hospitals utterly perverse? Does my right hon. Friend understand why so many Labour Back Benchers are deeply unhappy with his proposal to introduce commercial hit squads as an advance guard for covert privatisation? Does he agree that the real wreckers of the NHS are not the failed administrators but the cynical promoters of the private finance initiative and management madness of the sort announced in the House six weeks ago?

Mr. Milburn: No one on the Government Front Bench thinks that the private sector is a panacea for the problems in the NHS, but we intend to use it when it can bring expertise or resources to help improve services. My hon. Friend will be interested in the announcement that I made in early February about the first wave of so-called franchising. New management will be brought in to help turn around poor performance. I stress again that the people being brought in to help with the small minority of poorly performing trusts have some NHS experience. They have a track record of proven success in delivering improved NHS services.

I urge my hon. Friend to accept that we should not simply close our minds to the idea of harnessing managerial experience—as long as it is good and in keeping with the public service ethos—wherever we can obtain it. We do not have a monopoly of wisdom in the NHS. If we can get good managers from local government, the voluntary sector or even from parts of the private sector, we should use them.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Will the Secretary of State admit that he had no clinical outcome data to justify his labelling the hospitals as failing, and that the hospitals were not failing hospitals but scapegoat hospitals? On the day when the right hon. Gentleman announced the franchise plan, two hospitals that I visited—at Portsmouth, and Ashford and St. Peter's—were told that their performances merited two stars, even on the right hon. Gentleman's flawed performance indicators. Are not the hospitals involved facing problems of capacity owing to the scandal of bed blocking and nurse vacancies, which undermine capacity? Would it not be better for the Secretary of State to take expert advice to tackle the problems of capacity? If the private sector managers were from MFI and were able to bring beds with them they might be able to do some good—they will make no difference otherwise.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman's jokes are about as good as his policy—

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Better.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman says they are better. I have two things to say about different performance in the NHS. First, every patient knows that there are some first-class hospitals delivering high-quality services. Often, they stand cheek by jowl with other hospitals that are not capable of delivering the same quality, even though they are dealing with precisely the same problems with the labour market, deprivation, health and capacity. The fundamental difference between such hospitals is management organisation, although culture and attitude sometimes play a part.

If the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) does not recognise that, he should listen to those Back-Bench Liberal Democrat Members who are prepared to listen to that proposition. For example, the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), who is sitting behind the hon. Gentleman, said of his party's policies:

> "Many of our policies are out of date, a legacy of past commitments, endlessly carried forward year after year rather than representing the sort of priorities which we might arrive at logically."

Indeed, the hon. Gentleman went on to say that Liberal policies were alienating key voters. I think that all hon. Members will express some sympathy for that opinion.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be aware that the Darent Valley hospital in my constituency is one of those being franchised out. The interim management led by Sue Jennings are already making an appreciable difference to the way in which the hospital is run, and improvements are noticeable all around. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House how the franchising system is running, and whether he believes that the system will finally bring the problems in the Dartford and Gravesham acute trust to an end? Will we be able to look forward to stability and improving standards in the future?

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful for the support that my hon. Friend has given, in pretty difficult circumstances, to that hospital and to social services in the Dartford and Gravesham area. Some very real problems exist. They are partially problems of capacity and cash, but as my hon. Friend and other clinicians in the local community have recognised, they are also problems of management and organisation. If we can bring in some new blood from elsewhere in the NHS, and use that expertise for the benefit of patients in the area, that would be a sensible thing to do. I hope that the new management team that we will bring in before too long will help to turn around the performance of what has been a difficult hospital to manage. Patients there have not always had the services that they need. My hon. Friend knows as well as I do that good leadership in a hospital, just like good leadership in a school, is crucial to that hospital or school's success. I hope that by bringing in some new leadership, we can make a difference.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Is the Secretary of State aware that people in my constituency do not care whether managers are private sector or public sector managers so long as they are competent? We are relieved and grateful that his Minister overruled the decision of local managers to close the maternity and children's units at Hemel Hempstead general hospital and decided to try and keep them open. However, is not that decision a vote of no confidence, echoing the vote of no confidence in local management by all parties on St. Albans district council? Local managers have made it more difficult to keep those units alive by their decision to announce a closure, leading to the resignation of large numbers of staff and the biggest nurse shortages in any county in the country.

Mr. Milburn: I shall certainly not stand here and condemn local management out of hand when I do not know the facts. I shall be very happy to look into the right hon. Gentleman's allegations. However, managing any public service, particularly the national health service, is not an easy job. It is pretty difficult. It would be helpful if Conservative Members got behind some of our people rather than always running them down.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Further to that question, will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on the tremendous work done by his colleague Lord Hunt for the Hemel Hempstead hospital and the special care baby unit in using the hospital to set up a pilot scheme looking at a national framework for neonatal services? Many of the local health service managers performed outstandingly well when it came to supporting Lord Hunt and arriving at that excellent decision.

Mr. Milburn: I can only agree with my hon. Friend. It is often difficult when changes are proposed in local health services. I know that my hon. Friend has been concerned about the local situation; he has been to see me about it as well as my noble Friend Lord Hunt. I hope that the solution that we have come up with will be good for staff in the local hospitals as well as the patients who use the services.

Bed Blocking

5. **Mr. David Ruffley** (Bury St. Edmunds): What his policy is towards tackling bed blocking. [34704]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Our policy is to reduce bed blocking through additional investment and reforms to the way in which the national health service and social services work together.

Mr. Ruffley: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. He will be aware that the bed blocking figures for my county are the sixth worst in the country. Given the right hon. Gentleman's personal commitment to private enterprise and the private sector, will he investigate Suffolk social services' abysmal record in encouraging the expansion of private sector residential home care places?

Mr. Milburn: I will gladly look into the point about Suffolk county council. The hon. Gentleman is right that there is a particular problem in Suffolk with regard to care home or home capacity. I am aware of that. For that reason, the Government have made available additional resources above and beyond the resources made available to other comparable councils. Suffolk is receiving an extra £5 million in this financial year and the next financial year to stabilise the situation, presumably by first raising care home fees and then by investing in new capacity, presumably in the private voluntary sector as well as in the public sector, through intermediate care, rehabilitation services and all the other services that I hope the hon. Gentleman supports. That is the right thing to do first of all.

I understand from the figures that I have received that these measures are already bearing fruit. There has been a 30 per cent. reduction in delayed discharge problems in the hon. Gentleman's area since the additional money was made available. That, with respect, is what happens when additional money is put in. The question for the hon. Gentleman is whether his party would be prepared to match it.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I welcome the £800,000 that the Government have given my constituency this financial year and the next to help with the problem of delayed discharges. That money is helping, but we still have far too many people waiting to be discharged from Princess Margaret hospital. I hope that my right hon. Friend welcomes last week's decision by Swindon borough councillors to restore proposed cuts in social services budgets, which would have reinforced the problem. I should be grateful if he would look at the situation. Social services have made it clear to me that we need more funds if we are to develop the specialist domiciliary services that are necessary to get more people out of hospital and into their homes, which is where they want to be.

Mr. Milburn: As my hon. Friend knows—I visited her just a few months ago to talk about precisely such issues—I am aware of some of the problems in Swindon. In Swindon as elsewhere, we need to do three things. First, it is true that there is a problem with the level of funding received by many social services departments, not just for the care of the elderly but for the care of vulnerable children. Budgets are rising very fast, but resources have not always matched them. I am seized of that problem.

Secondly, as the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) rightly pointed out, there are capacity problems in some parts of the country as a consequence of changes in the residential and nursing home market. We have to do something to stabilise the market and ensure that it can grow again, including offering alternative forms of provision, and more home-based and intermediate care.

Thirdly, in my view we must reform the relationship between health and social services. We cannot have a stand-off between them. Health and social services are two sides of the same coin. They rely on each other and the patient relies on both, and we need closer, rather than more distant, working relations between them.

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): Given the Secretary of State's previous answer, does he accept that the time has come for a fundamental review of the funding of nursing care and the relationship between the two Departments? It is the NHS that is carrying the inevitable burden of an inadequate and inequitable system of nursing care funding that is producing perverse results such as that in west Kent. The Kent and Sussex hospital is making available extra beds and recovery wards just to hold the extra patients who cannot be released, but at the same time the number of nursing care beds in west Kent has declined by 17 per cent. in the past two years. Moreover, nursing care funding in Kent per elderly patient is a third of that received in other parts of the country such as London.

Mr. Milburn: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) and to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds, there is undoubtedly a capacity problem in the south—although the problem is not peculiar to the south—and we have to deal with it.

Nursing home fees and fees paid by local authorities to care homes have not risen markedly for years. As a consequence, many owners of residential and nursing homes have decided to get out of the business. We must stabilise that situation, but we must do so through more investment. The issue for the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) and his party is whether they are prepared to match the resources that we have put into extra social services funding. The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) could stand at the Dispatch Box and agree with us that extra money is going into social services and that more is still needed.

Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): Will the Secretary of State or one of his Ministers visit Portsmouth in the near future to see a good example of a working partnership between social services and the health authority, which has reduced deferred releases considerably? The money provided was very welcome, but a visit from the Secretary of State or a Minister would be a morale booster at a time of change.

Mr. Milburn: You see—such visits are a morale booster. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Woodspring is not convinced, but the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who boosts morale wherever she goes, will visit that constituency. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear.] On that point, at least, the cross-party consensus on health is alive and well.

The level of delayed hospital discharges is a very serious problem in the Portsmouth area and across the country, but it is worth getting it in perspective. At the end of December last year, about 5,100 patients aged over 75 had their discharge delayed. That is far too many, and it is clear that we need to deal with the problem, but the numbers are falling. In the comparable period of the previous year, some 5,800 patients had their discharge delayed, but in December 1996 the number was 20 per cent. higher. The extra investment and some of the changes are beginning to bite, and we need to do more of that.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a clear relationship between the loss of care home beds, bed blocking in NHS hospitals and the increase in cancelled operations? Who is responsible for the current situation?

Mr. Milburn: Of course there is a relationship between the capacity available outside and inside the hospital. That is absolutely true. I note with interest, however, figures from the premier market analysts, Laing and Buisson, on the care home market. Those figures confirm, first, that there has been an overall loss in care home capacity of approximately 19,000 places; and, secondly, that demand and supply are more or less in equilibrium in many parts of the country. That is not of course the case in all parts of the country, and we have made extra resources available where it is not so. If the hon. Gentleman and his party are so concerned, the question is whether they are prepared to put their money where their mouth is and match the record extra resources—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister should not ask the Opposition spokesman questions. Questions are put to the Minister for answer.

Dr. Fox: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for admitting the relationship, but I wonder whether it has come to him as a recent revelation. Why did the Government not do something about it earlier? More than two years ago, on Second Reading of the Care Standards Bill, we predicted exactly what would happen as a result of Government policy. We said that tens of thousands of care home beds would be lost with increased misery for elderly patients, more blocked beds, more cancelled operations and more patients waiting in casualty to be admitted to hospital. Will the Secretary of State apologise for his negligence and incompetence and for the fact that patients have to queue not just to get into hospital but to get out again?

Mr. Milburn: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman, who is so fixated about care home beds, did not say a word about NHS beds. There is a simple reason for that: when his party was in office, the number of beds in hospitals fell by 60,000. Under the Government, the figure is rising again.

Dr. Fox: That was a pretty disappointing answer, even by the Secretary of State's standards. Under Labour's stewardship, the number of NHS beds has fallen below the number of administrators for the first time in the history of the national health service, and that tells us all that we need to know about the Government's centralising tendencies. It is typical of the Secretary of State to hide behind a few figures. Under the present Government, we have seen the fiddling of waiting list figures and cancelled operation figures. We have seen the Government fixing accident and emergency times to make themselves look better. They have even taken wheels off trolleys so that they could call them beds and slapped themselves on the back for it. Does not all that simply show that the Government draw no distinction between truth and untruth, merely between convenience and inconvenience.

Mr. Milburn: There is a fundamental question for our health and social services. We recognise that there is a big problem, which has been caused by decades of neglect and under-investment. The choice for the country is straightforward: are we prepared to invest more money—to put our money where our mouths are—to deal with the evident problems? We say that there is no such thing as a free lunch. If we want world-class health care, we have to invest and we have to pay for it. That is precisely what we are doing and what we are committed to doing. The issue facing the hon. Gentleman is whether he is prepared to match our spending, and the answer is a decisive no.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does my right hon. Friend accept that things are not quite as simple as we tend to imagine. We tend to assume that people are either in hospital or in care homes. In fact, however, Nottingham Healthcare NHS trust tells me that the number of patients waiting to go into care homes has reduced greatly as a result of the Government's provision of money, but that there is a problem with intermediate beds for their transfer to acute care. Will my right hon. Friend address that problem as he funds the health service in coming years?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point: we face not only the problem that, when people are ready for discharge from hospital we are sometimes unable to discharge them, but the fact that many people need not end up in hospital at all. Provided that decent primary and community services are in place, we can offer more appropriate care, closer to home, for many elderly and disabled people.

My hon. Friend asks about the provision of intermediate care services—often an important missing element in the range of services available in many local communities. There is genuinely good news on that. We expected to see about 1,000 extra intermediate care beds by March this year. That is well on target; indeed, it is ahead of target and I expect there to be about 2,000 extra intermediate care beds by March this year. That does not solve every problem, but it means that we are setting up more appropriate care for many people who would prefer not to be in hospital in the first place.

MMR Vaccine

6. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): If he will make a statement on trends in the uptake of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine over the last 12 months. [34705]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): The latest available evidence shows that the uptake of MMR at two years old stood at 84.2 per cent. in the summer and in the autumn of last year. The coverage by five years of age remained at more than 90 per cent., having fallen slightly compared with the previous quarters. Those figures were achieved despite extensive media coverage at the beginning of last year of unfounded claims of a link between MMR and autism.

Mr. Osborne: We shall have to wait until the figures are published to see what the effects of the publicity of the past few weeks have been on the uptake. Will the Minister answer the question that she refused to answer during the debate held in Westminster Hall this morning? If a parent, for whatever reason—however irrational the Minister feels they are—refuses to give their child the MMR vaccine, should the child have three separate vaccinations or no vaccination at all?

Yvette Cooper: The recommendation from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation is clear. The Committee recommends the MMR jab as the safest way to immunise children against deadly diseases. The equivalent US committee has considered exactly the same issue within the past two weeks and has also concluded that it recommends only the MMR jab. It is not the job of the NHS to recommend something that is less safe and that would put more children's lives at risk. I really wish that Opposition Members would consider carefully the remarks that they make on this issue. It is disgraceful of them to play games with an issue that affects children's health and, ultimately, children's lives.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): In the light of the fall in the rate of immunisation and given the outbreak of childhood diseases in the London area and other areas, does my hon. Friend welcome the campaign by Sense—the charity for deaf-blind victims of rubella—to inform parents of the relative risks of immunisation and non-immunisation?

Yvette Cooper: I strongly welcome the campaign by Sense. One of the biggest risks in introducing separate jabs would be a dramatic fall-off in the coverage of rubella. Exposure to rubella among pregnant women can lead to serious cases of deafness and blindness in babies. That is not something that we want to return to in this country.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I have to point out that, once again, the Minister has not answered the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne). It is a very important question. The Minister and I are in similar positions as mothers of small babies so she must surely appreciate the position of an individual parent. No matter how often the Minister says—with sincerity, I am sure—that MMR is the best route and no matter how much she believes that, she will not convince every parent in this country who has to take the risk to their own child into consideration. Will she not admit that it would be better to give three injections than none at all—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Yvette Cooper: I am sorry to hear that question—I really thought better of the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing). The evidence and the advice from the medical experts, in this country and abroad, has been extremely clear: MMR is the safest way to immunise children, and introducing separate jabs would put more children at risk. It would lead to reduced coverage. Coverage would fall because children would be left unimmunised for longer between the jabs and more children would not complete the course of immunisation. Recent research from Chester shows that two thirds of the children who are currently given separate jabs do not complete the course. That is very serious. We listen to all the advice from the experts, but Opposition Members are expecting us to reject advice from huge numbers of independent medical organisations—to ignore their advice and to go for the politically easy option of introducing separate jabs. That would be politically easy but it would put children's health at risk and it would be morally wrong.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Minister should know that 500 million MMR jabs have been administered worldwide since 1972, but not one scare has taken place in any country in the world, until that of the past year, caused by the political opportunism of the Conservative party. For the sake of allaying young parents' fears and for the sake of sanity and the health of young people in this country in the future, will the Minister and the Department engage in direct mailing or become involved in ensuring that GPs' surgeries inform parents of the weight of medical and nursing opinion behind the MMR jab?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. The overwhelming evidence from and consensus in 90 countries across the world support the MMR jab, not separate jabs. That is exactly why the assistant surgeon general in the United States, the head of the vaccine programme of the Pan American Health Organisation, the regional adviser for communicable diseases of the World Health Organisation, the chairwoman of the Australian National Immunisation Committee and the chairman of the American Academy of Paediatrics have all recently contacted us to urge us not to introduce separate jabs and to stick with MMR.

My hon. Friend is right to suggest that parents need to be able to get answers to their questions; they are understandably concerned, given all the reports that they have read. That is exactly what we are trying to do.

Cancelled Operations

7. **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): How many cancelled operations there were in each of the last two years. [34706]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): In 2000–01, 77,818 operations were cancelled on the day by the hospital for non-medical reasons. During 1999–2000, 60,242 operations were cancelled.

Mr. Prisk: Given that significant national increase and the fact that, in Hertfordshire, the number of cancelled operations has more than doubled in the five years since 1997, will the Minister explain why the link between bed blocking and the increase in cancelled operations matters? What will she do to reduce both those factors?

Jacqui Smith: A whole range of issues is likely to determine the number of cancelled operations. The Government are taking action through the Modernisation Agency and an £8.5 million project to ensure that good management and reform is in place to cut the number of cancelled operations. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already said, we are taking significant action and investing significant amounts of money to ensure that we tackle the problem of delayed discharge and its effect not only on the health service, but especially on the individuals whom it affects. We are also increasing capacity in the health service. Although we have not made much progress on that issue, we need to return to the fact that the Government are putting in place the reform and investment necessary to make the difference. Would Opposition Members support that investment?

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I welcome the Minister's statement about the action that the Government are taking to reduce the number of cancelled operations. However, to put the issue in context, will she confirm that, since the Labour Government came to power, the number of operations completed by the NHS has increased by more than 500,000, and that the answer is not to return to the Conservative approach of carrying out fewer operations, but to continue to put in additional resources, so that more people are treated by the NHS under a Labour Government?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend is right. Not only are we performing more operations in the NHS, but we are achieving better outcomes in the NHS. The NHS and those people who work in it deserve congratulations on that. Of course, that is happening because the Government are increasing the capacity of the NHS to do so. For example, we have achieved our NHS plan pledge for 20,000 more nurses by 2004 two years early. Opposition Members described that pledge as preposterous. It is not preposterous; it shows that the Government are delivering for the NHS and its patients.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): As one of the most significant contributing factors to Portsmouth Hospitals NHS trust's failing was the high number of cancelled operations, will the Minister give an assurance that finance will play no part in the cancellation of further operations in our hospitals? Will she also consider whether the new private finance initiative franchising scheme for Portsmouth will have to carry forward the £3 million deficit? If it does have to do so, it will lead to even more operations having to be cancelled.

Jacqui Smith: I am not surprised that Liberal Democrats, following the lead of their health spokesman, should argue for more resources to go into the health service. We have no objection to that. This Government, in two spending reviews, have increased the amount of money going into the national health service by more than a third. However, that must be matched by the sort of reform that is also necessary to ensure that we reduce levels of cancelled operations—sharing best practice, ensuring that the Modernisation Agency brings about improvements and investing in diagnostic and treatment centres to split emergency and elective care. Money itself is not enough—it is crucial, but so is the reform with which this Government are accompanying it.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Will the Minister confirm that the 77,818 operations cancelled last year for non-medical reasons represented not only a 50 per cent. increase under her Government but an increasing trend over the last year—up by 29 per cent.—and an increasing proportion of total operations? Even more worryingly, the number of patients not readmitted for their operation within a month has more than doubled. Although her response to the problem—spending £8.5 billion on appointing a gaggle of cancellation tsars—will no doubt have many patients dancing on their trolleys, will she tell our constituents, in layman's terms, her definition of non-medical cancellations? Furthermore, will she explain why, in her national health service, there are such wide variations in cancellation rates between hospitals, ranging from 0.1 per cent. to 18 per cent?

Jacqui Smith: Levels of cancelled operations in the national health service are too high. That is why this Government are reforming the service and ensuring that efficient management and systems are in place. Most important, we are increasing the capacity in the national health service. There were more beds last year for the first time in 30 years, more staff and an increase of 5.7 per cent. in the number of consultants working in the national health service. We are increasing capacity and investment. Will the hon. Gentleman support and reinforce that?

NHS Dentistry

8. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): If he will make a statement on the number of dentists working in the NHS. [34707]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): A total of 20,480 dentists were working across all dental services in England in September 1997. The number of dentists working in September 2001 was 22,440. That is an increase of 1,960.

Lawrie Quinn: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and welcome the increase in the number of NHS dentists. Does he agree that in market towns, such as Whitby, where there is great difficulty in gaining access to NHS dentists, people have to travel to larger centres? Will he say what the primary care trust can be expected to do to make it easier for people in rural locations to have access to NHS dentists?

Mr. Hutton: I agree with my hon. Friend that people in some rural areas clearly experience problems in accessing NHS dentistry. That is true in my constituency. I am sure that he will welcome the decision of the local health authority to establish one of the new dental access centres in his constituency on two sites—one in Scarborough, with which I am sure he is familiar, and one in Whitby, too. Next year, when the service begins to operate with full efficiency, it is estimated that it will be able to treat about 3,500 patients in his area. That is an important step forward.

As my hon. Friend probably remembers, the Government's rural White Paper made it clear that we were committed to developing access to NHS dentistry in rural areas. There are three things in particular that we can do. First, we need to continue to invest in dental practitioners' premises in rural areas, and the lion's share of investment is going into such practices. Secondly, we have dental access centres, and the majority of the new 49 DACs serve rural areas. Thirdly, local health authorities, including the primary care trust in my hon. Friend's area, can enter into spot contracts with local dentists to treat unregistered patients on the national health service. That will help my hon. Friend's constituents and others in rural areas in particular.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The experience of the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) matches mine in Chippenham, a town of 35,000 people in which not one national health service dentist practises today. Is the Minister aware of the British Dental Association's commentary on the so-called dental strategy? It says:

> "There is nothing very new in the strategy. What we've been given is ministerial double-speak . . . We are heading for an unmanned toothache service."

Is he proud of that?

Mr. Hutton: I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Gentleman, but he is speaking a load of old cobblers. He might like to look at some of the statistics on NHS dentistry because he will probably be struck, as I was, by the fact that since 1997 the total volume of NHS dental treatment has increased by 1.8 million. That compares strongly with the period between 1992 and 1997, when the number of NHS treatments for dentistry declined. Of course there is a problem. It would be stupid to pretend otherwise and we are taking action to deal with that. The dental strategy is not a waste of time. It is increasing NHS access to dental treatment and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman cannot find it within him to welcome any of the progress that is being made.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): Although I welcome the increased number of dentists who work in the NHS in England, will my right hon. Friend undertake to hold discussions as soon as possible with the Health Minister in the National Assembly for Wales to compare the success in England with the success stories in Wales?

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. She is aware that such matters are the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales. However, we keep in regular contact with Jane Hutt, the Health Minister in the Assembly, and we share similar objectives to increase access to NHS dentistry in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Accident and Emergency Services

9. **Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): If he will make a statement on waiting times in accident and emergency units. [34708]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The NHS plans set a target to reduce waiting times in accident and emergency departments to a maximum of four hours from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge by 2004. The NHS is on track to meet that target with 77 per cent. of all A and E attenders currently spending four hours or less in A and E. In nearly a third of trusts, at least 90 per cent. of people attending A and E are discharged or admitted within four hours. The Government launched the reforming emergency care strategy last October, supported by investment of £118 million. That is helping hospitals around the country to tackle waiting times in A and E departments and to meet the NHS plan target.

Dr. Murrison: I grateful to the Minister for that upbeat reply. I am afraid that the community health councils, which her Government have pledged to abolished, do not agree with her, however, as they said in their report, "Nationwide Casualty Watch" recently. At the Royal United hospital in Bath and Salisbury district hospital, 10 per cent. of my constituents admitted through the casualty department have to wait for four hours or longer on a trolley. What is she going to do about that? Will she condemn the practice of keeping acutely ill patients waiting in ambulances outside casualty departments for long periods of time?

Ms Blears: I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government are taking a series of actions to address the admittedly serious problems in his local hospital. An intervention team was established on 7 January this year. It comprises top-class consultants and physicians who have gone into the hospital to work side by side with the clinicians to help them to change their practices, to improve the length of time that people wait in A and E and to ensure that delayed discharges are treated in a much better fashion.

I am pleased to say that there have been marked improvements on all those indicators in the past two weeks in terms of trolley waits, waits in A and E and delayed discharge. A great deal of extra investment is going into the service. The hon. Gentleman's local hospital shows, however, that it needs to be matched by reform if we are to get the results that will benefit his constituents and patients in that area. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chamber is far too noisy.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): May I thank the Minister for the extra investment in the A and E facilities at the Queen's medical centre in my constituency? I hope that she had a chance to see the excellent fly-on-the-wall documentary produced by Channel 4, "The Trust", which illustrated the enormous pressure under which the A and E department is having to work. I am sure that she recognises that some causes of that pressure are not within our control, but will she act on two points that arose from the documentary? First, will she support the QMC's initiative to take a zero tolerance approach towards violence by patients against A and E staff? Secondly, will she hold serious discussion with primary care trusts about the withdrawal of funding for community-based services relating to drugs, mental health and alcohol problems, which result in a disproportionate—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We will now let the Minister reply.

Ms Blears: I am delighted that my hon. Friend is pleased about the modernisation that has taken place in his local A and E department. Some 180 A and E departments throughout the country have been improved as a result of Government investment. I am also glad to reassure him that we have a policy of zero tolerance of violence against every person working in the NHS, and those of us who have visited A and E departments on a Friday and Saturday night will have seen the entirely unacceptable stress under which staff operate.

My hon. Friend is right to say that the problems in A and E are problems of the whole system—of primary care, of delayed discharges and of the need to increase capacity. We must get the whole system working if we are to reduce the pressures on A and E. This Government are about putting investment into the whole NHS system, making sure that A and E departments can provide first class services to the patients for whom they are responsible.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): It is not only accident and emergency waiting times that concern us; between 1997 and 2001 the number of people in Wales waiting for treatment for six months or more increased by an enormous 1,000 per cent. In the past, the Secretary of State has told us with some glee that he does not do Wales, but does he not accept that he has some responsibility for that scandal?

Ms Blears: Obviously, those are devolved matters, but it is not a question of us not doing Wales at all. We are delighted to be able to work with our colleagues in the devolved Administrations to make sure that everybody has the chance to access high quality services. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that our NHS services are operating under tremendous pressure; A and E departments see 15 million patients every year, which is 30,000 patients every day, and in the vast majority of cases they are providing top-class, first-rate services. Clearly, there is increased pressure, but the Government are tackling that with increased investment in every part of the NHS, including primary care, secondary care and accident and emergency. That is this Government's record, and I wonder whether any Opposition Members would be prepared to match that investment to make sure that we can provide high-quality services for people in every part of the country.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of the enormous pressures on Leicester royal infirmary. We welcome the extra investment that will improve its capacity. Is my hon. Friend aware of the fantastic achievement of walk-in centres in reducing the number of admissions to places such as the royal infirmary? Will she ensure that continued funding for such centres, particularly the excellent one in Loughborough, is part of the NHS budget from the centre, rather than the burden being placed on local primary care trusts?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend makes a characteristically intelligent and analytical remark about the role of NHS walk-in centres. He is absolutely right that such centres, of which there are now 42 throughout the country, with another one set to open this summer, are playing a significant role in reducing pressure on A and E departments because they are able to see many patients with minor illnesses. It is important that we evaluate walk-in centres, which are still pilot projects, before extending the funding nationally. It is vital that we ensure that walk-in centres, minor injury units, NHS Direct and out of hours services provide high-quality services.

Government Targets (Clinical Decision Making)

10. **Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): What recent discussions he has had with representatives of health care professionals on the impact of Government targets on clinical decision making. [34709]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Ministers in the Department of Health meet regularly with representatives of health care professionals to discuss all aspects of the Government's strategy for investment and reform in the NHS.

Mr. Stunell: Is the Minister satisfied that in the north-west cancer patients are being diverted from treatment simply to meet the Government's two-week waiting target when treatment does not affect survival? Would it not be more satisfactory to move to average waiting times when setting those targets, as the Liberal Democrats advocate?

Mr. Hutton: To be honest, I am probably not alone in not quite knowing what the Liberal Democrats are saying about access to treatment. As I understand it, they want waiting times to come down, but they cannot say by how much or even give a time when patients should be treated. The majority of the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and other Members of this place, want patients to be treated at the earliest opportunity, especially if there is a diagnosis of suspected cancer. It is right that we have set targets, which patients and the public support. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to note that the death rates for two of the country's major killers, cancer and heart disease, are coming down, and that more than 90 per cent. of cancer patients are now being seen within two weeks of urgent GP referral. That is progress and not, as he would like to characterise it, a step back.

Resignation of Martin Sixsmith

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the circumstances surrounding the resignation of Mr. Martin Sixsmith from the post of director of communications in my Department.

On 14 February, the *Daily Express* and *The Mirror* reported that my special adviser Jo Moore had sought to schedule an announcement on the day of the funeral of Princess Margaret. Both papers reported that an e-mail had been sent from Martin Sixsmith to Jo Moore in the following terms:

> "Dear Jo, there is no way I will allow this Department to make any substantive announcements next Friday. Princess Margaret is being buried on that day. I will absolutely not allow anything else to be."

In fact, no such e-mail was sent from Martin Sixsmith to Jo Moore. Nevertheless, *The Mirror* reported yesterday that Martin Sixsmith apparently told the reporter concerned on 14 February,

> "every aspect of your story is correct. I'm happy with it."

On the morning of 14 February, the Prime Minister's official spokesman briefed the Lobby on the allegations contained in the *Daily Express* and *The Mirror* using an explanation that had been agreed with Martin Sixsmith. Subsequently, that lunchtime and into the afternoon, it seems that one or more officials from my Department began to brief the press that the line used by the Prime Minister's official spokesman was incorrect. At least one official appears to have spoken on the basis that he was ringing on behalf of Martin Sixsmith. So what we had was a concerted attempt by a very small number of civil servants in the press office to undermine the Department—*[Interruption.]* I should stress that only a very small number were involved and their actions are being investigated. The vast majority work in a very good, committed and dedicated manner.

On the morning of Friday 15 February, I met my permanent secretary, Sir Richard Mottram, to discuss the situation. Sir Richard told me that in his view, the positions of both Martin Sixsmith and Jo Moore had become untenable. He felt that the best thing for the Department would be if they both left their posts, because relationships within the Department and with its Ministers had broken down. He recommended that we should seek their resignations. I agreed with Sir Richard's recommendation. I said that I would talk to Jo Moore, and Sir Richard said that he would talk to Martin Sixsmith.

We were clear that the Department could not carry on with the communications department in the state that it was. As I made clear on the Dimbleby programme at the weekend, I believed that both should go. Jo Moore agreed to resign. Martin Sixsmith agreed to resign. I announced the resignations. The details of the events that day are set out in Sir Richard Mottram's statement of yesterday.

Since then, there have been a number of meetings and discussions involving Mr. Sixsmith in an attempt to resolve the detailed terms of his departure. I have not been directly involved in those negotiations. I have not met or spoken to Mr. Sixsmith since his resignation, and the detail of those discussions has been conducted by Sir Richard Mottram. I made it clear to Sir Richard Mottram, however, that in my view—this view is strengthened by the events of the past few days—Mr. Sixsmith should not be given a job elsewhere in government.

Ultimately, I was not in a position to block any arrangement about his future employment elsewhere in the civil service and I accepted that discussions between Sir Richard Mottram and Mr. Sixsmith should continue. Those discussions focused on him either getting another job in government or being compensated according to the terms of his contract. It was because, in the end, this decision about his future beyond his leaving my Department was not for me to take that I sought to make it clear on the Dimbleby programme that I was not personally involved in the discussions with Mr. Sixsmith on an alternative civil service job. But if my answers on the programme gave the impression that I did not put forward a view or make clear my views to others inside and outside the Department, that is obviously something that I regret and I welcome this opportunity in the House to clarify matters.

It is true that I was not personally involved in the negotiations. It is also true, however, that I believed that Mr. Sixsmith should not be given another job. I did not see the Dimbleby programme as a suitable place for detailed discussion about a personnel issue. Indeed, it is with some regret that I stand here now making clear what my views of Mr. Sixsmith actually are.

I should emphasise that this is not an argument between elected politicians and civil servants. As the Prime Minister has repeatedly made clear, the dedication, professionalism and political impartiality of the British civil service is one of this country's greatest assets. *[Interruption.]* I wholly endorse that view. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is entitled to have a hearing and the House should give him one. He is going to be questioned and he should be given a hearing.

Mr. Byers: My Department, like every other, is staffed by dedicated, hard-working people who impartially serve Governments of any colour. What is at issue is whether one or two unnamed officials, acting quite contrary to the traditions and ethos of the civil service, can be allowed to disrupt and undermine the vital work of a Department of State. I do not believe that they can. I will not allow this issue to distract myself, my ministerial team or my Department from delivering on the challenging agenda ahead of us. Long before this issue is forgotten, people will judge us by what really matters. I will not shy away from taking the tough decisions, whether in relation to Railtrack, reforming local government, or making sure that none of our regions is left behind.

What matters to the people of our country is seeing improvements to our transport system, value given once again to local government, providing decent homes for our people and the regeneration of our communities. That is what we are committed to doing as a Government, and that is what I am delivering—and will continue to deliver—as Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Today is a day of humiliation for the Secretary of State, that he should have

[Mrs. Theresa May]

to come to the House once again to explain how his version of certain events differs from that of other people involved. His Department is in a state of paralysis, key issues are not being addressed, and there is a breakdown in trust between him and the civil servants. He has compromised the impartiality of the civil service and today, yet again, for the third time running, No. 10 has abandoned him.

The Secretary of State's version of events is simply not credible, as he yet again he resorts to blaming civil servants for his own failures. He is ducking and weaving around the facts, and resorting to the last bastion of new Labour: the desperate attempt carefully to choose the words to give one impression, when the reality is very different. He is spinning constantly; spinning to the very end.

Throughout all the claims and counter-claims about the events surrounding Mr. Sixsmith's resignation, two key facts stand out. First, the Secretary of State announced on 15 February that his Department had accepted the resignation of Mr. Sixsmith and Jo Moore; Mr. Sixsmith had not resigned. Secondly, the Secretary of State said on the Dimbleby programme on 24 February:

> "I had absolutely nothing to do with and no discussions about Mr. Sixsmith's departure."

Yesterday, however, the permanent secretary made a statement in which he said:

> "It was clear to me this situation could not continue and that Jo Moore and Martin Sixsmith should both leave their posts, because relationships within the Department and with its Ministers had broken down. I discussed this with Mr. Byers. He agreed with my proposal."

Today, the Secretary of State needs to answer a number of questions clearly and accurately, with no more words chosen carefully to give an impression that is different from the facts, no more phrases that mean different things to different people, and no more passing the blame on to others. He says that he prides himself on taking tough decisions; let him put those words into action today.

When the Secretary of State announced on Friday 15 February that his Department had accepted Mr. Sixsmith's resignation, had he been told by the permanent secretary, Sir Richard Mottram, that Mr. Sixsmith had resigned? Will the right hon. Gentleman now confirm to the House that, contrary to his clear statement on the Dimbleby programme, he did indeed have discussions with the permanent secretary about Mr. Sixsmith's departure? Will the Secretary of State also tell the House what Mr. Sixsmith did wrong that required his resignation from the Department?

Did the right hon. Gentleman at any time say that he would accept Jo Moore's resignation only if Mr. Sixsmith resigned at the same time? Will the Secretary of State also clarify whether Mr. Sixsmith has now resigned? Since the Secretary of State's announcement on 15 February, has he contacted or sought to contact or been contacted by anyone with a view to discussing a pay settlement for Mr. Sixsmith? Did the Secretary of State see Sir Richard Mottram's statement of 25 February before it was issued?

Does the Secretary of State believe in the impartiality of the civil service? Does he believe that that impartiality has been strengthened or weakened by his actions? Has he no pride? How dare he come to the House today—*[Interruption.]* After the chaos and paralysis that he has brought to his Department, after compromising the impartiality and neutrality of civil servants, after making statements to the press and on television that do not reflect the reality of the situation, how can he come here today and attempt, yet again, to put the blame—

Hon. Members: Bye, bye.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the hon. Lady speak.

Mrs. May: How can the Secretary of State come here today and yet again attempt to put the blame for his own failures on the civil servants in his Department? Just what does it take for this Secretary of State to go? Is he content to stay at any price—a despised Secretary of State who no one trusts and no one will deal with? He has said that his Department needs a fresh start. He has prided himself on taking tough decisions. Let him salvage something from his shattered reputation: give the Department the fresh start it needs and go now.

Mr. Byers: I think that that was prepared a little earlier, before the hon. Lady had read my statement. The important point that the House needs to address—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Answer the questions.

Mr. Byers: I will answer the questions.

Mr. Forth: All of them.

Mr. Byers: I will answer all the questions. When Opposition Members have had the opportunity to read my statement, they will see that most of the questions have already been answered in it.

The situation is this. The hon. Lady referred to the Dimbleby programme, on which I was very clear about the circumstances of the resignations. That was reaffirmed by the points made in yesterday's statement by the permanent secretary, Sir Richard Mottram. His view was that the situation of both Martin Sixsmith and Jo Moore was untenable in the light of circumstances in the Department's press office and that we should seek their resignations. I agreed with that. It was a recommendation from the permanent secretary, and I made that clear. If hon. Members see the transcript of the Dimbleby programme, they will see that I said that.

The crucial issue, I think, relates to whether, in the circumstances, Martin Sixsmith's resignation was communicated to me. As yesterday's statement from Sir Richard Mottram makes very clear, he informed me and the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson, that Martin Sixsmith had agreed to resign. It was on that basis that I made the announcement. The hon. Lady raises the issue that the condition of Jo Moore resigning was that Martin Sixsmith should resign as well. There were no such conditions attached to Jo Moore's resignation.

On the issue of whether I have been involved in the detailed discussions relating to Mr. Sixsmith's termination, the situation—I hope that I made it clear in my statement, but I shall try to clarify it for Opposition Members—is that I made it clear to Sir Richard Mottram that, in my view, which I believe has been strengthened by events over the past few days, Mr. Sixsmith should not be given a job elsewhere in government. The crucial issue addressed in the Dimbleby programme, however, was whether I had in some way blocked his appointment. Ultimately, as I have said, I am not in a position to block any arrangement regarding his future employment elsewhere in the civil service, and I accepted that discussions between Sir Richard Mottram and Mr. Sixsmith would continue. It is appropriate that they should.

Those, I think, are the key issues raised by the hon. Lady. I am clear that, given the way in which he conducted himself in the Department, Martin Sixsmith was not a suitable person to remain in government; but that, ultimately, was not a decision made by me as Secretary of State. It is a matter to be discussed between the permanent secretary and Mr. Sixsmith himself, and those discussions were continuing up until last Friday.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his determination to deal with the real problems that his Department faces in sorting out local government finance, securing a modern transport system for us, and making a reality of urban regeneration. Does he accept that he will be judged at the end of this Parliament, both by Labour Members and in the country, on his success in those areas rather than on the minutiae of today's debate?

Mr. Byers: Of course—and I must stress that not just my ministerial team but the vast majority of civil servants in the Department are committed to achieving those objectives. They are impartial: they serve the Government of the day. We have experienced difficulties in this particular instance, but they have occurred in the communications department and, thankfully, not in a department that has been responsible for delivering on those important aims.

We need to ensure that we concentrate on the key issues that concern people in our country. Those issues are very clear. I can understand why the Conservatives do not want to talk about them: they were responsible for 18 years of neglect. Communities in our country are still suffering the scars inflicted by that Conservative Government, and that is what the Conservatives do not want to talk about. They will concentrate on the contract of employment of one senior civil servant. What about the millions who lost their jobs under a Conservative Government? We hear nothing about that. But this Government, this Department and this Secretary of State are dedicated to improving transport, to reforming local government, to giving decent housing to our people, and to the regeneration of our communities. That is our agenda, that is the country's agenda, and that is what we will deliver on.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): It would be all too easy to call for the Secretary of State's resignation over this one issue. After all, the Tories do it at the drop of a hat. But does not this particular issue demonstrate the feuding that has been going on for far too long at the very heart of the Secretary of State's Department? Not only has that feuding detracted from the Department's ability to do its work; it is symptomatic of a crisis of management within the Department—a crisis of management that has led to chaos on our railways, in London Underground, and in National Air Traffic Services.

Does this not mean that the Department no longer even knows what is going on? For example, it does not even keep records of the research that it has commissioned, and does not know whether or not vital safety recommendations to improve our railways have been implemented. Even today's statement was entitled "Resignation of Martin Sixsmith", although it is absolutely clear that he has not resigned at all.

Even more important than the crisis of management over which he presides, however, is the Secretary of State's own behaviour. Section 58 of the ministerial code specifically requires ministers not to issue instructions contrary to the civil service code, and requires them to behave as good employers. As it is clear from his statement that the Secretary of State was directly involved in the removal of Mr. Sixsmith, how can he claim not to be in breach of section 58 of the ministerial code?

How can a senior member of the right hon. Gentleman's Department be removed without any inquiry into allegations of misconduct, particularly when it is now claimed that Sir Richard Mottram has said that there has been no misconduct? Surely if the Secretary of State and his Department are behaving as good employers, Martin Sixsmith should have the same employment rights as anybody else. Like the Secretary of State, Martin Sixsmith deserves to have a hearing. Can the Secretary of State tell the House of what Martin Sixsmith is actually guilty?

Is it any wonder, with all this going on, that it appears that the only person retaining full confidence in the Secretary of State is the Prime Minister? Given all of these causes for concern about the crisis in his Department, would it not be right for the Secretary of State at least to move over and make way for somebody else to lead the Department and to go now?

Mr. Byers: I have looked carefully at the ministerial code as well, and the hon. Gentleman will know that section 58 clearly talks about issuing instructions. I thought that I had made it clear in my statement—certainly Sir Richard Mottram did yesterday—that Sir Richard Mottram came to me on 15 February to say that, in his view, in the interests of the Department, the best outcome would be if Jo Moore and Martin Sixsmith resigned. That was his recommendation to me, and I agreed with it. There is no question of instructions; a permanent secretary came to me and made a recommendation. That was the substance of the allegation that has been made.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) says that the Department is not doing anything, and that it is in paralysis and crisis. This is a Department that, in the last eight months—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members immediately talk about what we did in relation to Railtrack. I know that it is very difficult for the Conservatives to come to terms with the fact that we have acted in relation to their failed privatisation, but the reality is that we have. In addition, we have issued a White Paper on the reform of local government structures and finance. For the first time since 1947, we have issued a Green Paper on changing the planning system. We have also changed the Strategic Rail Authority to provide greater focus. We have the new deal for communities, which is making a difference to literally hundreds of thousands of people in our country.

That is what we have been able to do in the Department. It is not a Department in paralysis; the Department is taking action. The Liberal Democrats

[Mr. Byers]

disagree with much of what we have done; I wear that as a badge of compliment. We are doing the right things and we will continue to do so in the interests of the people of this country.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the British civil service not only performs important tasks, but, in his Department, provides skilled and intelligent back-up for transport policies that are desperately needed in a country where the railway system is breaking down and there are considerable problems with roads and aviation. Will he bear in mind that those civil servants are worthy of much better appreciation? Will he make it clear that the politicisation of the civil service relationship—begun under a previous Conservative Prime Minister—will not be tolerated by those who want the transport system of this country to be rejuvenated under the aegis of those who are prepared to take difficult decisions?

Mr. Byers: I have never taken the view that one should judge a civil servant on whether or not they were one of us, and I know that certain Opposition Members would not disagree with that approach. My hon. Friend makes an important point. As Chairman of the Transport Committee, she deals with many officials in my Department and she will know that they are dedicated and hard-working. They want to work with me in meeting the challenges posed by the railways, roads, buses, underground and aviation. Big challenges lie ahead, and I am confident that we will be able to meet them together as a Department. I honestly believe that the resignations of Jo Moore and Martin Sixsmith mean that we are in a stronger position to meet those challenges.

There is no doubt in my mind that the impartiality of the civil service is one of its greatest strengths. I have done nothing as Secretary of State that would in any way compromise that impartiality, and that is how I intend to continue.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Given that this morning the Prime Minister's official spokesman repeatedly refused to answer the simple, direct question whether the Prime Minister believes that the Secretary of State has told the truth, on what basis should the House form a judgment about the latter's statement? Clearly, the Prime Minister no longer believes him.

Mr. Byers: The Prime Minister will make his position clear. Had the Prime Minister's official spokesman in the Lobby briefing this morning gone through the statement that I intended to make to the House, the right hon. Gentleman would have been the first to criticise that. The House has had an opportunity to hear at first hand from me about the circumstances of Martin Sixsmith's resignation. I have declined invitations to go on numerous television and radio programmes to provide the House with this opportunity, and I have been open and honest, knowing the consequences that would follow were I to mislead the House in any way. My statement, confirming the points made yesterday by Sir Richard Mottram, set out the facts of the events that occurred in my Department over the past two weeks.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What were the circumstances in which so equable a civil servant as Sir Richard Mottram, whom some of us have known for 20 years, since the time when he was Michael Heseltine's private secretary and gave evidence at the Old Bailey in the trial of Clive Ponting, was prompted to say that the Department was—let me use the word "stymied"?

Mr. Byers: I have heard it expressed in many ways, but "stymied" is not one of them. My hon. Friend's question had a serious point, however. The permanent secretary felt deeply frustrated at the way in which communications in our press office had broken down and there was a lack of confidence and trust. Sir Richard Mottram has indeed had a long and distinguished career in the civil service, and he shared my frustration at what had been going on and expressed himself accordingly. In his statement yesterday, he made it absolutely clear what had happened. I invite all right hon. and hon. Members to study carefully the statement that he made yesterday, as well as the statement that I made this afternoon, because they represent an accurate recollection of events as they took place.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Whatever the Secretary of State may gloss over, does not he realise quite how demeaning this is for himself, Sir Richard Mottram and the standing of Government? He is evasive on key points. He says that he does not involve himself in personnel matters, but does not recommend that a particular person should find a position in another Department. This is a demeaning process. The House is concerned about the standard of public administration, and this looks like a considerable failure on the part of the Secretary of State and his Department. This is shaming.

Mr. Byers: When the hon. Gentleman has had an opportunity to look at the sequence of events that occurred in the week in question, I hope that he will be able to see exactly what Martin Sixsmith was involved in and will draw his own conclusions. It was in the light of that that I expressed the view that he was not a suitable person to remain in the senior civil service. That is the situation, and when hon. Members consider the points that I have made, I think that they will be able to recognise that.

The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that these are serious issues in terms of ensuring that the civil service is impartial and can get on with its job. I believe that what we have done will ensure that that impartiality remains.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): I assure my right hon. Friend that not many people on the streets of Cunninghame, South are worried about the future of Mr. Sixsmith. They are worried about the state of the roads and the railways. I have been a member of the Transport Committee for many years, and have heard many Secretaries of State give evidence. I assure my right hon. Friend that he is among the best that I have encountered. Perhaps the main reason why he is taking such flak today is that Conservative Members, who were responsible for the privatisation of the railways, now condemn him for taking Railtrack into administration. That is the real reason why they are baying for my right hon. Friend's blood today.

Mr. Byers: Some tough decisions have been taken. Many have been opposed by Opposition Members, which is always an indication that we are moving in the right direction. More difficult decisions will be taken in the months and years ahead. I look forward to appearing before my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) and the Transport Committee for many years to come.

Sir Teddy Ta[illegible] (Rochford and Southend, East): Will the Secretary of State clarify the situation, as no one ever believes anyone about anything nowadays? The right hon. Gentleman has said that Mr. Sixsmith has resigned, but that gentleman says that he has not and that he was told that he had done nothing wrong. In those circumstances, does Mr. Sixsmith have the right to go for an impartial hearing on unfair dismissal? I hope that the Secretary of State will answer that clear and specific question.

Mr. Byers: The resignation was agreed with Martin Sixsmith and the permanent secretary. It is still the case that the precise terms of his departure are being negotiated and discussed by Martin Sixsmith and the permanent secretary. Mr. Sixsmith's resignation has been accepted, and the terms under which he is to depart are being negotiated.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will my right hon. Friend explain how the situation that he has set out to the House this afternoon compares with the occasion when Colette Bowe, a press officer in the Department of Trade and Industry, was ordered by Bernard Ingham to leak a letter from the Solicitor-General against Michael Heseltine? At the time, John Biffen described Bernard Ingham as the sewer, not the sewage. Will my right hon. Friend explain how that action might have compromised the impartiality of the civil service, to use the words of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May)? Will my right hon. Friend accept it as a compliment that the BBC—which spent the whole of last Monday ringing Labour MPs to get one to criticise the Government on air—and the Tory press are using this matter as a distraction—

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must let the right hon. Gentleman put his question.

Mr. Kaufman: They are using this matter as a distraction from the fact that the Government have a lead of 17 per cent., according to the latest ICM poll. The Opposition's present performance will only serve to increase that lead. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in the Gorton division—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the Secretary of State can answer.

Mr. Byers: Once again, my right hon. Friend has done the House a service by reminding us of the events of 1985 and the role played by Bernard Ingham. I am conscious of the great support that I have had from my right hon. and hon. Friends. This is not an argument about one civil servant, but a real conflict about the direction in which the Government are going. The Conservatives simply cannot understand that the Government have a commanding lead in the opinion polls because we are putting the priorities of the people first. We will continue to do that and will not be distracted by events such as this.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Secretary of State has so far given the impression that Mr. Sixsmith was removed because he was inconvenient. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us precisely what Mr. Sixsmith did wrong to warrant his removal, when the allegation was put to him, so that he knew what he had to deal with, and who put that allegation to him?

Mr. Byers: As I think I said clearly in my opening statement, the permanent secretary, when I met him on Friday 15 February, said that in his view the situations of both Jo Moore and Martin Sixsmith were untenable because of the way in which the press office was operating and that it would therefore be in the best interests of the Department if the resignations of both of them could be secured. I agreed with the permanent secretary's recommendation and, as a result, both individuals resigned.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): May I say to my right hon. Friend how welcome is the clarity of his exposition of the events leading up to the resignation—with hindsight, the welcome resignation—of Martin Sixsmith? I remind him of the full support that he has from those on the Government Benches for the objectives that he has set for his Department. I urge him to ignore the futile fumblings of a mealy-mouthed Opposition and the feeding frenzy in the media and get on with what matters outside Westminster—the delivery of those objectives.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am sure that in the streets and clubs of Walton, in Liverpool and in the country generally, Martin Sixsmith is not the issue of the day. The issues are about improving our transport system, regenerating communities such as those on Merseyside which have been battered for far too long—we are taking steps there—getting decent housing for our people and ensuring that we have an infrastructure fit for the 21st century and the fourth largest economy in the world. We do not have that at the moment. We are about investing and reforming. Conservative Members do not accept that. They would take the money away and would not put reforms in place either.

.Norman Baker (Lewes): It is indeed brave of the Secretary of State to lay down his civil servant's life to save his skin. What happened to the convention that Secretaries of State take responsibility for what happens in their Department, instead of passing it on to civil servants? The Secretary of State has been very keen this afternoon to rubbish Martin Sixsmith and to say that Jo Moore should have resigned. What responsibility does he take? Does he think that he did anything wrong in this episode, or is he perfection personified?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the convention is that Secretaries of State do not get involved in the detailed personnel matters of the civil service. That is the reality of the situation. What happened in this case, as I explained in my statement, is that the permanent

[Mr. Byers]

secretary came to me with what he regarded as the best way forward, given the difficulties that we had, and I agreed with his recommendation.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): Will the Secretary of State keep it firmly in his mind when he looks at some of the headlines in newspapers whose journalists spend too much time watching soap operas that the British people are not terribly interested in a conflict between two individuals in one section of his Department, whereas they are extremely interested in putting right the botched privatisation of the railways? In a few months' time, people will remember only one thing about this—it is a story of the media, by the media and for the media.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point and there is a lesson for us all. When this issue is long forgotten, people will still be looking to us to improve the transport system, whether rail, road, bus, the underground or aviation. Those are the big issues that matter to people, as do regeneration, decent housing and sorting out our planning system. The Opposition may regard this as the big issue of the day, but if they fight the next general election on such a basis they will end up with even fewer Members of Parliament.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): The Secretary of State must know that he has yet to give an explanation of why Mr. Sixsmith was sacked—or of why he resigned—that would stand up in any employment tribunal. He has suggested that Mr. Sixsmith had to go because he could not get on with other people in the Department, but is it not clear that the Secretary of State cannot get on with those people? Does that not suggest that, according not to employment law rules but to his own, he ought to resign?

Mr. Byers: I made it clear that, in the view of the permanent secretary, the positions of Martin Sixsmith and Jo Moore had become untenable and that it would be best for the Department if we could secure the resignations of both. I spoke to Jo Moore and the permanent secretary spoke to Martin Sixsmith, and in the light of that both agreed to resign.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): The Secretary of State says that he does not want to be distracted from important issues. On leaving the House, will he go back to his office and get out the map for congestion charging in London, which was announced today by Ken Livingstone, and explain to me why Kennington is regarded as being in central London but Harrods is not? Will he also do what he should have done before—call in this ridiculous plan, so that a full public inquiry and environmental audit can be undertaken?

Mr. Byers: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, and we made clear representations about the matter in discussions with the Mayor of London, but under the terms of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 we are not allowed to deal with it. It has been devolved to the Mayor, who will be answerable for the scheme that he wants to introduce.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Secretary of State say whether Mr. Martin Sixsmith was a civil servant in his Department on 22 February?

Mr. Byers: As I said earlier, Martin Sixsmith offered his resignation, which was accepted, on 15 February.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): This is a sorry affair. If it is true that Martin Sixsmith, while a civil servant, telephoned a journalist on *The Mirror* on 14 February to make allegations about a fellow Government official, will the Secretary of State confirm that such behaviour was a breach of the civil service code and civil service impartiality, and should have merited instant dismissal?

Mr. Byers: Members of the House will have seen the reports in yesterday's edition of *The Mirror*, which have been accurately reflected in my hon. Friend's comments. The allegations are clearly serious and simply could not be ignored.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): The customs and conventions of the civil service are absolutely clear: resignations are placed in writing. The Secretary of State has said time and again this afternoon that Mr. Sixsmith has resigned. Would he be good enough to place in the House of Commons Library the letter from Mr. Sixsmith, dated 15 February, offering his resignation, and say what time it was delivered to him?

Mr. Byers: That issue was addressed in yesterday's statement by the permanent secretary, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to read it.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I have known my right hon. Friend for several years and I know him to be a person of integrity. I suspect that part of his problem is that he has upset some mighty vested interests with his decision on Railtrack. If he is guilty of anything, it is of showing excessive loyalty to a colleague and friend. In these days of shifting values, that is not a very great crime. By his statement this afternoon, my right hon. Friend has lanced the boil and we must not surrender to the feeding frenzy. We now need to look forward and move on.

Mr. Byers: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. I chose to make a statement to the House this afternoon for exactly those reasons. I felt that it was appropriate that the House should have the opportunity to hear my account of events. I will be held to account for the comments that I make in the House and I appreciate that. The statement that I have made and Sir Richard Mottram's statement yesterday reflect accurately the sequence of events that have taken place over the past 14 days.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) asked the Secretary of State whether he required Martin Sixsmith's resignation as a condition of Jo Moore's resignation. The Secretary of State replied that no conditions were attached to Jo Moore's resignation. As he knows, that is not an answer to the question that was put. Given that his integrity is on trial, will he now answer the question directly? Did he make Martin Sixsmith's resignation a condition of Jo Moore's resignation?

Mr. Byers: No.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I have not always been an uncritical friend of my right hon. Friend's Department, especially in relation to London Underground, but it is to his considerable credit that we have been able to have those disagreements without rancour. Will he accept my confirmation that he has many friends on the Government Benches and in local government, where he is widely seen as the most visionary and supportive local government Minister for a quarter of a century? Does he accept that the delivery of personal social services and housing to millions of people is vastly more important than who said what to whom in a row between two press officers, especially when it is essential that Ministers are able to retain confidence in their press officers?

Mr. Byers: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words. It is important not to lose sight of the issues that really matter to her constituents and others, including the reform of local government and—especially in her constituency—tackling the problems of children growing up in bed and breakfast accommodation. Far too many children are denied life chances because of the conditions in which they are being brought up, and we want to take action to address that. Those are the real, big issues that matter to people outside this place.

The present issue is a media story, because it is linked with a director of communications. The media have focused on it and are not interested in anything else. However, I have the responsibility in my Department to deliver on the big issues that people really care about, such as transport, quality of life, decent homes and the regeneration and restoration of hope to communities. I and the Government will not be diverted from delivering on that agenda.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): The Secretary of State told the House some time ago that the notorious e-mail that started all these discussions was never sent by Mr. Sixsmith to Miss Moore. Can the Secretary of State say whether that e-mail, or a similarly worded one, was sent to anyone else in his Department by Mr. Sixsmith, or was a hoax within the Department, or was just an invention of the newspapers?

Mr. Byers: The e-mail to which I referred in my statement was clearly false. What actually happened has been made public, and I shall be more than happy to place a copy of the relevant e-mail in the Library of the House so that all hon. Members may read it. The director of communications, Martin Sixsmith, sent an e-mail to me at my personal e-mail address rather than, as is normally the case, to a private secretary. That e-mail was sent on the Monday following the weekend of the death of Princess Margaret. The Friday of that week had already been announced as the date of her funeral. The e-mail was sent at about 12.30 pm to me as Stephen Byers MP. It began—these words may not be exactly correct, but they are fairly precise—"You asked me to reschedule an announcement to Friday".

The implication was that I, after Princess Margaret's death, had approached Martin Sixsmith and said that I wanted to change the date of an announcement to the Friday. That is totally inaccurate. Anyone who read that e-mail would have drawn the same conclusion as I did. I do not know why Martin Sixsmith sent the e-mail in that form, but, without any explanation behind it, it clearly had the potential to put me, as Secretary of State, in a difficult situation.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Is it not a fact that anyone who analysed Martin Sixsmith's talk on Radio 4's "Today" programme this morning and Richard Mottram's statement yesterday would fully accept the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just made? Is it not also the case that much of the protest today results from the fact that my right hon. Friend had the guts to take action to deal with the Tory shambles of rail privatisation? That is what the Opposition are protesting about. We should let him get on with doing the rest of his job in the same bold and courageous way that he has done it for the past few months.

Mr. Byers: I have started, and I intend to finish.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), the Secretary of State referred directly to the ministerial code—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please let hon. Members put their questions.

Mr. Tyler: In his response to my hon. Friend, the Secretary of State made great play of the fact that he had not instructed that the resignation or dismissal of Mr. Sixsmith should occur. The word "instruct" does not appear in paragraph 58; can he explain that discrepancy? Furthermore, if the Secretary of State did not instruct that Mr. Sixsmith should lose his job, did he agree with the proposition that Mr. Sixsmith had to go? Was that connected with the e-mail that he has introduced at this late stage of our discussion, and will he place that e-mail in the Library so that we may see the context of the statement that he has just made?

Mr. Byers: In response to a previous question, I said that I would place a copy of that e-mail in the Library. I shall of course do so because it is right that hon. Members should read it. I have also said that I agreed with the recommendation made by the permanent secretary. I made that absolutely clear.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that among the so-called pundits called on by the BBC and other media organisations over the past few days is a man—one Andy Wood—who worked from when our Government were elected in 1997 to undermine their efforts to obtain an agreement in Northern Ireland? Is not the reality that although the vast majority of civil servants have worked loyally to implement the reforms that we have tried to make and to support the efforts of my right hon. Friend and his colleagues to improve investment in

[Mike Gapes]

the London underground, reform Railtrack and much more, some people follow their own agenda and wish to support the Tories—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the Secretary of State need reply to that.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On "The Frost Programme" on Sunday morning, the Secretary of State for Scotland dismissed Mr. Sixsmith as a spin doctor who was seeking to negotiate his exit package. Does the Secretary of State agree with that description of a senior civil servant in his Department? Are we to infer from that that when Cabinet members say that senior civil servants are spin doctors, it is a dismissable offence?

Mr. Byers: The terms of Mr. Sixsmith's departure are being discussed between him, his representatives and the permanent secretary. That is the appropriate way of dealing with these matters.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Will the Secretary of State categorically state that at no time did he insist that he would not accept the resignation of Jo Moore without the resignation of Mr. Sixsmith?

Mr. Byers: I hope that I have made that clear, but I shall try to do so again. There was no linkage between the two. Jo Moore resigned without any conditions being attached. I understand from the statement made by Sir Richard Mottram—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is no point in the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) asking the Secretary of State a question if he does not allow him to answer it. The right hon. Gentleman should let the Secretary of State answer.

Mr. Byers: The statement made yesterday by Sir Richard Mottram made it clear that it was a condition of Martin Sixsmith's resignation that Jo Moore should resign.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Does the Secretary of State believe that the shambolic events of the past week reflect well or badly on the leadership of his Department, including himself?

Mr. Byers: I think that we have done the right thing by securing the resignations of Jo Moore and Martin Sixsmith. As I said earlier, I honestly believe that the Department is now in a stronger position to move forward and to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

NEW MEMBER TAKING THE OATH

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath:

Huw Irranca-Davies Esq., for Ogmore

Point of Order

4.33 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the statement, the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) chose to smear in a most disgraceful fashion the reputation of Andy Wood, a distinguished public servant with many years of service to his country through public service in Northern Ireland. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will rise to apologise. If he does not, Mr. Speaker, will you confirm that it is wholly out of order for hon. Members to treat in such a disgraceful fashion the civil servants who serve our Government and our country?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members are responsible for what they say. That is a privilege that has some responsibility attached to it. What the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) said is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I worked with Andy Wood for a long time when I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Northern Ireland Office—as was the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) later—and I can confirm that he was a public servant for more than 30 years. I should like your guidance, Mr. Speaker. Do you have any authority to protect public servants from the sort of attack that we have just heard? It was clearly wrong and demeaned the hon. Gentleman and the Ministers whom he served as a Parliamentary Private Secretary.

Mr. Speaker: As I have said before, I have only the powers that the House has given to me, and I have no power to do what the right hon. Gentleman suggests.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The remarks about Andy Wood may have been made off the cuff by the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes). As you have rightly said, hon. Members have to use their own discretion on whether to use the power make an attack—whether slanderous, accurate or inaccurate—on someone outside the House. Could you remind the House that that power is occasionally valuable, but when it seems to be used as part of the weaponry of the reputation assassins, trying to support a Minister in trouble, it makes the House look rather mean and silly?

Mr. Speaker: I have nothing to add to the points that have been made.

Health Reform (Education and Public Involvement)

4.35 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the training of health professionals and for the involvement of patients and the general public in the decision-making processes of the National Health Service; and to provide mechanisms for the regulation of training and public involvement.

My Bill is based on the Kennedy report. Most people were shocked by what happened at Bristol. It is not necessary for me to remind the House of the grim statistics—we remember them all too well. It is my intention not to reopen that issue today, but to learn from it, particularly from the Kennedy report, which makes it clear that the treatment given to the children was substandard and that parents were dealt with shoddily—hardly the health service that we wish to see. The Bristol royal infirmary and the Government have done a lot to put right the hospital's mistakes, but this is not about the Bristol tragedy; it is about the holes in the NHS through which patients can fall—holes that still exist despite recent changes.

On 18 June 1998, the inquiry was set up by the then Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). Kennedy produced close to 200 recommendations; my Bill seeks to address only two issues. I am aware that the Government have done much, and have plans to do much more. My intention is to assist the Government. They have already introduced a Bill to establish the Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals. My Bill would clarify one of the new council's responsibilities and strengthen patient representation—a principle already embraced by the Government. Kennedy says that staff

> "must feel able to be open about their work and the work of colleagues".

On patient representation, it would be obligatory for each NHS trust to appoint two people, as non-executive directors, to oversee patient involvement, to ensure that patients are involved in decisions that relate to their care and that the complaint and decision-making processes are transparent to patients. According to Kennedy, the relationship between the patient and the professional should be

> "imbued with the idea of partnership".

Users and providers should meet as equals.

Of course, the professionals who currently sit on the boards can be patients, too, but their job is not to represent patients, and I want people on the boards who only represent patients. Having two representatives would allow trusts to ensure geographical representation, and allow for the division of responsibility.

The Kennedy report states that patients are entitled to

> "be cared for by healthcare professionals with relevant up-to-date skills and expertise".

The report also says that:

> "periodic revalidation, whereby healthcare professionals demonstrate that they remain fit to practise . . . should be compulsory for all healthcare professionals".

Therefore, my Bill would also make provision for continuous training.

When the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill completes its stages, the Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals will come into being. It will have the power to regulate and set uniform, continuous training and assessment requirements for health care professionals. My Bill would make it obligatory for the council, with the Secretary of State, to use those powers and ensure that health care professionals receive regular training to update their skills and working methods. However, there is a disciplinary system in place to cover professionals who refuse training or fall below certain minimum standards of knowledge and practice. Any disciplinary action should be undertaken within reasonable time. I am sure that most hon. Members have heard me mention previously some of the issues affecting the health service in Coventry, where several consultants have been suspended for considerable periods—at least two for a two-year period—at considerable cost to the national health service. Another consultant was suspended as recently as Friday. I do not know too much about the details of the case, but I am struck by the fact that every time a consultant is suspended in Coventry, it seems to be for bullying. That reminds me of my days in industry, when the catch-all offence was gross misconduct. It seems that the charge of bullying is being used in the same sort of way.

As I said, I do not know the details of the case, but I shall not let the matter rest. I intend to seek Adjournment debates to pursue the issue. Some of the managers in the local health service, and even at regional level, have said that they are not going to let half a dozen Members of Parliament push them around. It is not about Members of Parliament pushing management around; it is about ensuring the best possible management for Walsgrave Hospitals NHS trust and Walsgrave hospital. That is the real issue.

The national health service should be a good employer and allow staff to refresh their skills and learn new ones. The Government have spent a lot of time and money encouraging employers to invest in their staff and make lifelong learning opportunities available to them. Surely it would be wrong to exclude such opportunities from the NHS. After all, they are available in the education system. In addition, the NHS would benefit from sharing examples of best practice.

For all those reasons, I want the new council to address the issue and ensure continuous training for all health care professionals. It would be easy to adopt the route of the Opposition and lambast the health service for its inadequacies and mistakes. That is not my style. I am introducing this Bill because it provides a productive approach and real solutions. It will go some way towards giving our constituents an effective service, and a health service to be trusted.

I very much hope that hon. Members will support my Bill and the Kennedy recommendations included in it. Let us start a new chapter in the improvement of the national health service.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jim Cunningham, Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas, Mr. Brian Jenkins, Mr. Stephen McCabe, Mr. Mike O'Brien, Mr. Bill Olner, Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, Ms Debra Shipley, Rachel Squire, David Taylor and Mr. James Wray.

HEALTH REFORM (EDUCATION AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT)

Mr. Jim Cunningham accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the training of health professionals and for the involvement of patients and the general public in the decision-making processes of the National Health Service; and to provide mechanisms for the regulation of training and public involvement: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 June, and to be printed [Bill 99].

Proceeds of Crime Bill (Programme)(No. 2)

4.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I beg to move,

That in accordance with the resolution of the Programming Committee of 25th February and pursuant to the Order of 30th October 2001 (Proceeds of Crime Bill (Programme))—

Consideration and Third Reading

(1) The proceedings on consideration shall be taken on each of the allotted days as shown in the first column of the following Table and shall be taken in the order so shown, and each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

Table

Proceedings	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First allotted day	
New Clauses relating to Part 1, amendments relating to Clause 1, Schedule 1 and Clauses 2 to 5; new Clauses relating to Part 2, Part 3 and Part 4; amendments relating to Clauses 6 to 141, Schedule 2 and Clauses 142 to 248	Three and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order
New Clauses relating to Part 5; amendments relating to Clauses 249 to 256, Schedule 3, Clauses 257 to 272, Schedule 4 and Clauses 273 to 316; new Clauses relating to Part 6; amendments relating to Clauses 317 to 325, Schedule 5 and Clause 326	Six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order
Second allotted day	
New Clauses relating to Part 7; amendments relating to Clauses 327 to 330, Schedule 6 and Clauses 331 to 335	Two and a quarter hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill
New Clauses relating to Part 8; amendments relating to Clauses 336 to 407; new Clauses relating to Part 9; amendments relating to Clauses 408 to 425; new Clauses relating to Part 10; amendments relating to Clauses 426 to 433; new Clauses relating to Part 11; amendments relating to Clauses 434 to 439, Schedule 7, Clauses 440 to 444, Schedule 8, Clause 445, Schedule 9 and Clauses 446 to 450; remaining new Clauses; new Schedules and remaining proceedings on consideration	Four and a quarter hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill

(2) The proceedings on Third Reading shall be brought to a conclusion six hours after the commencement of the proceedings on the Bill on the second allotted day.—[*Mr. Bob Ainsworth.*]

I should like to state my appreciation for the approach taken by both the main Opposition parties. Her Majesty's official Opposition stated their opposition to programme motions in principle. None the less, they sought to make absolutely sure, as they did in Committee, that the motion was structured to ensure that the appropriate amount of time was available to discuss all the different parts of the Bill. I commend the motion to the House.

4.44 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I thank the Minister for his courtesy and for the way in which he has approached the details of programming the two days of Report. Throughout the Bill's proceedings there has been considerable and welcome co-operation between the Government and the Opposition in trying to find sufficient time to discuss the matters that require consideration.

Although I wish to make it clear that it is not the Opposition's intention to divide the House on the programme motion, it is only right to point out that six hours on each of the two days for Report stage does not give us sufficient time to consider the Bill properly. We have tried to divide the time up as best we can, but I fear that, even if we go as quickly as we can, the sheer volume of a 450-clause Bill will make it difficult for us to meet the timetable that has been set. The Opposition will endeavour to do our best to meet the timetable, but I must record our continuing unhappiness at the way in which the House will I fear, once again, send legislation off to the other place without completing its consideration properly. We will do our best to avoid that, but the possibility remains a source of sadness to me.

When we started our consideration of the Bill, I said that I hoped that its scrutiny would be a model of its kind. I suspect that, on occasions, we have all fallen short of providing a model, but we have made an effort. Two days on Report, however, is not sufficient to do justice to an extremely important Bill.

4.46 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): I also wish to thank the Minister for his courtesy in discussing the programme motion with the Liberal Democrats as well as with the Conservative Opposition. Indeed, I thank him for his courtesy throughout the proceedings on the Bill and for the way in which he was prepared to discuss its timetabling and the real issues in Committee. The Committee stage proved to be a useful exercise and all three parties co-operated to try to bring about better legislation.

Because of a Division, I did not have an opportunity at the end of the Committee stage to make a few comments, so I hope that you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I now thank the Minister for the way in which he has listened to the arguments that have produced the Bill as it is today and thank the official Opposition for their constructive approach. In particular, I thank the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and the staff on the Committee who helped us with our deliberations.

I am the first to criticise the Government when we do not have sufficient time to discuss detailed legislation. This is a long Bill of 450 clauses, but I believe that the Government allowed us sufficient time in Committee and that it is adequate to have two days on Report. I am happy to make it clear that I do not think that we had enough time to consider, for example, the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, but on this occasion the Government have been quite generous. I have no problem with the amount of time allocated or with the way in which it has been divided up. We will therefore support the programme motion.

4.47 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I shall contribute to the debate because that will take less time than a Division. We either vote to show our displeasure at the programme motion or we place our main points of concern on the record.

I do not believe for a moment that enough time was provided for the Bill's consideration in Committee or that we shall have enough time today and tomorrow for Report. We need only consider what has happened thus far to appreciate the difficulties that the House faces. The Bill has 450 clauses and, although the Committee had 39 sittings, 133 clauses were not considered. We did not have enough time in Committee. We are now confronted with the prospect of debating 271 selected amendments in two days and, if my maths is any good—I suspect that it is not, but it is not too bad—we shall have two and a half minutes for the consideration of each amendment. It is therefore inevitable that, as happened in Committee, large parts of the Bill will not be considered over the next two days.

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): Only if the hon. Gentleman rabbits on.

Mr. Wilshire: The Minister says that the Bill will not be considered only if I rabbit on, and he said that several times in Committee. However, the Government do not understand that the Bill needs proper and thorough scrutiny, and I and my colleagues will never apologise for doing the job that we were elected to do, which is to hold the Government to account. If they do not give us enough time, it is their fault—not ours.

Large chunks of amendments will not be considered today. However, if one accepts that nothing can be done because the Government have the majority and can dictate the time available, it would be churlish of me not to say that within that constraint the approach has been helpful and considerate, with a great deal of give and take. I hope that my Front-Bench colleagues will not force the motion to a Division, despite the fact that we object to it.

4.50 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I have two questions for the Minister. A huge number of amendments have been selected, despite the fact that the parties agree to the general principles underlying the Bill. Given that we will have about two minutes per amendment, is the two-day restriction based on the Government's belief that there is general agreement for the principles? Did the discussions that took place through the usual channels agree that the timetabling was adequate?

4.51 pm

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank hon. Members for their kind comments. Much of our discussion in Committee was constructive. It caused some parts of the Bill to be reviewed and led to us tabling some of the amendments that are before us for discussion. It reflected the House working at its very best in terms of scrutinising and improving legislation. Although that is not true of every hour that we spent in Committee, it is certainly true of many of them.

I understand why hon. Members claim that we have not had sufficient time to scrutinise the Bill, but we did have 39 Committee sittings. We met every morning and

[Mr. Bob Ainsworth]

afternoon of every Tuesday and Thursday on which the House sat since the first week in November. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary joked that we had been in Committee for 300 years. In addition to the length of time that we spent in Committee, we restructured the time allocated to it in response to problems that were repeatedly raised. I have been thanked for that and the Whip who dealt with negotiations on the Bill has been thanked for being flexible.

The Bill is large. It is complicated and important, and many amendments are tabled to it. There is no doubt that it looks like a daunting task to get through all of them. However, those of us who spent a considerable amount of time considering the Bill know that it is very repetitive. Things that are changed in part 2 have to be changed in parts 3 and 4, which multiplies the number of amendments to address a single issue. Many of the amendments are minor drafting amendments with no policy implications.

A large number of the amendments are a direct result of issues raised in Committee and reflect our attempt to respond. I am sure that Opposition Members understand that we were not going to respond to everything that concerned them, but nearly all the amendments that are of substance are in response to problems raised in Committee which I agreed to reflect on and address on Report. I do not think that the task will be as daunting as it looks on paper if the good will demonstrated in Committee continues so that we properly consider the Bill and use the time available appropriately in order to expose the important issues.

In response to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), I point out that there was flexibility in the time allocation, and a great deal of agreement. In the first instance, there was agreement about the amount of time needed in Committee, which was extended in response to representations. I can therefore answer the hon. Gentleman's question in the affirmative.

Question put and agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Proceeds of Crime Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Committee, considered.

Schedule 1

ASSETS RECOVERY AGENCY

4.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I beg to move amendment No. 77, in page 260, line 23, leave out "a senior official" and insert—

'an assistant to the Director'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: Government amendment No. 78.

No. 174, in page 261, line 32, at end insert—

'(3A) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (3), there shall be no more than 10 performance targets for any financial year and those targets shall relate specifically to the functions of the Agency.'.

Government amendment No. 79.

No. 196, in clause 4, page 3, line 6, at end insert—

'(1A) Such co-operation shall take place in accordance with the provisions of other enactments.'.

Government amendment No. 89.

Mr. Ainsworth: In Committee, we discussed whether the title "senior official" was appropriate for the member of the agency who would be responsible for exercising the director's functions in Northern Ireland, and I agreed to reflect further on the issue. Amendment No. 77 is the result.

We were not attracted by the title "deputy director", which was suggested in Committee, as it would leave scope for confusion. The term "deputy" would imply that the person would act as a substitute for the director on the whole range of his functions. However, the title "assistant director" would avoid such confusion, while reflecting the importance of the agency's work in Northern Ireland. As I said in Committee, the director would have to consult the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland before making that appointment. Amendment No. 78 will include that commitment in the Bill.

Amendment No. 174, in the name of Conservative Members, would mean that the director's objectives could include no more than 10 performance targets, and those would have to relate specifically to the agency's functions. The performance targets in the agency's annual plan will be drawn up by the director and must be approved by the Secretary of State. I explained in Committee that the targets will take into account the assets recovery strategy and the wider work of the assets recovery committee.

It is too early to say with certainty what those targets will be, but I shall share with hon. Members, as I did in Committee, our latest thinking on the measures that we ought to apply to the agency's output. They are likely to include the number of confiscation orders obtained by the agency and the value of those orders; the number of successful civil recovery actions and the amounts recovered through that route; the number of successful taxation cases and the amounts recovered; and the proceeds recovered as a percentage of the number of confiscation orders made, in respect of those cases for which the agency is responsible for enforcement. Some measure will need to be applied to international co-operation on confiscation matters, the performance of the centre of excellence and the agency's financial performance. We will also seek to include a measure of the agency's involvement with the Secretary of State's priorities and other Government priorities.

We do not want to restrict the director's ability to draw up targets. It is for the director to decide how many targets there should be, according to his priorities and what he thinks he and the agency will be able to deliver. To impose an artificial cap on the number or nature of targets at this point would be inappropriate.

5 pm

I accept concerns expressed in Committee that the scope of clause 4(1)(b) is too broad. We concluded that everyone whom we would wish to be under a duty to co-operate with the director is already covered by subsection (1)(a), so Government amendment No. 79 proposes to delete subsection (1)(b); I hope that that deals with the points that were usefully made in Committee.

I do not know whether amendment No. 196, which was tabled by the Opposition, is the result of a misunderstanding of the Bill's intentions. The disclosure of information to the director will be governed by the provisions of part 10, so it is clear that clause 4 is not supposed to set out the rules on disclosure of information. The power in part 10 to disclose information to the director will be permissive; nobody will be required to disclose information. Anyone disclosing information can place restrictions on its further disclosure. The amendment would cause confusion about the extent of co-operation required under clause 4. We do not want people to be unsure about whether they can co-operate with the director; we do not want a conflict between the provisions of part 10 and other provisions on disclosure of information.

Government amendment No. 89 deals with clause 320's taxation powers, specifically inheritance tax appeals. All inheritance tax appeals are already reserved to the special commissioners, but the provisions of clause 320(2) and (3) on the assistance of expert assessors are not currently available for inheritance tax appeals. It would be highly desirable for the commissioners to have such assistance. The amendment would apply the same appeal system—specifically the potential for input from expert assessors—to all the director's tax functions.

I hope that that is sufficient, as I do not wish unnecessarily to prolong consideration of the amendments. I urge the House to accept Government amendments Nos. 77, 78, 79 and 89, and I hope that in the light of what I have said Opposition Members will not press amendments Nos. 174 and 196 to a vote.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Opposition Front Benchers welcome Government amendments Nos. 77, 78 and 79. As the Minister said, and as other Members mentioned in our recent discussions on the programme motion, there was quite a lot of helpful and constructive co-operation between the Government and Opposition in Committee. It is fair to say that Government amendments Nos. 77, 78 and especially Government amendment No. 79, which deletes some inelegant phraseology, reflect that continuing co-operation. I am grateful to the Minister for accepting some of the arguments that we made in Committee.

We are disappointed, however, that the proposal in our amendment No. 174 was not included in the Government's further improvements to the Bill. As the Minister said, on 13 November last year we had a detailed debate in Committee about performance targets, which is recorded at columns 12 to 19 of the *Official Report*. Although he said that it may be premature to cap the number of performance targets, he may have forgotten what he said in Committee:

> "I accept what the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) said about the number of targets and potential difficulties."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 13 November 2001; c. 14.]

He went on to express some of his misgivings in that regard.

We have specifically suggested a limit of 10 performance targets; under other legislation, the Government have imposed ridiculous numbers of targets in other law and order fields. In Committee, I mentioned police forces as an example and pointed out that the Government were seeking to impose as many as 58 performance targets on my force in Surrey. As the chief constable told me, such a number is ridiculous: no sensible organisation has 58 separate performance targets. All that such a large number of targets will do is create huge amounts of bureaucracy. The Government listened to some of the Opposition's complaints about the number of targets imposed on chief constables and police authorities, but they reduced the number from 58 to only 43, which is still far too many.

Amendment No. 174 seeks to bring some common sense to bear. We cannot conceive of any sensible organisation having more than 10 performance targets. The point of such targets is that they should concentrate on the nitty-gritty of an organisation's work. We have, therefore, sought once again to persuade the Government to limit that number. I have no doubt that this matter will arise again in another place if they continue to argue that organisations should be encouraged to concentrate on the main issues only by something as formal as performance targets. That does not mean that there will not be other things beyond such targets that everybody will want an organisation to do well; none the less, it cannot be sensible for any organisation to have more than 10 formal performance targets. It must also be absolutely clear that, whatever the targets are, they should be central to that which is germane to the work of the organisation. Only then will we have a sensible organisation that is not over-bureaucratic.

I am disappointed that the Minister has not yet been persuaded of the argument—but I have hope, given the constructive way in which he has responded previously, not only by tabling some of the other amendments in the group but by accepting amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and I in Committee. As we shall see, that has happened not least by the Government adding their names to Opposition amendments. They have tried to be constructive when they have felt able to do so, and I still hope that

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

amendment No. 174 will be yet another proposal on which they will accept in the end, perhaps in another place, that we have common sense on our side.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): In his relatively brief speech, the hon. Gentleman has twice suggested that if he does not get his own way he will get the old boys along the Corridor to try to emasculate the Bill. Do the Conservatives intend to adopt that strategy throughout this process? If they do not get their own way here, will they try to block the Bill until they do so in another place?

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman has perhaps forgotten that in Committee, in relation to a similar amendment, he said:

> "I support the thrust of the amendment, especially with regard to one subject."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 13 November 2001; c. 17.]

He went on to talk about its remit in relation to Scotland. I am rather disappointed to find that he seems to have changed his mind.

Mr. Davidson *rose—*

Mr. Hawkins: I shall give way in a moment, when I have finished my point. The hon. Gentleman's contributions in Committee informed and amused us throughout our proceedings. As tributes have been paid to others for their work in Committee, I pay my own tribute to him for those constructive contributions.

We have no intention of using what the hon. Gentleman describes as the old boys along the Corridor to block the Bill. As he will remember from Committee, we have said throughout discussions on the Bill that we support its broad thrust and are trying merely to improve it. I hope that he will return to what he helpfully said at column 17 on 13 November in expressing his support for the thrust of an Opposition amendment that was similar to amendment No. 174. If he still wants me to give way, I shall do so.

Mr. Davidson: How can I resist? The hon. Gentleman's compliments on my behaviour in Committee would have been much better received if I had not had to drag them out of him by intervening on him. As he has already twice mentioned the fact that he is going to take these matters to another place, and as the Conservatives raised this point consistently in Committee, may I take it that he is speaking on behalf of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and himself when he says that it is not his intention to sabotage this measure in the Lords? Or is there a division on the Conservative Benches, as there was so often in Committee?

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman's memory must be playing him false. There were no divisions between me and my hon. Friend, and we have no divisions on this point. As my hon. Friend has rightly said, we are concerned that the Government might have overloaded the programme for today, and I do not want to detain the House further on this matter. We hope, however, that the Government will continue to consider it in the responsible and constructive way in which they have considered many other issues.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I pay tribute to the Opposition parties, and to how well they conducted themselves in Committee. I also welcome the three members of the Scottish National party to our discussions; I hope that they might contribute something for a change.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has extended a special welcome to us today. The fact is, we have been involved in this matter. We were not on the Standing Committee because we were not awarded a place. We had no place on the Committee of Selection, and we had to rely on the good will or otherwise of the Liberals to secure a place on the Standing Committee. Of course, they preferred to have two places for themselves, although, from looking at their attendance record, I see that they both managed to miss 15 or 16 sittings apiece. Perhaps there was a wasted place, and if the Liberals had not sought to have two places for themselves, they could have allocated one to the SNP—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that we have a sufficiency of that matter on the record. May we please return to the amendment?

John Robertson: I am sure that my colleagues on the Liberal Benches will respond to the point made by the hon. Lady.

On amendment No. 174, the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) talked a great deal about targets. Although I have some sympathy with the Conservatives on targets—on many occasions, various bodies have to adhere to too many targets—limiting the number to 10 would cause different problems. Which 10 targets should we choose if there happened to be 12, or 20—who knows? Then again, there might only be five. If we talk about a specific number, such as 10, we might have to try to invent targets to get the total up to that number. I accept that the proposal was for a maximum of 10, but sometimes maximums have a habit of becoming actuals. That could be a problem.

Having read the Bill, I would have thought that the matter would be covered by schedule 1(8)(1), which requires the director to set an agenda for the year. That would involve targets. I would be inclined to consider a reduction in targets, rather than an increase, in circumstances in which the director would examine what was required for the year. The objectives themselves would become targets.

On amendment No. 196, tabled by the Liberals, I agree entirely with the Minister. I thought that the Liberals misunderstood the matter, and I found the issue very complicated. Then again, I found the whole Bill a bit complicated, not being a lawyer. That is the first time that that has been said in the debate, but it will be said many more times over the next two days.

I ask the Minister to look at the targets. I know that the situation is fluid and that it will change, but we should consider it in a better light, perhaps strengthen the director's objectives and make them part of the targets.

5.15 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): First, may I briefly put it on record that we received no request from the SNP for a place on the Committee?

Annabelle Ewing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Norman Baker: I have not even started.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker). We do not want to go back down that track. Let us stick to the amendment, as there is an awful lot to cover today.

Norman Baker: I am sure that we would have given them a seat if they had wanted one.

I thank the Minister for listening to what was said in Committee and for the Government amendments, all of which we welcome, especially amendment No. 79. As he knows, it addresses a point of concern raised not just by Opposition Members, but by the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird).

I want briefly to address our amendment No. 196. We shall not press it to a Division, but we want to tease out from the Minister, even at this stage, more information on how the co-operation will occur. Our motivation is the uncertainty that persists following the discussion in Committee, and I refer the Minister to columns 49 and 50 and the rest of that debate.

We want to ensure, first, that nothing a director does could jeopardise criminal proceedings by cutting across prosecution authorities and, secondly, that the director does not receive material that is passed to him unlawfully. Nor do we want him to be artificially hampered in respect of information that would help his work that has been collected and could be used by him. The amendment represents an attempt to clarify the legal position.

In Committee, I raised with the Minister the position regarding telephone taps and whether information from such sources could be passed to the director. In return, he referred me to the specific exemptions in part 10—the Data Protection Act 1998 and part 1 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. We are clear on those, but, of course, other legislation is involved. For example, a collection of material relates to telephone communications—not taps, but records of numbers that have been dialled, which are not covered by the two Acts.

It is possible for information to be collected by a prosecution authority or, indeed, by the security services, which are not among the bodies set out in part 10. Therefore, there is doubt in my mind about whether they are included and what their role is. It is also possible for information to be collected by the security services that is intended for a prosecution. The judgment may be made that a prosecution would not be sustainable. In such circumstances, would it be permissible to pass information that had been collected to the director? If not, would the information be lost in respect of any subsequent action that may be taken by the Assets Recovery Agency?

We are uncertain about those issues. I repeat that I do not want information that should be used for confiscation procedures to be collected but not passed on, but nor do I want anyone to be in a position where they are deemed to be passing information unlawfully. I think that our amendment helps to clarify the legal position, but the Minister clearly takes a different view. He must provide more clarification and, in particular, refer to the position of the security services, which are not mentioned in clause 427(5), as other prosecution and law enforcement agencies are.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): I shall confine my remarks to amendment No. 174 and the question of the performance targets, which has already been raised. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) may be labouring under a misapprehension. My reading of the Bill suggests that the performance targets will be set not by the Government, but by the director in the confines of the plan. Will the Minister confirm that? The Government are not imposing targets on the director, as the hon. Gentleman suggests; rather, the director, in managing his organisation, will decide to present performance targets in the confines of his own plan.

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough): Does it not strike my hon. Friend that the purpose of the Opposition's amendment is effectively to allow the Government to impose limitations on the director's discretion to set whatever targets he thinks appropriate?

Ian Lucas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As so often over the past few months, he has pinched my point and made it better than I could ever have done.

Mr. Hawkins: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that any director running a sensible organisation in the private sector would have more than 10 performance targets?

Ian Lucas: As one who ran a business in the private sector before coming here, I would certainly have more than 10—and my business was much smaller than the agency will be.

I think the Minister's point [illegible] Government should not fetter the director's management goals is the salient point, the one that carries real force. If the Minister can confirm that the director rather than the Government will impose the performance targets, the Opposition's argument must surely fall.

Mr. Stinchcombe: If the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) is right in saying that no sensible director would impose more than 10 targets, he has nothing to fear from the employment of—presumably—such a sensible person. We merely suggest that, rather than our dictating to him how he should exercise his powers and discretions, he should decide for himself.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I do not know what more I can say about disclosure, other than repeating the commitment I gave in Committee that part 10 will do nothing to authorise a disclosure prohibited by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, or cut across the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) asked whether the director would receive information that had been obtained illegally. In effect, the director is not an individual but a public body; certainly, he is a public person. All the usual restrictions involving operating within human rights legislation and other requirements will apply to him as they do to any other person.

[Mr. Bob Ainsworth]

The hon. Gentleman and I may differ on whether, and to what extent, the human rights legislation should be replicated in different parts of the Bill, but we think the restrictions in the Acts I have mentioned, along with the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998, are sufficient to ensure that the director cannot act in any way that is inappropriate.

As for the possibility of the director's actions cutting across prosecutory authorities, I can only ask the hon. Gentleman to return to our debate about the hierarchy that we envisage. We do not want any of the powers in the Bill to impede the primary objective, which must be the prosecution and bringing to book of criminals by the ordinary prosecution authorities, and their ability to take such people to court if possible and, when appropriate, to lock them away. Nothing that the director does within any of the powers that we are giving him under the Bill ought to cut across the activities of the other law enforcement agencies, which should come as a first consideration in the hierarchy.

Norman Baker: Law enforcement agencies might collect information at an early stage with a view to prosecution that would then not be used. Can the Minister guarantee that information that is collected and which may be useful in subsequent proceedings undertaken by the Asset Recovery Agency will be passed on? Are there circumstances in which it will not be passed on?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hierarchy will work in such a way that the overwhelming majority of the information that comes to the director comes from the police authorities or the prosecution authorities. In most circumstances, that will occur where they have decided that prosecution is not viable or appropriate, for whatever reason. Of course the information, where appropriate, will be passed on to the director of the Asset Recovery Agency so that he can consider whether or not to pursue the issue through civil recovery, his taxation powers or whatever else is appropriate to him.

I can only repeat that the director will act as a public body. He is restrained by all the requirements that fall upon him under human rights and data protection legislation and the RIPA provisions. We feel that they are sufficient to make sure that information is passed on to the director appropriately.

We do not want to put any restrictions on people co-operating with the director; quite the reverse. We want people to co-operate with him and we want powers to recover the proceeds of crime used far more extensively in this country than they have been over many years. That has been the desire of Governments of all complexions for a long time, but our legislation has been woefully inadequate until this point. We can only hope that our provisions will rectify that and that we can attack those profits and dismantle some of those organisations by preventing them from doing what they exist in order to do, which is to generate money and proceeds.

Norman Baker: Can the Minister explain why, in part 10, MI5 in particular and the security services in general are not listed as permitted persons?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman is right; the security services are not listed as bodies that are permitted to disclose information to the director. Discussions are continuing as to whether it would be appropriate to list them. We had a discussion in Committee about this. When I am able to say something about it, I will try to make sure that Parliament is made aware of our conclusions. For the moment, the security services are not listed. We are continuing to examine whether they ought to be, and in what circumstances.

On the question of targets, my hon. Friends the Members for Wrexham (Mr. Lucas) and for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) are absolutely right. There is widespread discussion about how many targets we impose on how many bodies and whether or not it is appropriate for us to do so. We had such a discussion in Committee. I ask Opposition Members to accept that while everyone complains about the number of targets that we require of them, let them try to remove one. The complaints come quickly that by removing the target, we are saying, in effect, that the activity concerned is not core or central and that we are not giving it sufficient prominence. Here, we are not talking about imposing targets on the director, as my hon. Friends have said. The director will draw up the targets. He will have to have the agreement of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Hawkins: Not too many.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman says that we should not impose too many targets. Obviously, the director will want to manage the business that he has been given and he will need to decide on the level of the targets. The hon. Gentleman may be right, and the director may decide that the number should be far fewer than 10, but why cannot we leave it up to him to decide appropriately?

5.30 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The Minister will recall that one of the anxieties expressed in Committee was about detailing targets for what could ultimately be the amount to be confiscated in any given year. The fear is that there could be a conflict between what is essentially an economic target for a Department and the interests of justice. I accept that no such target is set out, but it is a legitimate matter to raise and to express anxiety about.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It would be ridiculous to require the director to involve himself in X number of confiscation proceedings, with no consideration of quality or added value or what return comes from those proceedings. The Bill is structured so as to allow him to draw up the targets. He will have to do that and seek the agreement of the Secretary of State. We do not need a numerical restriction.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Wrexham and for Wellingborough for their input, and I ask hon. Members to support the Government amendments and not to insist on theirs.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 78, in page 260, line 24, at end insert—

'(2) But the Director must not appoint a person under sub-paragraph (1)(b) unless he first consults the Secretary of State.'.—*[Mr. Bob Ainsworth.]*

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I beg to move amendment No. 226, in page 261, line 24, at end insert "and in Scotland.".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 228, in page 262, line 20, at end insert—

'11A In section 15 of the Scotland Act 1998 (disqualification from membership of the Parliament) insert in subsection (1)—

"(aa) he is the Director of the Assets Recovery Agency";

11B In section 12 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 (disqualification from being an Assembly member), insert in subsection (1)—

"(e) he is the Director of the Assets Recovery Agency".'.

Government new clause 13—*Performance of functions of Scottish Ministers by constables in Scotland.*

Government amendment No. 90.

Government new clause 14—*Performance of functions of Scottish Ministers by constables in Scotland (No. 2).*

Government amendment No. 285.

Amendment No. 229, in clause 447, page 258, line 29, leave out "or 431(6)" and insert ", 431(6) or 446".

Government new clause 6—*Enactment.*

New clause 1—*Operation of the Act in Scotland: reports and review—*

'(1) The Lord Advocate must, as soon as possible after the end of each financial year, publish a report on how he has exercised his functions under Part 3 and under Chapter 3 of Part 5 during the financial year.

(2) The Scottish Ministers must, as soon as possible after the end of each financial year, publish a report on how they have exercised their functions under Part 5 during the financial year.

(3) Within a period of two years after the coming into force of Part 5 of this Act, the Lord Advocate and the Scottish Ministers must publish jointly a review of the operation of the Act (other than Part 6) in Scotland, including their opinions on the case for the establishment of a Scottish Assets Recovery Agency.

(4) A report under subsection (1) or (2) or a review under subsection (3) must be laid before the Scottish Parliament.'.

Mr. Carmichael: I associate myself with the remarks made earlier about the conduct of the legislation and our proceedings in Committee. This is the single largest piece of legislation from Scotland to go through the House since the Scotland Act 1998. In that context, I am pleased to welcome back to the debate Scottish National party Members. I am not given to defending my Whips Office, but I remind the House that Plaid Members, who are in the same position as Scottish National party Members, somehow managed, through my Whips Office, to get representation on Standing Committees. I fear that there is something slightly false in the self-righteous indignation that we hear from the SNP.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Such is the lack of confidence in the Liberal Whips Office and its representation of minority parties that not only the SNP but Plaid Cymru, all the Unionist parties, the SDLP and every other minority party have defected from the Liberals as representatives and are now being represented by the Government Whips, because the Liberal party consistently filched our places on Standing Committees.

Mr. Carmichael: Had the hon. Members for Angus (Mr. Weir) or for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) asked our Whips Office, they would have been more than welcome.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have heard enough of this argument, which is quite outside the terms of the amendment. Let us get on with the substance of the amendment.

Mr. Carmichael: I take your point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The amendment is not of massive significance, but I urge the Minister to consider it seriously. The functions of the director of the Assets Recovery Agency that are to be executed north of the border—primarily taxation functions—should be incorporated in a plan. Plans are being outlined for the rest of the country, and I do not see why there should be any difference for Scotland.

Likewise, in connection with amendment No. 228, it must be remembered that the Bill comes before this House as a result of a Sewel motion. Much has been made during the Bill's passage through the House of the virtue of uniformity of provision throughout the United Kingdom. As drafted, the Bill provides that the director of the ARA would be excluded from membership of both this House and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Given that the director has some functions in Scotland and Wales, it seems only sensible that the exclusion should apply there also.

More significant is new clause 1. The Bill will require the director of the ARA to make reports to this House. New clause 1(1) would mean that the Scottish Parliament would benefit from the same level of reporting, from the Lord Advocate. The general point is that the Lord Advocate and the ARA director will have nearly identical roles. Therefore, the Scottish Parliament should be able to subject the actions of the Lord Advocate in the performance of his functions under the Bill to the same degree of scrutiny as this House will be able to bring to bear on the performance of the ARA director. Proposed new subsection (2) deals with the execution by other Scottish Ministers of their functions under the Bill.

Proposed new subsections (3) and (4) are based on the assumption that at some time in the future there will be a Scottish ARA. In Committee, I expressed concern that the Lord Advocate's significant range of functions under the Bill could give rise to a conflict of interests with those functions that he currently executes, either by statute or by common law, in relation to the investigation and prosecution of crime in Scotland. There is a fairly strong argument for saying that, in light of the nature of the powers to be given to the Lord Advocate or executed by the state under the Bill, a new body should be created. That body would physically distinguish the new powers from the Lord Advocate's prosecution functions, which are all based in the Crown Office.

On balance, I am persuaded that the relatively small nature of the operation north of the border means that the creation of a special ARA for Scotland would lead merely to an unnecessary—and possibly unwieldy and less effective—layer of bureaucracy. However, the option

[Mr. Carmichael]

should be kept open. Once we see how the functions—especially with regard to confiscation—are carried out when the Bill is enacted, we should be able to consider whether it is necessary to establish an equivalent agency to operate independently in Scotland.

There is a danger of cross-contamination between some of the confiscation and subsequent civil recovery proceedings, and the investigation and prosecution of crime. It seems to me appropriate that the position should be properly assessed after a couple of years, and that the Scottish Parliament should be able to revisit the matter in the light of experience.

The only other matter on which I wish to comment at this stage is amendment No. 229. I am prepared, on balance, to support the Scottish National party on the amendment. It highlights an important issue in relation to the conduct of legislation through this House subsequent to the passing of a Sewel motion by the Scottish Parliament. I have gone on record before as saying that it is important to have proper scrutiny by Parliament of the Executive on legislation coming here under a Sewel motion. That is currently problematic.

The SNP's amendment would at least require an order to be brought before the Scottish Parliament and would allow Members of the Scottish Parliament to have the final say on whether they were happy with what we have done in this place. That is very little in the way of parliamentary scrutiny but it is preferable to none at all, which appears to be the situation at present.

I understand that the Scottish nationalists may divide the House on the amendment. They will have the support—albeit grudging—of Liberal Democrat Members.

Annabelle Ewing: I rise to support amendment No. 226, tabled by the Liberal Democrats and the SNP-Plaid Cymru group. I should also like to speak to amendment No. 229 which, as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) pointed out, has been tabled by that group.

The SNP-Plaid Cymru group is broadly supportive of this important Bill's objectives. It is about time that the drugs barons and their like accepted that they are not above the law. There are many good provisions in the Bill that will, I hope, secure the Bill's objectives.

Amendment No. 229 is of fundamental constitutional importance, because it seeks to ensure that the spirit of the Scotland Act 1998 is respected. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland pointed out that the Bill was referred by the Scots Parliament by way of a Sewel motion, passed on 24 October last year. That was necessary because the Bill covers not only reserved matters but also many matters devolved to the Scots Parliament.

At the time of the debate in the Scots Parliament in October, my SNP colleagues in Edinburgh supported the procedure proposed by the Scottish Executive on that occasion, although we have grave concerns about the ever-increasing recourse to Sewel motions put forward by the Labour-Liberal Scottish Executive in the Scots Parliament. There have been some 30 Sewel motions since May 1999. Let me put that in context by saying that there have been only 30 substantive Acts passed by the Scots Parliament in that time.

This matter was passed to Westminster in the sense that it was the original Bill that was approved by the Scots Parliament, including my SNP colleagues. However, there have been many major and substantial changes to the Bill, particularly to part 3, which deals with confiscation orders in Scotland.

5.45 pm

Mr. Davidson: The hon. Lady says that some 30 Sewel motions have been passed in the Scottish Parliament, compared with the 30 or so Acts that have also been passed. Is she saying that in these circumstances, the business in Sewel motions should have been held back? Is it the position of the SNP that the Bill should not have been dealt with by Westminster and that the measures to be taken against drugs barons should have been delayed until such time as the Scottish Parliament had the space to deal with them?

Annabelle Ewing: I have already addressed that point; perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening. I said that on that occasion, my SNP colleagues supported the Sewel motion on the Bill. That is a matter of record, if the hon. Gentleman should ever read the minutes of the Scots Parliament.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Lady might wish to acknowledge that when the complete rewriting of the Scottish parts of the Bill took place in Committee, the opposition to that taking place without further reference to the Scottish Parliament came principally from the Conservative Opposition.

Annabelle Ewing: On the basis that the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) is not even here, notwithstanding that we are dealing with major changes to Scots law, nothing surprises me about the Conservatives.

The amended Bill involves major and substantive changes to Scots law, particularly in dealing with the mandatory rather than discretionary powers of the sheriff or the High Court judge to consider whether to proceed with a confiscation order hearing. That represents a major change to Scots law and it should be dealt with in the proper forum—the Scots Parliament. The Scots Parliament was presented with a Bill that did not contain this provision. This is a substantial amendment, and it must surely be in the interests of the democratic process that the Scots Parliament reviews whether it wishes to proceed with such a significant change to Scots law.

John Robertson: I have been looking at amendment No. 229. Can the hon. Lady explain why she wishes to incorporate clause 446 into the Bill, which is already drafted?

Annabelle Ewing: We are seeking to ensure that key changes to the Bill concerning part 3 are referred back to the Scots Parliament for proper debate. If there is a Division and the amendment is passed, that is what the amendment will achieve. That is clearly what it states; perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to reflect further on the text. It is the democratic way to proceed.

If the Government do not concede the point, I am pleased that we will have the support of Liberal Democrat Members in a Division. I wonder, however, what the position of Mr. Jim Wallace, the Liberal Democrat Minister for Justice in the Scots Parliament, would be.

Mr. Carmichael: It is a particularly cheap shot, even from a Scottish nationalist, to attack someone who is no longer a Member of this House. Does the hon. Lady not understand and accept that Sewel motions do not last for ever? If there is any aspect of the Bill with which she or her colleagues in Edinburgh are not happy, it is open to them, when the Bill is enacted, to bring forward amending legislation in the Scottish Parliament. Surely that is what they should be doing—they should put up or shut up.

Annabelle Ewing: That is putting the cart before the horse. Surely the best time to deal with legislation is when it is going through its parliamentary stages, which is what we are seeking to do. That is better than adopting legislation and then going through a further procedure.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Annabelle Ewing: With respect to the hon. Lady, I think that I have given way quite a lot. I do not want to tie up the time of the House unduly.

Many hon. Members have argued in favour of extensive recourse to Sewel motions. However, in January 1998, the late Donald Dewar indicated that the Sewel motion would be used only in very rare circumstances. We in the SNP are trying to respect the spirit of the Scotland Act.

Mr. Carmichael: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

We hope to get the support of the Minister on the amendment. I remind him that he stated in the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs on 7 November that although there may be no legal obligation to refer the matter back to the Scots Parliament, if there were substantial or major changes such as the mandatory rather than discretionary jurisdiction of the courts, there would be a political imperative to do so. I therefore ask the Minister to support the amendment, so that we do not need to divide. That is the democratic way to proceed.

I also support amendment No. 226, the argument for which was made eloquently by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. To ensure consistency in the Bill, the director of the new agency, if he is to have a particular role in Northern Ireland, should also be required to explain in his annual plan how he intends to carry out his role in Scotland.

Mr. Hawkins: On hearing the meowing of the pussycats among the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish nationalists and Scottish Government Members, one feels, as a member of the Opposition Front Bench, as if one is intruding on private grief. We had an interesting debate on these matters in Committee on 6 December 2001. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), whose contributions were otherwise able and distinguished, had to concede that he was doing something other than what one of his spokesmen in the Scottish Parliament had asked him to do, and my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and I often felt that we were indeed intruding on the private grief of the other parties.

There are some serious points. As was noted in Committee, if the Government had envisaged the change from a discretionary to a mandatory regime at the time, one would have expected the Minister for Justice to inform the Scottish Parliament, so that the debate could proceed on that basis; the fact that such a statement was not made before the debate took place in the Scottish Parliament was very odd timing.

We acknowledge that, through this group of amendments, the Government have introduced some sensible changes. Government new clause 6, which will include Scottish Parliament Acts and Northern Ireland legislation, is a sensible clarification. Amendment No. 90, which amends clause 326, is also helpful. In deleting the phrase

"but excluding a lease which is not a long lease",

it addresses a point that was raised in Committee. Through this group of amendments, the Government have adopted the same constructive approach that they adopted in the previous group. We await with interest to hear what the Minister has to say about the issues that have so exercised Government Back Benchers from Scotland, Scottish nationalists—I am never quite sure whether they are calling themselves the Scottish nationalist and Plaid Cymru group instead—and Liberal Democrat spokesmen.

We understand the point made by the Scottish National party in its short but none the less significant amendment No. 229. Given the overloading of amendments that we must consider in but two days, it remains to be seen whether we will have time to divide on that amendment. Although we are debating it now, it would be called for a Division not today but tomorrow, because it relates to a later part of the Bill. Once again, therefore, we might prove unable to finish discussing an important matter in this House, and it might have to be returned to in another place.

These are important matters and they will surely receive considerable attention in the Scottish Parliament. We will listen with interest to what the Minister has to say about them, and perhaps we can return to them tomorrow, or in another place at another time.

Mr. Davidson: I am somewhat puzzled by the position of the nationalists. They seem to be against Sewel motions in principle, but in favour of every individual example thereof—such as the Proceeds of Crime Bill—because they are impossible to oppose. That position gives rise to a certain difficulty, particularly when they try to argue for their proposed new procedure.

As I understand it—the Minister will doubtless correct me if I have misunderstood—under the Sewel procedure the opportunity for amendment always exists. Indeed, that is the purpose of debate in Committee and at this level. I cannot understand why, in such circumstances, the SNP did not ask the Liberal Democrats for a place on the Committee. You have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is out of order to pursue that issue and I do not particularly want to do so, but we need to consider the procedure that should be followed.

If a party such as the SNP agrees to the Sewel mechanism, it should not then argue that legislation passed by this House must return to the Scottish

[Mr. Davidson]

Parliament for further amendment. Under the Sewel mechanism, legislation should be amended in Committee, so the nationalists ought to have asked the Liberal Democrats—their bosses in respect of that procedure—for a place on the Committee. Three places were taken up by Liberal Democrats, but I presume that there was internal dissent, as they were never present at the same time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his point. I listened very carefully and he was quite ingenious, but I do not want to go back to the general issue. Has he concluded his remarks?

Mr. Davidson: No, there is plenty more. However, I take the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am not to mention again that the nationalists were not represented on the Committee, and I shall not discuss the fact that they declined to ask for a place.

We need to consider how such matters are dealt with and the question of the lack of scrutiny, which was raised by the Conservatives. On several occasions, the Conservatives have threatened us with the old codgers along the Corridor. They have suggested that if they do not get their way here, they will try to block the Bill in the other place. Although the Conservatives have engaged in a degree of constructive discussion, they have also indulged in an inordinate amount of piffle and waffle. It is clear that on some occasions they were deliberately delaying business to prevent further argument on the Floor of the House.

I realise that it is often difficult for a non-lawyer—many of my colleagues are also not lawyers—to distinguish between time-wasting and the normal language of lawyers. None the less, it was clear to those of us with open minds that the Conservatives were employing circular arguments—admittedly, they were ingenious on occasion—for no purpose other than delay. We must reject completely the strategy that anything that they cannot win here, they will try to win along the Corridor. *[Interruption.]* I am receiving signals from those on my Front Bench to keep going, but I shall draw my remarks to a close.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let me assure the hon. Gentleman that he must not keep going on that subject. May I suggest that he speaks to the amendment? We have a very considerable agenda to get through today, and he will do a service to hon. Members throughout the House if he confines himself to remarks relevant to the amendment.

Mr. Davidson: In the light of that eloquent plea, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not mention again the fact that the nationalists did not ask for a place on the Committee, and I draw my remarks to a close.

Mr. Salmond: Repeating an allegation does not make it any more true. I can well understand, having listened to that contribution, why the Committee stage on the Bill took so long. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) is a one-person Committee. If only he would be as assiduous in the Chamber as he is in Committee, he would have a better chance of reselection in Glasgow.

6 pm

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) attacked the SNP, the Liberals and the Government in turn, and he runs the risk of uniting us against him. Those parties share some common characteristics, one of them being that we do not necessarily pay much attention to Conservative Front Benchers. However, I hope to see the Conservatives in the right Division Lobby if the key amendment is called tomorrow.

The issue of the Sewel motion is a matter of principle. I know that the Minister will answer in that spirit, because when he appeared before the Scottish Affairs Committee on 7 November 2001 he specifically said that he could foresee considerable difficulties with legislation that was amended after a Sewel motion was passed. He said that it would be up to the Scottish Executive to go back to the Scottish Parliament. He continued:

> "I think that there may be no legal obligation but I think that there may be a political imperative to do that, if there was a major change in relation to the principle. In relation to the question of mandatory/discretionary, that would be a major change."

The Minister saw a difficulty in a significant change being made after a Sewel motion, without a procedure to refer the matter back to the Scottish Parliament.

I can tell the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok and others that the issue is not about the Sewel process. The issue is what happens if legislation is changed significantly after debate in the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Grieve: At the risk of repeating the question that I put to the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing)—to which I received an incoherent and ungracious answer—has the hon. Gentleman read the report of the 15th sitting of the Committee on Thursday 6 December 2001, and if so will he acknowledge that those constitutional points were made by the Conservatives?

Mr. Salmond: I am willing to reveal to the House that even the Conservative party can be caught telling the truth occasionally and the contributions from the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in Committee were one such example.

In front of the Scottish Affairs Committee, the Minister acknowledged the real difficulty at issue in this debate. The merits of mandatory or discretionary powers for Scottish sheriffs are not at issue, because they will be addressed in a later amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats. The debate tonight is about the principle of a significant change in legislation.

If the Minister will not be gracious enough to accept the amendment, at least he should tell us what he thinks is the answer to the question. I know that the Minister has enormous powers of persuasion and he may have convinced the Scottish Minister for Justice that the change is okay. However, it is a question not of the Scottish Executive being convinced, but of legislation passed by this House for the Scottish Parliament. Can the Minister tell us what he sees as the answer? Is it to place a rider in the legislation to the effect that if serious changes are made, the matter must go back to the Scottish Parliament to see if it meets with approval there?

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I shall not speak at great length, because I appreciate that we have much more to deal with. I wish to associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), because I have enjoyed serving on what was a good-humoured Committee almost throughout its 39 sittings. The good humour broke down around the 36th sitting, but everything worked out well in the end. We had some useful debate during the three months and, as both my colleagues on the Front Bench have pointed out, some of it has germinated into Government amendments.

It is implicit in the fact that a Sewel motion has arisen that a Bill of this importance requires revision. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) referred to that revision as being performed by the old codgers down the Corridor, but the fact that we have a second Chamber allows sensible and constructive revision to take place. I am sure that I speak for my fellow Conservatives in hoping that whatever revisions take place in the House of Lords they are constructive and do not destroy the intention of what is proposed. We all hope that the revisions are minor and that we can agree on them.

I have much sympathy with the hon. Members for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and their points about Scottish democracy. On this Bill and others in the future, it will have to be decided how, after a Sewel motion has arisen, we can ensure that the right legislative changes have been made. That is one of the problems with the democratic system being thrown into the air after devolution, as we pointed out to the Government five years ago. The issue will remain to be determined in the years ahead.

I hope that the Scottish issue will not affect the main thrust of the Bill, which everyone on the Conservative Benches understands. We have several concerns that have been expressed in amendments that we will come to today or tomorrow. For example, I would be concerned if, in the provisions on money laundering, we were to have a separate English and Welsh track alongside a Scottish track. It might then be perceived that it was easier to launder money through one of the jurisdictions, and the Mr. Bigs—whom we all wish to catch—would be attracted to London or to Edinburgh to launder their funds. We need to take the issue seriously and that is why the Sewel motion has arisen. The Bill is complex and should be considered similarly throughout the UK.

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): In spite of occasional acrimony in the debate, I propose to be reasonably and perhaps untypically helpful. It was poetic irony that the spat between the SNP and the Liberal Democrats occurred when the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) was moving an amendment tabled by both parties. Amendment No. 226 would require that the director's annual plan set out how the director intends to exercise his functions in Scotland. However, the remit of the director will apply in Scotland only in relation to his taxation functions under part 6. As experts on the Scotland Act 1998 on both sides of the House will know, taxation is a reserved matter: it is not within the remit of Scottish Ministers or the Scottish Parliament.

The director's tax functions will be delegated from the Board of the Inland Revenue. That arrangement was made precisely because tax is a reserved matter, to preserve a unified tax system throughout the United Kingdom. We do not believe that it would be appropriate for the Scottish Ministers or the Scottish Parliament to become involved, however indirectly, in the exercise of tax functions. We will therefore resist amendment No. 226. However, I shall be a little more helpful shortly.

Under paragraph 10 of schedule 1, the director cannot be a serving Member of Parliament or Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly while he is the holder of the post. Amendment No. 228 would mean that the director would also be disqualified from membership of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. We agree with the principle behind these amendments. There is no obvious reason why the director could become a member of the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly, when he could not be a Member of Parliament here or a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly. We do not propose to accept the amendments as drafted, but we will consider how their purpose is best achieved. If appropriate, we will propose amendments to the Bill in the other place—so graphically described by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson).

As new clauses 13 and 14 and Government amendment No. 285 affected Scotland, the Government consulted and were advised closely by Scottish Executive and Crown Office officials. They, in turn, consulted their Ministers. I pay tribute to the officials who advised me and my colleagues on the Bill.

Under part 5, the Scottish Ministers are responsible for civil recovery in Scotland. I am pleased to advise the House that we envisage the creation of a small, multidisciplinary civil recovery unit to assist them in their functions. That unit will be staffed by people with relevant skills, including lawyers, accountants and civilian financial investigators. I am sure that that will please many hon. Members, particularly those of my hon. Friends who have asked for it. That initiative will strengthen the arm of the Scottish Executive in the fight against drug barons and money laundering. It will provide what I hope will be an effective new unit.

In criminal cases, the Lord Advocate and the procurator fiscal will continue to pursue the proceeds of crime of accused and convicted criminals, but with the greatly strengthened powers of the Bill. We envisage that advantage will be gained from seconding to the unit from time to time police constables with experience in investigating the proceeds of crime. On secondment, officers will not take with them their police powers. That would not be appropriate to the civil nature of the part 5 scheme.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): In which Department in Scotland will that unit be located? Will it be among the responsibilities of the Lord Advocate, and therefore located in the Crown Office, or will it be a responsibility of the Minister for Justice, and therefore part of his Department?

Mr. Foulkes: The internal arrangements are a matter for the Scottish Parliament and Executive. Given all that has been said, far be it from me to determine such matters. The unit will, however, work closely with the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, representatives of both of which I recently met in Paisley.

[Mr. Foulkes]

Scottish Ministers have a number of functions under parts 5 and 8 that it would not be appropriate for seconded constables to exercise. The purpose of the two new clauses is to set out those functions for parts 5 and 8 respectively.

Mr. Davidson: I welcome the fact that a special unit is to be established. As the Minister rightly said, it comes about as a result of an initiative taken by me and my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) and for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) following discussions with Strathclyde police. Does the Minister agree that that, more than anything else that we have heard, demonstrates the advantage of participating in the Committee? Is not this the time to draw to the House's attention the fact that no SNP Member was ever present on that Committee?

Mr. Foulkes: That point may not have escaped the House, and it certainly would not escape Madam Deputy Speaker if I sought to make it again.

Amendment No. 90 relates to clause 326 and part 6. It is a drafting amendment to achieve consistency on the matter of the long lease, and I am glad to say that it has been welcomed by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve).

Amendment No. 229 would require an affirmative resolution of the Scottish Parliament before Scottish Ministers could make a commencement order under part 3. The Scottish Parliament discussed that provision during a debate on the Sewel motion on 24 October. I attended that debate, which I do not believe is true of any of the four SNP Members who are here today. I must tell them that the SNP spokespeople who did attend that debate actually wanted the Bill to be strengthened. The move towards mandatory provision for Scotland takes account of the representations that those spokespeople made, and which were even more eloquently made by my hon. Friends in Committee. As my hon. Friend would doubtless wish to point out, they could have been made by others in Committee too.

6.15 pm

When we decided to make that change I consulted the Deputy First Minister, who is Minister for Justice in Scotland, and the Lord Advocate. The change was then discussed within the Scottish Executive, and they agreed that we should proceed along the lines suggested. It was on the basis of that agreement that we did so.

May I say to the Tories, particularly the English Tories—we do not have the privilege of having the single Scottish Tory with us today—that they should not be fooled, as they were in Committee, by the apparently reasonable blandishments offered by the SNP? The SNP may talk about respecting and understanding the spirit of the Scotland Act 1998, but that is no part of its agenda. The SNP's agenda is to break up Britain, and every action that its members take is to that end. If the hon. Member for Beaconsfield does not understand that, he is more naive than he looks.

Mr. Grieve: As I said to the Minister in Committee, my party stands for the Union, but it also stands for the proper constitutional working of the devolution settlement. That is central to our principles. That is why I expressed concern in Committee, notwithstanding the Sewel motion, which we fully understood, about substantially rewriting legislation without its having gone before the Scottish Parliament. I should add that that issue and the issue raised by amendment No. 229 are not identical, which is why I shall listen carefully to what the Minister has to say.

Mr. Foulkes: I am not responsible for bringing matters to the Scottish Parliament. My responsibility was to consult the Minister for Justice and the Lord Advocate, and I did so. On this occasion, they judged that because they knew the views of all parties in the Scottish Parliament, there was no need to consult it. At the time of the Sewel motion, effective unanimity had been expressed that we needed strong powers to deal with the drug barons. I think that their judgment was correct.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The Minister will recall that I raised that point in the Scottish Affairs Committee, and he said:

> "I think that there may be no legal obligation but I think that there may be a political imperative"

to take the matter back to the Parliament. The point was specifically canvassed in the Scottish Affairs Committee. I asked not about the Executive, but the Parliament. I made that point several times. When did the Minister change his mind?

Mr. Foulkes: I have not changed my mind, and the hon. Gentleman does not make his point any more effectively by shouting—*[Interruption.]* I shall hear no comments about pots and kettles. I said that there may, in certain circumstances, be a political imperative to consult the Scottish Parliament, but it is up to Scottish Ministers to decide when that is the case. In this case, they decided that it was not necessary, and I respect their decision.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Foulkes: I shall deal next with new clause 6.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Foulkes: No. I have dealt with that point and we have many important matters to cover.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): The Minister obviously will not give way.

Mr. Foulkes: It was fairly obvious, was it not, Madam Deputy Speaker? You are quite right.

New clause 6 would ensure that where the Bill interacts with other pieces of legislation, it is clear beyond doubt that United Kingdom legislation, including that passed by devolved legislatures, is included within the definition of the enactment. In case hon. Members are curious about why there is an exemption for clause 448(1), that is intended to ensure that additional public money is made available only where it has been specifically provided for by Westminster. I hope that everyone will agree with that.

Finally, and I hope helpfully to the Liberal Democrats, I will deal with new clause 1. Its effect would be to require the Lord Advocate and the Scottish Ministers to publish separate annual reports and other items outlined by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, which I shall not list again. Hon. Members, particularly the hon. Gentleman, have contrasted the position in Scotland with that of the director of the Assets Recovery Agency. They have pointed out that the director is required by schedule 1 to publish both an annual plan and an annual report. I stress that the difference between the director and the Lord Advocate and Scottish Ministers is that the agency is a statutory body. It is therefore quite correct for the Bill to make detailed provisions on the director's duties and responsibilities. With regard to the Lord Advocate's responsibilities under the Bill for confiscation and cash seizure, I can assure the House that appropriate details of how he has exercised his functions will be set out in the Crown Office annual report, which is laid before the Scottish Parliament. Similarly, appropriate information on how Scottish Ministers have exercised their civil recovery and cash seizure functions will also be published and made available to the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Carmichael: I welcome the news that that information will be published as part of the Crown Office annual report. However, does the Minister accept that that is produced only because the current Lord Advocate and some of his predecessors have chosen to do so, not because any such obligations are placed on him? If any future Lord Advocate decided not to produce such an annual report, Scotland would be left in a significantly weaker position than the rest of the country.

Mr. Foulkes: I do not accept that, because it is up to the Scottish Parliament to require the Lord Advocate and Ministers to produce reports as appropriate, and no doubt they will take that up. The hon. Gentleman has one or two friends in the Scottish Parliament, and he can raise it with them. I shall be helpful to the hon. Gentleman, and had he been a little less impatient he would have been even more excited about what I am about to say.

The Government attach considerable importance to the Bill and are determined to ensure that they work effectively to deprive criminals and others of the proceeds of their crime. That applies equally to Scotland. I can therefore assure hon. Members that, as with all new policy initiatives, the effectiveness of the new provisions will be kept under regular review by the Lord Advocate and by Scottish Ministers. If they consider that further changes or improvements are required, they will not hesitate to bring them forward. We consider that keeping responsibility for confiscation in Scotland with the Lord Advocate and making the Scottish Ministers responsible for civil recovery is the most effective arrangement for Scotland. However, if that should turn out not to be the case, of course consideration will be given to other options, including the setting up of a Scottish Assets Recovery Agency. I hope that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland will welcome that assurance.

The Government are determined to ensure that the Bill works effectively to deprive criminals and their associates of their ill-gotten gains. It will also recycle substantial amounts of the money recovered from the proceeds of crime to help the victims of crime. That is an important part of the Bill.

Mr. Carmichael: I am happy to welcome the Minister's assurances, but does he not accept that the difference between my proposal and his is that the Scottish Parliament, not the Scottish Executive, should be the ultimate arbiter of whether the system is working well?

Mr. Foulkes: Of course, the Scottish Executive is accountable to the Scottish Parliament. The hon. Gentleman has colleagues not only in the Scottish Parliament, but in the Scottish Executive. Indeed, he has a very close colleague there, and he should talk to him a bit more.

Given what I have said, I do not think it appropriate to tie Ministers' hands in the way that the amendment seeks to do. In particular, within two years may be too short a period in which to reach a proper assessment of the overall effectiveness of the Bill's arrangements. We do not know how many civil recovery cases there will be in Scotland, but Ministers will have the option of a Scottish agency if they think it appropriate.

In the light of the assurances that information on the exercise of Ministers' functions under the Bill will be published, and that the effectiveness of the Bill in Scotland will be kept under regular review, and given my reasonable and, I hope, eloquent reaction to the amendments, I invite hon. Members to withdraw the amendment and not to press the others.

Mr. Weir: I want to return to the point that I tried to pursue earlier by reminding the Minister that when he appeared with the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Advocate-General before the Scottish Affairs Committee on 7 November, the point about the position of the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament was clearly canvassed. The Minister was specifically asked whether the Bill would go back to the Scottish Parliament if there was major change. He said:

> "I think that there may be no legal obligation but I think that there may be a political imperative to do that,"—

that is, to take it back to the Scottish Parliament—

> "if there was a major change in relation to the principle. In relation to the question of mandatory/discretionary, that would be a major change".

That major change has come to pass, so does he not agree that it should go back to the Scottish Parliament? The Bill as agreed by the Scottish Parliament and with the passing of the Sewel motion will now be substantially different from the Bill that will be passed in this place. The Minister spoke of it and was taken up on the point. The Bill should therefore go back to the Scottish Parliament.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 4

CO-OPERATION

Amendment made: No. 79, in page 3, line 4, leave out from "offences" to end of line 5.—*[Mr. Bob Ainsworth.]*

New Clause 2

DISPOSAL OF FAMILY HOME: ENGLAND AND WALES

'(1) This section applies where a confiscation order has been made in relation to any person and the prosecutor or the Director (as the case may be) has not satisfied the court that the person's interest in his family home has been acquired as a benefit from his criminal conduct.

(2) Where this section applies, then, before the receiver disposes of any right or interest in the person's family home he shall—

(a) obtain the relevant consent; or

(b) where he is unable to do so, apply to the court for authority to carry out the disposal.

(3) On an application being made to it under subsection (2)(b), the court, after having regard to all the circumstances of the case including—

(a) the needs and financial resources of the spouse or former spouse of the person concerned;

(b) the needs and financial resources of any child of the family;

(c) the length of the period during which the family home has been used as a residence by any of the persons referred to in paragraph (a) or (b),

may refuse to grant the application or may postpone the granting of the application for such period (not exceeding 12 months) as it may consider reasonable in the circumstances or may grant the application subject to such conditions as it may prescribe.

(4) Subsection (3) shall apply to an action for the purpose of obtaining vacant possession of that home in order to dispose of it brought by the receiver as it applies to an application under subsection (2)(b) and, for the purposes of this subsection, any reference in subsection (3) to the granting of the application shall be construed as a reference to the granting of the relief sought in the action.

(5) In this section—

"family home", in relation to any person (in this subsection referred to as "the relevant person") means any property in which the relevant person has or had (whether alone or in common with any other person) a right or interest, being property which is occupied as a residence by the relevant person and his or her spouse or by the relevant person's spouse or former spouse (in any case with or without a child of the family) or by the relevant person with a child of the family;

"child of the family" includes any child or grandchild of either the relevant person or his or her spouse or former spouse, and any person who has been treated by either the relevant person or his or her spouse or former spouse as if he or she were a child of the relevant person, spouse or former spouse, whatever the age of such a child, grandchild or person may be; and

"relevant consent" means in relation to the disposal of any right or interest in a family home—

(a) in a case where the family home is occupied by the spouse or former spouse of the relevant person, the consent of the spouse or, as the case may be, of the former spouse, whether or not the family home is also occupied by the relevant person;

(b) where paragraph (a) does not apply, in a case where the family home is occupied by the relevant person with a child of the family, the consent of the relevant person.'.—*[Mr. Grieve.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Grieve: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 3—*Disposal of family home: Northern Ireland*—

'(1) This section applies where a confiscation order has been made in relation to any person and the prosecutor or the Director (as the case may be) has not satisfied the court that the person's interest in his family home has been acquired as a benefit from his criminal conduct.

(2) Where this section applies, then, before the receiver disposes of any right or interest in the person's family home he shall—

(a) obtain the relevant consent; or

(b) where he is unable to do so, apply to the court for authority to carry out the disposal.

(3) On an application being made to it under subsection (2)(b), the court, after having regard to all the circumstances of the case including—

(a) the needs and financial resources of the spouse or former spouse of the person concerned;

(b) the needs and financial resources of any child of the family;

(c) the length of the period during which the family home has been used as a residence by any of the persons referred to in paragraph (a) or (b),

may refuse to grant the application or may postpone the granting of the application for such period (not exceeding 12 months) as it may consider reasonable in the circumstances or may grant the application subject to such conditions as it may prescribe.

(4) Subsection (3) shall apply to an action for the purpose of obtaining vacant possession of that home in order to dispose of it brought by the receiver as it applies to an application under subsection (2)(b) and, for the purposes of this subsection, any reference in subsection (3) to the granting of the application shall be construed as a reference to the granting of the relief sought in the action.

(5) In this section—

"family home", in relation to any person (in this subsection referred to as "the relevant person") means any property in which the relevant person has or had (whether alone or in common with any other person) a right or interest, being property which is occupied as a residence by the relevant person and his or her spouse or by the relevant person's spouse or former spouse (in any case with or without a child of the family) or by the relevant person with a child of the family;

"child of the family" includes any child or grandchild of either the relevant person or his or her spouse or former spouse, and any person who has been treated by either the relevant person or his or her spouse or former spouse as if he or she were a child of the relevant person, spouse or former spouse, whatever the age of such a child, grandchild or person may be; and

"relevant consent" means in relation to the disposal of any right or interest in a family home—

(a) in a case where the family home is occupied by the spouse or former spouse of the relevant person, the consent of the spouse or, as the case may be, of the former spouse, whether or not the family home is also occupied by the relevant person;

(b) where paragraph (a) does not apply, in a case where the family home is occupied by the relevant person with a child of the family, the consent of the relevant person.'.

Amendment No. 207, in clause 101, page 60, line 29, at end insert—

'(bb) the needs and financial resources of a person of the same sex as the person concerned, who is and has been for a period of not less than six months, living with the person concerned in a relationship which has the characteristics, other than that the persons are of the same sex, of the relationship between husband and wife;

(bc) the needs and financial resources of any member of the person concerned's family who is and has been, for a period of not less than six months, living with the person concerned in the family home.'.

Amendment No. 208, in page 60, line 31, leave out "or (b)" and insert "(b), (bb) or (bc)".

Amendment No. 209, in page 60, line 35, at end insert—

> '(3A) Before granting an application under subsection (3) above, the court must take into account representations made to it by any of the persons referred to in paragraphs (a), (b), (bb) or (bc) of subsection (3);
>
> (3B) In making representations under subsection (3A), any of the persons referred to in paragraphs (a), (b), (bb) and (bc) of subsection (3) shall be entitled to appear before the court.'.

Amendment No. 210, in page 61, line 5, at end insert—

> 'or by the relevant person with a person of the same sex as the relevant person in terms of subsection (3)(bb) or by the relevant person with a member of his family in terms of subsection (3)(bc).'.

Amendment No. 211, in page 61, line 20, at end insert—

> '(c) where the family home is occupied by the relevant person and a person of the same sex as the relevant person in terms of subsection (3)(bb), the consent of the same sex partner;
>
> (d) in a case where the family home is occupied by the relevant person and a member of his family in terms of subsection (3)(bc), the consent of the member of his family.'.

Mr. Grieve: When we considered the Bill's confiscation provisions in Committee, it was noted that the provisions for Scotland, which were otherwise being brought into uniformity with those for England, Wales and Northern Ireland through the Government's amendments, remained entirely different in one respect—that is, the safeguards for the disposal of the family home in the event of the various assumptions being made.

During the debate, as the Minister of State, Scotland Office, the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), may recall—I could refer him to the relevant passages in *Hansard*, but I do not want to take up an excessive amount of the House's time—he emphasised the issue of the different regimes that would exist in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. He provided the Committee with interesting historical background on why the safeguards for the family home existed in the Scottish system.

The official Opposition did not try to amend the sections on England, Wales and Northern Ireland to include a similar provision, but the Minister undertook—on behalf of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth)—to consider whether uniformity was desirable for the purposes of safeguarding the interests of spouses or former spouses or the needs and financial resources of any child of the family. However, nothing has happened. I am not criticising the Minister, but I shall be interested to hear why he feels that no further change is necessary.

When I considered the matter before this debate, I found myself inexorably drawn to what I must assume is the opposite conclusion from that of the Minister: that there are compelling reasons for introducing a similar safeguard under the England and Wales regime to that which existed for Scotland, and likewise for Northern Ireland. I shall explain why.

During consideration of the Bill in Committee, I accepted that the equitable jurisdiction that applies in English courts when dealing with property, especially property that may be occupied by a spouse or a child, may provide certain safeguards that would mean that if the spouse could show that in the course of the marriage she had acquired an equitable share in the property, it is possible that that part of the property might not [illegible] seized. I use the word "possible" advisedly, because it is not easy to reconcile the ordinary principles of an equitable jurisdiction with a criminal confiscatory mechanism, as stipulated in part 2.

During that debate in the 15th sitting of the Committee, the Minister accepted that the principal responsibility of the court, once the assumption had been made, was to realise the assets, and that must include confiscating the family home.

The matter becomes particularly obvious and glaring in the different regimes that will now exist north and south of the border, as is shown by subsection (1) of new clause 2. It is immediately clear that, under the regime in Scotland, the reversal of the burden of proof that arises when the assumptions are made will not apply if one of the objects of seizure is the family home. The burden will remain on the prosecutor to show that the family home specifically has been acquired as a benefit from the criminal conduct.

6.30 pm

Of course, if that specific trigger arises, no protection will be afforded under the Scottish provisions to the wife, former spouse or the children who live in the house. However, if that trigger cannot be fulfilled, there is no reverse burden on the defendant at that point and the court may be able to consider all the circumstances set out in clause 101 in relation to Scotland. The court can postpone seizure or decide that in no circumstances would it be reasonable to allow the family home to be seized at any time. That seems to be a sensible and compelling safeguard, which could ultimately lead to the removal of serious risks of injustice and the perception of injustice. Clearly, that has been thought a very sensible measure in the Scottish jurisdiction, which is why it was introduced with other confiscatory mechanisms in the mid-1990s.

The more I consider the issue, the more convinced I become that no similar safeguard will exist under current rules in England and Wales or in Northern Ireland. I have become increasingly concerned that we shall end up with a system that diverges considerably north and south of the border—the very thing that the Minister said when arguing on the provisions for Scotland he wanted to get rid of; he wanted to produce uniformity. Also, we run the risk of it being said that the system in England and Wales is unjust. I have to tell the Minister, bluntly, that I cannot help thinking that the other possible outcome is that a far greater burden will be placed on the state through the social security system than might otherwise be the case.

The more I have thought about the issue, the more convinced I have become that there is every reason to include similar safeguards for the wife, former spouse or child in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland to those that exist in Scotland. I am prepared to be talked out of my position if the Minister can persuade me that similar safeguards that would have the same result exist south of the border. I do not wish to take up too much time because there is a lot of other business to discuss, but that is a very important point. I am sorry that we did not have more time to focus on this issue in Committee.

[Mr. Grieve]

This shows that, however carefully legislation is considered, there is always a further opportunity to find something else to do when we consider it again. Perhaps this matter can be dealt with in the other place if the new clauses and amendments that I have tabled are not sufficient.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Would new clause 2 or the Bill allow the director to apply to the court for a charge on the matrimonial property that can hang there while the wife, spouse or any children need the house?

Mr. Grieve: The answer to my hon. and learned Friend's question is no, because the purpose of the provision is to produce a mandatory ratchet system, by which, when the assumptions have been arrived at, confiscation must follow. There is one possible caveat: confiscation may not take place if there is a serious risk of injustice. I am always a little anxious about what that term means. In any event, I am not 100 per cent. certain that it relates to the status of the spouse, former spouse or child. The Minister may choose to correct me if I am wrong, but that term seems to relate to the possibility that the asset may have been wrongly identified as resulting from criminal conduct and thus should not be seized.

The Minister may be able to provide some reassurance about that, but I have to tell my hon. and learned Friend that I do not find the issue at all clear because we are, in fact, dealing with legislation that relates to the confiscation of criminal assets. So such a safeguard may exist, and it may be possible to beef it up even further by going down the road proposed by the Human Rights Committee, which suggests that we should use the term "real risk of injustice" instead of the term "serious risk of injustice". All those things are interconnected in reality.

In short, I need to hear some compelling reasons why England and Wales should not have the same protection as that which the Government have been happy to provide north of the border. They should accept new clause 2, which I have adapted, I hope correctly, to make it sensible in English, rather than Scots, law. I wait to hear from the Minister on this important issue.

Mr. Carmichael: I have a broad degree of sympathy with the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) on new clause 2. It would be ungenerous if we did not afford to the English the same protection as that given to the Scots, although that is often the case in any event. However, I do not know enough about English property law to comment on new clause 2 in any great depth, so I merely seek to bring to the House's attention amendments Nos. 207 to 211, tabled by my hon. Friends the Members for Lewes (Norman Baker) and for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) and myself.

Under amendment No. 207, which has the greatest substance—the other amendments are essentially consequential—we would afford to third parties who are in same-sex relationships the same protection as that given to spouses, former spouses and siblings who may have lived in the family home of the person against whom the confiscation order is made. There may be circumstances in which it is necessary to consider the needs and financial resources of the other members of the family who have resided with the accused in the family home. For example, siblings could have resided together in a house that is owned jointly, and it would be inappropriate to disregard the needs or interests of one party because the other is subject to confiscation proceedings under the Bill.

The point that I seek to make is one of general policy and principle. In 2002, there seems to be no good reason why the rights and interests in law of people in same-sex relationships should not be afforded the same protection in relation to their family homes as that given to spouses and former spouses. Of course, I readily concede that there are some difficulties with the definition of the relationships that might qualify.

I fully accept that six months is essentially an arbitrary choice, and other hon. Members may disagree about whether it is appropriate. It may be felt to be too short, but I remind the House that the court will still need to be satisfied that there is proof that the relationship exists and is worthy of the envisaged protection. The less time that the relationship has existed, the greater the difficulty in proving in court that it has existed. I draw a parallel with the Scots view on marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute, which has established a substantial case history in which it has been found that such relationships exist in law in some circumstances, but not in others. A general theme throughout the Bill, on which the Liberal Democrats have been happy to support the Government, is that fairly significant curtailments will take place of what would otherwise be regarded as civil liberties and human rights. If the Bill is to be effective and maintain public sympathy and support—which is crucial to the broader aims of the Bill in terms of the prosecution of crime and the promotion of law and order—it is particularly important that the interests of all third parties should be protected. We have identified a classification gap in relation to people who will not be protected.

John Robertson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that amendment No. 207 might have fitted better if it were inserted into subsection (3)(a), which refers to spouses and former spouses? Perhaps the word "partner" might have been added. Although I support the hon. Gentleman's intention, that might have been a better approach.

Mr. Carmichael: That would be an option. Without proper consideration, I would not like to say, on the hoof, whether the amendment would fit as neatly where the hon. Gentleman suggests as it does in its current place. However, I welcome his support for the broad principle of our proposal. I reiterate that what is important is that we are seen to give equal credence to the rights of those in same-sex relationships. By taking a more imaginative and bolder step, we might set precedents for the reform of other aspects of property law, particularly in relation to providing protection for people who are in abusive and violent relationships, which can be same-sex as well as mixed-sex relationships. If we are seen to take seriously the rights of every group that stands to be disadvantaged, the Bill will be much better regarded by the community.

Vera Baird (Redcar): When a home is not part of the proceeds of crime and the family are innocent of all crime, there should simply be a power for a court to protect them from confiscation by refusing or postponing its sale, if that is just. I echo what the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said about the absence of any other kind of protection in English land law if the Bill provides no protection. I, too, have thought long and hard about whether the Government's statement that there was no need for such protection was accurate. However, I cannot find any way in which the rights of innocent families can be protected unless it is expressed in this statute.

I accept totally that it is right to seize the expensive mansion with swimming pool in the home counties that is owned by a man who has a dog called Brinks and another called Mat. I also accept entirely the right to confiscate cheap houses—the only type of house available in Redcar—as drug dealers live in them, and they should not be subsidised by their lifestyle. Nobody suggests that that power should not exist and should not be strong; it exists and it will remain.

However, a house is not just a piece of property; it is a home. There may be children between the ages of one and five living there, who do not have a clue that their father is a criminal. What is the difficulty in obliging authorities to obtain the court's sanction to sell in such a situation, therefore obliging the court to balance the interests of the family? If the interests of the family require the court to postpone the sale or outlaw it altogether, it does not diminish one iota the power of the statute to take the proceeds of crime away. It is a way of entrusting a decision to the judiciary. The judiciary will not allow the power to be abused—it makes decisions in other important areas of this Bill so why should it not do so in this one?

6.45 pm

The Joint Committee on Human Rights, of which I am a member, considered the absence of protection for a family in the Bill and wrote to the Home Office raising queries. I do not do the reply an injustice by saying that it asserted that anyone who had a property interest in a home could be protected. That is right. As I have said, however, property rights are not the end of the matter. I am not speaking merely about the obvious justice of protecting families, because there is now a legal duty to protect family life.

Article 8 of the European convention on human rights provides a right to family life, which, in a democratic society, must not be interfered with unless it is necessary. Under the Bill, such interference would be for the prevention of crime. However, the difficulty is that the Bill does not provide an opportunity for the interests of the family to be weighed when the balance is struck as to whether it is justifiable to intrude—I hope that I am making myself clear. There must be an opportunity for those interests to be brought into play. Unless that point is specified, there will be no such opportunity.

The Home Office's reply to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which is appended to the 11th report of the Committee, stated:

> "Even where it cannot be shown that the family home was, itself, obtained from the proceeds of crime, the receiver may sell it because this is necessary in order to satisfy the confiscation order . . . The need to ensure that criminals do not retain the benefit of their offending outweighs the interests of innocent family members in staying in their home. The family members will not be prevented from living together elsewhere and, if left without funds, will be able to claim state benefits. Therefore, the family will not be prevented from having a family home."

It continued:

> "If the spouse or child wishes to make a payment in order to extinguish the defendant's interest and remain in the family home, this is possible".

I hope and trust that that quotation is one to which no Minister would wish to lend support. On some occasions the public interest in seizing the assets might outweigh the family's interests, although, sometimes, it might not. The trouble is that the Bill provides no opportunity to do the balancing exercise.

Mr. Garnier: I ask the hon. Lady this question as I suspect that she knows a lot more about the criminal law than most other Members in the Chamber this evening. Does the Crown court have a power of its own motion to hear an affected party who is not the defendant but may be an innocent family member or an innocent affected person outside the confines of that family? Does it have that power anyway, or does the hon. Lady contend that the court will do that only if it is given the power in statute?

Vera Baird: Not being the author of Archbold—although I am grateful for the compliment paid to me by the hon. and learned Gentleman—it seems that there is probably no such power. There may be a power to allow somebody to be heard but it is unclear what power there would be to restrain the confiscation order as a consequence of what they said unless an express power were provided in the statute to protect that interest under article 8. From two points of view—that of the approach taken by the Joint Committee on Human Rights and that of straightforward justice—there is a real danger that there will be litigation on the matter very soon, and that a hard case of an innocent family evicted for a confiscation order will mean that the Government will lose.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): The hon. Lady referred to justice and equity, so may I draw to her attention the parallel that developed some years ago in English civil land law, which applied to the rights of the deserted spouse?. I think that it resulted from the case of Bendall *v.* McWhirter, but it certainly came from the noble mind of Lord Denning when he was Master of the Rolls. The protection of a deserted spouse has a certain resonance in this debate, so might we not draw some useful parallels?

Vera Baird: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. A self-sufficient legal right developed and in my respectful submission—said she using language that she should no longer be using—it is a good idea, if I can put it in a more folksy way, for the Government to consider whether it is necessary to put something similar in the Bill to protect family interests.

I emphasise that I am suggesting not that family interests will always prevail, but that they should be taken into account when they are drawn to a court's attention. There is a further danger that, given the situation in Scotland, article 14 of the European convention on human rights, which prevents the discriminatory implementation of the convention's rights, might also cause the Government litigation problems soon. I invite them to take a fresh look at the matter.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) for

[Mr. John Redwood]

moving these excellent new clauses, and the whole House benefited from the learned contribution of the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird); I certainly learned from it.

The Government want to create a strong law, but it is important that it is not a vindictive law. They want it to be a tough law, but it is important that it is not a foolish law. It is very much easier to legislate soundbites but to regret them afterwards when one comes to work out the detail or the unintended consequences. I therefore urge Ministers to think carefully about what well trained and well qualified lawyers in this place have said about the lack of proper protection in English law and the lack of symmetry between Scottish and English law.

The rest of us, who have concentrated on the possible human tragedies, have pointed out that it would surely not be right to visit in all circumstances all the sins of one person on all the other family members. The issues require careful analysis by proper people in a proper place—in a court of law hearing evidence and making careful consideration of all the facts and circumstances.

We want to achieve not merely proper punishment of the wrongdoer or to send out the strong and clear message that people should not profit from their crimes, but to create a stable background against which the families of such people have a chance of being brought up in a different lifestyle and in a different way.

John Robertson: Who will look after the rights of the people who have suffered and died as a result of becoming drug addicts? Who will look after their rights if we allow people to benefit from crime and buy houses from its proceeds?

Mr. Redwood: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman; he has misjudged his shot at me. I approach the matter in a consensual fashion, because we all agree that we do not want people to exploit others through the misery that is created by drug-pushing. We want to ensure that the villains are likely to have their ill-gotten gains confiscated—that is the purpose of the Bill.

We are now debating—an earlier intervention suggested that the hon. Gentleman sympathised with this view—whether it is right in every circumstance to take every asset and every valuable away from a family when their home may have originally been acquired quite legally and responsibly. Continued possession of the family home by the family members who are not in prison might be the best and most economical way from the state's point of view of giving that family a chance once they are separated from their loved one or former loved one who committed dreadful crimes and is rightly being punished for them.

If we consider the issue of state budgeting, we realise that it is not always sensible to take all the means of support from people, only to have to grant other means of support to them. If houses are confiscated, I trust that we will not leave families on the streets. Alternative provision must be made, and that might not only be worse for the family involved but it may turn out to be rather expensive for taxpayers who have to bear the burden of making the provision that had previously legally been made by the family. That could be the result if the law goes too far and does not give courts the opportunity to say, "In this case, the family would be better off if they were allowed to stay in the family home. All the assets from the trade have been confiscated and the person involved will be strongly punished in a variety of ways." For the sake of the family involved, it might be better for them to stay in the family home.

When I read the new clauses, which were drafted with considerable care and admirably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield, I was struck by just how moderate they were. They do not tell a court always to allow the family to remain in the matrimonial home and do not spell out circumstances in which they should definitely keep the family home. The new clauses clearly state that, when the family home is acquired as a direct result of the drugs trade, it should be confiscated. As the hon. Member for Redcar memorably remarked, if a great big mansion in the home counties with a swimming pool was clearly acquired from the proceeds of an illicit trade, the law should be designed so that part of the punishment should be its confiscation. There is much sympathy for that view on both sides of the House.

The new clauses modestly and moderately point out, however, that a protection similar to that in Scottish law should be afforded in English law and that the House of Commons should trust the courts to make difficult judgments and possibly mitigate action in a limited number of cases. The courts should be given the opportunity to decide whether a punishment was too harsh on the family even though it would properly punish the offender.

The Government have also argued that the protection already exists in English law and that there is no need for the Bill specifically to legislate for such a provision. We have heard the legal advice in the House that has been given freely, which is most desirable and unusual. I am grateful to the members of the legal profession for giving so freely of their advice and pointing out that the protection might not necessarily already exist in English law. Therefore, it is beholden on Ministers to spell out precisely how the protection will be provided if they really believe that it exists elsewhere in the law. If, as I fear, they are unable to do that, why do they not allow the protection afforded by the new clauses to be inserted in the Bill?

Ministers do not seem to object to the principle of protection in Scotland, so how can it be fair to allow for the protection to exist in one part of the United Kingdom—a kingdom that many of us would like to be even more united than it is under this Government—and not in another? We would like similar protection to be accorded under English law.

I hope that the Government feel the need to respond to the points made in the debate. They are either arguing that there are no circumstances in which families should be allowed to stay in the family home and that that would always be wrong, or they are saying that there is already adequate protection in English law. If that is so, they need to demonstrate that clearly tonight. I am sure that if they could show that such protection existed, my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield would reflect again on his new clauses.

I fully support my hon. Friend and the moderate new clauses that he moved so admirably. They deal with a potential injustice in the legislation. I conclude as I began:

it does not help a law that is intended to be strong to make it vindictive. My hon. Friend is offering a modest but important improvement to the Bill, of which the House could be proud if it accepted it tonight.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I can be brief because virtually all the points that I wanted to make have been made, but I wish to add to something said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood).

In Committee, Ministers went out of their way—at least, I think they did—to say that we need not worry because the protections exist already. They may be right or they may be wrong, but I do not think that matters. The Government have said that the protection offered in Scotland is right and that we have it in England already. All we are saying, however, is that the new clauses underline what the Government say already exists in England. If I understand that correctly, I cannot understand why they wish to resist the provision because the new clauses merely provide what already exists.

The only way to resolve the problem is for the Government to say that they agree with what we are trying to achieve. Where is the harm in saying that all over again to make certain that there is no doubt whatsoever? The Minister did not argue in Committee, and I hope that he will not argue tonight, that the protection should not be available in England. That is not the issue; everyone agrees that the protection should be available. The new clauses would ensure that it is, and I do not understand the Government's problem.

7 pm

Mr. Garnier: I, too, will be brief because much of what I wanted to say has been said, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird).

We are under a special duty to get the legislation right. I declare an interest to the extent that I might have to apply the law that we are passing when I sit as a recorder in the Crown court in England. During the past four or five years that I have sat as a recorder, it has occurred to me that most of the people who come before the Crown court are little people; they are not the Mr. Bigs. I dare say that the Government intend to catch the Mr. Bigs, but most of them are sensible enough not to come within our jurisdiction. It is the mules and the smaller fry in the criminal chain who get caught. We must concentrate on them and their families, because that is what happens in real life in the conveyor belt that comes before the Crown court.

The hon. Member for Redcar said that she represents people who live in fairly inexpensive houses. They are the very people who are likely to get caught because their husbands or wives will be accessible to the police and therefore to the criminal justice system. The families will be the unwitting victims of this well-intended Bill. Once they have lost their houses or whatever chattel may be confiscated, they will fall upon the state. It is unwise of the state to take with one hand for a good and sensible criminal deterrent purpose and to give to the family of that defendant with the other.

I understand that the procedures under part 2 are compulsory. I may be wrong, and no doubt others who have studied the Bill in more detail will be able to tell me whether it is mandatory on the director to make an application in all circumstances in which the facts fit. If there is a mandatory requirement to apply part 2, we must be all the more careful to ensure that the Human Rights Act 1998 is properly respected.

Mr. Grieve: The prosecutor does have a discretion to ask the court to proceed. Once he has done that, the wheels grind into motion. The noteworthy aspect is that at that stage there are few exceptions to getting out of the process, apart from the possibility of the court not coming to a final decision because of the serious risk of injustice. As I see it, that relates to the circumstances of the defendant, not the innocent people who may be affected by the eventual decision.

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend allows me to bring my remarks to a swift conclusion.

The simple point is that we are all interested in deterrence and in inhibiting those who benefit from crime. However, I should also like to think that we are interested in justice. If we can do anything during the deliberative process to bring justice to the Bill while achieving its sensible consequences, this is the time for the Government to pause and think.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I shall begin by setting out the background to the different situations in the jurisdictions as they relate to the matrimonial home before I turn to the substantial issues, such as devolution, time to pay, representations and the jurisdiction of England and Wales.

The difference between parts 2 and 4 and part 3 is one of policy. The same policy difference is found in legislation that covers the three jurisdictions. Courts in England and Northern Ireland enjoy a discretion in the decision to exercise their restraint and receivership powers, but that must always be used to satisfy a confiscation order. I was accused of governing by soundbite. It is an honour to be accused of that. I never thought that that was a strong part of my political armoury, so that accusation is interesting to say the least. The policy difference exists in legislation that was passed by a Conservative Government. There is no provision in legislation that covers England or Northern Ireland to permit the family home not being realised.

Part 3 reflects the long-standing provision in Scottish legislation that gives Scottish courts the power ultimately to refuse the realisation of the family home when satisfying a confiscation order. The provision replicates earlier confiscation legislation for Scotland contained in the Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995. That developed a briefer provision that was set out along the same lines in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1987. So the difference in the two jurisdictions has been around for a long time.

The confiscation legislation in the three jurisdictions is different because Scottish law adopts a different approach to the occupancy rights of spouses in general. The Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981 gives the right to occupy the matrimonial home to spouses who are not owners or tenants and provides for the protection of occupancy rights. There is no equivalent

[Mr. Bob Ainsworth]

legislation in England and Wales or Northern Ireland, so the general legal framework against which the confiscation legislation operates is different in the three jurisdictions.

There are arguments in favour of both positions. What is the justification for allowing someone to retain the proceeds of crime? People say that we are insensitive or, perhaps, ridiculous, and that although we are after the Mr. Bigs we will catch the little people. Let me give a couple of examples to justify the situation in England and Wales. I accept that things are different in Scotland, but that is its choice.

If we allow the Bill to contain loopholes, the serious criminal will ensure that the overwhelming majority of the proceeds of crime that are visible and retained by him are sunk in the matrimonial home to give him protection. We must make no mistake about that. That is what happens now and it will happen to an increasing extent. People with large homes in Surrey, with their swimming pools and the rest, will say that they are not subject to the legislation if it involves their matrimonial home.

I love it when Conservatives become concerned about the little person. Let us imagine two little people living side by side in a street of terraced houses in any one of our constituencies. Such people turn up at our surgeries all the time, do they not? One person has lost his job and is unable to pay the mortgage, but there is no discretion for the court to prevent the mortgage company from taking away his home. Such people are not criminals, and their husbands and wives are not criminals. Yet they wind up in our surgeries, having lost their matrimonial home because they are unable to pay their debts. That happens to all of us, all the time. Those cases are heart-rending, and local authority social services and the welfare state do their best to rescue the situation, using whatever power they have.

Next door to the family who have lost their home because they were unable to pay their mortgage live a couple, one of whom is a drug dealer. He has paid for his home, entirely and beyond doubt from the proceeds of crime. Are we saying that those people should not face the same situation as the honest family next door? It is not only big people that we are talking about; the Bill may affect small people too. We have never been prepared to give to ordinary people who fall on hard times and lose their matrimonial home the protection that some Members claim should apply to people whose home has been paid for with the proceeds of crime and of the misery inflicted on the community in which they live.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I give way to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier).

Mr. Garnier: The examples given by the Minister have an attraction, but only a spurious attraction. As often as not, in the civil cases in which people cannot pay their mortgage, both partners will be aware of what is going on and will be able to make their own arrangements with the building society or mortgage lender. I accept that some circumstances will be different, but that will be the case, by and large. Whether or not their actions are effective, they will at least be able to take part in a process. In the second example, the spouse or partner may be wholly ignorant of any criminal activities. The Minister may not like my response to his argument, but that is my response.

Mr. Ainsworth: That is nonsense, and the hon. and learned Gentleman ought to know it. I have been a Member of Parliament for 10 years and I do not know how many times I have seen at my surgery women who claim that their husband ran up debt on a credit card, in a credit agreement or in payment for a car without them knowing anything about it. They are not responsible for that debt, but they end up being jointly and severally liable and losing their matrimonial home as a result. That happens all the time, and the hon. and learned Gentleman must know that. Although there is no joint responsibility for credit card bills, there is a joint responsibility to pay the mortgage, and if people cannot do so they lose their home. If the hon. and learned Gentleman can tell me that that does not happen, I will be more than happy to listen to him.

Vera Baird *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment because I want to deal with some of the points that she made.

What about a person who loses their job? How is that the fault of the spouse? Yet the spouse becomes liable for the financial situation that results. The hon. and learned Member for Harborough must know that the circumstances that apply to the innocent spouse in that case are the same as those that apply to the innocent spouse of a criminal. Hon. Members are saying that we should provide protection in one case but not the other. I think that my honest constituents who find themselves in that situation would find it offensive if we gave protection to the spouses of drug peddlers that they themselves are not entitled to.

7.15 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) expressed concerns about time for payment. I refer her to clause 12, which says that if a defendant shows that he needs time to pay, he can be provided with six months, which can be extended to 12 months. Clause 62 provides that any person who may be affected by action that the receiver proposed to take can apply to the Crown court, which can give them extra time to pay. The receiver has discretion, where there are enough assets, to choose which to go for. I suggest that in those circumstances the spouse would be in a situation no worse than that faced by many of our constituents.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael).

Mr. Carmichael: I am not quite the Minister's hon. Friend. He makes a compelling case for reforming the law on debt and on the removal of family members as a result of heritable repossession. I look forward to considering the legislation that will no doubt flow from that. As ever, the Minister makes the case on the worst-case scenario—that of the drug dealer, whose trade must be perfectly obvious. I suggest that many cases will involve not a drug dealer but a person who, to all intents and purposes, appears to be a perfectly respectable member of the business community. An example was given earlier of someone who runs a tanning studio in Glasgow, a scrap business or a security company—something with a high cash turnover. In those cases, it may be difficult to establish the facts, but surely it should be open to innocent members of the family to seek protection, and that is what our amendments aim to achieve.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman knows that this provision applies to criminal confiscation and to individuals who have criminal convictions. He knows that the circumstances that we are discussing will probably arise in cases in which a criminal lifestyle assumption has been triggered, and he will know which offences, or pattern of offences, trigger the assumptions procedure. Otherwise, we would be talking about confiscating only the proceeds of a particular crime. We are not talking about cases in which there has been no pattern of criminal activity over a period or evidence of a lifestyle offence being committed. I mentioned drug dealing because it is a lifestyle offence, as the hon. Gentleman will know. We are talking about the homes of convicted criminals.

Vera Baird: My hon. Friend said some time ago that we are talking about cases in which the home has been acquired, lock, stock and barrel, through the proceeds of crime, but that is absolutely the opposite of the situation that we are talking about. Clause 101 protects only those matrimonial homes that have not been obtained from the proceeds of crime, so with great respect to my hon. Friend, what he said was not right.

I agree with the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) that my hon. Friend makes a good case for providing protection for families in cases where mortgages are to be called in. If, however, the relevant law is wrong, duplicating it in the Bill will not improve it.

Forgive me for making a long intervention, but may I just ask one more question, Madam Deputy Speaker? My hon. Friend referred to clause 62, which allows any person to make a further application to the Crown court. However, under the Bill the Crown court does not have any power to respond to the application by an injured spouse.

Mr. Ainsworth: The power relates to the time to pay; I am sorry if that point was not clear. My hon. Friend made much of the fact that she did not think that it was possible to make representations, and was concerned that there would not be time to pay. There is both discretion and time to pay; it is possible to make representations. Hon. Members have said that I have made a good case for the reform of debt and that we should not be making matters worse. However, we would make things worse if we gave protection to family homes where the family had got into debt, because that would have wide ramifications. I do not know what would be the position of different parties and individuals in the house, but it would not be within the scope of the Bill.

As I have explained, we are not changing the law, which has operated for a long time in the jurisdictions of England and Wales. The power has been in existence throughout the time when confiscation legislation has been in place; if we are going to talk about the issue in relation to debt, this is the wrong starting point.

Vera Baird: My hon. Friend's point about the law having been in existence for some time is relatively minor, given the vast extension of the power to seize the proceeds of crime that the Bill will rightly introduce.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend knows about, and supports, the real need for legislation given the massive problem that we face. The Bill would not be necessary or deemed proportionate if the problem did not exist. I accept that, as a result of historic precedents, different circumstances apply under the three jurisdictions, but to say that because something applies in Scotland it must apply in England and Wales is a strange construction to put on devolution, and would give us real problems.

The other amendments in this group apply only to Scotland. Amendment No. 207 seeks to extend to same-sex partners the protections that are available to the spouse. Clause 101 provides a degree of protection for the accused's spouse or former spouse and replicates the Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995, which in turn mirrors section 40 the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985. The law makes different provision in different contexts for spouses, cohabitees and dependants. In the 1985 and 1995 Acts, and now the Bill, the main question under Scottish jurisdiction is balancing the rights of creditors or the public against the needs of children and spouses. The protection does not extend to cohabitees, whether they are same-sex or not. Spouses have agreed to financial obligations to each other in a way in which cohabitees have not.

The Scottish Executive are to issue a draft family law Bill based on the Scottish Law Commission's 1992 report. The commission did not propose that protection against the owner of the family home selling it or giving up the tenancy should be extended to cohabitees, whether same-sex or otherwise.

Mr. Carmichael *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I know that the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, and I would like to give way to him, but we have a lot of important amendments to discuss. We have spent a lot of time on this group and I have already taken a lot of important interventions.

Any changes in this area of the law should not be made piecemeal; they need to be part of a coherent package. I hope that I have explained to Members what, I accept, is a difficult area of the law. However, anomalies would be created if we went down the tempting road of simply examining the issue superficially. I hope that Opposition Members will not to press their amendments to a vote for the reasons that I have given. If not, I hope that my hon. Friends will be prepared to vote them down.

Mr. Grieve: I am sorry to hear the Minister's response to what, I hoped, were serious and constructive proposals. I hope that I may be forgiven if I did not detect that in advancing his arguments the Minister was not partly persuaded of the merit of the case that I tried to make, and felt that there were intervening factors that required him to make a contrary case.

[Mr. Grieve]

I shall pick up a couple of the Minister's points, which highlight the oddity of the Government's position. First, a telling and learned point was made by the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) about the fact that the proposal has nothing to do with situations where we are certain that assets that are the proceeds or benefits of crime have been used to purchase a house. In those circumstances, there would be no exception, but in circumstances in which the director has not satisfied the court that the person's interest in his family home has been acquired as a benefit of his criminal conduct, new clause 2 kicks in. The idea that, as a result of our proposal, an individual could leave his wife and children in a £5 million house somewhere in Surrey is far-fetched. As we examine clause 102, which applies to Scotland—I am asking that it apply to England, Wales and Northern Ireland—we can see that the court has enormous flexibility and the ability to

> "grant the application subject to such conditions as it may prescribe."

I can envisage a situation in which, while there ought to be enough money to provide a house, it will not be in leafy Surrey. The new clause is fair, decent and proper, and the provision that it makes is distinct from the question of mortgages and debts. We have strong views because sometimes mortgages are foreclosed in painful circumstances, but at least they concern private property rights. If a person does not honour those rights, they will not receive any money. Courts have powers of postponement, which they sometimes exercise, but eventually the trap door opens, or closes, and people go.

We are putting together a policy designed to attack criminals, which the Opposition support. Indeed, there is universal support in the House for the principles of the Bill, but we are seeking to mitigate its harshness. In those circumstances, a different set of rules should apply; we should differentiate the rights of the state upholding the rule of law from those of the person to whom the state should sometimes show mercy.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: It is not like the hon. Gentleman to present half an argument without presenting the other half. He is right about the circumstances applying to the home, but he must accept that we are talking about an assumptions procedure where there is deemed to be a criminal lifestyle. He cannot present one half of the argument without the other half, and it is not like him to do so.

Mr. Grieve: I understand the Minister's point, but it is important that the House should understand the issue under discussion. The assumption is made and the person is deemed to have a criminal lifestyle. As he knows, huge consequences will result. Effectively, the burden of proof is reversed and all assets except those which can be shown to have been acquired legitimately disappear and are confiscated. The point of the new clause is to provide an extra safeguard. In some circumstances, the criminal lifestyle may be established to exist, but the reversal of the burden of proof should not take place in relation to the matrimonial home or the home in which the spouse, ex-spouse and children are living. In such circumstances, the burden should stay with the prosecutor. If the prosecutor cannot discharge it, would not a right-thinking person say that there might be a situation in which the full force and rigour of the law should not be invoked?

7.30 pm

Mr. Stinchcombe: The hon. Gentleman is arguing that there may be some circumstances in which the full rigour of the assumptions procedure should not bite. However, is it not the case that it does not bite under the Bill if either the assumption can be shown to be incorrect or there is a serious risk of injustice?

Mr. Grieve: I return to the point that I made at the outset: my view is that the serious risk of injustice arises in relation to the assumption and not to the circumstances surrounding the spouse, ex-spouse or child. I have been very well briefed on the matter and I am sure that the Minister would have corrected me if I had got that wrong. He has not done so. Although I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, I do not think that it alters the force of the argument in any way.

The hon. Member for Redcar eloquently pointed out that the system will be divergent within the United Kingdom. I appreciate that diversity can exist, but let us consider what would happen if separate cases arose in relation to two adjoining properties in one jurisdiction, but the person in the first case was dealt with through the Scottish courts, while his brother next door—his co-drug smuggler—was put through the English courts. That could produce completely different results for the spouse or ex-spouse and children in each of those adjoining properties. When that happens, people will complain long and loud about that injustice, which may well be in breach of the Human Rights Act 1998.

We are proposing a small change that would not have the catastrophic consequences that the Minister fears. If it could have such consequences, not only would he never have allowed the Scottish provision to survive, but Scottish Members would have called long and loud for its removal in Committee. However, they did not do so, and I dare say that this provision is seen in Scotland as a fair one that has not been abused. I do not believe that the difficult consequences that he foresees would flow from the new clause. Without it, the House will have a reputation for unfairness in the context of England of Wales on the basis of a law that is inexorable and shows no respite for those whom it should protect.

I do not know what will happen in another place and I realise that we are unlikely to succeed in persuading enough hon. Members to vote with us for the new clause. Listening to the debate, I hoped that the Minister would make a small concession, so that I could ask leave to withdraw the motion, while these matters could be returned to in another place. However, the more I have heard, the more persuaded I am that we are right to insist on our proposals. We shall, therefore, seek to press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 157, Noes 273.

Division No. 169] **[7.33 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham

Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew

Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to intervene on the deliberations on the Bill, but I understand that it is widely reported that there are two suspected cases of foot and mouth disease on the north York moors in my constituency. I am sure that the whole House would want to express its hope that the tests being carried out on samples from the two sheep prove negative. Our thoughts are with the farmer concerned and those in the surrounding area, who must be very apprehensive. In the event that the result of the tests is bad news, the House would like reassurance that there will be an emergency statement from the appropriate Minister, and I would be grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you could ensure through your good offices that would be done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I have no knowledge of the matter to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Ministerial statements are entirely a matter for the Ministers responsible, but the House will have heard the point that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you had notification from the Minister of State, Scotland Office that he is going to make a statement on an interview that he has given to BBC Scotland suggesting that the Electricity Act 1989 should take precedence over planning Acts in Scotland, to allow decisions on the development of nuclear power stations in Scotland to be made here rather than in the Scottish Parliament? If the Minister is going to make statements subordinating Scottish democracy to this Government's nuclear obsession, at least he should have the courtesy to do so from the Dispatch Box, rather than to BBC Scotland.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Clause 6

MAKING OF ORDER

Mr. Grieve: I beg to move amendment No. 39, in page 3, line 20, at end insert—

> 'and the court considers that there is no real risk of injustice from it so proceeding'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 41, in clause 8, page 4, line 20, at end insert—

> '(1A) But the defendant shall not be held to have benefited to the extent that such benefit has already been forfeited by reason of any other power or enactment.'.

Government amendments Nos. 80, 190 to 192, 85 and 86.

Amendment No. 204, in clause 94, page 56, line 11, leave out "three" and insert "four".

Amendment No. 146, in page 56, line 12, at end insert—

> 'and the court considers that there is no real risk of injustice from it so proceeding'.

Amendment No. 205, in page 56, line 23, at end insert—

> '(4A) The fourth condition is that, after considering the evidence contained in a statement of information prepared by the prosecutor under section 104, the court believes that it is appropriate for it to act under this section.'.

Government amendment No. 230.

Amendment No. 206, in page 56, line 41, at end insert—

'(8A) In making representations to the court under subsection (8), any person whom the court thinks is likely to be affected shall be entitled to appear before the court.'.

Amendment No. 150, in clause 96, page 57, line 16, at end insert—

'(1A) But the accused shall not be held to have benefited to the extent that such benefit has already been forfeited by reason of any other power or enactment.'.

Government amendment No. 290.

Amendment No. 212, in clause 104, page 63, line 11, leave out from first "the" to end of line 12 and insert—

'prosecutor asks the court to act under section 94, the prosecutor shall, within such period as the court may specify, give the court a statement of information'.

Government amendment No. 255.

Amendment No. 213, in page 63, line 31, leave out "If the prosecutor gives" and insert "After giving".

Amendment No. 214, in page 63, line 32, leave out "he" and insert "the prosecutor".

Government amendment No. 257.

Amendment No. 215, in clause 105, page 63, line 36, leave out from beginning to "on" in line 37 and insert—

'If the court is acting under section 94 and it is satisfied that the prosecutor has served a copy of the statement of information'.

Government amendments Nos. 258 to 260.

Amendment No. 216, in clause 109, page 67, line 37, at end insert—

'(bb) the prosecutor has evidence which was not available to him when the court decided the amount of the accused's benefit for the purposes of the order,'.

Government amendments Nos. 261, 231, 262 and 263.

Amendment No. 217, in clause 118, page 73, line 16, at end insert—

'(cb) a decision of the court not to act under section 94;".'.

Amendment No. 218, in page 73, line 17, at end insert—

'(3A) In subsection (2), after paragraph (v) insert—

(vi) under paragraph (cb), that the decision not to act under section 94 was inappropriate".'.

Amendment No. 219, in page 73, line 28, at end insert—

'(cb) a decision of the court not to act under section 94;".'.

Amendment No. 220, in page 73, line 29, at end insert—

'(7A) In subsection (4A) after paragraph (b)(v) insert—

"(vi) under paragraph (cb), that the decision not to act under section 94 was inappropriate.".'.

Government amendments Nos. 269 to 275, 233, 276 to 278, 234, 280, 283 and 284.

Amendment No. 147, in clause 162, page 96, line 38, at end insert—

'and the court considers that there is no real risk of injustice from it so proceeding'.

Amendment No. 151, in clause 164, page 97, line 37, at end insert—

'(1A) But the defendant shall not be held to have benefited to the extent that such benefit has already been forfeited by reason of any other power or enactment.'.

Government amendments Nos. 178, 193 to 195, 183, 184, 100 and 187 to 189.

Mr. Grieve: Were we to attempt to consider each amendment individually in the time available before the guillotine falls on our proceedings, I fear that we might get into difficulty. Therefore, I intend to confine my remarks to amendments Nos. 39 and 41, which are of considerable importance. However, they are very different and there is no immediate link between them, so they should be discussed separately.

I start with amendment No. 39. As we discussed at length in Committee, clause 6 is the first relating to confiscation orders, which we have debated in respect of new clause 2. On making an order, clause 6 baldly states:

"The Crown Court must proceed under this section if the following two conditions are satisfied."

The first is that a person has been

"convicted of an offence or offences in proceedings before the Crown Court"

and is

"committed to the Crown Court for sentence"

or

"committed to the Crown Court in respect of an offence or offences under section 70".

The second is that

"the prosecutor or the Director asks the court to proceed"

or the court

"believes it is appropriate for it to do so."

On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) made the point that the process of confiscation may be initiated although a person may have committed only three exceptionally minor offences for gain over the previous six years. That drew a few exclamations from those on the Government Benches, but it was not challenged. Indeed, it is quite clear.

The point was also made on Second Reading that the process may be initiated by a prosecutor when a person has committed offences amounting, perhaps, to no more than having no rear light on their vehicle. As the law will stand, those are offences for gain, because there is undoubtedly a pecuniary advantage in not having or replacing a rear light. As we discussed extensively in Committee, by such small matters a person may be moved into a procedure that the Minister has often acknowledged is draconian. Indeed, it is intended that it should be draconian towards those from whom assets are to be confiscated.

In Committee, we suggested that it might be better if "must" were replaced by "may" to allow some judicial discretion as to whether the process should be initiated. If a prosecutor says that he wants to embark on the process, a judge presented with a convicted criminal may simply reply at the outset, "What are this person's assets? Please tell me what you suspect. The offences appear to be of the utmost triviality." The judge could prevent the process from being initiated if he thinks that an injustice would result. Indeed, such a form of words existed for the Scottish provisions until they were reworded at the request, I am told, of Scottish Labour Back Benchers. The change that we discussed earlier therefore came about.

I acknowledge that the Government have a point about changing "must" to "may" in respect of the signal that might be sent out as to their resolution in dealing with

[Mr. Grieve]

criminals. Nevertheless, having thought about the matter following our debates in Committee, I still believe, as does the Law Society and a number of organisations, that a safeguard to prevent the procedure from being embarked on would be useful. That is why amendment No. 39 states that the other factor that may be taken into account when the court proceeds is whether

"the court considers that there is no real risk of injustice from it so proceeding".

Those words have been selected advisedly, because, as the Minister knows, the report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights spells out specifically that the expression

"a real risk of injustice"

is the acid test on which the court would determine the compatibility of the human rights provisions. Indeed, the Committee thinks the confiscation provisions compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998, but suggests a change in the wording, which, unfortunately, we shall not have time to discuss.

I ask hon. Members to consider whether the change would provide the residual safeguard to prevent time and money from being lost and injustice from occurring while in no way detracting from the force of the legislation. I commend the amendment to the House and say bluntly to the Minister that it would create not some loophole through which a criminal could escape the confiscation of his assets, but prevent time wasting in the judicial process. A judge considering what is being sought could say that injustice would result from the court and the prosecutor embarking on an onerous procedure that places great burdens on the accused.

Let me put one or two possibilities to the Minister. Ending up with defendants who fall ill, experience memory loss or suffer brain damage is not unheard of. Indeed, I have represented a person on serious criminal charges who was undoubtedly suffering from mental incapacity resulting from injury. In precisely such a case, the judge might say, "How on earth can this individual rebut the assumptions made against him when the burden is placed on him?" That is what the full thrust of the procedures is all about.

In such circumstances, the power of the legislation would be enhanced by allowing a judge to say at the outset, "This procedure is likely to be unfair and to lead to serious risk of injustice." That would show that Parliament has taken on board the possibility that injustice may result.

Mr. Stinchcombe: Is it not right that the judge would have some discretion to prevent such proceedings from commencing? The second condition includes the words

"the court believes it is appropriate for it"

to carry on.

Mr. Grieve: No, the hon. Gentleman is mistaken. Were the matter left to the court, it would have that discretion, but if the prosecutor or the director made such a request of the court, it would not. I appreciate his point, but the second condition says

"or the court believes it is appropriate".

It does not use the word "and".

Mr. Stinchcombe: I think I said that the judge has some discretion and that the provision includes the power for the court to rule that it is not appropriate to commence. The only point that the amendment attacks is the discretion of the prosecutor or the director also to ask the court to proceed. It contemplates the director asking the court to proceed even if he thinks a serious risk of injustice is present. Surely that is counter-intuitive.

Mr. Grieve: I hope that, in my time as a prosecutor, I tried to act fairly, but the duties of a prosecutor or a director and those of the judiciary are somewhat different. I think most people hope that they have a fair prosecutor, but I trust that they look to the impartiality and good sense of the judiciary to prevent injustice. I would normally look to the powers of judges in that regard.

8 pm

Of course, such powers exist in a multiplicity of areas in judicial proceedings. In criminal proceedings, judges can stop cases. They can direct juries to return verdicts of not guilty. Those are substantial powers, which I have watched being invoked. It seems to me that, in such circumstances, giving the judiciary that power in no way detracts from the thrust of the legislation.

Amendment No. 41 deals with a completely different issue, which we did not tackle in Committee and to which I was oblivious at that stage. The amendment would make confiscation impossible if the benefit involved had already been forfeited. I am grateful to a professor of academic law at the University of Cardiff for bringing the matter to my attention, albeit too late for it to be considered in Committee.

A recent House of Lords decision—in the case of R *v*. Smith (David Cadman) 2001—had a surprising result. Let us suppose that cigarettes worth £200,000 are imported illegally into the United Kingdom and are seized at the port concerned. Let us suppose that those involved are forced to pay the duty, and that confiscation proceedings are then brought and a further £200,000 is demanded—as it would be under the Bill, as proceeds of crime.

With all due respect to their lordships, I find that a rather surprising concept. It is, in fact, a process of double recovery. I do not understand how the second amount can constitute the proceeds of crime when the proceeds of crime have already been confiscated, and I do not understand how, in that case, the amount can be recovered. It seems to me that a measure that, it should be remembered, related to the precise issue of smuggling rather than the wider issue of criminality could lead to unfairness.

The House and the Minister may, of course, wish such unfairness to continue. Let me point out to the Minister, however, that as a result of the Bill it may not just continue but be enormously widened. In many instances, people whose drugs worth £2 million are confiscated will be told "The proceeds of the crime are also worth £2 million. Pay up". Those amounts will relate to a single offence.

Mr. Garnier: I too have read the paper by Professor Peter Alldridge of Cardiff university, and I find the arguments very persuasive. During the Committee's consideration of clause 8, did the Government come up with their own definition of "the defendant's benefit"?

Mr. Grieve: There was undoubtedly discussion of what constituted the benefit, but it was based on the existing rules. There was no discussion of the impact of the court decision to which I have referred. It was not mentioned at any point. In fact, I must plead guilty to complete ignorance of not just its impact, but the consequence of widening the principle contained in it to the much wider issue of proceeds of crime generally.

I found the arguments of the Judicial Committee surprising, and I feel that Parliament should consider whether this is what it really intends. If we follow such a route, the matter may well not stop at the Judicial Committee; I suspect that it will end up in Strasbourg. Surely saying that, although the proceeds of a crime have already been confiscated under another provision, they will be confiscated again under the Proceeds of Crime Bill is nonsensical. I hope that the Minister will use the few minutes that remain to tell us whether that curiosity will be continued.

Mr. Carmichael: Of necessity, I shall be brief.

A number of amendments have been tabled by Liberal Democrats, including me. Under amendment No. 216, before seeking reconsideration of the benefits, the prosecutor must have new evidence that was not available when the court decided the amount of the accused's benefit for the purposes of a confiscation order. Such a procedure should be used in appropriate circumstances, and the amendment would avoid ambiguity.

Amendment No. 205 would ensure that the statement of information became an integral part of the assessment of the case, rather than something produced after the court had decided whether or not to proceed.

We agree with the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) on amendment No. 39. It, along with the latter part of our amendment No. 205, would reintroduce to the courts some degree of discretion in the determination of the appropriateness of proceeding.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) spoke of legislating by soundbite. I fear that our desperate drive to emasculate the courts and fetter their discretion will produce bad legislation. The proposals in amendments Nos. 39 and 205 are modest, and even at this late stage I ask the Minister to reconsider.

Mr. Garnier: I want to speak briefly on amendment No. 41, and to support my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve).

My hon. Friend referred to the case law in Smith. The question of law certified by the Court of Appeal as being of general public importance for the House of Lords to consider was whether an importer of uncustomed goods who intended not to enter them for customs purposes and not pay any duty on them derived a benefit under section 74 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 through not paying the required duty at the point of importation, where the goods were forfeited by Customs following importation, before their value could be realised by the importer.

The House of Lords said yes. There was only one speech, delivered by Lord Rodger of Earlsferry, a Scots judge. It was noteworthy for its commitment to a harsh approach to the confiscation legislation. He held that the subsequent fate of the cigarettes was irrelevant to the confiscation order. If they had been lost, liability to pay duty would remain. That they were seized was likewise irrelevant.

Are the Government aware of that case, and are they passing legislation deliberately in the knowledge of that decision?

Mr. Foulkes: The list of amendments looks formidable, but many are technical. A number are drafting amendments, and a number bring Scotland into line with England and Wales. Amendments Nos. 39, 146 and 147, however, would require the court not to proceed with a confiscation hearing if it considered that there would be a real risk of injustice if it did so. I am afraid that the amendments run counter to the philosophy underlying the Bill, which is that recovering the proceeds of crime never involves any injustice.

The Bill specifically makes provision for the court not to make the statutory assumptions, but that is a different matter. Nobody is disputing that making the assumptions may occasionally present a serious risk of injustice and the Bill provides for that. That is not the same thing as a blanket provision that suggests that it may be unjust to proceed at all. If the purpose of the amendments is to suggest that recovering criminal proceeds is inherently unjust, I am afraid that I and my colleagues cannot share that viewpoint. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the amendment.

Amendments Nos. 41, 150 and 151 would require the court to investigate whether any benefit of the defendant's had been recovered by means of any other power or enactment. We understand the spirit behind the amendments but, at the same time, we do not think that the approach is correct. The thinking underlying the amendments is clearly that the same benefit should not be confiscated twice. In fact, the Bill already makes provision to prevent this from happening at clauses 9(3), 97(3) and 165(3). However, I invite Opposition Members to send us details of the matters they have raised. We will consider them and see if any changes would be appropriate in the light of new evidence or circumstances. I hope that they will find that helpful.

Amendments Nos. 80, 269 and 178 are straightforward. They give the prosecutor in all three jurisdictions, and the director in the case of England and Wales, the right to be heard at all applications for time to pay or an extension of time to pay a confiscation order. That seems to us sensible, because there should be a counterbalance to the submissions of defendants who will often try to avoid payment by stalling for time.

Amendments Nos. 204 and 205 are unnecessary. The prosecutor's statement that sets out the Crown's calculation of an accused's proceeds of crime and of his assets will always be served upon a convicted person and lodged with the court. Accordingly, the court will always have before it a prosecutor's statement. Amendments Nos. 212 and 215 are consequential and, therefore, equally unnecessary.

The remaining Government amendments are either drafting amendments or bring Scotland into line with England and Wales. I will not cover them in any great detail.

Amendment No. 216 relates to proceedings held to consider increasing a confiscation order. It would prevent the prosecutor from deploying evidence at a hearing of this kind if it has been made available to the prosecutor when the confiscation order was made. It is rather odd that this proposal differs from the other reconsideration

[Mr. Foulkes]

clauses in allowing the prosecutor to use evidence that he or she has not previously deployed. I agree that Opposition Members have a point with this amendment. I am glad to be helpful to Liberal Democrats—not often, but occasionally.

I am reluctant, however, to bring the clause into line with the others until I am clear why it is being treated differently. There may be good reason for the difference, but it is not immediately obvious. However, on the understanding that I am willing to give the point further consideration and that we will return to the House when matters have been clarified further, I invite hon. Members not to press the amendment.

I hope that I have answered the points in relation to amendments Nos. 39 and 41. I have resisted amendment No. 39, but I have been helpful on amendment No. 41. I hope that, on balance, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield will not press any of his amendments.

Mr. Grieve: With respect to amendment No. 41, I will seek to persuade the Minister that the safeguards do not exist in the Bill, because Professor Alldridge has persuaded me that they do not in the particular circumstances of prior forfeiture, as opposed to other confiscation.

There is an issue of principle with regard to amendment No. 39 and I will seek to put it to the vote. We are proposing a sensible judicial safeguard that will be of great benefit to the Bill and to the reputation of the law that this House passes.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 158, Noes 260.

Division No. 170] **[8.13 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Sir Robert Smith.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being more than three and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day], put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 12

TIME FOR PAYMENT

Amendment made: No. 80, in page 7, line 6, at end insert—

'(7) The court must not make an order under subsection (2) or (4) unless it gives—

(a) the prosecutor, or

(b) if the Director was appointed as the enforcement authority for the order under section 35, the Director,

an opportunity to make representations.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 14

EFFECT OF ORDER ON COURT'S OTHER POWERS

Amendment made: No. 190, in page 8, line 5, leave out subsection (7).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 17

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION

Amendment made: No. 81, in page 10, line 4, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

'(4) A statement under subsection (3) must include information the prosecutor or Director believes is relevant—

(a) in connection with the making by the court of a required assumption under section 11;

(b) for the purpose of enabling the court to decide if the circumstances are such that it must not make such an assumption.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 25

INADEQUACY OF AVAILABLE AMOUNT: DISCHARGE OF ORDER

Amendment made: No. 191, in page 17, line 42, leave out—

'is situated in England and Wales and'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 30

VARIATION OF ORDER

Amendments made: No. 82, in page 20, line 20, at end insert—

'(ba) he is convicted of an offence (or any of the offences) mentioned in section 29(2)(a),'.

No. 83, in page 20, line 24, leave out from second "the" to "he" in line 25 and insert "relevant period".

No. 84, in page 20, line 33, at end insert—

'(3) The relevant period is the period of 28 days starting with—

(a) the date on which the defendant was convicted of the offence mentioned in section 29(2)(a), or

(b) if there are two or more offences and the convictions were on different dates, the date of the latest.

(4) But in a case where section 29(2)(a) applies to more than one offence the court must not make an order under this section unless it is satisfied that there is no possibility of any further proceedings being taken or continued in relation to any such offence in respect of which the defendant has not been convicted.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 42

RESTRAINT ORDERS

Amendment made: No. 192, in page 28, line 34, leave out from "by" to "or" in line 35 and insert "the defendant".—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 55

SUMS RECEIVED BY JUSTICES' CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Amendment made: No. 85, in page 37, line 10, leave out subsection (7).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 57

SUMS RECEIVED BY DIRECTOR

Amendment made: No. 86, in page 38, line 28, leave out subsection (6).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 78

GIFTS AND THEIR RECIPIENTS

Amendments made: No. 87, in page 50, line 3, leave out "the defendant obtained it" and insert "of the transfer".

No. 88, in page 50, line 9, leave out "the defendant obtained it" and insert "of the transfer".—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 94

MAKING OF ORDER

Amendments made: No. 230, in page 56, line 33, leave out from "pay" to "amount" in line 34 and insert "that".

No. 232, in page 57, line 3, leave out "absconds" and insert "is unlawfully at large".—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 100

EFFECT OF ORDER ON COURT'S OTHER POWERS

Amendment made: No. 290, in page 60, line 11, leave out subsection (7).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 104

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION

Amendments made: No. 255, in page 63, line 12, leave out "specify" and insert "order".

No. 256, in page 63, line 19, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3) A statement under subsection (2) must include information the prosecutor believes is relevant—

(a) in connection with the making by the court of a required assumption under section 99;

(b) for the purpose of enabling the court to decide if the circumstances are such that it must not make such an assumption.'.

No. 257, in page 63, line 34, at end insert—

'(6) If the court makes an order under this section it may at any time vary it by making another one.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 106

PROVISION OF INFORMATION BY ACCUSED

Amendment made: No. 258, in page 64, line 42, at end insert—

'(4A) For the purposes of this section an allegation may be accepted in a manner ordered by the court.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 107

NO ORDER MADE: RECONSIDERATION OF CASE

Amendment made: No. 259, in page 65, line 8, leave out—

'as soon as practicable and'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 108

NO ORDER MADE: RECONSIDERATION OF BENEFIT

Amendment made: No. 260, in page 66, line 24, leave out—

'as soon as practicable and'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 109

ORDER MADE: RECONSIDERATION OF BENEFIT

Amendment made: No. 261, in page 67, line 38, leave out—

'as soon as practicable and'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 112

INADEQUACY OF AVAILABLE AMOUNT: DISCHARGE OF ORDER

Amendment made: No. 231, in page 70, line 29, leave out—

'is situated in Scotland and'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 113

INFORMATION

Amendments made: No. 262, in page 70, line 39, leave out ", 110 or 111".

No. 263, in page 70, line 44, leave out ", 110 or 111".—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 114

CONVICTION OR OTHER DISPOSAL OF ACCUSED

Amendment made: No. 264, in page 71, line 9, at end insert—

'and if it believes it is appropriate for it to do so'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 115

ACCUSED NEITHER CONVICTED NOR ACQUITTED

Amendment made: No. 265, in page 71, line 35, at end insert—

'and if it believes it is appropriate for it to do so'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 116

VARIATION OF ORDER

Amendments made: No. 266, in page 72, line 21, at end insert—

'(ba) he is convicted of an offence (or any of the offences) mentioned in section 115(1)(a),'.

No. 267, in page 72, line 25, leave out from second "the" to "he" in line 26 and insert "relevant period".

No. 268, in page 72, line 34, at end insert—

'(3) The relevant period is the period of 28 days starting with—

(a) the date on which the accused was convicted of the offence mentioned in section 115(1)(a), or

(b) if there are two or more offences and the convictions were on different dates, the date of the latest.

(4) But in a case where section 115(1)(a) applies to more than one offence the court must not make an order under this section unless it is satisfied that there is no possibility of any further proceedings being taken or continued in relation to any such offence in respect of which the accused has not been convicted.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 119

TIME FOR PAYMENT

Amendment made: No. 269, in page 74, line 23, leave out subsection (7) and insert—

'(7) The court must not make an order under subsection (2) or (4) unless it gives the prosecutor an opportunity to make representations.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 123

RESTRAINT ORDERS ETC

Amendments made: No. 270, in page 78, line 5, at end insert—

'(5A) The court may make such order as it believes is appropriate for the purpose of ensuring that the restraint order is effective.'.

No. 271, in page 78, line 14, leave out from "includes" to end of line 17 and insert—

'removing the property from Scotland.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 124

APPLICATION, RECALL AND VARIATION

Amendments made: No. 272, in page 78, line 20, leave out "only".

No. 273, in page 78, line 21, leave out "must" and insert "may".

No. 274, in page 78, line 42, leave out subsection (10).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 129

SEIZURE

Amendment made: No. 275, in page 81, line 12, after "constable", insert "or a customs officer".—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 132

POWER OF ENTRY AND SEARCH

Amendment made: No. 233, in page 82, line 43, leave out Clause 132.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 134

APPLICATION OF SUMS BY ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATOR

Amendments made: No. 276, in page 83, line 32, leave out from "in" to end of line 34 and insert—

'making any payments as directed by the court;'.

No. 277, in page 84, line 11, leave out subsection (9).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 135

SUMS RECEIVED BY CLERK OF COURT

Amendment made: No. 278, in page 85, line 1, leave out subsection (8).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 138

PROTECTION OF PERSONS AFFECTED

Amendment made: No. 234, in page 86, line 31, leave out from "appropriate" to end of line 32.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 139

RECALL AND VARIATION OF ORDER

Amendment made: No. 280, in page 86, line 34, after "prosecutor", insert ", an administrator".—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 148

TAINTED GIFTS AND THEIR RECIPIENTS

Amendments made: No. 281, in page 91, line 41, leave out "the accused obtained it" and insert "of the transfer".

No. 282, in page 92, line 3, leave out "the accused obtained it" and insert "of the transfer".—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 155

PROCEEDINGS

Amendment made: No. 283, in page 94, line 37, at end insert—

'(5) If—

(a) the accused is convicted in proceedings for an offence but the court decides not to make a confiscation order against him, and

(b) on appeal under section 108(1)(ca) or 175(4)(ca) of the Procedure Act, the High Court of Justiciary refuses the appeal,

the proceedings are concluded on the determination of the appeal.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 157

SATISFACTION OF CONFISCATION ORDERS

Amendment made: No. 284, in page 95, line 18, at end insert—

'(2) A confiscation order is subject to appeal until there is no further possibility of an appeal on which the order could be varied or quashed; and for this purpose any power to grant leave to appeal out of time must be ignored.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 168

TIME FOR PAYMENT

Amendment made: No. 178, in page 100, line 20, at end insert—

'(7) The court must not make an order under subsection (2) or (4) unless it gives—

(a) the prosecutor, or

(b) if the Director was appointed as the enforcement authority for the order under section 191, the Director,

an opportunity to make representations.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 170

EFFECT OF ORDER ON COURT'S OTHER POWERS

Amendment made: No. 193, in page 101, line 23, leave out subsection (7).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 173

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION

Amendment made: No. 179, in page 103, line 20, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

'(4) A statement under subsection (3) must include information the prosecutor or Director believes is relevant—

(a) in connection with the making by the court of a required assumption under section 167;

(b) for the purpose of enabling the court to decide if the circumstances are such that it must not make such an assumption.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 181

INADEQUACY OF AVAILABLE AMOUNT: DISCHARGE OF ORDER

Amendment made: No. 194, in page 111, line 16, leave out—

'is situated in Northern Ireland and'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 186

VARIATION OF ORDER

Amendments made: No. 180, in page 113, line 38, at end insert—

'(ba) he is convicted of an offence (or any of the offences) mentioned in section 185(2)(a),'.

No. 181, in page 113, line 42, leave out from second "the" to "he" in line 43 and insert "relevant period".

No. 182, in page 114, line 5, at end insert—

'(3) The relevant period is the period of 28 days starting with—

(a) the date on which the defendant was convicted of the offence mentioned in section 185(2)(a), or

(b) if there are two or more offences and the the convictions were on different dates, the date of the latest.

(4) But in a case where section 185(2)(a) applies to more than one offence the court must not make an order under this section unless it is satisfied that there is no possibility of any further proceedings being taken or continued in relation to any such offence in respect of which the defendant has not been convicted.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 197

RESTRAINT ORDERS

Amendment made: No. 195, in page 121, line 25, leave out from "by" to "or" in line 26 and insert "the defendant".—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 210

SUMS RECEIVED BY CHIEF CLERK

Amendment made: No. 183, in page 130, line 8, leave out subsection (7).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 212

SUMS RECEIVED BY DIRECTOR

Amendment made: No. 184, in page 131, line 25, leave out subsection (6).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 233

GIFTS AND THEIR RECIPIENTS

Amendments made: No. 185, in page 142, line 28, leave out "the defendant obtained it" and insert "of the transfer".

No. 186, in page 142, line 34, leave out "the defendant obtained it" and insert "of the transfer".—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

New Clause 13

PERFORMANCE OF FUNCTIONS OF SCOTTISH MINISTERS BY CONSTABLES IN SCOTLAND

'(1) In Scotland, a constable engaged in temporary service with the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Part may perform functions, other than those specified in subsection (2), on behalf of the Scottish Ministers.

(2) The specified functions are the functions conferred on the Scottish Ministers by—

(a) sections 253(1) and (2) and 263(1) and (7) (proceedings in the Court of Session),

(b) section 272(2) (trustee for civil recovery),

(c) sections 275(3) and (4) and 276(5) (agreements about associated and joint property),

(d) section 279(2) (pension schemes),

(e) section 286(1) and (2) (exemptions)

(f) section 287(5) and (7) (compensation),

(g) section 290(2) (financial threshold),

(h) section 296(1) (code of practice),

(i) section 301(1) (forfeiture),

(j) section 306(1) (minimum amount).'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 249

GENERAL PURPOSE OF THIS PART

Mr. Grieve: I beg to move amendment No. 57, in page 148, line 36, at end insert—

'(3) No powers conferred by this Part are exercisable in relation to any property which is, or represents, property obtained through unlawful conduct prior to the coming into force of this Part.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 201, in clause 250, page 149, line 10, leave out—

'decide on a balance of probabilities'

and insert—

'give the benefit of the doubt to the person whose property is the subject of these proceedings in deciding'.

No. 60, in page 149, line 10, leave out—

'on a balance of probabilities'

and insert—

'to the standard of proof applicable in civil proceedings'.

No. 59, in clause 252, page 149, line 30, leave out "thinks" and insert—

'has reasonable grounds to believe'.

No. 61, in page 149, line 31, at end insert—

'(1A) No proceedings may be taken by the enforcement authority in relation to property where there has been a previous positive finding in relation to a defendant in confiscation proceedings pursuant to section 6 or 162 and the property that was the subject matter of the proceedings under section 6 or 162 includes the property sought to be recovered under this Part.'.

No. 163, in clause 253, page 150, line 3, leave out "thinks" and insert—

'has reasonable grounds to believe'.

No. 164, in page 150, line 4, at end insert—

'(1A) No proceedings may be taken by the enforcement authority in relation to property where there has been a previous positive finding in relation to an accused in confiscation proceedings pursuant to section 94 and the property that was the subject matter of the proceedings under section 94 includes the property sought to be recovered under this Part.'.

Government amendments Nos. 133, 114, 286, 287, 235, 115 and 116.

Amendment No. 202, in clause 282, page 164, line 19, at end insert—

'or if the property was acquired more than 6 years before the date on which the proceedings were commenced'.

Government amendments Nos. 117 to 119.

Amendment No. 62, in clause 287, page 167, line 31, at end insert—

'(1A) If any other person has suffered a loss or damage as a result of an interim receiver or interim administrator dealing with his property in the reasonable but mistaken belief that he was entitled to do so in pursuance of an interim receiving order or interim administration order, such person may apply to the court for compensation'.

Government amendments Nos. 120 and 128 to 131.

Amendment No. 58, in clause 316, page 184, line 13, leave out subsection (3).

Mr. Grieve: This part of the Bill concerns civil recovery. As the House will be aware from our discussions on Second Reading, it is the intention that, in circumstances in which people have committed no offence whatever, a process can be initiated by the director that aims to seize their assets on the basis that it can be shown on the balance of probabilities that they have been gained as a result of criminal conduct.

The proceedings are not so much against the person as against the assets. The tainted nature of the assets is the key to whether they are liable to seizure and confiscation. It emerged in Committee as we considered part 5 that the process under civil recovery should not be considered akin to that which one might expect in normal civil litigation between citizens in England and Wales. In fact, it is wholly dissimilar. It is a process of administrative law by which the state sets out to recover assets that it believes to have a criminal origin. The scales are weighed in a way that is wholly different from what happens in ordinary civil proceedings. This is not a case of two people with competing rights going to court. It is a procedure initiated by the state against assets but, in reality, it affects the individuals holding those assets. It can have serious consequences for those individuals, who can suffer eventual bankruptcy. The procedure also attracts adverse publicity, but the Government have always treated the matter as a civil procedure.

8.30 pm

After the Standing Committee had concluded its consideration of part 5, the Joint Committee on Human Rights provided a helpful and illuminating report on the Bill's compatibility with human rights legislation. The Joint Committee contains a number of members who are well versed in human rights law. Its report expresses serious doubts about whether part 5 is a civil procedure. I share those doubts, and that view became firmer as we scrutinised the Bill in Committee.

If it is true that part 5 is not a civil procedure, a glaring difficulty is that it is retrospective in operation. It concerns not only assets that may be acquired after the legislation comes into force, but assets that may have been acquired, subject to the 12-year limitation period, prior to that date.

Amendments Nos. 57 and 58, the first and last amendments in this group, deal with that matter. Amendment No. 57 proposes that a new subsection (3)

[Mr. Grieve]

be added to clause 249 on page 148. That clause deals with the general purposes of part 5, and the proposed new subsection states:

> "No powers conferred by this Part are exercisable in relation to any property which is, or represents, property obtained through unlawful conduct prior to the coming into force of this Part."

Amendment No. 58 applies to clause 316, which is a definitions clause. The House will see that that clause allows for retrospective application, and the amendment would delete subsection (3), which states:

> "For the purpose of deciding whether or not property was recoverable at any time (including times before commencement), it is to be assumed that this Part was in force at that and any other relevant time."

I suppose that a pernickety person might argue that amendment No. 58 on its own would have the effect of removing the retrospective element from this part of the Bill, but it seemed wise to spell out, by means of amendment No. 57, what the House was trying to achieve.

If the Minister believes that the Joint Committee on Human Rights is mistaken, he must provide a detailed analysis this evening of his reasoning. I am mindful that time is pressing, so I do not want to read out the details of the Joint Committee's recommendations. However, the report specifically draws the matter to the House's attention. Paragraph 26 states:

> "In accordance with its view on the classification of civil recovery proceedings, the Government consider that they are not proceedings for a criminal offence or a penalty, and so do not engage the right to be free of retrospective penalties under ECHR Article 7. For reasons which we have already developed, we disagree. The Government accepts that, if it is wrong on the classification issue, the civil recovery provisions would violate ECHR Article 7 because of their retrospective operation. We draw this matter to the attention of each House."

That is a serious issue. The Minister has put his imprimatur on the Bill to say that it is ECHR compatible, but the Joint Committee set up—ultimately—under the aegis of the Government to provide scrutiny of human rights law, takes the opposite view. It would be much better for the reputation of this House if that conflict could be resolved here rather than subsequently in the courts.

One approach would be to say that, if in doubt, the House should err on the side of seeking to uphold the principles of the Human Rights Act 1998, which only so recently incorporated the ECHR into our law. The Government gave it a fanfare of publicity, and I am sure that the Minister would not want to go down in history as one of the early examples of non-compliance with the 1998 Act.

I have read the Joint Committee's report carefully, and I am bound to say that I favour its view. Everything that I have seen about the civil recovery provisions leads me to believe that they have nothing to do with ordinary civil litigation.

Three other amendments in the group tabled by the official Opposition merit consideration. They are part of a package, and allow the House to take a global view of the principles involved in part 5. Amendment No. 60 applies to clause 250, and addresses the question of what the tests in the proceedings should be to determine whether the assets arise from unlawful conduct. Unfortunately, we have not had an opportunity to look at the matter in detail in relation to confiscation, but the Government insist that the correct test in this case is the balance of probabilities.

My view, which was shared in Standing Committee by other hon. Members, is that the proper test should be the standard of proof applicable in civil proceedings. Generally speaking, that standard of proof is the balance of probabilities. That is how most issues are resolved. For example, if I am run over by a car and sue the driver, the question of whether he is responsible for my injuries through his negligence will be decided on the balance of probabilities.

However, because it is also well established that allegations are made in civil litigation that are tantamount to allegations of criminal conduct, the courts have developed principles for a higher test. That is because of the gravity of the allegations. Indeed, the test has been known to rise, effectively, to the criminal standard.

I take the view that when Parliament is initiating such a profound legislative change, it would be wise to allow a measure of discretion to the judiciary to develop, by practice, the appropriate standard within civil litigation to apply. Given the draconian nature of the consequences to the individual of the director establishing that assets have been unlawfully gained, it would be correct to allow the standard of proof applicable in civil litigation proceedings to apply.

We had a long discussion about this and I do not wish to go over it again. However, I have deep anxieties. I was concerned in Committee that, as these are not ordinary civil proceedings, the standard of proof should not simply be the same as that which applies in a county court if someone has been injured by a motor car through someone else's negligence.

It is not for us, as a Parliament, to set the way in which judges develop the standard of proof. If the judiciary wish to stick to the balance of probabilities, they can do so. If they wish to evolve a fresh or new test at an intermediate level, they should be allowed to do so. We are fettering them, and I am concerned that that may lead to injustice. I am also concerned that it may lead to the erosion of the Bill's compatibility with the Human Rights Act 1998. For that reason, I commend amendment No. 60 to the House.

Amendment No. 59 raises a fundamental issue that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) touched on when the matter was discussed on Second Reading. Clause 252 states:

> "Proceedings for a recovery order may be taken by the enforcement authority in the High Court against any person who the authority thinks holds recoverable property."

My hon. Friend expressed consternation at the presence of such a word in a Bill setting out the requirements on which a judicial process should be initiated. The word "think" does not imply much at all. There should be a higher standard and burden on the director before we start dragging people through the civil courts and, as I said on Second Reading, exposing their entire finances to public scrutiny in a way which may ultimately prove unjustified.

Mr. Mark Field: I would be interested if my hon. Friend could go into some detail about this. I am also concerned that a "think" test will be applied rather than any of the other tests that would apply to similar civil or, indeed, criminal proceedings. Can my hon. Friend go into detail about other legislation in which such a test is believed appropriate before draconian action is taken?

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I do not claim great expertise in reading legislation, except possibly in relation to this Bill. I simply believe that it is rather an unusual term to use in relation to an administrative judicial process for the recovery of property against individuals.

Coming back to my analogy about being run over by a motor car, if I think that the driver was negligent, I may choose to initiate proceedings. I suppose that is where the Government's notion of the director "thinking" comes from. I certainly do not need to do more than that—whether I am justified in thinking that, only the judicial process may expose. There are a number of safeguards as the process unravels, so that if I have no case, it may become increasingly difficult to sustain it.

The thing about part 5 is that these are not ordinary civil proceedings—they are heavily weighted in favour of the state. The state has power: it can put in the receivers and it can confiscate and hold the assets, pending final determination. The state is given a range of weapons—for, I might add, perfectly valid public policy reasons—but it is important that they are not deployed without good and sufficient reason. That is why to change the test to one of "reasonable grounds to believe", thereby allowing for the possibility of review or criticism if proceedings are initiated when there could not have been said to have been a reasonable ground to believe, would be an appropriate safeguard to ensure that the assets that are pursued and the people who are roped along in the process are not unfairly or unjustly victimised. As the Minister acknowledged in Committee, the legislation will work if the public see the recovery of assets and the targeting of individuals who are palpably suspected of criminality, but who have never been nailed down through the ordinary criminal process. If people run to the courts and disappear off to Strasbourg, complaining that their rights to privacy, family life and property are being interfered with by an all-encompassing state agency with enormous powers—that is what we are creating—our process of law and the House that introduced such legislation will be brought into disrepute. It is precisely that outcome that I want to avoid.

8.45 pm

I am sure that the Minister's views and mine are absolutely identical when it comes to the legislation's desired outcome. However, I am anxious that, in their overwhelming desire to leave no loopholes by which devious criminals might suddenly escape, the Government have done rather more than close them. They have created a one-way system from which, potentially, there is no exit for the innocent until a lot of damage has been done. Amendment No. 59 goes a long way towards dealing with that issue and I commend it to the House.

Amendment No. 61 would amend clause 252, which, as I have said, states:

> "Proceedings for a recovery order may be taken by the enforcement authority in the High Court against any person who the authority thinks holds recoverable property."

The amendment, which would add a new subsection (1A), states:

> "No proceedings may be taken by the enforcement authority in relation to property where there has been a previous positive finding in relation to a defendant in confiscation proceedings pursuant to section 6 or 162 and the property that was the subject matter of the proceedings under section 6 or 162 includes the property sought to be recovered under this Part."

I apologise if that is a bit of a mouthful, but I was conscious in Committee that the amendment that I drafted then was deficient. I sought then, as I do now, to prevent double jeopardy, but I appreciate that the original amendment—I shall return to this point in a moment—might have had the unforeseen and unintended consequence of creating a loophole.

The House must ask itself whether it thinks it right in principle that it should be even theoretically possible for the Assets Recovery Agency to tell a person pursued in confiscation proceedings in relation to a particular asset—where the burden of proof is reversed and the asset is excluded from confiscation at the end of that process because the tests were not followed or did not succeed—"Well, we didn't get you that way, but we think we might get you by the civil recovery route." It will be remembered that the civil recovery route will be aimed at the asset, not the individual. I find that highly questionable.

As I said, I am conscious that the amendment tabled in Committee was defective. It had the unintended consequence of preventing civil recovery in a failed confiscation, even though other assets might exist that were not the subject of the original confiscation proceedings. That is why I have worded amendment No. 61 in a slightly convoluted fashion.

Mr. Garnier: I understand precisely what my hon. Friend is saying, but I wonder whether he can answer this question, so that I can appreciate the strength of his argument. Would not a court faced with a second claim of the type he has just described consider that there had been an abuse and strike it out on that ground, and of its own volition deal with the evil that he has identified through amendment No. 61? Perhaps he has considered that possibility and dismissed it, but I mention it now so that we can include it in our discussion.

Mr. Grieve: My hon. and learned Friend makes a good point. I find it difficult to say whether that might or might not happen, although my opinion was that there were no grounds for believing that it would. We are creating a statutory framework that, in many respects, overrides ordinary principles of criminal and civil law. There is nothing to prevent anyone from embarking on such a double system of recovery. If Parliament thinks that that should not be allowed, it would be wise to spell that out. I am mindful, however, that the area under discussion is not free of pitfalls. I do not wish to create loopholes and will listen carefully to the Minister's response to an amendment that is a variation on a point already raised in Committee.

I do not think that we should rely on the court's ability to strike out proceedings. For example—this may be an argument in the Government's favour—prosecuting someone who is not convicted does not prevent one from bringing civil proceedings for interference with goods if

[Mr. Grieve]

one's house has been burgled. The principle of a civil criminal recovery system is not one with which I take issue.

The problem is that we do not have such a civil criminal recovery system in this case. We are instead creating two parallel administrative law recovery systems, which are hybrids between the civil and criminal. Rather different tests apply to each. One test is onerous because a person is pushed into it if he has certain previous convictions that mean that he can be defined as having a criminal lifestyle. The other is a slightly more difficult test by which the Assets Recovery Agency may have a go at a Mr. Clean who has no previous track record of criminality.

All sorts of choices are open to the director, and the House would be wise to be aware that applying the usual test of whether the system is criminal or civil has little relevance. We are creating an administrative law recovery system for the state against individuals and assets that have a taint attached to them. We must be extremely careful about that, and I shall be grateful to hear the Government's response to amendment No. 61. They may think that the matter can be approached in another way, and I believe that it might be approached through guidelines, so I have a slightly more open mind on amendment No. 61 than on some of the others that we have debated tonight.

I have been on my feet for rather longer than I had hoped, but I had many amendments to put to the House. I hope that we may have a sensible discussion on those and on the Government amendments. In conciliatory mode, I am mindful that the Government are tabling many amendments that address comments and issues raised in Committee. I shall respond further to those amendments in due course, but I am grateful to the Minister for the way in which he has addressed those matters.

Norman Baker: I shall focus on the human rights aspect with which the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) began. I agree with much of what he has said. I hope I do not flatter him too much by saying that if the rest of the Conservative party conducted itself as he does, it might be doing better in the opinion polls and have more seats in the House. He is welcome to use that in his election literature if he wants.

Mr. Hawkins: He can use it against the Liberal Democrat candidate.

Norman Baker: We are probably too far behind to win Beaconsfield anyway.

The impact of the Human Rights Act 1998 is important. I was concerned by the Minister's response in Committee when I asked about the Bill's compatibility with the Act. The Minister referred to that tangentially earlier today. In Committee, he said that the proposal then under discussion was compatible with the Human Rights Act because the Act is to be read in conjunction with the Bill. However, I believe strongly that each piece of legislation should in itself be consistent with the human rights legislation, not least because a future Government—run not by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield, but perhaps by some of his colleagues—might repeal the Human Rights Act. Each piece of legislation must, therefore, of itself be consistent with the Act.

I raise that point because of comments made by the Joint Committee on Human Rights of which I am a member, as is the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), who is in the Chamber. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield quoted from the Committee's 11th report, which was agreed unanimously by all three parties and both Houses. There was no dispute in the Joint Committee as to the direct language used about the clauses that we are considering.

I shall not read out the whole report, but shall select some portions to which I hope the Minister will respond later. Paragraph 20 of the report states:

> "If domestic law classifies a matter as criminal, it will be treated by the European Court of Human Rights as criminal under the ECHR, automatically attracting all the safeguards accorded to defendants in criminal proceedings."

There is agreement on that point. However, the paragraph continues:

> "If domestic law classifies the proceedings as civil, that carries relatively little weight under the ECHR. The reason is that giving domestic classification any real weight would make it too easy for a State to deprive people of the protection of appropriate standards of criminal procedure, merely by reclassifying matters as civil. We are therefore not swayed by the decision in the Bill to characterize the proposed new regime as civil."

That was one of the key paragraphs in the report. Another was paragraph 24, in which the Committee concludes:

> "Taking all these matters into account, we consider that the Government's confidence that the civil recovery process would be treated as civil, rather than criminal, for ECHR purposes is not justified."

Furthermore, paragraph 26—to which the hon. Member for Beaconsfield referred—states:

> "The Government accepts that, if it is wrong on the classification issue, the civil recovery provisions would violate ECHR Article 7 because of their retrospective operation."

I do not criticise the Minister for not giving a detailed response to those conclusions as they were only recently published, but we need him to explain why the provisions would not fail the ECHR test under article 7. Is he confident that the word "civil" is not a misdescription of either a criminal or hybrid system as regards ECHR law?

I turn now to the arguments about the balance of probabilities although I do not want to repeat points made in Committee. The Bill's powers are far reaching. An appropriate balance must be struck. We must ensure that criminals and those who benefit from the proceeds of crime are properly apprehended and charged or have their assets seized, as appropriate; but it is equally important not to do injustice to innocent people by setting standards and thresholds that are so high that they cannot convince the relevant authorities of their innocence.

I am not sure that the Government have got that balance right, especially given my comments and those of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield about the human rights implications. That is why I draw the Minister's attention to our amendment No. 201, although I freely confess that it would introduce a novel form of safeguard. It would replace the words

> "decide on a balance of probabilities"

with the phrase

> "give the benefit of the doubt to the person whose property is the subject of these proceedings in deciding".

We have chosen that form of words because we are confident that the Government would not wish to see a major increase in the threshold, which would defeat their purpose.

9 pm

We want to draw attention to the fact that we are uncomfortable with the phrase "balance of probabilities". We are seeking a way marginally to improve the protection for innocent parties without weakening the legislation in a way that would defeat the object of the Bill. That is why we suggest the phrase that we do, which I discussed with John Wadham of Liberty the other day; I hope that the Government will look on it kindly—we are always optimistic.

I fully support amendment No. 59, tabled by Conservative Members. The word "thinks" looks entirely out of place in clause 252. It is the sort of word that some of us might have included in an amendment after being a Member for a couple of months; it is not the sort of word that one expects Government draftsmen or Ministers to use, although I do not blame any individual for using it. I am sure that the Minister will take responsibility for any bad drafting in the Bill.

The suggested alternative phrase—"has reasonable grounds to believe"—appears regularly in legislation and is commonly understood by legislators and those in the courts. It is a reasonable phrase to include. After all, if a person, or an authority, does not have reasonable grounds to believe something, how can he or she proceed? The word "thinks" is a rather looser term, which defies tight description, so I hope that the Government will consider that amendment sympathetically.

I shall conclude my remarks because I want to give other hon. Members a chance to contribute and to ensure that we move on to later groups of amendments, but we are dealing with important issues, especially given the conjunction or interface—to use that dreadful word—with human rights legislation. It is simply not good enough for the Minister to say that the Human Rights Act exists so we should not worry as the courts will deal with such issues later. The Bill should reflect the fact that Parliament has passed the Human Rights Act, not simply as an adjunct but in the Bill itself.

Mr. Garnier: I, too, will be as brief as I can, given what has been said already. I turn first to amendment No. 57. I agree with the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) that European convention jurisprudence is not concerned so much with what Governments think—if I can use that word—but with the effect of any provision. Certainly on first blush, clause 249 involves a criminal penalty, and to dress it up as part of a civil proceeding does not rescue the Government from that problem. Given that, in effect, a criminal penalty will be exacted, the evil of retrospection ought to be carefully guarded against.

Powers of retrospection seem to be increasingly introduced into this country's criminal law, but as often as not they are confined to serious terrorist activities. I shall be corrected by the Minister who knows an awful lot about this, but I think that the terrorist statutes that the House has passed in the past two or three years are examples of laws where retrospection has been accepted to a greater or lesser extent.

Mr. Davidson: The hon. and learned Gentleman speaks about the evils of retrospection and is prepared to accept them for terrorist offences, but does he accept that more people have been killed in my constituency as a result of drug misuse than by terrorist activity and, therefore, that the significance of retrospection should be considered in that context as well as simply in that of terrorism?

Mr. Garnier: I am not an expert on the hon. Gentleman's constituency or on how people die in it. I dare say that what he says is perfectly true. However, we are not talking about criminal offences but about what the Government claim is civil recovery. If he is right, he should confine his remarks to the criminal law. We should not introduce retrospection into civil law, which this part of the Bill claims to be about.

On the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and the hon. Member for Lewes, the Government should inform us of their view of article 7 of the convention, of which I am sure the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) is aware. If they did, we would be able to understand what lies behind their thought processes in relation to part 5. I do not need to labour those points—they have been made already with considerable force by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield—but they are there to be answered. I take it that the report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights has recently been published, although I regret that I have not read it. The Government have therefore not yet had a chance to reply in full or had a chance to indicate whether they intend to reply at all. I dare say that somebody will assist me on that.

Amendment No. 60 deals with the question of the balance of probabilities and/or the standard of proof applicable in civil proceedings under clause 250(3). My hon. Friend was right to say at the outset that in all civil proceedings the general standard of proof is based on the balance of probabilities. However, in those proceedings, the judge or jury will be advised to consider a particular allegation in a slightly different way. In my field of defamation, a defendant publisher will often want to allege that it is true that the claimant is guilty of fraud or some other hugely antisocial activity. By and large, the more serious the allegation that is being made, the greater the degree of proof that the court will require to be satisfied that it has occurred.

In the context of a Bill that deals with serious criminal activity—whether it be drug trafficking, money laundering or another serious crime—we are dealing, as a sub-set of that, with civil recovery by the agency of unlawful proceeds, which is, in effect, a criminal penalty. It certainly seems to me that it would be just that the court should not accede to the claim issued by the authority unless the wording of amendment No. 60 were taken into account. To use the expression "balance of probabilities" is, in these circumstances, insufficient. I urge the Government to think carefully about what my hon. Friend has said.

Amendment No. 59 refers to clause 252. There has already been criticism of the use of the word "thinks". Although it is an English word that is easily understood, I am not sure that it is the right one to use in this context. Not all thoughts are necessarily rational or based on evidence or fact; they may be based on other factors. I dare say that the authority—or the director who runs the authority—would not wish to mount a claim on an irrational basis simply because it thought that somebody held recoverable property. None the less, it is an unwise word to use in this Bill even though an element of protection might be provided by the pleadings process that

[Mr. Garnier]

the authority will have to employ to mount its claim. We know that the enforcement authority must serve a claim form, which used to be called a writ, and a particulars of claim, which used to be called a statement of claim. No doubt those two documents—or one document, if one is endorsed on the other—will set out properly the basis on which the case is to be deployed. If that is so, there is no harm in the Bill reflecting the need for something more than thought to be the basis on which a claim is mounted.

My hon. Friend's arguments in support of amendment No. 59 are unanswerable. It would be sensible, wise and just to replace "thinks" with

> "has reasonable grounds to believe".

That does not damage the Bill. Indeed, it makes it more respectable. The same could be said of clause 253(1), which relates to Scotland.

My hon. Friend's amendments would not damage or wreck the Bill. Indeed, they would enhance its ability to do what the Government intend. I trust that the Minister, having listened to what my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Lewes said—even if he ignores what I have said—will conclude that the amendments are good and give them serious consideration. I hope that he accepts them.

Vera Baird: Amendment No. 57 deals with retrospectivity, which is a theoretical issue at the moment and is part and parcel of whether the proceedings are criminal or civil. If what the Government call civil turns out to be criminal, the retrospectivity will make the proceedings incompatible with the European convention on human rights. On the other hand, it is good that we will have the power to seize the proceeds of a crime committed a long time ago or the day before the Bill comes into force. What were criminal goods before that date will retain the quality of criminal goods after it and should be seized. While the procedure remains civil, the problem with retrospectivity is relatively small.

Amendment No. 60 deals with the standard of proof. Current legislation uses the standard of proof that is applicable to civil proceedings. The draft Bill used the same standard of proof. The Government have changed that—if change it be—to the balance of probabilities. The issue is whether the change is cosmetic and whether it matters. Opposition Members said that common law authorities have noted that even if proceedings take place on the civil standard of proof, the fact that the complaint involves a criminal allegation requires that standard to slide upwards in relation to the criminality and the consequences that follow.

Interestingly, having accepted that that principle is right—indeed, I have experienced it and implemented it in court many times and seen the sense of it—we must consider a problem that was recently set out by Lord Bingham in a case in 2001. He said:

> "It should, however, be clearly recognised . . . that the civil standard of proof does not invariably mean a bare balance of probability . . . The civil standard is a flexible standard to be applied with greater or lesser strictness according to the seriousness of what has to be proved and the implications of proving those matters."

The difficulty is contained in what he went on to say:

> "I have no doubt that, in deciding whether the"—

question in respect of truth of criminality—

> "is fulfilled, a magistrates' court should apply a civil standard of proof which will for all practical purposes be indistinguishable from the criminal standard."

Granted, the Bill sets out, and the background documentation sets out as a policy, a hierarchy of proceedings so that the choice will be to prosecute on the criminal burden of proof when prosecution is possible and to resort to civil recovery only when it is not. It is not practical for the burden of proof in civil recovery ever to be as high as that in criminal proceedings, or one would not be able to succeed where one had already failed. Consequently, there are real conundrums in respect of the standard of proof.

9.15 pm

I looked, as a good lawyer would, to an evidence textbook to muddy the waters even further. I found in the latest edition of the textbook, that the civil standard of proof and the balance of probabilities were dealt with as though they were exactly the same thing. I comfort myself in this way: under clause 6(7), the court has to decide on the balance of probabilities the issues that arise under that clause, and under subsections (4) and (5) in particular. When it comes to the big decisions to be taken under clause 11, and to whether or not the assumptions should bite—that will be the penal bite of this aspect of the Bill—the court will not have to apply a standard of proof at all. It has to be satisfied that there is not a serious risk of injustice if the director's application is granted.

As I have understood it throughout my practising life, when a judge is considering the question of an injustice, he does not apply a burden or standard of proof on either side; he uses his experience and reason and makes a proper decision. Consequently, the backstop, which encourages me to think that the amendment is not as necessary as it might have first appeared, is that one can, I suspect, leave the balance of probabilities to be applied by the judiciary within the confines of what is acceptable.

Mr. Garnier: Is not the point that the hon. Lady is drawing to our attention that most decisions reached by the courts do not depend on the burden of proof but are much affected by the standard of proof? The burden of proof is who has the duty of proving a particular thing, and the courts are not always very worried about that. They are interested in the quality of the evidence in front of them and the standard to which it has to be proved.

Vera Baird: I know what the hon. and learned Gentleman means, but I have argued time and again at the Court of Appeal, when it is eminently in my interest and that of my client to do so and when the issue is injustice, that the burden of proof falls on one side, and I have repeatedly been faced with the answer that it does not. I have been told that when the issue is one of injustice, what is important is the judge's properly reasoned view of what is just and what is not.

As a backstop provision, that comforts me into thinking that however doubtful one might be, there is that difficult conundrum that the civil burden of proof, is capable of rising up until its application becomes wholly impractical. The Government will already have tried to prosecute the person concerned and will be unable, on the same standard of proof, to take away his property under civil recovery proceedings.

I conclude my remarks on this difficult issue by saying that, as long as these are civil proceedings, it is acceptable to leave the question to the judiciary. If they become criminal proceedings, we will have to think again.

Mr. Mark Field: We have spoken at great length on this matter, so I shall keep my comments brief because I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say. I agreed almost entirely with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve).

Part 5 has been the crux of Opposition Members' concern, both in Committee and on Second Reading. I fully understand the inevitable frustrations of many Labour Members, which, as usual, were vocally expressed by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), when individuals are seen to get away with blue murder, or at least with the proceeds of their crime. I hope that Members on both sides of the House accept our concern about many aspects of part 5. I probably go a wee bit further than my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield, who, in his perennially consensual way, talked about our agreement with the main thrust of the proposals. I agree with the basic long-term aims of part 5, but I have deep concerns about the way in which the Government propose to introduce it. As has been said in relation to amendment No. 57 and the issue of retrospective recovery, we are trying to make a civil recovery test when we are dealing with criminal activity. There is therefore great concern that we are muddying the judicial waters.

On amendment No. 60, there is, as a number of Members have said, great concern about using the test of a balance of probabilities, rather than a test based on a decision beyond reasonable doubt. The hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) made an extremely good point that is slightly unanswerable: that if we move towards a test based on a decision beyond reasonable doubt, many other amendments that we may wish to make would inevitably fall away. I entirely understand where the hon. Lady is coming from, but equally I would like the Minister to say something about the proposals in amendment No. 60, which, broadly speaking, rehearses arguments that we made in Committee.

On amendment No. 59, there is understandable concern about the power of the state, which, to many people with a libertarian cast of mind, is being unacceptably extended by the Bill. The state will have an almost overwhelming power; there is an assumption that if an individual is not prepared to tell all and sundry about the state of their bank account and assets they will quickly find themselves under full-frontal assault by a number of different state agencies, not least the all-powerful Assets Recovery Agency. I am interested to hear what the Minister has to say, but the use of the word "thinks" in clause 252 is symptomatic of the state's all-embracing power. At the very least, it should be substituted by words such as "reasonable grounds".

Norman Baker: The words "thinks" is a test that the ARA applies to an individual. It can say, "Well, we did think that", and that is all that has to be satisfied, whereas the criterion in the amendment based on "reasonable grounds to believe" is external and has to be justified and validated by someone else.

Mr. Field: I thank the hon. Gentleman and entirely agree that that is our core concern. I should be grateful if the Minister elucidated other cases in which such power rests with a state organ and in which there is simply a test on its director to think rather than believe or have reasonable grounds to believe.

I shall not harp on, as other Members have done, particularly the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), about human rights aspects of the Bill. That ground has been covered; Members will know that had I been in the House when it discussed our country becoming a signatory to a lot of European human rights legislation, I would not have supported that proposal. We all want to make sure that the Bill works. Nothing could be worse than finding ourselves in a position where a number of high-profile cases fell through simply because the European court of human rights could interfere, and the legislation became a jamboree for a lot of human rights lawyers. That is not a sensible way forward, particularly given the long-term goals of the Bill and the ideas that have understandably been put in place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield was right that there are no loopholes through which wrongdoers can possibly escape; the risk, however, is that a lot of innocent people will be put through the mill.

On amendment No. 61, concern has been expressed about what is almost a double-whammy in terms of the underlying intention of the Bill. I fear that the Assets Recovery Agency will be put under great pressure to produce results, with an increasing temptation for it or other organs of the state to go through the process of a second prosecution.

Clause 287 deals with compensation—I know that it arises elsewhere in the Bill, but it is obviously specific to part 5. Amendment No. 62 seeks to bring a certain level of justice into play by accepting that a receiver or interim administrator can initiate a course of action without culpability.

Mr. Grieve: In a desire to sit down and allow the debate to progress, I inadvertently failed to comment on amendment No. 62, whose importance my hon. Friend clearly appreciates. He may agree that the reason for that importance is that the Bill as it stands allows a defendant to obtain compensation in respect of a civil recovery, but not a third party that has been affected by the actions of the receiver. As the process is initiated by the state and may leave a third party at a grave disadvantage, that appears rather surprising, as he may agree.

Mr. Field: Something might be said about organ grinders and monkeys—but perhaps I am being a little too harsh on myself. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the innocent person must be protected. The current provisions establish a convoluted route; in effect, as he says, a defendant can get compensation if his interests have been upset, but a third party will always have to be put into the shoes of a defendant in order to do so. That is why some amendment is necessary to protect the interests of other persons.

Mr. Davidson: I rise to speak with some trepidation, given that so many learned Members have spoken.

[Mr. Davidson]

The implication in such debates is always that the rest of us are not so learned. Allow me to confirm that prejudice by speaking from a non-legal background, as this is one of those debates where the voice of non-lawyers ought to be heard.

Norman Baker: That includes me.

9.30 pm

Mr. Davidson: The hon. Gentleman is a Liberal, and I am never quite sure what category the Liberals fall into. They certainly have a natural tendency to bore.

I speak as someone who has been generally committed to the principles of civil liberty. For a long time, I was a member of the executive of the SCCL, the Scottish Council for Civil Liberties, so I do not approach these matters from an intolerant point of view. As the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) and some other hon. Members said, however, we are considering a question of balance. I have heard little to indicate that many hon. Members, especially Opposition Members, appreciate what is happening in the lives of constituents and understand how they are adversely affected by the actions of those whom we wish to pursue by introducing the Bill.

I appreciate that criminals have rights. I accept that they will want to hire the best lawyers whom they can afford to defend them, and that the job of those lawyers is to find loopholes and tricks to get their clients off, even though they might be as guilty as sin and the lawyers might know that. I recognise that that is all part of the game, but it must also be recognised that my constituents have rights. They have a right to expect criminals to be taken off the streets. There are families in my constituency who never go out together because they are afraid not to leave someone in the house, because they know that if they do so it will be broken into by people looking for something to steal and sell in order to feed their drug habit.

I know that some of those points are Second or Third Reading issues, but these matters must be seen in context. The Bill must be considered in the context of the perils and difficulties faced by people outside. I am struck constantly—

Norman Baker *rose—*

Mr. Davidson: I am struck constantly by the hon. Gentleman, to whom I shall give way.

Norman Baker: There are three categories of people involved here. First, there are the criminals who want to hire the best lawyers, as the hon. Gentleman puts it; that is the category that the Government want to pursue. Secondly, there are the hon. Gentleman's constituents, who are entirely innocent and the victims of crime. Thirdly, there are those who may be innocent but who might be swept up by the provisions of the Bill and who may not be able, if the thresholds are set too high, to escape from the one-way street that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield described. That could include some of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. That is the category of people about whom we are concerned.

Mr. Davidson: I understand that, and I have some sympathy with that position. However, given what I have heard from Conservative Members in particular, I suspect that they are using that group that they wish to defend to try to weaken the legislation in a way that will benefit them and theirs. They are trying consistently today, as they did in Committee, to water down the Bill and to take out its teeth. On these matters, the Tories are soft on crime and soft on criminals, and that is an issue on which I feel strongly.

Looking at amendment No. 57 in terms of plain English, it seems to propose—perhaps I am misreading it—that a defence in these circumstances would be to say, "This money was stolen before the Act came into force, so you can't touch it." That might be a good game for lawyers, but people outside in the real world would regard it as ludicrous. Yet that is what the amendment seems to be all about. The Conservatives seem to want to water down the Bill, to weaken it and to try to draw the teeth from it.

I understand the point about retrospectivity; after all, we must remember that, by his own confession, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield is descended from cattle and sheep thieves and therefore has a vested interest in this matter. *[Interruption.]* Yes! The other Members on the Conservative Front Bench did not know that, but in his maiden speech he confessed to being descended from cattle and sheep thieves in the Borders. Indeed, as the shadow Home Secretary is here, perhaps I could just mention, Mr. Lord, as it is directly relevant—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. First, the hon. Gentleman must address the Chair correctly. Secondly, I think that he is now in danger of wandering off down—dare I say?—sheep tracks.

Mr. Davidson: I take that point. Last week or the week before, when I was coming into the House, I passed the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field). He gave me a cheery little wave and said, "I'm off to launder some money." I hope that that will also be taken into account when the future of the said Member is discussed. But it would be irrelevant for me to pursue that matter further, so I shall not do so.

Much of the discussion that we have heard from lawyers has smacked of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. I recognise that the issues are important, but hon. Members ought also to bear in mind the wider circumstances outside. We have a responsibility to ensure that we are not overly self-indulgent, and that we remember the people whom we represent. I am quite clear as to what the people I represent want me to pursue: draconian measures against those who blight their lives.

I hope that the Under-Secretary, who, along with his colleague, the Minister of State, Scotland Office, has been extremely agreeable during this exercise today as well as in Committee, is not going to be too agreeable in conceding too much ground. The Under-Secretary has, of course, got form, having been a Whip in the past, and I know that he wants to demonstrate that he is not just a mindless thug. He wants to show that there is actually a heart there, but I hope that he will not do that by weakening the legislation.

It would be entirely out of order for me to observe that SNP Members are at last back in their places here, despite having played absolutely no part in the work of the Committee, because they chose not to apply to the Liberals for a place on it.

Annabelle Ewing *rose—*

Mr. Weir *rose—*

Mr. Davidson: I shall give way to the lady first.

Annabelle Ewing: We have been over that ground and such comments were ruled out of order by the Chair. The hon. Gentleman should respect the wishes of the Chair.

Mr. Davidson: Well, well, well: trying to get protection from the teacher—that is an old one. The hon. Lady has not answered the point and the fact is that the SNP did not ask for a place on the Committee. The hon. Member for Lewes, with whom I do not always agree, is shaking his head, so it must be true.

Mr. Weir *rose—*

Mr. Davidson: I give way to the other nationalist.

Mr. Weir: As my hon. Friend the Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) pointed out, that matter has been discussed in great detail. I worry about the hon. Gentleman, who seems to have an unhealthy obsession with it. It has been well discussed in the debate and he would do better if he commented on the merits of this matter.

Mr. Davidson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point, but I, of course, have been able to discuss the merits of this and other matters at considerable length, because I was a member of the Committee. I volunteered to serve, as did many of my colleagues here, but, unless I am mistaken, there was no nationalist on the Committee. Indeed, not a single one of them asked to be on the Committee. If those remarks are out of order, the Speaker would point it out to me.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have just arrived in the Chamber. The hon. Gentleman's remarks are out of order, because he is implying that the Committee of Selection got it wrong, and he would not want to do that. He is questioning the Committee of Selection procedure.

Mr. Davidson: I certainly would not wish to question the Committee of Selection in any way whatever. Its members are a fine body of men indeed, and women. I was once a member, but my understanding is that the Committee selects only from those who volunteer or are volunteered. As the nationalists were not volunteered—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. Sometimes hon. Members are conscripted. We will now speak to the amendment, and if he does that there is no way he can go wrong.

Mr. Davidson: I shall conclude. I was tempted to say "finally", but, as the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) knows, when a Member uses that word he is often only 40 per cent. through his speech and wants to give the audience hope.

I hope that the Minister does not weaken on the legislation in any way. There are teeth in it and it is essential that they remain, because there are serious people out there who need to be bitten.

If people in my community and in the communities represented by many other Members who have considered the Bill are to be safer, action must be taken against the major criminals who curse our society and, indeed, against their collaborators. Those criminals could not survive without the collaboration of some lawyers, accountants, bankers and others in the financial community. The sooner the legislation goes through the House and starts to bite the criminals and their allies, the better.

Mr. Wilshire: I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) and pleased to see that he is back on form. I can only conclude that he has recovered from his beloved Scottish rugby team's defeat at the hands of the English. I am glad that he is better and over it. I am also pleased that he made his little speech about watering down provisions only once, because that means that I have to say only once that the amendment is simply an attempt to make the Bill fair and just and nothing to do with watering it down. I think he understands that, but he prefers to suggest that he does not.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that amendment No. 57 specifically aims to water down the legislation by ruling out retrospection? It would therefore give any criminals with an eye on the Chamber plenty of notice and allow them to hide their ill-gotten gains if they so wish.

Mr. Wilshire: I do not agree one little bit. The amendment would introduce fairness and justice, exactly as I suggest, when draconian measures, which are neither fair nor just, are being proposed by the Government. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok made a remark with which I agree: there is a point when a layman's common sense may add to the erudition of the lawyers, who are being technical and wise.

It is blindingly obvious to me, as a layman, that although what we are discussing is entitled "Civil recovery", it is actually all about criminality. We are discussing confiscation and seizure, which are penalties for criminality. Seizing or confiscating in this context is not a civil matter. It is a penalty, arising in this instance from assets acquired criminally. If such assets are to be seized, sooner or later it must be demonstrated that they were the proceeds of crime. As a layman, I am struggling to understand what civil recovery and civil law have to do with criminality.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) gave another reason for supporting the amendment when he pointed out that, under the Bill as it stands, it would be possible to go back 12 years to seize assets. Even if we accept that retrospection should be possible, that is surely excessive. Anyone seeking to defend himself against the seizure of business assets—the chances are that a business will be involved somewhere, rather than stashes of £5 notes all over the place—is unlikely to have records going back further than six years, because that is the point at which the Inland Revenue says that it is not necessary to keep them.

I hope the Minister will explain in detail why he and his advisers reached the opposite conclusion from the Joint Committee. We are aware that there is a difference of opinion between two groups who have studied the same

[Mr. Wilshire]

facts, and I think it entirely proper that Parliament should resolve the issue rather than passing legislation that we know will require judicial sorting out. If we are to sort it out, however, the Minister must give us the facts.

Amendment No. 60 also strikes me as reasonable. I do not see it as a watering down; I see it as allowing the courts to do what they are good at—using their discretion on the basis of the facts before them in each case. The Government seem to be trying to make the courts into a rubber stamp. They want to say "We, the Government, wish this to happen; you, the court, will do what you are told rather than what you consider to be just and fair."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said, there might be grave circumstances in which it would be appropriate to increase the burden of proof. Some of the consequences of action taken under civil recovery provisions may involve the loss of irreplaceable assets. Under the Bill, seized assets can be sold ahead of a resolution of the issue. In that event, assets that could not be replaced because they were unique would disappear.

Grave consequences could also arise from the seizure of business assets. The owner of the business might lose trade—a part of his livelihood—that could not be recovered later. That would probably mean the closure of the business even if the attempt to confiscate the assets ultimately failed. In those circumstances, too, the burden of proof should be increased.

In an earlier debate this evening, we discussed the possibility of spouses and children being made homeless. If ever there was something that was grave and serious, it is that. I would argue that the burden of proof in such issues should be higher than is proposed in the Bill.

9.45 pm

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) made the fair point that not all thoughts are factually based. I would go one stage further and say that not all thoughts are of themselves guaranteed to be just and fair—the argument that I have used on the other two amendments. If the director "thinks" unjust or unfair thoughts, he still thinks them. Under the Bill, that gives him the power to act. That cannot be right.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok asserted that the simple act of carrying £25,000 in cash was almost proof of criminal activity. He felt that that would be proceeds of crime because he could not conceive of anyone under any circumstances carrying such an amount unless they were criminals. In that example, the hon. Gentleman "thinks" that he has the evidence that he needs to take action. What appeal can there be against him, as he has simply asserted that that is what he thinks? There can be no appeal against that, which is why we should introduce some concept of "reasonable grounds".

I would not wish to test your patience, Mr. Speaker, by rehearsing the debate we had in Committee about why it is possible to carry £25,000 in cash and not be a criminal. It is important that we are allowed to ask whether the agency has reasonable grounds for believing, rather than thinking, something. That is why I believe that amendment No. 59 should be sorted—I mean supported. *[Interruption.]* Some might think that it also needs to be sorted; others may think that I should be sorted. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok has said that more than once in Committee.

Amendment No. 61 concerns double jeopardy. The highlight of the day for me is to hear two of my expert legal friends offering two different views of what something means. I would not wish to choose between my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough and my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield. Afterwards, they can sort out how the court would act, because that is not as important as the principle that there should not be double jeopardy. For the avoidance of doubt, we should support the amendment to ensure that that cannot happen, whatever the court may or may not do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) was right to say that amendment No. 62 is also important. The principle of paying compensation when things go wrong is established and accepted by the Government. It is important that that should be fair and just to all those people who are involved. It is perfectly possible to have a partnership of several people where all but one of them are totally innocent and ignorant of what one partner is doing. If action is taken against one of the partners and subsequently fails, that single partner, under the Bill, will have some redress by way of compensation. If the business has been disrupted by seizure and by the failure of that action, all the partners in the business will suffer equally, but the Bill will allow only one to receive compensation.

A great deal more could be said, and it might be useful to hear the Government's view of their amendments. We may well wish to debate those but, for now, I shall just say that I should like to return to the matter if the Government provoke me on their amendments.

Mr. Stinchcombe: I speak with some trepidation, standing in front of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), because I am a lawyer who practised in part in human rights law, and many of my former colleagues are in Matrix chambers. We have to be careful to ensure that the Bill is fully compatible with the European convention and the Human Rights Act 1998, which I spoke in favour of, as did the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), the only difference being that I voted for it and he refused to do so.

There is a tension between the Bill and some elements of the Human Rights Act, as can clearly be seen in some of the different definitions of unlawful and criminal conduct. Close examination of those provisions shows that the Government are striving to ensure that the hierarchy of procedures and processes that they are setting up is fully compatible with the Act, targeting different remedies at different behaviours in an appropriate way. There is clearly some tension, so we must be especially careful in our scrutiny.

We must give full credence to the three categories of persons talked about by the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker): we want to confiscate unlawful proceeds from the guilty while protecting both the victims—the people who die of drug addiction and those whose property is stolen by drug addicts—and the other innocent people who could get swept up in the process. We must strike that balance.

Opposition Members say that the amendment does not water down the Bill, but it clearly does. It precisely targets people who are guilty and puts them outside the parameters of the legislation. In terms, it targets people who have property that is the proceeds of unlawful conduct and exonerates them from having that property recovered under the civil procedure. That simply cannot be right.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield spoke about that part of the Bill being a close from which the innocent should be able to escape, but the amendment would make it a road that the guilty never enter.

Mr. Ainsworth: I will not be able to go into detail on all the amendments, not because they are not worthy of discussion but because we walked all over most of this ground in Committee at great length. However, I want to deal with the points made by the Human Rights Committee and to go into some detail about the word "thinks", which appears to be exercising Members so greatly.

On amendments Nos. 57, 58 and 202, both the new civil recovery scheme and the expanded cash forfeiture scheme use the concept of recoverable property. By virtue of clause 316(3), the unlawful conduct that generated the recoverable property is not confined to conduct that took place after the commencement of the Act. That will enable the two schemes to have complete and immediate effect, allowing recovery of property that has already been obtained through unlawful conduct when the Act comes into force. To that extent, it has a retroactive effect.

The retroactive effect is circumscribed by clause 291, which imposes a limitation of 12 years. When we introduced the Bill, we did so to tackle a problem that we have now. I believe that it is important—and our constituents would consider it important—for the legislation to begin to bite now, rather than biting slowly over the next six, 12 or however many years. The present legislation clearly does not work well. There is abundant evidence that people are enjoying wealth that they have obtained illegally. The Government at least do not want to create what in effect would be an amnesty, which would be the result of stopping the retroactive operation of the Bill. If the amendment were accepted, people would consider what they possessed to be safe. Lawyers would advise clients, in no uncertain terms, to hang on to what they acquired before the Proceeds of Crime Bill became law, as that could not be touched.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) very capably pointed out, that has nothing to do with protecting the innocent. I accept that Opposition Members have made much constructive comment on the Bill, but on this matter, as on some others, the Opposition leave themselves open to the allegation that they are soft on crime. If they continue to push the line that retrospection in any form should not be allowed, that allegation becomes increasingly justified.

Mr. Grieve: The Minister may be missing the point. I share his desire to seize criminal assets, and to see prosecuted those people who have committed actions that I consider to be reprehensible. However, that does not allow me to pass retrospective criminal legislation. That is a well-established principle, and the Joint Committee on Human Rights has said that it fears that the structure being established by the Bill would do precisely that.

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall therefore move on to the important point, which is not to do with amendment No 57. It was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), who spoke about the definition that applies to this part of the Bill, and its consequences. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) talks about retrospective criminal legislation, and he knows far better than I do that applying that definition to the Bill would cause problems with retrospection.

We believe that the provisions in the Bill are justified. There is no question that retroactivity will be applied to the definitions of what counts as unlawful conduct. We accept that the retrospective nature of the civil recovery proceedings depends on the fact that civil recovery is not regarded as a criminal penalty, for the purposes of the ECHR. That was the central point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar.

We note that the Joint Committee on Human Rights has expressed reservations about the view that the Government have taken—that civil recovery does not amount to a criminal penalty. However, we note also that the Committee accepted that the matter has not been decided conclusively, either way, in existing case law. Civil recovery is, of course, a brand new procedure for the United Kingdom. We continue to believe that civil recovery should properly be regarded as a civil procedure.

Civil recovery is operated successfully in other countries. For example, Ireland, which has accepted the ECHR, has signed up to the same procedures as the United Kingdom. We are not persuaded that the scheme that we have created should be characterised as anything other than civil. As my hon. Friends have said, we have struggled to ensure that we have stayed within that definition and made this part of the Bill appropriate to be classified as civil. We fully understand that these powers are extensive, but we believe that we are on the right side of the line. That is the advice that we have had, and we continue to take that view, notwithstanding the views expressed by the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

10 pm

Norman Baker: I have listened to the Minister carefully. The Human Rights Committee report was published only this month. What steps has the Minister taken to seek legal advice subsequent to the report's publication to check his initial conclusions, which were reached before the report was published?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am not a lawyer, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and neither is he. I have taken legal advice on the Bill, as appropriate, from when I assumed responsibility for it last summer. I continue to take legal advice on the Bill and anything that has an impact on it, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will continue to do so. He writes me off as a cavalier person who is not the least interested in human rights considerations but wants only to catch criminals, whatever the expense. That is a caricature. I accept that we have a very real problem and that we need to deal with it. The proportionality and need for the legislation are an important part of the argument about whether it is compliant with the European convention on human rights.

We considered some time ago whether to limit the retrospective nature of the scheme to a defined period of time. Our preliminary view was that we should not. However, we made it clear in the Command Paper issued earlier this year that we wanted to think about it further.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

We concluded that while we wanted to ensure that civil recovery proceedings will be as effective as possible, the introduction of a limitation period would nevertheless be appropriate. We have therefore specified that it should be 12 years.

Amendments Nos. 201 and 60 deal with issues that we tramped all over in Committee. We believe that the balance of probabilities is the appropriate test. Amendment No. 201 contains a formulation about giving the benefit of the doubt to the person whose property is subject to these proceedings. Amendment No. 60 calls for the application of the civil standard of proof.

As we said at length in Committee, the balance of probabilities is the normal standard of proof applicable to civil proceedings. However, some limited civil proceedings attract the criminal standard of proof. Amendment No. 60 would therefore make the position less clear in our view. The wording in the Bill achieves what we intend to do in a way that a reference to the standard applicable to civil proceedings would not. Some civil proceedings, notably the applications for contempt of court, attract the criminal standard of proof.

In Committee, I quoted from Lord Justice Nicholls' comments that the balance of probabilities is not a rigid but a flexible standard. The burden of proof will be on the director to prove his case on the balance of probabilities. In cash forfeiture proceedings, the burden will be on Customs and Excise or on the police to prove on the balance of probabilities.

The wording in amendment No. 201 does not, to our knowledge, appear in any other legislation. Therefore, when clarity is important, it would be highly undesirable to introduce anything into the Bill that would prejudice that clarity.

I want to talk about amendments Nos. 59 and 163 at some length, as there has been considerable discussion about them. Clause 252 gives the enforcement authority the basic power to bring civil recovery proceedings, and it explains what they are for and against whom proceedings may be brought. The person against whom proceedings may be brought is immediately the subject of the obligations imposed on the enforcement authority by clause 252(2)(a). The phrase

"any person who the authority thinks holds recoverable property"

therefore explains who the target respondent is, and that civil recovery proceedings are concerned with recovering property from the people holding it.

That phrase does not do what amendment No. 59 seems to want it to do: it does not introduce a free-standing test that the authority would have to satisfy even to start civil recovery proceedings, and which could be used by a respondent by way of an extra round of challenge to undermine the authority's position at the outset. That is not how civil litigation normally works. A claimant does not need to pass the test of having reasonable grounds before bringing a claim.

The director cannot begin civil recovery proceedings on a whim, as was suggested by Opposition Members. High Court proceedings are a serious undertaking. The director is under a statutory obligation to exercise his functions efficiently and effectively. He cannot use public money unreasonably, and in any event, as a public authority he is bound by public and human rights law. He is not allowed to go on escapades of his own. No purpose is to be served by making unnecessary and disruptive preliminary challenges before a case can be looked at properly.

There are two paths down which the authority can travel. If an interim receiving order is to be sought, a good arguable case will have to be made, and if the authority proceeds straight to issuing a claim form, the full basis for the claim must be set out. As soon as a civil recovery action begins to affect anyone, mechanisms are in place to allow a respondent to challenge it.

Amendments Nos. 61 and 164 are unnecessary, because the Bill already provides that a court may not make a recovery order in the circumstances set out in them. Clause 311(9) explicitly provides that property is not recoverable if it has been taken into account in deciding the amount of a person's benefit from criminal conduct for the purpose of making a confiscation order. Clause 282(8) provides that, if property has been taken into account for the purpose of making a confiscation order and the enforcement authority subsequently seeks a recovery order in respect of related property, the confiscation order will be treated as a recovery order for the purposes of the clause. Not only is the original property that was taken into account for confiscation purposes not recoverable; any property that represents the original property is not recoverable either.

In speaking to amendment No. 61, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield suggested that even property considered in confiscation should not be potentially liable to civil recovery. I do not want to discuss that issue now, but he will recall that I wrote to him and the rest of the Committee, setting out at length the argument that property that is considered part of the confiscation case might nevertheless be brought within the ambit of civil recovery. Those arguments have not been refuted.

Government amendment No. 133 deals with an issue raised in Committee. It limits the power of entry to premises to which an interim order applies. I agreed in Committee that the power was too widely drawn and the amendment limits it to entering such premises as may be specified by the court in an interim recovery order.

Government amendments Nos. 114 and 235 provide that any court in which other proceedings are pending in respect of property that is, or may be, subject to an interim receiving order may stay the proceedings or impose its own terms on how they should continue. Before exercising that power, the court must give the enforcement authority and the interim receiver the right to be heard. Amendment No. 114 also requires the court to give any other person who may be affected by the order an opportunity to be heard before it exercises the power, and amendment No. 235 makes equivalent provision for Scotland.

Government amendment No. 286 applies where an interim administrator is to be independent of both parties. It makes it clear that he must not be a member of staff of the Scottish Administration. Amendment No. 287 is purely a drafting change. Amendments Nos. 116 to 119 are technical.

Amendment No. 62 would provide an avenue for compensation to a person whose property is not included in an interim receiving or administration order, but who has suffered loss or damage because the receiver or administrator reasonably, but mistakenly, dealt with his property. We discussed that point at some length in Committee, and I indicated that I would give it further thought. I understand the concern that has been expressed, but I am not persuaded that there is a case for the sort of change that the amendment would make to compensation provisions.

I accept that that may leave a category of persons with no avenue for compensation, but I have difficulty in envisaging circumstances in which that might happen without anyone being liable. Exonerating the receiver from liability in circumstances in which his action was based on a reasonable belief and where he was not negligent in causing loss or damage is the normal position in civil law. Liability normally assumes fault, and strict liability is very much the exception. We do not see the point in putting liability on the receiver in the circumstances outlined.

The question arises of whether we should provide another avenue for compensation. That might happen on the basis that because someone applied for an interim receiving order or administration order, they would be liable if the receiver or administrator dealt with property not covered by the order. The normal position is that a person does not become liable as a result of actions taken in respect of property not subject to proceedings. We would therefore be providing an unusual form of Crown insurance to those affected by the actions of an interim receiver in civil recovery cases if we agreed to the amendment. Compensation provisions in clause 287 mean that civil recovery proceedings follow the normal pattern for civil recovery actions.

The other Government amendments are minor and allow us to update Scottish legislation by bringing it into line with that which applies in England and Wales. They have no effective policy implications.

I ask hon. Members to understand that although the Bill contains many powers, those under part 5 are key to it. If we succeed in keeping them within the realms of civil recovery, they will enable us to take effective action against a group of people who for a long period have managed to [illegible] their ill-gotten gains beyond the reach of the law. Th[illegible] powers are needed. They are justified and they will [illegible] a great deal in respect of our ability to deal with those matters. Hon. Members raise important issues, but I ask them to consider the other side of the argument.

10.15 pm

Mr. Grieve: The debate has been interesting and I am grateful to the Minister for taking the time to respond to the concerns that were expressed.

I share the hon. Gentleman's desire that assets that result from criminal conduct should be confiscated. He put a persuasive argument in relation to amendment No. 57: I would not want to put in jeopardy the possibility of recovering past assets. However, as he is aware, there is a link between all the amendments that we have considered: the hybridity of the system that we are establishing. That system will not be entirely criminal, administrative or civil. Overall, we retain serious reservations about it.

That is why, in a spirit of co-operation, we shall withdraw amendment No. 57. If the Minister is subject to a retrospective challenge under the Human Rights Act and the whole of part 5 is demolished as a result, we shall be able to tell him that we raised concerns about the matter. I hope that does not happen, however, and I understand the hon. Gentleman's arguments why it will not.

We shall thus ask to withdraw the amendment, but will put amendment No. 59 to the vote. I continue to believe that it is fundamental to the operation of part 5 that the procedure should be seen to be reasonable. Changing the clause by the use of the words "reasonable grounds to believe" is essential both to provide reassurance and to remind the director of the onerous duty placed on him. I ask that amendment No. 59 be put to the vote, but I beg to ask leave to withdraw the lead amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 252

ENFORCEMENT RECEIVERS

Amendment proposed: No. 59, in page 149, line 30, leave out "thinks" and insert—

'has reasonable grounds to believe'.—*[Mr. Grieve.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 155, Noes 276.

Division No. 171] **[10.18 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter

Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. John Randall.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim

Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Angela Smith.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 3

POWERS OF INTERIM RECEIVER OR ADMINISTRATOR

10.30 pm

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I beg to move amendment No. 132, in page 267, line 5, at end insert—

'(6) This paragraph does not confer power to require a person—

(a) to produce, or give access to privileged material,

(b) to answer any privileged question.

(7) Where a person would be entitled to refuse to produce any material, or to refuse to answer any question—

(a) in relation to England and Wales and Northern Ireland, on grounds of legal professional privilege in proceedings in the High Court,

(b) in relation to Scotland, on grounds of legal privilege, within the meaning of Chapter 3 of Part 8,

the material or (as the case may be) question is privileged.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 94, 95, 64, 109, 65 and 110.

Amendment No. 68, in clause 356, page 207, line 31, after "the", insert "current".

Government amendments Nos. 111, 165 and 113.

Mr. Ainsworth: Most of our amendments are technical. Amendment No. 132, however, is slightly more than that. It deals with a problem that was raised in Committee. Hon. Members were right to think that there was an infringement on legal professional privilege, and we are putting that right.

As we have little time, I shall deal with amendment No. 68. It would limit the information that needs to be provided to the current name and address of a client. The amendment is not necessary. Its purpose is achieved in the Bill as drafted. It is self-evident in clause 356(1) that only the current name and address of the lawyer's client need to be disclosed, so the amendment would have no effect.

Mr. Hawkins: The Minister says that clause 356 makes it clear that only the current address can be disclosed, but that is not the case. If it did say that, we would not have tabled the amendment, which is, of course, to clause 356.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman is not right. There is no requirement in that clause to disclose anything other than the current name and address. If he can show me, either now or subsequently, that that is not the case, I assure him that I will address the problem because that is not our intention or policy. I hope that my assurance is clear and unambiguous and that he can accept it. I am more than happy to give him further clarification if he needs it. I commend the Government amendment to the House.

Mr. Hawkins: Opposition Members are genuinely grateful to the Government and the Minister for the series of concessions that they have made. I appreciate that he is being brief because of the time, but it is important to go through some of the important things that the Government are doing. The House will note that, although the Government have put their name to a number of the amendments, the Minister did not say that they were our amendments initially. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and I can happily say, as the Ministers conceded in Committee, that this is another set of Grieve-Hawkins amendments.

We are pleased, in particular, that the Government have agreed in amendments Nos. 94 and 95 to replace the inelegant drafting of "a view to" with "the intention of". That is a far better phrase, which is far more familiar to us from other legislation. We made that point in detail in Committee, and we are delighted that the Government have belatedly agreed with us, but however belated their agreement there is more joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth. We are glad to see that the Bill is being genuinely improved by the Government signing up to amendments suggested by the official Opposition.

The same thing has happened with amendments Nos. 64, 109, 65 and 110, which make the changes that we wished to make to the provisions on production orders and search and seizure orders. The Government have signed up to our suggested amendments to clause 376 and, in amendment No. 113, made an amendment that, while not one of ours, reflects a view that we expressed in Committee on schedule 8. The amendments relate to the deletion of provisions in clause 376 on names and addresses of clients. For the production order, that matter has been removed; for disclosure orders, it has been left in.

The one remaining issue, as the Minister rightly says, arises in our amendment No. 68. It was not only my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield and myself who referred to the matter in Committee; the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), whose contributions to the debate were very welcome, raised the same issues on 29 January when she said:

> "A person is obliged to provide material. Even if it contains only the name and address, the very existence of something called 'material', particularly when produced from a particular place, might be important evidentially, and be compellable under the clause. That is not what the Minister wants to get his hands on."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 29 January 2002; c. 1218.]

[Mr. Hawkins]

There was then quite a lot of discussion about the significance of documents which might or might not be privileged and might contain a defendant's name and address.

I appreciate that, because amendment No. 68 concerns a later clause in the Bill—clause 356—it will not fall to be voted on tonight. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield and I will, in the hours until tomorrow's proceedings, be considering whether we wish to press the matter. At this stage, however, we say that it is not for us to satisfy the Minister, as he invites us to, that clause 356 could relate only to the current name and address of a client; it is for him to satisfy us. I appreciate that he has, from the Dispatch Box, given a firm indication that only the current name and address is covered and, of course, we will be able to rely on the *Hansard* record of the debate.

Mr. Ainsworth *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hawkins: I see the Minister nodding. That is very helpful, and it may be that when my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield and I have considered the matter further, we may decide that we do not need to have a separate division on amendment No. 68. However, the Minister should reflect on the fact that my hon. Friend and I, dealing with these matters in our professional careers, and other hon. Members, including some who were members of the Committee and others who took an interest on Second Reading and have done so again tonight, are aware that when documents are being considered in preparing a prosecution case, those relating to the client's history are often regarded as very material. We are therefore concerned to ensure that any chipping away of the important safeguards of legal professional privilege, about which both the Law Society and the Law Society of Scotland are concerned—as the Ministers know, we debated that a lot in Committee—is strictly limited. I accept that the Government are firmly of the view that there will be occasions when certain documents that relate only to a defendant's name and address may be regarded under the legislation as material and disclosable in certain circumstances. I believe that the Minister will confirm that that is only in relation to disclosure orders. However, if disclosure is going to chip away at legal professional privilege, we need to be careful. I hope that, for the avoidance of doubt, the Minister will at least consider, even if he cannot do so at this stage, reinforcing still further his fair concession from the Dispatch Box tonight. Perhaps he would consider introducing a Government amendment in another place to do what amendment No. 68 does, simply inserting the word "current" wherever it sits most elegantly in clause 356, putting the position beyond doubt. There would therefore be something in the Bill. We would not simply have to rely on the Minister's concession at the Dispatch Box, whereby people involved in a case would have to trawl through *Hansard* to see what was said in the long watches of the night.

I hope that the Minister will give that further consideration and accept that it is an important issue. However, I am grateful for what he said and, with my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield, am particularly grateful that the Government have signed up to a series of Opposition amendments, which reflects once again the good and constructive spirit in which the Government and the Opposition have sought to improve the legislation. That spirit has characterised the vast majority of our debates, both tonight and in Committee.

Mr. Carmichael: May I briefly associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) about the Government amendments on legal privilege? I am delighted that our useful debate on the subject in Committee has borne fruit. It is good that the Government now accept that legal privilege and the important lawyer-client relationship can continue to operate without prejudicing in any way the efficacy of the Bill.

Liberal Democrat Members are inclined to support amendment No. 68, which was tabled by Conservative Members. The requirement to disclose a name or address that may previously have been used by a client clearly opens up the possibility of further information that would otherwise be privileged having to be disclosed. Now that the Government have accepted the general principle of the importance of legal privilege, I hope that that final aspect receives further mature consideration.

Mr. Wilshire: I hope that the fact that Opposition Members wish to heap praise on the Minister even at this late hour does not embarrass him too much, as I wish to do the same. It is important to put on record the fact that, during a long Committee stage, a huge number of issues were raised. The Minister suggested that he would go away and think about a range of matters that we brought to his attention. It would be churlish not to appreciate the fact that he has done just that and reported back. Indeed, this group of amendments, as well as others that we have discussed, and some that we will come to later, are a direct result of pressure that we put on a Minister who was willing to listen. That needs to be put firmly on the record.

As for amendment No. 68, the Minister again indicated—

It being six hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day] put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Amendment agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Remaining Government amendments agreed to.

Bill, as amended in the Standing Committee, to be further considered tomorrow.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

International Development Act 2002

Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002

European Communities (Amendment) Act 2002

Travel Concessions Eligibility Act 2002

Civil Defence (Grant) Act 2002

Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Act 2002

Homelessness Act 2002

British Overseas Territories Act 2002

Land Registration Act 2002

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

POLICE

That the draft Police Act 1997 (Enhanced Criminal Record Certificates) (Protection of Vulnerable Adults) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 7th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together motions 5 and 6.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Adjacent Waters Boundaries (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 7th February, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Sea Fisheries (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 7th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM

Ordered,

That Mr. David Chaytor be discharged from the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee and Chris Mole be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Mr. David Rendel be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Mr. John Burnett be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ordered,

That Mr. Alistair Carmichael be discharged from the International Development Committee and John Barrett be added to the Committee.—*[Keith Hill, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITION

Car Parks

10.48 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): The petition has been compiled by Hadleigh residents, the St. James the Lesser church, the Hadleigh Royal British Legion and many Hadleigh small businesses, all of which are deeply concerned about the action of Castle Point borough council in holding secret meetings to plan the sell-off of public assets against the best interests of the communities that the councillors are supposed to represent. I agree entirely with the petition, as does every single constituent to whom I have spoken. We are indebted to the local press and the *Yellow Advertiser* for bringing these matters to the people's attention.

The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament Assembled

The Humble Petition of Mrs. Susan James, resident, and others of like disposition sheweth

That residents and others connected with Hadleigh in Castle Point deplore the actions of Castle Point Borough Council in holding secret meetings in order to plan to sell-off car parks and other publicly owned assets when Hadleigh needs more off-road parking and facilities.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House shall urge the DTLR to consider the difficulty that selling-off Hadleigh car parks would cause to residents, businesses and Church attenders in Hadleigh and prevent these asset sell-offs.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

South Asia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

10.50 pm

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate peace in south Asia. This is a timely debate, as events across the region have moved rapidly in recent days. Peace and stability go hand in hand, but where there is no peace, bold leadership is required, not only from the conflicting sides but from the British Government in their role as an honest broker with strong links to nations across the region. We must exert greater pressure on India and Pakistan to restrict their military excesses. Instead of the widespread poverty in India and Pakistan being tackled, there have been steep rises in spending on arms in both countries.

Jane's latest estimates place Indian defence spending at almost $14 billion a year, and Pakistan's at $3.3 billion. With a standing army of well over 1 million in India and one of around 600,000 in Pakistan, this confrontational madness must end for the sake of the security of the whole region. India has also shown an interest in Russian air defence systems while being positive about President Bush's proposals for missile defence—much more so than other nations and many Members of this House, including myself.

Arms spending and military ambitions go way beyond the defence needs of both countries, but the nuclear capability possessed by India and Pakistan threatens us all. Although nuclear tests began four years ago on the sub-continent, there is still no treaty obliging either side to reveal the extent of their arsenal. *Jane's* experts speculate that India could have as many as 250 missiles, and Pakistan 150. The Centre for Strategic and International Studies estimates that India has about 60 warheads and Pakistan 25, but no one knows exactly how many each country has. Experts are uncertain whether either side even has a warhead able to be delivered by a missile.

This crazy uncertainty is a real threat to peace and stability in the region. Posturing along the border could quickly escalate. This is a crucial time. For more than five decades, Kashmir has experienced persistent conflict. Since partition, India and Pakistan have fought three wars over this disputed land. A nuclear confrontation would destroy both countries with terrible consequences for us all.

The situation has been extremely serious in recent months, and President Musharraf must be praised for taking bold steps to bring us back from the brink. He has made real gestures of friendship, not only with the symbolic handshake with Mr. Vajpayee, the Indian Prime Minister, at the conference of south Asian leaders, but with tough measures to tackle terrorist activity on Pakistani soil.

In recent days, the brutal murder of Daniel Pearl while he was working to expose the truth behind certain groups has only stiffened the resolve of President Musharraf. He is determined to deal with terrorists. I am disappointed that India has so far failed to respond positively. Prime Minister Vajpayee must show statesmanship, and India must negotiate with Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir.

There are currently moves to install India as a member of the United Nations Security Council. How can that be considered when India still fails to observe UN resolutions concerning Kashmir? I am not opposed to India or any other nation seeking membership of such a body, but how can any prospective member of the Security Council be seen openly to flout decisions taken by the United Nations?

Bilateral talks between India and Pakistan have taken place, but they were not successful. There must be a genuine attempt at mediation. In that matter, Britain has a special responsibility. As the colonial power, it created the situation facing Kashmir. Britain has a unique role as a close ally of both India and Pakistan, and it possesses much wider influence on the world stage. Britain is the leading nation in the Commonwealth and has shown itself to be an active and fair-minded member of the UN Security Council.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as British parliamentarians, Members of this place ought to concentrate on human rights and not take sides in any country in south-east Asia or any conflict arising there? We ought to concentrate on the people living in those areas whose human rights are being eroded and what we can do to assist them in restoring those rights so that they can live with respect and dignity.

Mr. Sarwar: My hon. Friend is right. There are gross violations of human rights in occupied Kashmir and we have a responsibility as Members of Parliament to do whatever we can to end such violations in occupied territories.

Britain must assume leadership in resolving the situation in Kashmir through mediation. Our Prime Minister should also use his special relationship with President Bush and the USA. There must be a change in priorities for the United States as the world superpower. Instead of making sabre-rattling threats against Iraq, Iran, Syria and North Korea, it must focus clearly and concentrate on outstanding issues such as Kashmir and Palestine. That will bring greater peace and stability not only for the people of those disputed regions but for us all, and build trust among Muslims that the west is even-handed.

That will not happen while the US continues to threaten other nations in the ongoing war against terrorism. The people of Kashmir deserve a just and peaceful settlement, and the leaders of Pakistan and India must show commitment to achieve it, bringing peace and stability to the region and enhancing the quality of life of the poor people of those two great countries.

We can take a lead from Sri Lanka. On Saturday, the ceasefire ending 19 years of civil war took effect. After substantial mediation by the Norwegian Government, the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan Government signed a permanent ceasefire, which I am confident will lead to direct peace talks. Measures to build confidence are to be implemented within three months. We know from Northern Ireland the difficulties involved in meeting deadlines, but that is a very positive start. Will the Minister join me in praising the Sri Lankan and Tamil leaderships for reaching agreement to build a better future for all on the island? Will he also join me in congratulating Norway on its pivotal role in bringing the opposing sides together? I am certain that the success in Sri Lanka is a lesson for Britain and the opposing sides in the dispute over Kashmir.

We must also remain vigilant over other threats to peace in south Asia. I have real concerns over the escalating crisis in Nepal. The conflict has worsened in recent weeks. Last Thursday, the vast majority of Nepalese MPs extended the state of emergency by a further three months, allowing the army to continue its deployment against the Maoists. A two-day general strike was then called by the rebels to mark the sixth anniversary of their uprising. Most places of work and education were shut and streets in the main towns were almost deserted but for army patrols and guards at Government buildings. The international community is backing Nepal's Government, but I fear that the conflict could extend beyond Nepal's borders. Can the Minister assure me that we will step up our support to tackle the threat, not just for the people of Nepal but for neighbouring areas?

We must also consider Afghanistan. We must work to extend the fragile peace from Kabul across the country. The Afghan people have suffered enough, living in grinding poverty and being bombed back to the stone age during two decades of conflict. I welcome the Government's pledged support, but it will take years of sustained aid to produce any lasting effect.

Major problems highlighted recently will hinder moves towards peace for the whole nation without Britain's leadership and resolve. Last week, a preliminary survey by the United Nations drug control agency found that drug production levels are again high and widespread, particularly where the Interim Administration have little control. Until recently, Afghanistan was the source of 90 per cent. of all heroin in European markets. A drug problem in Afghanistan means a serious drug problem all over Europe: I know that only too well from my constituency. The Turning Point drug crisis centre helps 5,000 hard-drug users every year.

Hamid Karzai has asked for the multinational force in Kabul to be extended to other areas while the Afghan army and police force are being built up. I praise the skill and commitment of the British armed forces leading the 4,000-strong International Security and Assistance Force. Their role will be crucial as more refugees return home in the coming weeks.

Five million Afghans are living in refugee camps and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is preparing for the return home of more than a million refugees, which will begin this Friday. But in northern Afghanistan thousands of minority Pashtuns are still being forced from their homes, with 20,000 stranded on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border trying to flee the country. The UNHCR is calling for international peacekeeping troops to be deployed to parts of Afghanistan where minorities are threatened.

There have been serious human rights violations. Families have been forcibly evicted from their homes, property has been plundered, and there is a very real threat of violence. People are genuinely running for their lives from areas where the Interim Government have little authority over local warlords.

The Prime Minister has put Labour principles at the heart of the international agenda, committing our Government to striving for peace and a better, fairer life for all who are denied it. I hope that Britain will continue to accept its responsibilities as a lead nation in rebuilding Afghanistan. I also hope that our Government will demonstrate bold leadership to bring peace and stability across south Asia.

11.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) for raising the subject of south Asia. I have just returned from a six-day visit to part of the region, so the debate is timely. Let me speak about the United Kingdom's relationship with Pakistan and India, about the relations between the two countries, and about Kashmir before moving to other regional issues.

The events of 11 September and coalition action in Afghanistan threw up new challenges for Pakistan. Domestic tensions increased. The appalling terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in December raised the temperature further. President Musharraf was faced with difficult choices, and he made the right decisions. His wholehearted support for the international coalition against terrorism was courageous; so was his decision to tackle extremism at home.

Pakistan is a key member of the international coalition, and President Musharraf's efforts have helped to reinvigorate the bilateral relationship. That relationship is founded on a shared history and is bound together by strong links, not least by 750,000 British citizens of Pakistani origin.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visits to Islamabad in October last year and January this year underline our commitment to supporting Pakistan over the long term. The Department for International Development has committed £11 million to Pakistan to help with the short-term humanitarian and broader economic impact of the Afghanistan crisis. In 2001, DFID's development assistance programme in Pakistan totalled £43 million, and it is now looking to increase that.

We are also reassured by President Musharraf's commitment to restore democratic government in Pakistan in line with the "road-map" proposals he announced on 14 August 2001. The restoration of the joint electoral system and more parliamentary seats for women are welcome developments. We have made it clear that the full participation of political parties is essential for free and fair elections in October. DFID is already engaged with the Pakistani electoral commission. We will continue to help in any way we can to ensure a smooth transition to democracy, strong democratic institutions and better human rights guarantees, especially for minorities in Pakistan.

Let me turn now to our relations with India, from where I have just returned. There is real strength and vitality in our bilateral relationship, which is confident and strong. Indian and British Ministers are in regular contact. The deep affection and fascination that the British people have always had for India remains. History, culture and shared interests and values bind us together. There is a genuine sense of shared purpose. We share a global vision and democratic values.

The Prime Minister paid a very successful visit to India in January this year. The vision of both Prime Ministers was set out in the New Delhi declaration of January 2002. We both want to play a positive and proactive role in international affairs. We have a mutual interest in co-operation on the world stage. We both play leading roles in the United Nations and the Commonwealth.

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

The partnership stretches from working to combat international terrorism, Afghanistan and peacekeeping, and on through to trade, investment, the environment, information technology, reforming international finance, development, science, technology and combating international crime.

Trade and investment is one of the great success stories of the Indo-British partnership. Bilateral trade between our countries increased by 20 per cent. last year to nearly £5 billion. UK development aid will treble over the forthcoming years.

The terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament outraged world opinion. We in Britain were deeply shocked by the attack on the very centre of Indian democracy. Once again, the destructive influence of terrorism on regional stability has been highlighted. As my hon. Friend pointed out, the resulting military mobilisation on both sides of the border is deeply worrying. Britain urges both India and Pakistan to exercise restraint. We are in close and constant contact with both Governments. The aftermath of 11 September has created a new dynamic in south Asia that we think will help us, and other friends of India and Pakistan, to encourage both countries to find lasting solutions.

Both sides will need to show flexibility and understanding. We were struck by President Musharraf's bold speech of 12 January in which he condemned all forms of sectarianism and religious hatred and made it quite clear that terrorism in the name of Kashmir would not be tolerated. As a friend of Pakistan, we will continue to encourage him to pursue this vision of a modern, tolerant and stable Pakistan; we hope others will do the same.

Terrorism and support for terrorist acts such as those that took place on 1 October in Srinagar and 13 December in Delhi must cease. There must be meaningful dialogue on the issues—all the issues—between India and Pakistan.

It is widely accepted that the long-standing tension between India and Pakistan is one of the most pressing regional security problems. The current military mobilisation on both sides of the border underlines the risks inherent in the continuing stalemate over Kashmir—risks that are all the more serious because of their nuclear dimension.

We remain concerned about the suffering of the ordinary people in Kashmir and militant attacks on civilians and the Indian security forces. Continuing violence in Kashmir has done nothing, and can do nothing, to promote a durable solution. An end to the support that the militants receive from outside Kashmir would greatly assist the search for a solution, as would early steps to improve the human rights performance of the Indian security forces in Jammu and Kashmir. We recognise and welcome the action already taken by the Indian authorities to address the concerns, but we will continue to press them to bring wrongdoers to justice and allow international organisations access to Jammu and Kashmir.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of mediation. Mediation can and does work in some situations, but only when the principals accept it. We and others have a role to play—to press the parties themselves to find a solution with which they can both live. We firmly believe, however, that any solution, if it is to carry with it the people living in Kashmir, must take account of their views; only then will it be accepted as a just and lasting solution.

Britain is playing a leading role in Afghanistan, as my hon. Friend rightly said. Almost an entire generation of Afghans have known nothing but war, poverty, insecurity, terrorism, drugs and refugee movements. Millions of Afghans have suffered appalling privations, but their resilience has been extraordinary, and the Government are determined to help make the future better than the past.

We have a responsibility to help, but we also have a direct national interest in doing so. In the first place, we want the Bonn agreement to succeed. The early signs have been extremely encouraging. In particular, we welcome the way in which Chairman Karzai and his fellow interim Ministers are working energetically to provide effective administration. Over time, the Interim Administration should become increasingly broad-based and representative.

Secondly, we are trying to combat poverty. At the Tokyo conference, we announced an additional pledge of £200 million over five years on top of our earlier commitment of £60 million for humanitarian and emergency aid.

Thirdly, there is the problem of insecurity, which my hon. Friend highlighted extremely well. It is perhaps the most pressing and immediate problem. As is well known, the United Kingdom is leading the International Security and Assistance Force, which comprises more than 4,000 troops from 18 contributor nations, but what is less well known is that we have also begun training the new national army of Afghanistan, and provided communications equipment for use by the Kabul police.

Finally, we are considering ways of enabling Afghan refugees now living in Iran, Pakistan and elsewhere, as well as internally displaced persons, to return to their homes.

My hon. Friend rightly drew attention to the extremely worrying situation in Nepal, which I also visited last week. Britain and Nepal have extremely long-standing ties. The Gurkha relationship, and in particular the exceptionally high standing in which these brave Nepalese soldiers are held in the United Kingdom, is an important mainstay.

Britain supports the democratically elected Government of Nepal and recognises the right and obligation of that Government to provide security for their people. We want to offer our full support to the Government of Nepal in their attempts to find a resolution to the Maoist insurgency, and we are actively considering extra ways in which we can do that. The European Union has condemned the Maoist attacks, which brought a violent return to conflict in Nepal, and expressed concern about possible abuses of human rights in the country, including quite barbaric acts by the insurgents.

We believe that the Nepalese Government went to great lengths to ensure a conducive atmosphere for the three rounds of peace talks last year. We would encourage both sides to make every effort to achieve a solution that will result in the renunciation of violence and bring the Maoists back into the political mainstream; only then will Nepal achieve the prosperity that its people need and deserve.

Finally, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan for drawing attention to the welcome news, emerging from Sri Lanka in the last week, that the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have signed a formal agreement on the cessation of hostilities. We applaud the efforts of all the parties responsible for bringing that about. It is vital that they now build on this agreement and continue to make progress towards a negotiated settlement that meets the aspirations of all communities in Sri Lanka. We fully support the Norwegian facilitation process, and we have made it clear to all concerned that the UK stands ready to help, if asked.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 27 February 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 6 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Violent Crime

1. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): What recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding violent crime in Wales. [35106]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have regular discussions with the First Secretary and his Cabinet colleagues about a range of issues, including levels of crime and the measures aimed at combating it. The Government are committed to improving the reporting and detection of violent crime, and to tackling its underlying causes.

Chris Grayling: I thank the Minister for that response. There has been much in the news of late about violent crime in London, but hon. Members will be concerned about the worrying trends in violent crime in Wales. The Minister will know that there is also considerable concern that county councils in Wales find the process of obtaining antisocial behaviour orders extremely bureaucratic. What steps is he taking to improve that, and to improve the campaign against violent crime in Wales?

Mr. Touhig: The British crime survey, generally regarded as the most authoritative measure of crime, has noted changes in public attitudes and a greater willingness to report crime. Between 1995 and 1999, there was a 22 per cent. fall in violent crime in England and Wales. Indeed, the detected rate in Wales for violent crime is running at 89 per cent.—nearly nine out of every 10 incidents. I pay tribute to the police for that.

I share the concern expressed by the hon. Gentleman about the problems of using antisocial behaviour orders. In my constituency, I have encouraged the police and the local authority to use them. As he is probably aware, the Police Reform Bill currently before the House contains opportunities for extending the use of ASBOs. I hope that they will be taken up, as I believe that the orders can be used very positively by the police service and local authorities.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): My hon. Friend the Minister will certainly have noted that, in Gwent, the numbers of violent crimes against the person, burglaries and thefts from vehicles have fallen by 5.7 per cent. Will he join me in congratulating the Gwent police on that, and in welcoming the 6.7 per cent. increase in the force's budget? That increase amounts to a rise in council tax of just £11.14 for a band D household. Does not he therefore consider that modest increases in council tax represent an excellent insurance policy?

Mr. Touhig: I recognise my right hon. Friend's point. I know that he has made strong representations about the funding of the Gwent police service. As a Gwent MP, I share his happiness at the success achieved by Gwent police in tackling crime and reducing crime levels. However, it is important that all of us in the wider community realise that we have to develop partnerships with the police service if we are to achieve meaningful and long-term reductions in crime. In the end, that comes to putting in the necessary resources, as the Government are doing. We also have to introduce reforms, and the Government will do that too.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Is the Minister aware of the organisation Youth at Risk, which has pioneered some ground-breaking work in addressing youth crime? The organisation's work to reduce the underlying causes of young offending has reduced reoffending by as much as 36 per cent.—three times more than similar projects. Is the Minister willing to accept representations from Youth at Risk, and also to support its establishment in Wales?

Mr. Touhig: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question, as it makes an important contribution to the wider debate about tackling crime. I am aware of the Youth at Risk project, and of the initiatives in west Belfast of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, which have achieved some success. People under the age of 18 commit about 7 million offences a year. It is important that we tackle youth crime and help young people involved in crime. I have been very impressed by the success that appears to have been achieved in west Belfast. I intend to raise the matter with the crime reduction director for Wales at our next meeting, so that we can examine how that success has been achieved in Northern Ireland, and to see whether we can develop such initiatives in Wales.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my hon. Friend the Minister aware of the work of the women's safety unit in Cardiff, which aims to help women suffering domestic violence? The project is funded by the Home Office, but for 12 months only. Will he do his utmost to persuade my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to extend the funding period, so that the unit can continue its valuable work?

Mr. Touhig: I am aware of my hon. Friend's commitment to domestic violence issues, and of her hard work in that regard. Domestic violence is one of the Government's main priorities for crime reduction, and we have a Minister to co-ordinate action across Government in that respect. Domestic violence accounts for about 25 per cent. of all reported violence. I am aware of the Cardiff women's safety unit. There are eight other projects across Wales, and Government funding amounts to about £750,000. I plan to visit the project in Cardiff shortly, and I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to join me. I have no doubt that I will receive representations about ongoing funding for the project. I shall listen to them, and pass them on to the appropriate Minister.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Is the Minister aware that in Wales, crimes of violence against the person are out of control and have more than doubled under Labour? They are up from 17,500 in 1997–98 to more than 38,000 last year. Is it not alarming, at a time of soaring violent crime, that the Government have so undermined police morale that the police are staging a demonstration on 13 March? Can the Minister assure the House that there will be adequate police cover in Wales on 13 March? When, at the beginning of his Administration, the Prime Minister said that he would be tough on crime and the causes of crime, what did he mean?

Mr. Touhig: I think that the right hon. Gentleman has been learning some tactics from the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). When the Government came to power, we looked at the way in which crime was recorded and we found it wanting. Indeed, the House will be interested to know that until the Government came to power, common assault was not counted as violence against the person, and neither were attacks on police officers. We were used to the previous Government doing all sorts of things with figures—we remember what they did with the unemployment figures. We have changed the way in which crime is recorded to make it more transparent. We are making it more accountable. We are putting in the resources and putting in place the reforms to tackle the rise in crime.

As I have already said, there was a 22 per cent. fall in violent crime in England and Wales between 1995 and 1999. When the police officers are demonstrating in London to advance the cause that they want to get across to the Government, I have no doubt that Gwent police service and the police service throughout Wales will make sure that sufficient officers are on duty, doing their duty as we all expect.

Shellfish Industry

2. **Mr. Martin Caton** (Gower): What recent discussions he has held with the Secretary for Agriculture in the National Assembly for Wales about the Welsh shellfish industry. [35107]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet regularly with the Minister for Rural Affairs in the National Assembly for Wales to discuss a range of issues, including the Welsh shellfish industry.

Mr. Caton: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. May I press him to take up with National Assembly Ministers, as well as with his colleagues in the Department of Health and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the desperate plight of cockle gatherers who usually work the Loughor estuary, including many of my constituents? For eight months they have been unable to earn their living because of a series of positive tests for diarrhetic shellfish poisoning. They need financial help and they need their estuary cleaned up. To do that will take action from Government agencies at UK level as well as from the National Assembly.

Mr. Touhig: Responsibility for the closure of the Burry inlet cockle beds rests with Carmarthen and Swansea county councils, which acted jointly in accordance with regulation 7 of the Food Safety (Fishery Products and Live Shellfish) (Hygiene) Regulations 1998. Having said that, however, I can tell my hon. Friend that on Monday I met representatives of the cockle-gathering industry in his constituency together with the Assembly Member for that constituency, Edwina Hart. I have been made fully aware of the problems that the cockle gatherers face, the difficulties caused by the cockle beds being closed for eight months and the impact that that has had on their industry and livelihood. I will make representations to other ministerial colleagues on their behalf and will happily ensure that my hon. Friend is included in the responses when I get them so that he can be fully in the picture and reassured that I and the Government will do all that we can to help the cockle gatherers in his constituency.

Foot and Mouth

3. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): What discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about producing a Welsh action plan for preventing future outbreaks of foot and mouth. [35108]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have regular meetings with the First Minister at which a variety of issues relating to foot and mouth are discussed. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State also has regular meetings with the Assembly Minister for Rural Affairs.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the Secretary of State share the view of the Farmers Union of Wales that the impact of last year's foot and mouth crisis on Wales was devastating and had many ongoing effects? Does he also share the FUW's view that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food failed to understand the need of Welsh farmers during the crisis? For example, there was a serious breakdown in communication between MAFF and the National Assembly when MAFF culled out border farms and then failed to inform Welsh officials. Surely that is yet another reason to have a full public inquiry into the foot and mouth crisis, and will the Secretary of State support it?

Mr. Murphy: I do not share those views. As a result of the relationship between the National Assembly for Wales and the Government, we have introduced a considerable number of packages and measures to help Welsh farming and the Welsh rural economy. It is not always enough, but we are trying to deal with what was, of course, a devastating blow for rural Wales—I agree with the hon. Gentleman about that. The Assembly put £65 million into a rural recovery plan. The actions of a Labour-led Assembly and a Labour Government were absolutely right. We did what we could to put right a very difficult situation for Welsh farmers and the Welsh rural economy.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Will my right hon. Friend join me in commending the distinct approach to agriculture that is being developed by the Welsh Assembly's Minister for Rural Affairs, Carwyn Jones? Does he believe that the priorities of the new action plan should include support for organic farming, expansion of the Tir Gofal agri-environmental scheme and greater support for Farming Connect? Will he join me in congratulating all the people at Usk agricultural college who put on the Farming Connect roadshow last Saturday, which attracted many farmers from Monmouthshire?

Mr. Murphy: I agree with my hon. Friend's comments about Usk agricultural college, which I know well. It has done a marvellous job in the past few months in ensuring that farmers in Monmouthshire are well catered for. I also agree—I think that the people of Wales, including the farming community, would agree too—that the Welsh Minister for Rural Affairs has done an excellent job during the past 12 months. There is no doubt about that. He is working together with the Government to ensure that we do all that we can to help rural Wales.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Given the support of the Welsh farming community and the farming unions for the devolution of animal health functions to the Assembly, what discussions has the Secretary of State had with Assembly Ministers to introduce the secondary legislation that will enable that to happen?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman refers to an area in which during the past 12 months the Assembly has, de facto, done a great deal on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—before that, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—in terms of what happens in Wales. That is because it is much closer to the ground.

Several matters remain to be dealt with in devolving any animal health functions to the Assembly. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that I have already had discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and with Ministers in the Assembly.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): When will the Secretary of State come off it? He knows that the handling of foot and mouth was botched. It cost £500 million and 35,184 cattle, 304,847 sheep and 5,941 pigs were slaughtered. Does he agree that the agriculture and tourism industries could not withstand another outbreak of foot and mouth? Does he agree with Bob Parry of the Farmers Union of Wales that one measure that would help Welsh and other British farmers would be to ban any substandard meat from coming into this country?

Mr. Murphy: I agree that we must ensure that we are vigilant about the importation of illegal meat. The hon. Gentleman is right about that. However, he is wrong in one respect. His comments come badly from a member of the party that dealt so poorly with the BSE crisis not many years ago. If his party was in government, it would have done nothing different from what the Government have done over the past 12 months. Millions and millions of pounds have been paid out in compensation to the farming community, and millions more have been paid in Wales for a rural recovery plan.

As regards tourism, the Assembly and the Government jointly are doing a great deal to bring tourists back to Wales, both from this country and abroad.

Mr. Evans: It is amazing, is it not, Mr. Speaker? The Secretary of State admits that we want to stop the importation of substandard meat, but the Government do nothing about it. When will they bring forward proposals to ensure that substandard meat is banned from entering this country, and when will the Secretary of State ensure that there are proper lines of communication? Last night was a warning shot across everybody's bows. We all feared that there would be another outbreak of foot and mouth. When will he ensure that cheap imports of food into Britain are banned?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is right about last night and we should remain vigilant in rural areas about foot and mouth. On meat imports, we recognise the genuine concerns of the farming community. That is why the Government, the Assembly, local authorities and Customs and Excise are working together to ensure that there is much greater vigilance and much greater public information. There is a tremendous amount of activity within government to ensure that we alert people to the dangers of illegally imported food. I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman on that. However, he is wrong to say that the Government do not recognise the problems because we certainly do.

Farming and Food

4. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What discussions he has had with *(a)* ministerial colleagues and *(b)* the National Assembly for Wales on the implementation of the report "Farming and Food: A Sustainable Future", with particular reference to modulation; and if he will make a statement. [35109]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues and the National Assembly for Wales in which a wide range of farming issues are discussed.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that reply which, bearing in mind the fact that he had a month's notice of the specific question, is rather pathetic.

Does he agree with the Farmers Union of Wales and the National Farmers Union Wales that flat-rate modulation would be ruinous for the smaller and medium-sector Welsh farmer? It is included in the report on England, which also says that it should happen in Wales. If the right hon. Gentleman is truly batting for Wales, when will he stand by the crease?

Mr. Murphy: I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree in principle with modulation. After all, his party voted in favour of it in the National Assembly not so long ago. I am sure that he would also agree with what his colleagues in the European Parliament say as members of the European group. They want a

> "step-by-step reallocation of the European Union budget for the CAP from surplus management to an integrated rural development policy".

That is all about modulation. The hon. Gentleman's party in Europe and the Assembly wants modulation.

The hon. Gentleman is right that discussions on the details are still taking place between the National Assembly and the Government. Of course we will look carefully at those. He knows that there is a distinction between the Welsh farming community and the farming community in England, and we will consider those issues. However, his party is in favour of modulation in principle, and so is mine.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a shame that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) introduces a critical and sallow note to the farming debate, especially as there is general agreement throughout Wales and in the hon. Gentleman's party that my Assembly Member, Carwyn Jones, has done a great job in leading the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department? Is it not good that "Farming and Food: A Sustainable Future" contains a blueprint that all people from rural communities in Wales fully support so that we can develop the food industry in Wales to maximise profits for our rural communities?

Mr. Murphy: I agree with my hon. Friend. Although I expect ignorant criticism of the Welsh Minister for Rural Affairs from Members who represent English constituencies, I would not expect it from a Welsh Member of Parliament.

Training

5. **Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn): What discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues and the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about the Government's steps to improve the training skills of the Welsh work force. [35110]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): Increasing skills is vital to raising productivity in all parts of Britain. Skills measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his pre-Budget statement will result in consequential allocations to the Welsh block, but it will be for the Assembly to decide how those funds are allocated among Welsh programmes.

Albert Owen: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. Does he agree that there should be greater co-operation between schools, training providers and the business community to match training to the needs of industry? Does he also agree that there should be a skills audit in areas of high unemployment, such as my constituency, to identify deficiencies in skills to ensure that we have even economic development throughout Wales?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, of course I agree with my hon. Friend. Only this morning, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in Wales introduced a document on skills and employment action that outlines no fewer than 50 actions to improve training and education among the work force in Wales. I also agree that that should start in schools, which is why the Assembly is introducing in Wales, as we are in England, vocational GCSEs in schools from September 2002. In many ways, Wales leads the United Kingdom in training and skills for young people.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Is my right hon. Friend aware that more than 1,000 jobs have been created on the St. Asaph business park, which is in my constituency, but that only 100 such jobs were created under the Tories? However, if that growth is to continue, my community needs skilled workers. That is the No. 1 issue. What representations is he making to the National Assembly on that important issue?

Mr. Murphy: I have visited my hon. Friend's constituency and St. Asaph, and as he knows, ELWa has recently given some £3 million to colleges in north Wales to support development of its manufacturing base. He asks what the Assembly and I are doing to improve training in Wales. The most important thing that the Government and the Assembly are doing is funding new training and new skills. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's pre-Budget report makes clear, some £40 million extra was given to Wales for training. As a result of that and other measures, Wales leads the way in training in the United Kingdom.

North Wales Police

6. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): If he will discuss with the Home Secretary the level of funding for North Wales police. [35112]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have regular contact with colleagues about issues affecting Wales. Under the police settlement announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 30 January, the North Wales police authority is set to receive a grant of £41.1 million, together with an additional £300,000 to bring the authority's grant increase up to 2.3 per cent. In 2002–03, it will also receive £28.7 million from the Assembly as part of the local government settlement. Together with the assumed 5 per cent. increase in the precept, that will constitute a budget increase for this year of 4.8 per cent., although I understand that the precept may be further increased by the police authority.

Ian Lucas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that response. Is he also aware of the excellent way in which Wrexham county borough council is securing additional funding for closed circuit television schemes in north Wales? I recently met two contented police officers who administer a £150,000 CCTV scheme on the Wrexham industrial estate. Will my hon. Friend please encourage other local authorities across Wales to apply for more money to fight crime?

Mr. Touhig: I agree with my hon. Friend. In fact, in his constituency £525,000 has been made available for CCTV in the period 1999 to 2002. The Government have made available £9 million for CCTV in town centres and car parks throughout Wales. That is having a positive impact on crime and crime reduction. It reassures the public and gives a warning to those out to commit crime that they will be detected.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Given that the majority of police funding in Wales comes from within that country, is it not high time that responsibility for the police was devolved to Cardiff?

Mr. Touhig: The Government have no plans to do that.

Tourism

8. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): When he next plans to meet the National Assembly secretaries to discuss tourism into Wales from the rest of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [35114]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I have regular discussions with the First Minister and other Assembly members on a range of issues, including tourism in Wales.

The year 2001 was a challenging one for Welsh tourism, given the foot and mouth epidemic and the tragic events of 11 September. I therefore welcome the Wales tourist board's new £10 million advertising campaign, which will have a big impact on bringing tourists back to Wales.

Michael Fabricant: Does the Minister agree that people such as Mrs. Pugh of Dolfanog Fach, are adopting the right attitude by approaching people to visit their guest houses? Does he also agree that mid-Wales has much to offer? What steps can the Government take to ensure that too many burdens are not placed on small businesses such as farms, which are open to guests?

Mr. Touhig: I well recall the hon. Gentleman's question to me in June, in which he mentioned Mrs. Meirwen Pugh and her farm at Talyllyn. Since then I have travelled round many parts of Wales and I am greatly encouraged by the improvement in the tourist industry. People are taking holidays—long breaks and short breaks—in Wales, including the hon. Gentleman and many from his part of the world. I hope that he will continue to do that and to encourage many others to do likewise. The Government have been putting in the funding to encourage the tourist boards and others to make Wales a more attractive place to visit. That will be a success at the end of the day, so I look forward to many more people coming to Wales for their holidays this year. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's advert for Mrs. Meirwen Pugh is much appreciated.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [35136] **Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 27 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. McWalter: My right hon. Friend is sometimes subject to rather unflattering or even malevolent descriptions of his motivation. Will he provide the House with a brief characterisation of the political philosophy that he espouses and which underlies his policies?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

The Prime Minister: First, I should thank my hon. Friend for his question, which has evinced such sympathy in all parts of the House, about the criticism of me. The best example that I can give is the rebuilding of the national health service today under this Government—extra investment. For example, there is the appointment today of Sir Magdi Yacoub to head up the fellowship scheme that will allow internationally acclaimed surgeons and consultants from around the world to work in this country. I can assure the House and the country that that extra investment in our NHS will continue under this Government. Of course, it would be taken out by the Conservative party.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does it remain a principle of the Prime Minister to sack any Cabinet Minister who lies?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course. I expect the highest standards of propriety.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Yesterday, the Transport Secretary admitted to the House that he told the British people something that was fundamentally untrue. Before the Prime Minister came to power, he said:

> "I would expect Ministers in a Government I lead to resign if they lie."

If that is so, why is the Transport Secretary today still in his job and sitting on the Bench next to him?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept what the right hon. Gentleman has said. My right hon. Friend came to the House yesterday and made an absolutely full statement, and he and his Department should now be allowed to get on with the issues that really matter to people—for example, issues to do with the botched privatisation of transport and the extra investment in our transport system that it needs. Of course, that is the last thing the right hon. Gentleman will ever ask me about.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Now we know that the Prime Minister clearly is not going to stand by his word. Under this Transport Secretary, rail delays are up by 40 per cent., and even last night passengers petitioned the Government to get rid of the Transport Secretary. After yesterday, no one will ever believe the Transport Secretary again.

Before the Prime Minister came to power he also said that under his Government there would be

"no more sleaze, no more lies, no more broken promises".

It is bad enough that such a Cabinet Minister does not resign, but last night the Prime Minister rolled out the red carpet at No. 10 and congratulated him. Is it any wonder that the public's trust in politicians has fallen so low when the Prime Minister is too weak to root out dishonesty?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman exactly what the Transport Secretary will concentrate on: sorting out a privatisation that has wrecked the state of Britain's railways, ensuring that we get the largest ever investment into the London underground and appointing the right people to the Strategic Rail Authority, so that we get the extra rolling stock and investment that the transport system needs.

Those are the issues, and there are two parallel agendas. One agenda—that of the Conservative party and parts of the media—is to do with scandal and gossip, day after day. The other agenda is about the economy, living standards, jobs, the NHS, education, crime, and the real issues of transport. He can concentrate on the first; we will concentrate on the second.

Q2. [35137] **Mr. Dai Havard** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Is the Prime Minister aware of the excellent work of the Merthyr crime reduction partnership? Will he join me in congratulating it on receiving a British community safety award for car crime prevention initiatives in my constituency? [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Is he also aware, however, that our efforts to extend crime prevention work are being frustrated because of the lack of use of antisocial behaviour orders? Will he therefore undertake to speed up both the implementation and issue of those orders? Will he ensure that they are used much more frequently—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House should let the hon. Member put his question. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is reading."] Order. I am not reading, and I am saying that the hon. Gentleman should be able to put his question.

Mr. Havard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will my right hon. Friend increase the frequency with which the orders are used when ex-offenders are returned to the community, so that we are equipped and armed to deal with crime reduction?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend should not be in the least surprised at the jeers from the Conservatives. After all, he was asking a question about a serious issue that concerns his constituents. Of course the Conservatives are not interested in it.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that antisocial behaviour orders are an important part of the armoury of law enforcement in our country today. We need to make them easier to use, because the one thing that makes life hell for people in their local communities is the serious antisocial disturbance and behaviour of groups, particularly of youngsters, and families. I urge local authorities and the police in his constituency and others up and down the country to work together to use the orders more widely. We shall announce shortly, however, changes to how they operate so that they are less bureaucratic and easier to enforce.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): In spite of the somewhat inadequate inquiries of a minute or two ago, will the Prime Minister explain to people out there in the country why exactly he retains confidence in his Transport Secretary?

The Prime Minister: For the very reason contained in the statement made by the Secretary of State yesterday, where he explained exactly what has happened, and because I believe that in the end the judgment that should be made, and indeed will be made, about this Secretary of State and this Government will be on the real issues to do with transport—the things that actually concern people in this country. I know that the Conservative party does not want to argue about them, but we do.

Mr. Kennedy: There is no doubt that that is what the Transport Secretary and, indeed, the Government deserve to be judged on, but if their presiding over a shambolic railway system, the financial failure of air traffic services, and their ploughing ahead with the part privatisation of the London tube in the face of popular sentiment and their own Labour-dominated Select Committee add up to confidence in the Transport Secretary, will the Prime Minister explain what would lead to a loss of confidence?

The Prime Minister: Let me deal with each of those issues in turn. First, in relation to the railway infrastructure, we know the problems caused by the lack of investment over many years and a privatisation which I think is generally regarded as botched and wrong. It was absolutely right that after the Hatfield rail disaster there was a full audit of the state of the infrastructure, from which time it was decided that there would have to be almost a complete renewal of it. That will require time to undertake and large amounts of investment. We are getting that investment in. It is right that it will take some time to sort out the mess of privatisation, but it will be done.

Secondly, in relation to National Air Traffic Services, the right hon. Gentleman is simply wrong. In respect of air traffic control, there has been pressure on systems and on the companies operating them around the world as a result of 11 September. The difference is that, in fact, as a result of the public-private partnership, we have managed to get hundreds of millions of pounds into the Exchequer which can then be used for the purposes of rebuilding the infrastructure over time. *[Interruption.]* Never mind pointing at Labour Members—why does the right hon. Gentleman not listen to the answers that I am giving?

The third issue that the right hon. Gentleman raises is in respect of London underground. From this April, there will be the largest investment in the London underground since the tube was built. Yes, part of that money will come from the private sector. If we did not get the £4 billion or £5 billion from the private sector, we would have to take it out of the capital investment programmes for schools and hospitals and other things.

Those are the answers to the questions that the right hon. Gentleman asks me, but I agree with him about one thing: it is on those questions that ultimately we are and should be judged.

Q3. [35138] **Mr. Colin Pickthall** (West Lancashire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in my constituency as we speak, wild hares are being torn to pieces by dogs in that great spectator event, the Waterloo cup? Does he share the disgust with that activity expressed by 81 per cent. of those surveyed in the most recent poll, and their desire for hare coursing to be banned and the annual atrocity at Altcar ended? Will he please tell us when the will of the House, expressed by overwhelming majorities in recent years, will be implemented? When will we follow the example of Scotland and ban the hunting of our wild mammals by a minority's dogs?

The Prime Minister: There will be an announcement made on the timing of the vote that we promised both in the manifesto and in the Queen's Speech. That announcement will be made shortly.

Q4. [35139] **Matthew Green** (Ludlow): I am sure that the Prime Minister agrees that Britain's livestock industry produces meat to the highest animal welfare and food hygiene standards in the world. Is he aware that imported meat often does not meet the same standards that we expect our farmers to reach, and is often cheaper than locally reared meat? For the sake of both the livestock industry and consumers, will he ensure that there is a level playing field, so that all meat imports have to meet the same standards as meat produced here?

The Prime Minister: I agree that that is an issue, and we are working on it with the farming industry. First, if imported meat is coming into this country in contravention of the rules, it should not be. That is why we are working with the industry to tighten the rules. Secondly, it is important to secure a sustainable future for British farming. The basis for that was outlined in the recent report by Sir Donald Curry. We need to make sure that we work with the farming industry to ensure that British produce, which is of really high quality, can be marketed and sold properly not only in this country, but throughout the world.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Does my right hon. Friend agree that police officers should not have to work long hours of overtime either to provide a first-class service, or to have a decent standard of living?

The Prime Minister: I think it important that police officers work under terms and conditions of employment that are right for the modern age. I have no doubt that we will be able to work with those in the police service not only to make changes in terms of policing reform, but to make major changes to our criminal justice system which will deliver the type of criminal justice system and police service that we need in this day and age.

Q5. [35140] **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): Like hon. Members on both sides of the House, the Prime Minister rightly takes an active interest in Africa, not least because many countries on that continent are part of the Commonwealth. Does he share my grave concern about the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe? Does he not think it absolutely outrageous that in the middle of the presidential campaign, the president's opponent and two of his close colleagues have been charged with treason? In the event of—I hope—the right outcome and the election of the candidate of the Movement for Democratic Change, what contingency plans do the Prime Minister and his Government have to help that country out of the hellhole in which its people currently live?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely that what is happening in Zimbabwe is an outrage. The actions of Robert Mugabe are completely undemocratic, wrong and dictatorial. It is for that reason that we argued with other members of the European Union in favour of sanctions being applied; we will make the same case in the Commonwealth. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we should now—and we are doing so in our discussions with other countries in Europe and in the Commonwealth—concentrate on making sure that if the result goes against Mr. Mugabe, although we cannot be sure that it will because of some of the appalling things that have been happening, we are in a position to ensure that the proper democratically elected Government of Zimbabwe are supported.

Q6. [35141] **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): It was announced today that 50 years of peat working is to end on three sites in the United Kingdom, including Hatfield moors in my constituency and Thorne moors in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes). Is not that landmark agreement a good example of how the Government are supporting conservation and sustainability? Will my right hon. Friend congratulate the Thorne and Hatfield Moors Conservation Forum, which has for many years fought hard to save those precious peat lands? Will he commit the Government to supporting and promoting the alternatives to peat for Britain's gardeners?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate not just my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) but my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) on leading that campaign with the pressure group that led it locally. The issue is important. Three internationally important sites are involved. If we can discover ways of promoting sustainable development, benefits will flow for the whole country.

The House may think that these issues are unimportant, but if people read the latest data and work on sustainable development and on the environmental degradation that will cause huge problems throughout the world, they will realise that some of these issues are far more important in the long term than they may seem.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Prime Minister tell us whether teacher vacancies in schools have gone up or down in the last year?

The Prime Minister: Teacher vacancies have gone up. Part of the reason for that, however, is that so many more teaching posts are available.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That must be one of the most feeble answers ever given. The figures slipped out by the Department for Education and Skills last Friday—this Government love Fridays—show that vacancies have almost doubled and that schools were short of more than 5,000 teachers in the last year, which is up from 3,000 in the year before. The Prime Minister talks about the number of new teachers being recruited. Will he tell us now how many teachers left schools in the latest year for which figures are available?

The Prime Minister: I do not have those figures, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that what he was saying a moment ago is absolute nonsense. Thousands more teachers are in place since we came to office. There are vacancies because schools are recruiting and have been given additional sums of investment. There are schools in my constituency, his constituency and up and down this country where we can see the new teachers, school buildings and classroom assistants.

The difference between the Government and the Opposition is that we believe that that investment should go in. Time and again, we ask the right hon. Gentleman for a commitment that the Conservative party supports that investment. Can we now have it?

Mr. Duncan Smith: Another feeble answer from the Prime Minister. If he wants to talk about my constituency, he should ask himself why at least one or two of those schools have had to struggle out of special measures while his Government have been in power. [Hon. Members: "Reading."] The answer that he would not give is that 19,000 teachers left schools in 1999–2000. Ofsted reports that 20 per cent. of—

Hon. Members: Reading!

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should let the Leader of the Opposition put his question. Some hon. Members are behaving rather childishly.

Mr. Duncan Smith: They would do anything to protect their Prime Minister—absolutely anything, Mr. Speaker.

Ofsted reports that 20 per cent. of newly qualified teachers have left the profession in the last three years. The Prime Minister must therefore answer this question. Instead of messing around with exams and piling more paperwork on teachers, why does he not address the problems to which teachers' leaders have drawn attention—morale going down, a lack of discipline and teachers leaving the profession?

The Prime Minister: Never mind about protecting me; it is the right hon. Gentleman who needs protection. Did I just hear him say, "messing about with exams"? I think that it is important that our children take exams. Fortunately, under this Government, exam results are going up. The numbers of teachers in schools have gone up for the simple reason that I have given—this Government are putting more money into our schools. If he talks to teachers not only in his constituency but up and down this country, he will find that they have seen the investment going into school rooms and school buildings.

As for schools in special measures, this Government have taken schools out of those special measures since we came to power. That is one reason why the Ofsted report to which the right hon. Gentleman referred concluded that education in this country is improving.

Hon. Members: More!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Recently, my right hon. Friend met the Italian Prime Minister to discuss European Union matters. Is he not concerned that Silvio Berlusconi and Jacques Chirac are able, with their votes in the EU, to shape legislation that is binding on the people of Britain, despite the facts that neither is accountable to the British electorate and that both face serious corruption allegations? Also, their domestic policies are not the sort of policies that would be supported by most people in Britain.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend has a deeply held and principled position, which is to be against our membership of the European Union. I happen to disagree with that. It is in the nature of legislation inside the EU that it has to be negotiated and agreed. I believe that we benefit far more from being constructive partners in Europe than from being semi-engaged in Europe.

When we came to office back in May 1997, this country was completely and totally marginalised in Europe. It had no proper power and no proper influence as a result of the divisions within the Conservative party. I am pleased that that is no longer the case. I know and believe that the vast majority of people in Britain, whatever worries they have about the EU—it is important that there should be EU reforms—believe that we should be in the EU fighting our corner and getting the best for Britain, rather than on the path to exiting the EU.

Q7. [35142] **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): Further to the question of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, will the Prime Minister say whether it is acceptable for a Cabinet Minister to lie and remain in office? Will he guarantee that he will not move the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in the next reshuffle?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman said about my right hon. Friend.

Q8. [35143] **Martin Linton** (Battersea): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be aware of the murder of the estate agent Timothy Robinson in an horrific attack on a Battersea street a month ago today. What assurances can he give my constituents that there will be more bobbies on the beat in Battersea; that there will be more street warden schemes, like the scheme that is starting in Clapham Junction on 1 April; and above all that the Government, who have been so successful in reducing burglary and car crime, will dedicate the same resources and the same determination to ridding our streets of street crime?

The Prime Minister: May I first express my sympathy to the family of one of my hon. Friend's constituents? He is right to raise the issue of street crime, which is a serious problem in London and elsewhere in inner cities. It is for that reason that the Metropolitan police are taking action that is specifically targeted on it.

There are two things that the Government must do. First, we must provide resources for additional police officers. I think that in the past year, about 1,000 extra officers have been recruited to the Metropolitan police. We must carry on that programme.

Secondly, we must make changes to the criminal justice system that allow us to get people to court quicker and give us the opportunity not to give bail to those who may be a threat to our communities. We must ensure that sentences that follow convictions are proper sentences that fit the crime. I say to all right hon. and hon. Members that this will be a major part of the Government's legislative agenda over the next few years. If people are serious about tackling the problems of crime on our streets, they must back our legislation, because it is needed.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): In addition to the incompetence and muddle that now define the Prime Minister's Government, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is also the substantial charge of unfairness? Is he aware that West Sussex county council receives only £300 per week under the standard spending assessment for the care of an elderly person? An equivalent elderly person in Islington receives £917 per week. Will the Prime Minister do what he can, please, to restore the deficit of £13 million in West Sussex county council's social services budget, and ensure that the vulnerable elderly of West Sussex are properly cared for?

The Prime Minister: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about the position in West Sussex, as I am not familiar with the details. Overall, there has been an increase in social services spending of about 20 per cent. in the past few years, which contrasts with the preceding few years, when there was a rise of barely 1 per cent. However, we accept that there is more to be done, particularly in making sure that care home places are available. For that reason, about £1.4 billion is to be invested over the next few years. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about the position in his constituency and council area.

Q9. [35144] **Charlotte Atkins** (Staffordshire, Moorlands): This week's decision to allow pensioners to claim benefits for the first 13 weeks of a hospital stay is extremely welcome, but does my right hon. Friend recognise that the pay gap between men and women at work becomes a pay chasm in pension entitlement? Is it right that women should have to pay that price for caring for their families?

The Prime Minister: I understand my hon. Friend's point. In spanning any chasm, it is necessary to take account of the resources available. However, she is right to say that the decision to extend the entitlement to 13 weeks has been widely welcomed. That had been unchanged since 1948 and it will bring considerable relief, especially to many elderly people. It is worth pointing out that as a result of the above-inflation rises in basic state pension, the winter fuel allowance and the free TV licences, prescriptions, eye tests and so on—as a result of all those measures taken together, we will have increased the amount of expenditure on pensioners by £6 billion a year from April. That is an indication of our support and dedication to making sure that their dedication and commitment are properly recognised.

Q10. [35145] **Mr. Paul Burstow** (Sutton and Cheam): Given that the Employers Forum on Age estimates that it costs the country £31 billion a year to deal with ageism in the workplace, will the Prime Minister explain why it is sensible to delay for another five years legislation to deal with age discrimination in the workplace? Should we not be getting rid of age discrimination now and legislating in this Parliament and this Session?

The Prime Minister: Everybody wants to get rid of age discrimination; the question is how to do it in a sensible way that does not impose undue burdens on employers. As I think the hon. Gentleman would acknowledge, there are huge practical issues to be worked through to make sure that any type of anti-discrimination measures work. It is important that we do that in consultation with employers, particularly small businesses and others that may be affected. I entirely agree with the objective, but it is important that we implement it sensibly.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend consider making further funding available for maternity services? In particular, will he ask our right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Health to look speedily and sympathetically at a £12 million bid to modernise the maternity services unit at Northwick Park hospital, which serves my constituents? Although I recognise that significant additional funding has been made available to my health authority, which is clearly an excellent start, will my right hon. Friend encourage our right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Health to recognise that further funding is necessary to get the unit modernised?

The Prime Minister: I know that an application has been submitted by those in my hon. Friend's constituency which will be considered in due course. He is right to single out maternity services as a necessary part of the Government's additional investment and expenditure. Precisely for that reason, we are making sure that additional resources go into our national health service.

Q11. [35146] **David Burnside** (South Antrim): The Prime Minister will remember well the very difficult decision made four years ago as part of the Belfast agreement to release all prisoners in Northern Ireland, both republican and so-called loyalist, who were guilty of the most horrific crimes. The people of Northern Ireland backed that because the prisoners were released on licence. It was not easy, but because the prisoners were released on licence, they would go back inside if they committed further crimes and terrorism.

Will the Prime Minister give a commitment to the House that he will stop the process, which I believe is far advanced, of initiating and legislating for an amnesty for those who committed crimes in Ulster in the past 30 years? That would drive a coach and horses through the confidence of the law-abiding community in Northern Ireland in the Belfast agreement.

The Prime Minister: We have said that the issue of those people who have been charged with crimes in the past has to be dealt with. How it is dealt with is a matter under discussion, but the hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to this point: those convicted prisoners who were given early release were released on licence, so that if they breach the licence conditions, they can be put back in prison again. I hope that he understands that we accept that the measure was very difficult for people in Northern Ireland to accept as part of the Belfast agreement. However, I believe that that agreement, taken as a whole, has given us a chance for the future in Northern Ireland. So we must consider very carefully how to proceed, but I hope that we will have his support in ensuring that the Belfast agreement is maintained.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that it has been a long-standing convention of the House that, in the interests of good cross-examination of Ministers, statements are released to Opposition spokesmen well in advance? Are you aware that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions yesterday released his statement only a matter of minutes before coming to the Dispatch Box? Would you—*[Interruption.]* I am not surprised that the Government Chief Whip does not want to hear this. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me hear the right hon. Member's point of order.

Mr. MacKay: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker. Would you deprecate such short notice, and, if it happens again, ensure that the sitting is suspended so that Opposition spokesmen can properly consider what is in the statement? It was quite clear yesterday that the admission that the Secretary of State had misled the British public on the Dimbleby programme was not given to other spokesmen in advance so that they could properly cross-examine him.

Mr. Speaker: It is not a rule of the House but a courtesy that Ministers give as much warning as possible of any statement that they are going to make. I encourage Ministers to do that. *[Interruption.]* Order. If there is any difficulty or short notice in future, I can use my discretion, but I would rather encourage Ministers to give out their statements well in advance.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: There is nothing further to that point of order. I have explained the situation exactly.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, during questions on the Transport Secretary's statement, I asked:

> "Did he make Martin Sixsmith's resignation a condition of Jo Moore's resignation?"—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 575.]

The Secretary of State said "No." On "Newsnight" last night, contemporaneous notes were revealed of a conversation between Sir Richard Mottram and Martin Sixsmith on the afternoon of 18 February. I quote directly:

> "The bigger roadblock is Byers. He's invested so much face in this that his credibility is very much on the line. He has also made a firm promise to Jo that if she stepped down he would get your head to roll as well so it would be very hard for him to announce that you hadn't completely resigned after all."

That confirms stories in *The Sunday Times* of 24 February—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to use points of order to put a case. He is aware of the rules of the House. There are ways in which he can pursue matters, including parliamentary questions or Adjournment debates. He is trying to draw the Chair into the argument that he is advancing. I do not have anything further to say on that matter.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not have anything further to say on that matter.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman should pursue this matter. I think that he has finished.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The matter is finished.

Mr. Andrew Turner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, the House of Lords Annunciators announced the proposed statement by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions at about 12 o'clock, but the Annunciators in this place did not give such notice until at least half an hour later. Is there anything that you can do to assist us in knowing when such statements will be made?

Mr. Speaker: I do not control affairs in the other place.

BILL PRESENTED

Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment)

Mr. Frank Field presented a Bill to permit the Secretary of State to withhold payment of housing benefit on grounds of anti-social behaviour in certain circumstances: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 19 April, and to be printed [Bill 102].

Fireworks

3.35 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision with respect to the retail sale of fireworks and use of fireworks by the general public.

I am sure many Members will be aware, if only from their postbags, that the problems caused by fireworks are extensive, and are no longer restricted to an annual seasonal event. The industry's voluntary code, which aims to promote the safer use of fireworks, stipulates that they are to be displayed to the public for only three weeks prior to 5 November, and for a few days afterwards. Unfortunately, however, the code is notably redundant, and fireworks are readily available to the public from retail outlets throughout the year.

Several significant problems are caused by the retail sale of fireworks. The most immediate is the number of injuries resulting from their use. In extreme cases their use can lead to fatalities. That, tragically, happened in the case of 13-year-old Martin Lamparter, a young man who lived in my constituency with his family and who was killed last December in an accident involving a firework. The event has devastated his family and the local community.

Even more tragic is the fact that Martin's death was not an isolated incident. Five deaths in the last five years have been directly attributable to fireworks. All were unnecessary, and would have been avoided had the retail sale of fireworks to the general public been prohibited.

Yet despite the focus of past debate on the subject—tending to centre on the devastating effects of injury and the potential for fatalities that fireworks possess—the hazard to human welfare of fireworks has not proved a sufficient propellant to effect the change in legislation for which my Bill calls. Following the implementation of the 1997 firework safety regulations, there was an 8 per cent. reduction in the number of firework casualties in 1998. However, the 30 per cent. drop in the volume of sales in that year makes the apparent decrease in injuries superficial, as proportionally the number of injuries was significantly higher. The number of casualties increased in both 1999 and 2000.

In recent weeks I have received many letters expressing support for the Bill, for a variety of reasons—not just because of the physical injuries that fireworks are capable of inflicting. The National Campaign for Firework Safety strongly supports the Bill, and has long recognised that under current legislation fireworks are a multi-faceted menace, at best a nuisance and at worst fatal.

The support that I have received of late has come not least from those concerned about the noise generated by fireworks. The noise pollution is not the occasional and tolerable inconvenience that it was once, but an ever-increasing source of fear and anxiety, especially to vulnerable groups in society. Such distress is not confined to people, but extends to domestic pets—some of which have had to be put down as a result—as well as farm animals and wildlife.

All those latter problems do not even necessarily entail the abuse of fireworks. When fireworks are deliberately misused, their effects are even more profound, exacerbating the possibility of injury, death and fear as well as fostering additional problems. The abuse of fireworks results in antisocial behaviour, criminal damage and—as police in Oldham, Bradford and Northern Ireland have found—their conversion into weapons.

Current legislation is failing to be effective primarily because it is reactive. Police powers are restricted to responding to specific offences arising from the misuse of fireworks, and the law, while making it an offence for under-18s to purchase fireworks, does not make their possession of fireworks illegal.

This is a serious problem. Statistics demonstrate that the greatest percentage of firework injuries are to those aged 15 or younger, accounting for some 40 to 50 per cent. of all firework injuries over the past five years. Such evidence clearly demonstrates the ineffectiveness of current regulations. If the current law were more vigorously enforced and the under-age use of fireworks all but eliminated, firework safety could still not be guaranteed. Age alone does not qualify someone to use explosive devices responsibly and competently. Being old enough to drive does not automatically qualify a person to do so. The safety provisions relating to driving require that a licence be obtained in addition to an age criterion being met. I believe that there is a strong enough case to draw a parallel between driving and the use of fireworks.

Only those who are trained and licensed should be able to access and use fireworks, because even when they are used within the law and with the best of intentions, they are still proving hazardous. Addressing the many problems caused by fireworks requires far more than the further enforcement of current statutes or the entrenching of the voluntary code into law. A statutory code that emulates the current voluntary code would not prevent the problems that I have identified from manifesting themselves around 5 November.

In addition, it is discriminatory to allow the sale of fireworks to the public to commemorate one historical and cultural event—bonfire night—but to deny other celebrations such as Diwali and the Chinese new year the opportunity to include fireworks in their festivities. The only safe and fair option is a complete ban on the retail sale of fireworks to the general public. All festivities would thus be entitled to include fireworks as part of their celebrations, provided that they were used in organised and licensed displays.

There will be those who will object to such a prohibition, perhaps because their profit or employment depends on the sale or manufacture of fireworks, yet the legal requirement for pyrotechnic professionals will create a new niche in the market. An economic calculation must be balanced against the paramount principles of public welfare and safety, and the cost borne by the taxpayer in picking up the tab for the damage caused by fireworks.

There will be those who will contest this Bill under the banner of liberty, on the basis of defending the public's freedom to continue to purchase what essentially constitute explosives. Ironically, in attempting to defend liberty they fail to extend it to those who wish to be free from excessive noise pollution, fear, criminal damage and injury.

A further form of opposition will come from those who claim that banning the retail sale of fireworks to the public will result in the creation of a black market. There is little evidence to support that. However, those who cite other examples of prohibition—such as alcohol—must concede that lighting noisy, colourful explosives is going to be much harder to conceal than consuming alcohol in one's own home.

A ban on retail sales and possession by the public of fireworks will invest the law with greater clarity and make it a lot easier to prosecute those who violate it. Numerous statistics demonstrate the need for reform to current firework legislation, for which neither the Firework (Safety) Regulations 1997 nor the Consumer Protection Act 1987 make adequate provision.

A ban on the retail sale of fireworks to the general public is the only way satisfactorily to address the many problems created by fireworks and to restore them to their role as a celebratory and pleasurable phenomenon. There is tremendous need—and equally tremendous public support—for this Bill, and it is with both of these things in mind that I urge Members to support it.

3.43 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I rise to oppose the Bill. It is only a little more than a month since the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) introduced his Bill. This Bill is even more restrictive than his, but I oppose it not on grounds of liberty, of whether one should have fun or not, or of being a killjoy or a spoilsport. I oppose it simply because it will not address the fears and concerns of most people.

I have fought for a long time on the issue of noise. The Bill that the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) will present shortly will not prevent cruelty to animals—be they cats, dogs, horses or wildlife. It will not stop antisocial behaviour by bad neighbours or by yobs who buy fireworks, legally or illegally. It will not stop public display organisers using very loud bangs. It will not protect the elderly from loud noises or young children from being frightened or injured by fireworks. It will not stop shift workers or night workers having their precious sleep shattered.

I shall not go into the regulations again. If hon. Members read the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Brent, North, they will see that there are a lot of them.

I also support the position of the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), who I am delighted to see in her place today. She said:

> "We have no plans to ban the sale of fireworks to the general public . . . The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 prohibit from sale to the public several types of noisy category 3 fireworks such as aerial shells and restrict the size of the others. We will, of course, consider any representations that are made."—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2001; Vol.375, c. 672W.]

To her credit, she has done that.

The explosives industry group of the Confederation of British Industry recognises the great concern in the country and last year's unprecedented reaction to firework noise. The group has been working with the Department of Trade and Industry to see what steps the industry can take to alleviate the problem. It met the Minister on 19 December 2001 to discuss a possible action plan. One aspect of that plan was for the industry to examine the noise aspects appertaining to airbombs—the main culprit, especially in the hands of hooligans—to see whether it might be possible to stop supplying them to consumers or voluntarily reduce the decibel level to conform to the forthcoming European standards.

All those present at an emergency meeting held at the recent Harrogate toy fair, at which the main consumer fireworks suppliers exhibit, resolved to take the single tube airbomb out of circulation. That is a major step for the industry to consider because orders have already been placed and there is existing stock. The industry takes a responsible view and has been working with the Minister to find some legal backing to enforce that possibility. The DTI officials present at the Harrogate meeting undertook to find out whether what the industry wanted was within the scope of the Firework (Safety) Regulations 1997. From then on it has been quite clear that the industry is willing to address the fears of the public.

I would press the Minister on one more important point. Fireworks are imported, usually in containers, through British ports. I think that most of them come through Felixstowe. Many are sold under the counter or out of the famous white vans. Those people are not bothered about having legal, licensed explosives storage, nor do they abide by the requirements. In order to catch the dodgy importers—who may represent only 1 or 2 per cent. of the fireworks trade—the explosives industry group has proposed the introduction of a tracking system from the point of entry to the final destination of the container, so that local authorities and the police can follow up the shipments and seize those that are illegal. That is why I urge the Government to strengthen the role of the port trading standards officers and encourage the police to assist.

The explosives industry group is fully committed to addressing the overall problem of firework noise and wishes to convince the public that responsible firework sectors take this matter very seriously. I invite the House to consider that it would be a much better proposition to work with the industry and the Government to achieve the objective that we all want—far less noise from fireworks. People do not object to the visual display; in almost every case it is the noise. That point has been made in letter after letter. The fireworks industry action plan should be supported by the House.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there is even something that you could do—as could hon. Members and anyone outside this place who feels strongly about the matter. If people log on to my website, robertkey.com, they will find that my online voting topic for this month is fireworks. They will see that, to date, voting is two to one in favour of my proposal—to reduce the noise—against the proposal of the hon. Member for Enfield, North. There is an opportunity for everyone to have their say online.

The Bill is not only restrictive but will not work. I wish that the Labour Whips would take a grip on their Back Benchers and encourage them to support the Minister in her achievements so far.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Joan Ryan, Linda Gilroy, Mr. Barry Gardiner, David Cairns, Dr. Nick Palmer, Dr. Evan Harris, Bob Russell, Sir Teddy Taylor, Ross Cranston, Siobhain McDonagh, Shona McIsaac and Tony Wright.

FIREWORKS

Joan Ryan accordingly presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the retail sale of fireworks and use of fireworks by the general public: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 April, and to be printed [Bill 101].

Orders of the Day

Proceeds of Crime Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, further considered.

New Clause 7

NEGLIGENT FAILURE TO DISCLOSE: REGULATED SECTOR

'(1) Where a person receives, in the course of a business in the regulated sector, information or other matter which gives him reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting that another person is engaged in money laundering, he commits an offence under this section, unless subsections (2) or (3) below apply.

(2) No offence is committed under this section if a disclosure within section 330(4) is made in relation to the information or other matter in question.

(3) No offence is committed if either of the circumstances in section 330(5) applies.

(4) Schedule 6 applies for the purposes of this section as it does for the purposes of section 330.

(5) Section 330(6) applies for the purposes of this section.'.—*[Mr. Grieve.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.52 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 71, in clause 330, page 192, line 24, leave out from "suspects" to end of line 25.

Amendment No. 72, in page 192, line 28, leave out from "based" to end of line 29.

Government amendment No. 93.

Amendment No. 175, in clause 332, page 194, line 11, at end insert—

'(3) A person guilty of an offence under section [*negligent failure to disclose: regulated sector*] shall be liable to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.'.

Mr. Grieve: On the second day of our consideration of the Bill on Report, we come to part 7 which relates to money laundering. As the House may be aware, some controversy has arisen as regards the impact of the measure on those who will have the duty of providing information to the Assets Recovery Agency—eventually through the National Criminal Intelligence Service—to ensure that money laundering is stopped.

In Committee, we discussed issues relating to money laundering and to the offence of failure to disclose in the regulated sector. That debate was, in fact, the largest single debate during the whole Committee stage. I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), will agree that the debate reflected the importance attached to the issue—especially by Government Back Benchers, although concerns were raised on both sides of the Committee about the existing legislation.

Clause 330 provides that a person commits an offence if, within the regulated sector, he

> "knows or suspects, or . . . has reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting, that another person is engaged in money laundering . . . The second condition is that the information or other matter . . . on which his knowledge or suspicion is based . . . which gives reasonable grounds for such knowledge or suspicion, came to him in the course of a business in the regulated sector."

The third condition is that he has not availed himself of the opportunity to disclose the information

> "to a constable, a customs officer or a nominated officer as soon as is practicable after it comes to him."

In Committee, serious disquiet was expressed about the fact that subsection (2)(b) will criminalise not only those who know or suspect that money laundering is taking place and who fail to pass that information to the authorities, but those who may have been merely inadvertently negligent in not noticing what a court might regard, with hindsight, as the evidence that would have allowed them to know or suspect that money laundering was taking place.

As I said, that gave rise to serious disquiet, which a number of hon. Members expressed fairly eloquently. I shall not take up the House's time by reading out chunks of what was said in Committee, but the hon. Members for Redcar (Vera Baird) and for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) both expressed concern about how the proposal would work. They spoke about the risk of unfairness, and of criminalising people who normally would be regarded by any right-thinking person as innocent. Such people would not deserve the frankly draconian penalties that are attached to the offence. The maximum penalty is a possible five years' imprisonment.

The Government's response was encapsulated in what the Minister said in response to the debate, which was that the Government

> "consider that an objective test is necessary because we want the financial industry at large to be much more diligent in identifying and reporting instances of money laundering. It is already the test for the requirement to disclose information on transactions relating to terrorism. The relevant provision can be found in the provisions inserted into the Terrorism Act 2000."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 22 January 2002; c. 1070.]

It seems to me that the question of money laundering goes much further than the prevention of terrorism. Although the Minister showed considerable willingness in Committee to appreciate the concerns that had been raised, his justifications for the proposal were inadequate.

The other issue raised in connection with the clause concerned its drafting. Clause 330(2) is unusual in that it seeks to encapsulate two separate offences. The prosecutor who has to draft an indictment will have to choose whether the accused either knew or suspected that money laundering was taking place, or had reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting. I remain unconvinced that that choice will be easy to make. I suppose that we will end up with an either/or offence, and that the jury will be offered the choice of convicting on the greater or lesser charge. However, the clause is also unusual in that it makes absolutely no distinction with regard to the penalty to be imposed, except in so far as the court's discretion might apply.

I am sure that the Minister would be the first to agree that the category of seriousness of an offence will be very different if the person who carries it out does so inadvertently or through negligence, or deliberately. However, Parliament does not seem willing to cater for that difference.

When we discussed the matter in Committee, the proposal that I put forward was fairly straightforward. It was that we should delete from the Bill a negligence offence. The Government resisted that proposal, even though I had the impression that some Government Back-Bench Members on the Committee would not have viewed such a course of action unfavourably.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Indeed not.

Mr. Grieve: From a sedentary position, the hon. Gentleman says, "Indeed not." In Committee, he tended to be the great exacerbator of all offences. Given the criminality of some of the penalties to which he wanted recourse, I do not think that I can mention them on the Floor of the House.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): In an echo of issues that were raised yesterday by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), may I ask this? Are not the really big operators in money laundering—those who commit the most serious crimes—likely to be operating outside this jurisdiction? Has my hon. Friend turned his mind to that problem? Am I right in assuming that the Bill, as and when it becomes an Act, will apply only within our domestic jurisdiction?

Mr. Grieve: My hon. Friend is right that the jurisdiction is territorial, although there are clauses in the Bill that provide for international co-operation to prevent money laundering, including the exchange of information. I hope that we will have an opportunity to consider these matters further because they raise difficult issues about the propriety of exchanging information between states which may have been derived from confidential information obtained in the United Kingdom from, for instance, the Inland Revenue, through the director. My hon. Friend is also correct that those who derive benefits from the proceeds of crime in this country may well launder their money elsewhere.

The issue that we are considering concerns the regulated sector in this country—those in banking, finance and accountancy who are asked to carry out transactions by clients which may reveal to them a suspicion or knowledge that the client may be dealing in tainted money. The Minister knows that Opposition Members—indeed, Members on both sides of the House—find unexceptionable the principle of requiring disclosure by the regulated sector, and, indeed, outside it, where we hope it will take place. The question is how we enforce a criminal sanction on the regulated sector to ensure compliance that does not end up being unfair. The amendments would still allow that, curiously enough. Amendments Nos. 71 and 72 on their own would still allow the House, if it wanted, to remove the negligence element from the offence. They are consequential upon new clause 7.

New clause 7 suggests the creation of a separate and distinct offence. Rather than clause 330 rolling into one the dual offence of either knowing or suspecting or having reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting—as is currently the case—we suggest that it would be sensible to amend clause 330 to remove the negligence offence and then, if the Government wish, to create a new offence which rests upon the test of negligence, but to associate it, as we suggest in amendment No. 175, with a penalty that is only financial. Let me say in passing to the Minister—I dare say that he will say it to me when he replies—that I am aware that amendment No. 175 as it stands is not wholly adequate to fulfil our purpose. However, that in no way reduces the validity of new clause 7, which goes to the principal issue.

If the amendment were accepted, there would be two separate and distinct offences within the regulated sector. In the first case, the offence would be committed when someone knew or suspected that money laundering was taking place and did not make disclosure. That is a serious offence, punishable by up to five years' imprisonment. In the second case, the offence is similar but would be committed only when the person had reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting. In those circumstances, the penalty would be only financial. In amendment No. 175, I stipulated

"level 5 on the standard scale",

which would be £5,000. However, that could apply only in summary proceedings; if the matter were to go to the Crown court, the fine would be at large. That is the normal practice in those circumstances.

The essential feature of the new clause is that a person could not lose their liberty as a result of committing an offence through inadvertence. That ties in closely with general principles of law in a wide field of statutes, whereby the criminalisation of individuals for acts of negligence normally attracts only a financial penalty. For example, under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 a negligent omission would generally—with very rare exceptions—attract only a financial penalty, albeit possibly a substantial one.

I commend the new clause to the House. If it were accepted, we would still be sending out a powerful message to the financial regulated sector—too powerful, some might argue. In the light of the proposal that I made in Committee, I have great sympathy for those who say that there should not be an offence based on negligence at all. However, assuming that hon. Members desire that such an offence should exist, the new clause would provide a valuable distinction. It would also improve the drafting of the Bill, bearing in mind the comments that were made in Committee about the unwieldiness of clause 330.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify the reference in amendment No. 175 to

"a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale"?

Which standard scale is that? As the scales in England and Scotland may differ in this respect, the amendment would appear not to cover Scotland.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, although, as he may have heard me say a few moments ago, I accept that amendment No. 175 does not fulfil the requirements that I should have wished of it. That is my fault, and I take full responsibility.

This makes no difference to the general issue on which the House can vote. The question is whether there should be a financial penalty for the offence of negligence. In England and Wales, level 5 on the standard scale is £5,000

[Mr. Grieve]

in a summary jurisdiction. If the matter were to go to the Crown court I would normally expect the fine to be at large. That is why I accept that amendment No. 175 would not fulfil the criteria.

If we found that there was a different scale of fines north of the border, hon. Members would have to decide—and inform the Minister, if he was minded to go down that road—whether they had a view of what the fine level should be. As a great respecter of the devolution settlement in Scotland, I acknowledge that there may be a degree of variety. However, some of the issues under discussion are reserved matters and it would be odd not to have uniformity as regards penalties north and south of the border. I suspect that even the hon. Gentleman might be capable of agreeing with me about that, but I may be mistaken.

Mr. Weir: I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman is saying. However, does he accept that if, by some mischance, the House voted to accept amendment No. 175, the clause would be rendered completely meaningless as far as Scotland is concerned, because the financial aspect will not be the same there? If he does not agree with that, does he think that the matter should be referred to the Scottish Parliament for a decision on Scots criminal law?

Mr. Grieve: No, I am afraid that I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman at all. His argument is without foundation. If hon. Members wish, they can vote on new clause 7. By doing so, they would demonstrate to the Government that they wished to have a separate, lesser penalty for negligence. The Minister, with the help of his advisers, would be in a position to tidy things up—as he has done on many previous occasions. I see the Minister nodding his head approvingly. Indeed, if he were minded to accept the substance of the new clause, the normal practice would be for him to say so and I would then of course withdraw it. There is no problem in those circumstances.

Mr. Davidson *rose—*

Mr. Grieve: I see the hon. Gentleman and, although that may mean a problem on the horizon, I will give way.

Mr. Davidson: The hon. Gentleman is too generous.

There is some merit in the point that the Scottish nationalists are making. However, it should have been made in the Committee. Had they asked to serve on it, no doubt they could have made their representations there.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. From reading *Hansard* this morning, I know that the matter that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) raises was mentioned many times yesterday and that the occupant of the Chair ruled it out of order on three separate occasions. For the sake of clarity, can we have another ruling on that, because there are many important matters to discuss and that would save everyone's time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The constitution of the Committee is not a matter for debate. We should concentrate on the new clause.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) makes a valid point, but we are going wide of the mark. Part 7 deals with money laundering. It is clear that it is intended to apply to the whole of the United Kingdom, because clause 327 states:

> "from England and Wales or from Scotland or from Northern Ireland",

and clause 332 appears to impose common penalties for money laundering. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I assume that in passing the Sewel resolution, the Scottish Parliament was content with the notion that there would be a common legislative framework for money laundering north and south of the border.

Mr. Weir: That is not the point. What matters is the scale, which is different in Scotland. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue his point, he should have tabled an amendment that applies to Scotland and the appropriate Scottish scale.

Mr. Davidson: The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) should have tabled an amendment in Committee.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman was not in Committee, but he is here and can contribute to the debate by telling us what the penalty should be.

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): The hon. Gentleman could have tabled an amendment on Report.

Mr. Grieve: He could had he bothered to read the amendment paper before he came into the Chamber. His contribution borders on the absurd. Throughout our proceedings, hon. Members on both sides of the House have done their best to improve the Bill. We might have got things wrong and we might have fallen out, but we did not descend to the nit-picking banality that characterise his interventions.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I thoroughly agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiment, if not his point. However, can I drag us back to the issue of negligence? Does he not accept that he is inventing an excuse or a get-out for criminals who could use negligence in their defence instead of being charged with a view to sending them to prison? They could claim that they are negligent and happily pay the money. The hon. Gentleman is giving them a cop-out that allows them to get away with it.

Mr. Grieve: Let me set out the approach that the hon. Gentleman should take. People who work in the regulated sector are for the most part—there may be terrible exceptions—likely to have been law-abiding citizens prior to the events covered by the Bill. I should be surprised if there are many chartered accountants lurking around who have strings of previous convictions.

I would apply the same test to a criminal matter as that which applied to any other. Let us suppose that the hon. Gentleman picks up a book in a book shop and, because his mind is elsewhere and he is not concentrating, walks out clutching it. If he is prosecuted for that, he knows that provided that he satisfies the court that it was unintentional, he will be acquitted. He would probably agree that to convict someone of a serious criminal offence of dishonesty when he had no intention of being dishonest would be a parody of the legal system. In the light of such circumstances, why should a different test apply to somebody who commits a mistake by wrongly assessing the information that he receives, which would lead him to make the disclosure?

4.15 pm

The Minister argued that, in the regulated sector, people should be fully trained, aware of the issues, and capable of picking up the problem and shouldering the burden—just as employers have to shoulder the health and safety burden in respect of their employees, including being criminalised for potentially negligent acts. I disagree, however, that that would provide an easy refuge. Any prosecutor who had to consider whether an offence was committed wilfully or negligently would probably have little difficulty extrapolating the answer to that question, and he could still pursue both offences and leave the jury to make up its mind.

The point at issue is that it is wrong as a matter of principle to establish a criminal sanction with a potential maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment for somebody who may ultimately be found to have acted inadvertently, given that, with the benefit of hindsight, others might say, "You ought to have realised that there was something funny about this transaction." That is an overly onerous provision.

If Parliament passes excessively onerous legislation that appears to weigh down heavily on people, the danger is that it will lead to all manner of unintended consequences. First, it will bring the law into disrepute, and when applied the sanction itself will appear to outsiders to have little merit. Secondly, people in the financial sector will be in a state of fear and less willing to participate.

The oddity is—the Minister will doubtless agree—that the entire money-laundering provision is dependent on the good will and honesty of the regulated sector in co-operating with implementation. The sanction exists for the rogue element who might not co-operate, but the assumption is that people will be willing to come forward and help. If, however, they are so fearful of the sanctions that they close down the hatches and do not want to co-operate, it will remain very difficult to gather the information because the regulated sector will provide none at all. That is a compelling reason why we should be particularly careful about criminalising people by imposing a penalty of up to five years' imprisonment for what will ultimately prove an offence committed purely through negligence.

Mr. Davidson: In discussing negligence, the hon. Gentleman mentioned shoplifting, and I can give him an example with which Conservative MPs will doubtless be familiar. Their former colleague Jeffrey Archer was caught shoplifting suits from a shop in Canada, but was given the benefit of the doubt because he had no previous. He pleaded negligence, rather than deliberate intent, and was let off, but he proved to be a proper bad'un, didn't he?

Norman Baker (Lewes): Then he copped it.

Mr. Davidson: Then he copped it, as the Liberal Democrat so eloquently puts it. Given those circumstances, are we not entitled to be a trifle suspicious of the defence of negligence and innocence? After all, the people involved in financial services are not babes in arms. Most of them are well aware of the way in which they operate, and in general they are exceptionally sharp in their dealings. Surely negligence should be no defence.

Mr. Grieve: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Ultimately, a court or judge will decide in such cases. The particular matter that he mentions never came to court, so it could not be ruled on and I am unable to comment on it. A court and, potentially, a jury will have to decide whether a person has acted wilfully, negligently or with no negligence at all. The court will be able to consider those three possible outcomes. I simply want to make sure that where the court finds that there has been negligence, there will be an appropriate criminal sanction that properly reflects the gravity of the offence, and in my view that should be a fine, not a sentence of imprisonment. When the hon. Gentleman considers that argument, he may see some force in it.

Before I sit down—I do not want to take up too much time, but my remarks have taken longer than I expected—I shall make a few comments about Government amendment No. 93. The Government have attempted to go some way towards dealing with the anxiety expressed in Committee, but they have done so by tabling an amendment that will, for the purposes of negligence, decriminalise those who have not been provided by their employer with

> "such training as is specified by the Secretary of State by order for the purposes of this section."

I welcome that, but it is not sufficient.

The amendment does not solve the problem of the excessive penalty for the negligence offence. I am concerned also that it will require the defendant in such cases to prove a negative. At the very least, it will complicate the issues. I have some anxiety about how a court will establish that a person was not provided by his employer with such training as is specified by the Secretary of State. For those reasons, I commend new clause 7 to the House and, subject to what I hear in the debate, I can tell the Minister that I am likely to press the matter to a vote, but I wait to hear from the Minister and other hon. Members how they view the matter.

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough): As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said, in Committee I expressed considerable concern about both the principle and drafting of clause 330. My concern arises from the inclusion in a single subsection of two offences, the first of knowing or suspecting and the second of negligence.

The question of principle is a simple one: do we believe that there should be a crime of negligence in the regulated sector? As a matter of principle, I do believe that. I disagree with the Tories on that point for two reasons. The first is that money laundering causes huge social problems. In my constituency, which is in leafy middle England, in Northamptonshire, there are some estates where up to 10 per cent. of young mums and dads are addicted to drugs and every single eight-year-old whom I have talked to has found needles in their garden. Those communities are ravaged by crime.

The second reason for establishing a crime of negligence in the regulated sector is that that is where we should be making regulations. We should be regulating

[Mr. Paul Stinchcombe]

people who, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) said, are not babes in arms and, moreover, are making huge amounts of money out of the business that they conduct. For both those reasons we should establish the strongest possible professional codes of conduct.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The hon. Gentleman seems to be under the impression that we are seeking to remove the offence of negligence from the Bill. Is he not aware that new clause 7 would simply move the offence elsewhere?

Mr. Stinchcombe: I was about to come on to that. In Committee, the Conservatives wanted to remove the offence from the Bill, but having heard some of the arguments of Labour Members, they have modified their position. However, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield made it clear in his arguments that, as a matter of principle, he still has residual objections to the crime of negligence being in the Bill, and I am simply putting on record why, despite my reservations about the way in which the offence of negligence is included in this legislation, I believe, as a matter of principle, that it should be in this Bill.

Mr. Wilshire *rose—*

Mr. Stinchcombe: Yesterday, we did not discuss many of the clauses, so if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will make progress so that I can deal with some points of drafting. It seems clear to me that the Government have tabled amendment No. 93 precisely to try to deal with some of the drafting points that I raised in Committee.

In Committee, I asked three questions—two of detail and one of more significance. First, how should the indictment be drafted? I appreciate the points made by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield, but, on balance, indictments can be drafted using the either/or formulation and that issue can be resolved. Secondly, what should be the appropriate penalty for the offences? I asked that question because it seems likely that different thresholds should be established for the two types of offence, given that different culpability will be attached to them. I simply tell the hon. Gentleman that, yesterday, he argued for judicial discretion. The current proposal will preserve such discretion, so the judge can reach his conclusion on what the appropriate penalty should be in the circumstances of any case, and there is some force in that argument.

Mr. Grieve: I perfectly understand the hon. Gentleman's point about judicial discretion, but most statutes provide upper and lower limits—usually upper limits—for penalties, based on Parliament's assessment of what is correct in public policy terms. For example, no one can be sent to prison for 16 years for a single theft offence. So, surely, there is no reason why, if the House considers that a financial penalty is appropriate in cases of negligence, we should not spell that out. Does he seriously think that someone should be sent to prison for an offence of negligence that relates to this type of default?

Mr. Stinchcombe: I can conceive of certain circumstances, involving gross negligence and huge sums, where such a penalty might be appropriate. I simply tell the hon. Gentleman that I understand his concerns and fully appreciate them—indeed, I raised them in Committee—but I also understand the force of the Government's argument, "Let us leave it to the judge to decide in any circumstances that come before him."

The issue of greater significance in respect of the offence of negligence that I raised in Committee—I do so again now to discuss whether the Government have dealt with it in amendment No. 93—is that we provide a defence, an opt-out, for all offences under the clause as drafted: the person can [illegible] that he did not disclose the information because he had a reasonable excuse not to do so. Of course, if an individual did not appreciate that someone was a money launderer when he should have done, he would not disclose it. Prima facie, that would be the most obvious and reasonable excuse, and the individual could say, "I did not do it, because I did not realise that I had to, or could have done." Otherwise, everyone would disclose all information, and that cannot be right.

That point seems to be dealt with technically in a satisfactory manner under Government amendment No. 93, because it states that no offence has been committed if the person

"does not know or suspect"

that other circumstances apply. That meets the drafting point, but the question then arises as to whether it meets in a satisfactory way. We have to decide whether to criminalise people on the basis of their negligence when they did not know or suspect that someone was engaged in money laundering, but when they should have done because they had been provided with appropriate training.

I am persuaded that that is the correct approach, for the very first reasons that I advanced for agreeing with the offence of negligence in principle. We are dealing with the regulated sector and people are making money out of that sector. Because it is regulated and because of the harm that can be done in estates in Glasgow and Wellingborough, we should require appropriate professionalism of those professionals. To amend clause 330 so that it will be mandatory to provide such training and to take it seriously is a very sensible way forward.

4.30 pm

Norman Baker: Not for the first time, I rise to support the broad thrust of the comments made by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve). It worries me slightly to find myself agreeing with the Conservative party so much—I hope that I am not catching anything nasty in doing so. However, he raises some interesting and important points, which need to be addressed.

First, someone's intention when an offence is committed seems to be terribly important. There is a difference between someone who deliberately sets out to commit a criminal offence, whatever it may be, and someone who commits an offence inadvertently, even if he or she should have known that that offence was being committed and should have been able to take action to stop it. In other words, they had been negligent. There is a difference between being negligent and wilfully intending to commit an offence.

The example cited by the hon. Gentleman of shoplifting is not the most happy one. I am familiar with the example of a river pollution incident. An individual, through an error, allowed a river to be polluted, and that led to a great deal of environmental damage, the killing of many fish and consequences for innocent third parties such as other farmers, and the like.

Although the consequences were significant for those affected and the environment, that is very different from somebody deliberately setting out to kill those fish, poison that river and affect innocent third parties. The consequences for the third parties might be the same, but the intention in the person's mind is different. The law must recognise that difference. That is why I am uncomfortable, too, with the wording of clause 330.

Another reason is that subsection (2) is an either/or provision. It states:

> "The first condition is that he—
>
> (a) knows or suspects"

that another person is money laundering. That is of course for the prosecution to prove. However, the subsection also says that a person commits an offence if he

> "has reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting".

That reverses the burden of proof and requires an individual to demonstrate that he did not have reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Is it not a matter for the prosecution to prove that the individual concerned had reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting? The burden remains on the prosecution.

Norman Baker: I am not sure that it does so entirely. Although the burden ultimately remains on the prosecution, it could construct a case for a person having reasonable grounds, and then that person must refute it. That would be different from the way in which he would refute the condition of knowing or suspecting in subsection (2)(a). They are not quite the same thing; the burden shifts slightly.

I welcome Government amendment No. 93, which picks up the point that people should be properly trained. Of course the regulatory sector should be properly trained, and to a high standard. It is not inappropriate for the Secretary of State to suggest the sort of training that should occur and to specify it in guidance. It would be more serious if someone had received such training and was still negligent. It is therefore right that the amendment will make the sector more regulated and the people in it more professional and properly trained. It also gives someone less of an excuse for negligence following such training.

The fact is, however, that somebody could still be negligent thereafter. They could fail to see something or inadvertently make an error that they should not have made and that the training should have prevented them from making, and be negligent. That is very different from deliberately setting out to commit an offence or from knowing or suspecting and doing nothing about it. If those two scenarios are different in someone's mind, the penalties for them should be different. That is why it is right to consider how the penalties could be separated. I am instinctively uncomfortable criminalising a wilful act in the same way as an inadvertent one. That is the essence of new clause 7, and I therefore support its premise.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield will accept that amendment No. 175 does not work.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Yes it does.

Norman Baker: My hon. Friend says that it does work. It works in the sense that it would create separate penalties—but for crimes north and south of the border, which was not the hon. Gentleman's intention in tabling it. So, it might need some tightening up.

Mr. Grieve: From having spoken to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), my understanding is that the comments from the Scottish National party Members are wholly erroneous and that level 5 on the standard scale in Scotland is identical to level 5 on the standard scale in England and Wales. However, I accept that the amendment could do with some tightening up with respect to summary jurisdiction and the Crown court.

Norman Baker: I am grateful for that interesting intervention. I made the mistake of believing that Scottish National party Members would know what the position is in Scotland. I shall not make that mistake again.

Mr. Weir: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the amendment does not specify the scale, and that there are different scales on different sides of the border?

Norman Baker: I am informed that there is no need to specify, but I am tempted to say, as would the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), that it is a pity that that was not raised in Committee, but it might be inappropriate to make that comment in response to the point made by the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir).

There is a serious issue relating to a general point that I made throughout Committee. The Government have the best intentions and want to make sure that the Mr. Bigs of this world who commit such acts are caught and that loopholes are closed. No one disagrees with those aims. However, as we proceed we must be careful to ensure that in catching the guilty, we do not accidentally entrap the innocent.

Vera Baird (Redcar): As has been said, I, like my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe), expressed disquiet in Committee about the whole notion of criminality by negligence, but I did so in a context different from the one in which my hon. Friend has set the issue today.

My hon. Friend refers to the regulated sector as though it were necessarily full of high-powered and highly trained people. On many occasions that will be so, but the schedule that defines the regulated sector is broad enough to include and specify building societies and credit unions. In building societies, transactions can flash across the screen before the eyes of people who may not be highly trained and may work part-time and who therefore do not fall within the category of persons whom we would regard as being capable of being complicit in money laundering. I worry about such people.

Far more do I worry about volunteers in Redcar, Grangetown, South Bank and other places in my constituency where there are credit unions. Those people

[Vera Baird]

run those credit unions on a wholly voluntary basis. Although I well appreciate that the answer might come back that little money is likely to be laundered through a credit union in Grangetown, the principle is the same: such people, who are not high-powered workers, will be in danger of being prosecuted for negligence. It is in that context that I expressed my disquiet, which I will not repeat at length today.

Throughout, the issue has been raised whether criminality should result from inadvertence and error. I merely mention in headline terms that the people whom we will be capable of criminalising by mistake include those whose child has kept them awake all night, so that they have not had much sleep; those who are worried about something, or who are not paying much attention and letting the job tick over; and those who have been divorced or bereaved.

We are all aware of the many reasons why someone might not pay proper attention to their job for a while, but some police officer, rightly, astutely and observantly, might come along later and say to such a person, "You should have seen that", with the result that that person is liable to the penalties that we have discussed. It is a less sympathetic example, but it is not uncommon for someone simply to make a mistake because they have had a bad day, and without real justification. Such people, too, may be criminalised. I am greatly concerned.

I am grateful for Government amendment No. 93. Another category of persons about whom I was concerned in Committee was learners, who might exercise all the diligence that they can but still fall below a reasonable standard and so be criminalised. The amendment brings into play the defence of lack of training. That helps and I am grateful for it. It provides evidence that a good deal of thought has been applied to the arguments advanced in Committee. That is proper, but generous as well.

Clearly, negligence in one form or another as a basis of criminality will remain in the Bill. NCIS says that that is important, and in Committee the Minister quoted NCIS's view that professionals have facilitated money laundering but claimed that they had no suspicion or knowledge. If it is to remain in the Bill, I ask that three issues be considered again in more depth than the evidence suggests has been the case up to now. I, too, raised an issue of drafting that was not dissimilar to that raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough. If one considers closely the drafting of clause 330(2)(b), one sees that it is an offence if a person does not disclose when he has

> "reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting that another person is engaged in money laundering."

The point that everyone is making is that, even though such reasonable grounds exist, that person may not know or suspect but is still guilty.

As my hon. Friend also said, the defence in subsection (5) is that

> "a person does not commit an offence if he has a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information or other matter".

As he said, the reasonable excuse ought to be, "I didn't know it, so I couldn't disclose it." However, that is not a defence because the offence still exists under subsection (2)(b), even if the person involved did not know about it. A defence of having a reasonable excuse for not knowing or suspecting is therefore necessary. That would cover a situation in which a person had been distracted, perhaps because his child was ill or for another reason that I have given as an example.

Drafting such a provision might be over-elaborate. Is the Minister therefore prepared to confirm to the House that the defence in clause 330(5)(a) of a reasonable excuse is intended to cover a person who simply did not know that there was anything to report, and that the reason the person was negligent in not knowing about it is one of the things that would offer a reasonable excuse? Will he confirm that the clause is big enough to cover that situation?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said, we discussed this matter in Committee at length. As he has graciously acknowledged, I have tried to pick up some of the points of concern. My reading of clause 330(5)—the legal mind of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) may be sharper than mine—is that it does not confine itself to not disclosing and refers to having a reasonable excuse for not disclosing. That would apply to a situation in which a person did not disclose because he did not know, and it would equally apply to a situation in which a person should have known but did not disclose in any case. It would cover both situations.

Vera Baird: If my hon. Friend is satisfied, I shall accept his assurances and not press the point. However, I am sure that the original drafting of the clause contains a non-link between the aspects that I have set out. I am nevertheless reassured and grateful to my hon. Friend.

I want to mention two more points. One of those has already been referred to extensively—that it would be wise to have two separate offences. I shall not repeat all the reasons that have been put forward for that, but there is an additional—if not huge—one. It is inappropriate that a person who is convicted of an offence that is the result of negligence, which could be seen as a disciplinary offence, should be labelled with the same criminal conviction as a person who has deliberately laundered money. Fair labelling—a well-known sociological concept—requires that there should be two charges so that a person who has had a bad night and missed a trick is not categorised by his previous convictions as a serious money launderer when he makes subsequent job applications. I therefore add my support to the proposal to have two offences.

In response to my suggestion in Committee that cases of negligence could be dealt with adequately as internal disciplinary matters, my hon. Friend the Minister was good enough to say:

> "In many cases, they could".

However, he went on to say:

> "there are organisations in which there is neither the will nor the ability to bear down."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B,* 22 January 2002; c. 1115.]

I appreciate why he made that point, but there will have to be a code of practice for prosecutions brought under the Bill. Will he therefore consider including in the code of practice the provision that no prosecution for negligent non-disclosure should be brought until it has been considered whether the matter can be met and will be met by internal disciplinary mechanisms? I invite him to consider the three points that I have made.

4.45 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): To return to the analogy with shoplifting, I am reminded of something that a legal jurist once said to me. He said that we have come across cases where people are so confused that they walk out of a shop without paying for an item, but they are never so confused that they pay for it twice. We are in the territory of legalistic definitions and passes being sold. We have subjective tests, and they were discussed in Committee; we also have an objective test, and I am afraid that we are stuck with it.

I support the observation of the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) that there should be a distinction between offences whereby the negligent failure to disclose should be punished by a fine not exceeding level 5 and those committed by someone who clearly should have known that money laundering was going on and, knowing that it was going on, failed to take the appropriate action. That distinction should be flagged up clearly for the reasons that she set out. However, it appears that someone who has had a bad night or a bad day will not be treated in a proportionate fashion by the legal and sentencing system in this country.

I am particularly concerned by clause 330(5). The Minister has just referred to that subsection in an intervention, so will he explain whether, when a legal adviser claims privilege, that adviser must also have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing information? I do not understand what such a reasonable excuse might be. It appears as though the legs are being cut from underneath the privileged defence if the type of reasonable excuse must be of the type expected elsewhere in the clause. I am not at all clear how privilege will operate in that respect. It may be my lack of acuteness—which is uncharacteristic, I hasten to add—so perhaps the Minister will enlighten me.

The hon. Member for Redcar also made an excellent point about training. The level of training expected has not been made clear in the Bill or in any of the Minister's comments that I have heard. We all know that the British Bankers Association, among many other distinguished bodies, has training days and training courses, but they are for employees of a certain level in a banking or financial services institution. That is fine, but unless we are given a clearer idea of the sort of accredited courses that will be run, we shall remain in the dark. For that reason, Government amendment No. 93 is defective, and this debate is important in flushing out what exactly Ministers have in mind.

The Secretary of State will draw up regulations and prescribe certain forms of training so, for the reasons that the hon. Member for Redcar outlined, I hope that it will be clear what level of functionary will be involved. Will it be Tracey or Wendy in back office accounts or will it be Alan or someone else? Will it be someone with no interest in financial services? Perhaps they will come across the issue only when it flashes across their computer screens.

The Minister may smirk, but I characterise the issue in that way to make my point forcefully. We are talking not about managing directors of banks, or even branch managers of banks; we are talking about back-office staff. Instead of grinning, perhaps the Minister will tell us what comfort he will give us on this point and on that raised by the hon. Lady.

Annabelle Ewing: I understand that to a considerable extent those who work in the financial services sector are already subject to stringent requirements and reporting duties. It may be that the proposed legislation will beef up the relevant provisions to an extent.

The hon. Gentleman cites back-office staff. Surely the first people in a financial institution who would be well aware of their duties under existing money-laundering legislation would be back-office staff.

Mr. Ruffley: The hon. Lady states the obvious, but is she suggesting that every employee at every branch, however small it might be, in every village, market town, town or city—for example, every member of the Natwest bank or the Halifax—will receive the appropriate training? If she is, I fear that she has probably missed the point.

It is clear that people may slip through the net, and that is the point that I am making. It is the point that the hon. Lady made powerfully. She talked about credit unions and volunteers. The clause could easily catch such individuals. The Minister is shaking his head. If he thinks that we are wrong and that the credit union point is wrong, he will be able to say so. I am sure that he would want to do so. It is a point that needs answering.

Training has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve). We are invited to believe that individuals who want to pray in aid the defence set up by Government amendment No. 93 will have to prove a negative. I shall be interested to hear the Minister explain how individuals might easily and conveniently do that. The amendment does not give us any clue how that process might work. I would appreciate the hon. Gentleman's answer to that question.

John Robertson: I thought that the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) was churlish when he attacked the Scottish nationalists. After all, three SNP Members have been in the Chamber for two days in a row, and that must be a record.

I am not a lawyer. I speak on behalf of victims who cannot speak for themselves. These are people who have already passed on and others who are drugged up to the eyeballs and cannot speak for themselves, and the families whom tried to support these people. These are the people whom I try to represent.

New clause 7 deals with a grey area, and in my opinion the purpose behind it is to try to cloud the issue. I feel that we are trying to introduce lesser sentences for those who deserve to be sentenced correctly. Clause 330 covers the rights of individuals, especially those who come into contact with those who have a criminal life style.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scotland Office and I visited the Drug Enforcement Agency in Scotland. We had a long and frank discussion with representatives of it. It was amazing to me how they mirrored the discussion that took place when I and my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) and for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) visited Strathclyde police force. I commend the deputy chief constable, Graham Pearson. It was said that part of the problem rested with

[John Robertson]

lawyers and others. That was a reference to those in the regulatory area. If they are part of the problem, they are the people on whom we want to focus, especially in terms of the clauses that we are considering.

Having read amendments Nos. 71 and 72, it strikes me that they are an attempt to introduce as a defence the claim, "I didn't know. I couldn't tell." That would take us down the road of a nice little fine and the person charged getting off.

Clause 330(3) states:

"The second condition is that the information or other matter—

(a) on which his knowledge or suspicion is based, or

(b) which gives reasonable grounds for such knowledge or suspicion,

came to him in the course of a business in the regulated sector."

Amendment No. 72 would delete the words

"or which gives reasonable grounds for such knowledge or suspicion".

Mr. Grieve: I understand why the hon. Gentleman should come to that conclusion. The amendment that he has just read out is similar to the one that was tabled in Committee, but as I explained to the House, it was linked to new clause 7. I would propose that those deletions should be made only if new clause 7 were incorporated, in which case there would still be an offence of negligence, but in the manner that I described, in a separate clause and with a separate penalty.

John Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am sure that the Minister will be pleased to hear that. However, as was said on many occasions in Committee, the amendments give the impression that the Opposition are the criminal's friend.

Reference has been made to a level 5 sentence, which is a maximum fine of £5,000. I should have thought that the Opposition, especially the Conservative party, with its law and order ethics, would want a punishment to fit the crime. A maximum £5,000 fine for someone who earns treble that in a week hardly seems a sufficient sentence for that person, particularly if the case involved severe negligence or fell just short of an offence having knowingly been committed.

Mr. Carmichael: With regard to the maximum sentence of a £5,000 fine, may I point out to the hon. Gentleman that that would apply in summary procedure which, by definition, applies only to the less serious offences? If it is appropriate as the maximum fine for any other offence on summary procedure, it must be appropriate for this offence on summary procedure. If it were on solemn procedure, an unlimited fine would be applicable.

John Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman and bow to his superior knowledge in matters of law. As I said, I am not a lawyer. I am speaking on behalf of the victims, not the Law Society. A fine of £5,000 is not enough. The sentence should be left to the judge's discretion and should match the crime.

Norman Baker: Does the hon. Gentleman accept, however, that there ought to be a difference in the penalty applied to someone who wilfully commits an offence and to someone who inadvertently commits the same offence?

John Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman, but I do not see his point. The case will be heard, evidence will be taken, and the judge and jury will determine whether the accused is guilty or innocent. Depending on the severity of the offence, the judge will hand down a sentence to match the error of that person's ways.

In conclusion, the debate in Committee on clause 330 left me bewildered. We spent an inordinate amount of time on the matter, during which time I wrote myself a note, which states, "I have given up the will to live." I see that we are going through the same debate again.

Mr. Wilshire: If the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) had been more willing to give way, it might have been unnecessary for me to speak. The thought of people giving up the will to live was also something of an invitation for me to contribute.

5 pm

Quite a while ago, I sought to intervene on the hon. Member for Wellingborough when he dismissed the view that the Opposition seek not to delete the offence of negligence, but to provide for it in a different way. After doing so, he made two observations. First, he said that he would not give way again because there would be no time to debate other matters if he did so. I must respond that it is not Opposition Members who determine guillotines, but Labour Members. If there is not enough time for him to do what he believes needs to be done, he should address his views to his Front Bench rather than complain to us. Secondly, he implied that it did not matter what we were proposing now, but that he held against us permanently the fact that we had made the same proposal before. That is very unfortunate. The Committee's proceedings were marked by the fact that the Government often listened to what Opposition Members said, accepted that we had made very good points and changed their mind. If he can support his own Government when they change their mind, he should not criticise us when the force of his argument helps us along.

Mr. Stinchcombe: I welcome the U-turn on the Tory Benches, but I was worried that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) seemed to be slipping back and suggesting that, despite the Opposition's grudging acceptance of an offence of negligence, there were still objections in principle.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) advanced the entire argument, but the fact remains that, like the Minister, we are sometimes prepared to say that we have heard and accepted what has been said. Just as I have thanked the Minister on a number of occasions for changing his mind and listening to what we say, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will manage to thank us—he can do so after the debate if not now—for behaving just as his own Minister has. I shall leave the matter there.

The process of 39 Committee sittings has begun to get me thinking sometimes like the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson); I noticed a while ago that he was busily writing and I hope that I am not about to pinch his speech off him. I am not so sure that there should be such universal enthusiasm among Labour Members for Government amendment No. 93. I learned in Committee that if one thinks long enough about anything that is proposed in an amendment to this Bill, one will see it as a loophole. None the less, I invite him, the Minister and other Labour Members who want to support their Front Bench to ask themselves whether Government amendment No. 93 can be used as a loophole.

I am an unscrupulous employer. *[Laughter.]* I am not, but let us assume that I am such an employer for the purposes of this argument and that I decide to become involved in money laundering, but do not want the powers of the Bill to affect me. The Government are now saying that if an employee has not been properly trained, he has a defence. Let us imagine that, as an unscrupulous employer, I ensure that some of my employees who are party to what is happening are not trained. I then let them do what is necessary.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I think that I understand where my hon. Friend is leading the argument. Should not we be greatly concerned that, as he says, if the new clause is agreed, an untrained individual will not be liable, so the full force of the agency will be directed at the unscrupulous boss? That will lead to an enormous feeding frenzy for the lawyers who are involved in trying to unravel this rather ill-thought-through provision.

Mr. Wilshire: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I am not sure whether the unscrupulous boss would be prosecuted under the Bill or any other legislation for aiding and abetting—or whatever the technical phrase would be—an employee.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman and hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) served on the Committee and should be aware that employers in the regulated sector are required to train their employees. I think that he knows that.

Mr. Wilshire: I am sure that there is an obligation to give training, but whether the training is satisfactory remains to be seen. That would be a matter for debate, and could provide the loophole.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) said that he thought he could see where the argument was going. Perhaps he saw that I was trying to persuade the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok and others to vote against their own Government. That is where the argument is going. The greatest advocate of not watering down the Bill is the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok, and I look forward to hearing what he will say after hearing the Minister trying to water it down.

The Government's proposal could indeed be seen as a loophole. An employee who had deliberately not been given satisfactory training would be provided with an excuse, and could launder money to his heart's content. I am sure that that is not what the Minister intends, but I think that it is what he is about to do.

Ian Lucas: In the circumstances described by the hon. Gentleman, would not the unscrupulous employer have

"reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting that another person",

namely the employee, was engaged in money laundering? He would therefore be committing an offence himself.

Mr. Wilshire: That may be so, but the person actually doing the laundering would be given an excuse. I am sure that the unscrupulous could find a way of protecting the proceeds of crime by shunting it down the line. I hope that I have said enough to cause Labour Members to have serious doubts about the loophole that is being proposed.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) expressed concern about lesser sentences and punishments, as though, again, we were seeking to water the Bill down. I think that he has got the wrong end of the stick. I realise that a Member whose constituency has a serious drug problem will always want the guilty to suffer the maximum penalty, but to advance that argument is to misunderstand the point that we are making.

Let us say, for the purposes of my own argument, that I accept a maximum sentence of five years for the negligent offender. Let us not get into a discussion about whether we want to water that down. Surely the hon. Gentleman accepts that if five years is adequate for negligence, we should consider an even longer term for deliberate offenders. That is the only distinction that Conservative Members seek to draw: that there are two different crimes, one far worse than the other, and that one should attract a more severe punishment than the other.

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is right. I would increase the sentence for deliberate offenders, but I would not lower it for those who had been negligent.

Mr. Wilshire: Then the hon. Gentleman accepts our argument. The fact that he does not like our solution is one thing, but it is another thing to suggest, as was suggested in Committee, that we are the friends of the criminals because we want to dilute the Bill. However, he has at last accepted that that is not what we are trying to do. We are trying to achieve justice and fairness. If he thinks that five years is adequate for the negligence offence, he should have tabled an amendment to increase the sentence for the deliberate offence.

If I have helped Labour Members to understand that even their own Government can create loopholes, and if I can persuade just one Labour Member that we are not the criminal's friend and that we are talking a great deal of common sense, my speech has been well worth while.

Mr. Davidson: My speech follows that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) by coincidence; he did not provoke me into speaking. I nevertheless think it worth repeating some of the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) about the framework of our discussions. I think that the Tories were a disgrace in Committee, and are a disgrace today. I still believe that they are weak on pursuing the collaborators of criminals.

[Mr. Davidson]

Criminals need professional advisers, and I consider those advisers as bad as, if not worse than, some of the criminals themselves. Severe action should be taken against them. The Conservatives' form can be held against them in that regard. The nationalists will not recall this because they were not present, but those of us who were in the Committee noted the Conservatives' view that negligence should be a complete, absolute, utter, total defence. They believe that it should enable people to get off everything altogether. There is a difference, however, between the adjustments that the Government have made and the adjustments that the Conservatives suggest that they have made. We have retained our principles while being prepared to make tactical changes, which is why I am prepared to accept what Ministers are proposing.

This is not a change in principle by the Conservatives. I believe that they are still in favour, in principle, of having negligence as a defence, but have been forced by political circumstance to modify that position. They are, therefore, putting forward the weakest suggestion that they can. It is interesting that we have heard from a variety of sources about the "not trained, bad night" defence for negligence.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman will remember that, in Committee, one of the most powerful speeches against the negligence defence came from one of his Back-Bench colleagues. It therefore strikes me as odd that the change to which we have adjusted in the spirit of conciliation should be greeted with his particular brand of opprobrium.

Mr. Davidson: Those on my side of the Committee who are now prepared to support a different position did not perhaps fully appreciate the majesty of the Government's position at that stage. They have now recognised that there are improvements within the same set of principles. I suspect that the Conservatives have retained the principle of wishing to water down this measure entirely.

Let me return to the "not trained, bad night" defence. There is an offence of careless driving; there is also an offence of negligent driving, worded in various ways. People can be found guilty of manslaughter through careless driving. Negligence is not a defence in those circumstances; nor should it be. If someone killed other people or caused horrendous consequences as a result of carelessness while flying a plane or driving a train, we would not say, "That's all right; it was just negligence. It's a terrible shame, but we'll let them off." In those circumstances, negligence should not be a defence.

Norman Baker: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that there is a difference between manslaughter and murder?

Mr. Davidson: Yes, but I take the view that manslaughter should not be excused on the ground of negligence. Negligence is, in itself, a culpable offence and ought to be subject to penalties. I accept that there will be some circumstances in which there is genuine negligence, but I believe that a defence of negligence would be argued in more cases than would be justified.

I want clarification from the Opposition on the level of penalties in cases of negligence. Their amendment No. 175 proposes that a person shall be

"liable to a fine not exceeding level 5".

Notwithstanding the points that the nationalists have made—which would have been better made in Committee—that would amount to £5,000 or so, and would apply to new clause 7 if it were agreed.

I and others referred in Committee to the scale of money laundering arising, for example, from the Nigerian incidents, in which billions of pounds were at stake. If someone involved in that exercise admitted negligence, perhaps on a plea bargain, would that mean that the maximum penalty to which they would be liable would be only £5,000?

Mr. Grieve: I explained earlier—I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman did not understand me—that level 5 on the standard scale is for summary jurisdiction only. It is the maximum fine that can be imposed in a magistrates court on the standard scale. There is, therefore, no diminution of the force of summary jurisdiction in relation to other offences in the Bill. If the matter were to go the Crown court, however, the fine would be at large; it could be up to any level.

5.15 pm

Mr. Davidson: I very much welcome that sign of adjustment from the Conservatives. They were giving the impression that they were in favour of minimising the penalties. I am reminded of prostitutes in Glasgow who consider fines a business expense. I can envisage lawyers, accountants and others regarding a small fine of £5,000 as simply a business expense, so the penalty needs to be a great deal higher. No doubt accountants would write it off against tax.

I now turn to credit unions and the like. The idea that someone would come into a credit union with a plastic bag containing £500,000 and say, "I would like to lodge this." and the people at the credit union would not think, "There's something a trifle peculiar going on here", leaves me cold. I take a similar view of the excuse that has often been mentioned of the baby crying.

Vera Baird: It is surely my hon. Friend who has talked not only about getting the Mr. Bigs, but about taking the heat out of the drugs industry and other evils at whatever level it occurs. No one was seriously suggesting high-level trade through a credit union, but the money that goes through credit unions in Redcar represents people's maximum savings and can equally represent big gains from drugs. The people who work in credit unions are subject to the same rules as the high fliers whom my hon. Friend detests so much and he will know that there are credit unions in Pollok, too.

Mr. Davidson: Indeed there are, and I can tell my hon. Friend that if a Nigerian chief turned up with an address in Arden and a plastic bag with £2,000, never mind £2 billion, they would immediately be suspicious. So I have no qualms about the way in which the provision will apply to credit unions.

I find the "bad night" defence laughable, however. The idea that somebody had a bad night—the usual sympathetic context is that the baby kept them awake, though in financial circles it is more likely that they were out spending several thousand pounds on bottles of wine—and that the next day, because they had a sore head, they did not notice £500,000 flitting across the screen is laughable. We have to expect a certain degree of competence from people in the banking and financial sectors. Are we seriously expected to believe that the whole future of the British economy rests on the competence of the staff we love so dearly, yet the same staff could quite easily mislay the odd £500,000 as it flits across the screen? I think not. If we accepted that, the felons would pay for the nights out so that the excuse could be used.

We asked earlier how we could discover what went through people's minds when all these transactions were taking place. I have a pretty good idea of what is in the minds of accountants, lawyers, bankers and others who handle these ill-gotten gains. It is money, money, money. They do it for the money. We should be in no doubt whatsoever about it. We would be much better served in the House—and we would have been in Committee—if the Conservatives were prepared to accept that some people involved in those industries are corrupt, dishonest and guilty of offences. Instead, the Conservatives adopted the stonewall defence of trying to pretend that the problem did not exist.

I am glad to hear that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve)—I apologise to him if I have misunderstood him—is in favour of collaborators of crime going to prison for substantial periods if they are caught. That is his position, as I understand it. Perhaps he is not quite as soft on crime as I previously understood him to be.

Finally, let me make two points—

Mr. Weir: Finally?

Mr. Davidson: Yes, about 40 per cent.

I was struck by the point made by the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who is no longer in his place, that if the regime were made too tough, people would launder their money elsewhere. That seemed to be his general point. In those circumstances, we have two alternatives. The first is to reduce our standards so as to attract such trade; the second, more reputable, option is to try to raise standards elsewhere in the world. The fact that the introduction of the highest possible standards might lose us some business is no reason whatever for allowing our standards to be watered down.

Finally finally, I have made my entire contribution without mentioning more than twice the absence of Scottish National party Members from the Committee. That must be a record.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: As the House seems content to spend the whole of this part of the debate discussing one group of amendments, I wanted to intervene before we ran out of time.

I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) that the amendments might not be perfectly drafted and that they are meant to be read as a whole. I do not want to descend into any nit-picking arguments about that; rather, I want to address the major issue that he has brought to the House, which we also discussed at great length in the Standing Committee.

The effect of the amendments taken together would be to split the failure to disclose offence into two separate offences. There would be different tests for each offence and a lower penalty for someone charged with having "reasonable grounds" to know or suspect—but not with actually knowing or suspecting—that money laundering was going on and thus needed to be disclosed.

The negligence test is one of the key proposals in the Bill. It reflects the Government's commitment to strong anti-money-laundering measures across the United Kingdom. Such measures, including the new negligence test, are fully justified against the background of several money-laundering cases that have taken place in the City and which were not reported to law enforcement. It is in the interests of the City and its financial reputation that we demand the highest standards of diligence.

In Committee, I gave a commitment that I would look again into the drafting to see whether there was any merit in having two different offences—the issue that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield has raised again today. I considered the matter at great length with officials in the Department, but I remain of the opinion that the negligence test would be most effective in a single offence, as currently drafted.

An abundance of legal ability was available to me from members of the Committee. Some hon. Members suggested that the handling of the indictment could be strange and difficult. However, it has been explained to me that the indictment can be handled even if the offence contains all three mens rea elements of knowing, suspecting and having reasonable grounds to suspect. Everything that has been said in the debate confirms my belief that the indictment can be dealt with in that way.

An indictment may contain only one offence or more than one mental element. There is no difficulty in specifying both in the indictment. There are precedents elsewhere, as the hon. Gentleman knows better than me.

The standard indictment for rape is that the defendant knew that the victim did not consent, or was reckless as to whether she did. In criminal damage, the indictment states that the defendant damaged property criminally with intent, or was reckless as to whether it would be damaged. The same situation applies in various circumstances. Courts and prosecuting agencies are able to deal with them in drawing up indictments.

Vera Baird: I am concerned about the analogy with rape. Does my hon. Friend not agree that the same level of criminality is probably involved when a man rapes a woman recklessly and does not give a damn about whether she says yes or no, and when a man rapes a woman knowing that she has not said yes? It would therefore be perfectly straightforward to charge the cases as alternative states of mind. We are talking in the Bill about two levels of criminality. Is it not difficult to see how a jury could inform a judge about the level of criminality of which it had found a person guilty?

Mr. Ainsworth: I was trying to talk about the mental element of an offence. I think that my hon. Friend accepts that that is dealt with elsewhere.

I shall move on to how the matter will be dealt with in sentencing. As I said, the indictment could be particularised, or it could state that the defendant knew or suspected, or had reasonable grounds to know or suspect.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

Those are the three mental elements, but a judge might impose a sentence on the basis that only negligence had been established. That would depend on the evidence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) noted, we are effectively leaving it to the discretion of the courts to decide, as they will be able to take account of the evidence provided.

The key argument against splitting the offence is that the prosecution would then have to decide whether to risk basing an indictment on knowledge, or suspicion. That is the problem with the current regime—it is very difficult to prove subjective knowledge. It is highly likely that prosecutors would go for the lesser offence if the proposed single offence were split, as the offence containing the subjective tests would be used only rarely, if at all.

Mr. Grieve: I confess that I do not see that. The new clause is drafted in a way that allows indictments to include alternative counts. For instance, a prosecutor may say to a jury, "Our view is that the accused acted wilfully. However, if you conclude that he did not act wilfully, we shall say that the evidence is that he acted negligently." So I simply do not see the problem with having two separate offences. Both can appear as two counts on the same indictment.

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's argument that there is a major difficulty with the Bill as drafted. It would be far more problematic to require the prosecutor to decide at the outset how to frame an indictment, and to make him choose then between the objective and the subjective test. That would lead to the power being under-used. It certainly would not lead to what is central to the argument—a step change in the quality of staff in the regulated sector in this country, and the way in which that sector operates with regard to money laundering. I contend that history shows that that step change is badly needed.

Ian Lucas: Does my hon. Friend accept that the real difficulty with the new clause is that it would lead to alternative charges being placed on the indictment, and that the inevitable result would be plea bargaining? The less serious offence would regularly be accepted, especially if it involved only the imposition of a financial penalty.

Mr. Ainsworth: I have said that that would be the dilemma facing the prosecutor. I believe that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield has accepted that that is what would happen, and that that is what he wants.

5.30 pm

Mr. Carmichael: Why does the Minister insist that the prosecutor should make the decision? Surely such a decision is best made by the jury after hearing all the evidence given in court under oath.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman must realise that the jury can do precisely that under the Bill as it stands. The mental elements can be taken into account by the court and by the judge in sentencing. There is not a problem in that respect given the way in which the Bill is structured.

As far as the sentence is concerned, the judge will weigh up the case and form a view about the mental element and take that into account when deciding the level of penalty.

Vera Baird: Is not the difficulty about the judge deciding the level of criminality so that he can impose the penalty that the jury might decide that the accused knowingly committed an offence while the judge sentenced him only for doing so negligently, or the other way around?

Mr. Ainsworth: I think that the courts are capable of dealing with this offence in the way that the Bill provides, and I believe that my hon. Friend agrees. They can decide on the element of mens rea present in the offence and take account of that when a sentence is imposed. I do not think that it is beyond the capacity of the courts to do that.

We were asked to look at defences. Representations have been made to everyone involved in the Bill about the impact that the offence could have on junior staff. Concern was expressed that people might not know or suspect that money laundering was taking place because they had not had the necessary training. There is an obligation to provide training for staff, and a company could be prosecuted for not doing so. We thought that that was adequate to deal with the situation, but because of concerns that have been raised both in the House and by organisations making representations to us, we brought forward Government amendment No. 93 to cover the situation and provide the defence that no training was given. The measure was discussed extensively in Committee.

Government amendment No. 93 will accordingly provide the defence that the employer had not provided staff with the relevant training. The training that we have in mind is that which all employers are required to provide to their employees by reason of regulation 5 of the Money Laundering Regulations 1993. We intend to use an order-making power to enable the Secretary of State to specify the kind of training that will apply.

As well as giving us an insight into some of his deeper thoughts about whether Traceys and Wendys could ever be thought of as company managing directors, the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) asked whether there was a problem with clause 330(5). He wanted to know that the provision in paragraph (b) was not dependent on that in paragraph (a). It is not. A professional legal adviser would be protected and would not have to prove that he had a reasonable excuse for not disclosing information.

Norman Baker: Doubtless the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) thought that Tracey was a man. Tracey is a man's name and that is why the hon. Gentleman believed that he might be a managing director.

We have discussed what constitutes a "reasonable excuse" under clause 330(5)(a). The hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) suggested earlier that a bad day or a problem with one's children might constitute such an excuse. I hope that I do not misrepresent her. Do such reasons constitute a reasonable excuse? If not, will the Minister give examples of things that might qualify?

Mr. Ainsworth: We went over that ground in Committee, and I was about to deal with the points that my hon. Friend raised.

Mr. Ruffley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: No. I have not managed to respond to the intervention of the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) yet. I cannot take another until I have done that. I do not want to stack up interventions, as the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds provokes me to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar sought some assurances about clause 330(5)(a). The offence for which the clause provides applies both when the person knows and when the person has reasonable grounds for knowing. Subsection (5)(a) provides a defence of a "reasonable excuse" for not disclosing. The examples that my hon. Friend gave would be raised with the prosecutor. She gave an amusing example of a police officer behaving obtusely or unreasonably, but the issues that she raised could be considered by the prosecuting authorities and accepted as reasonable excuses if they believed that they crossed the requisite threshold.

My hon. Friend also asked whether we could consider a code of practice. I am happy to continue the discussion with her if she wants to pursue the matter. However, I fear that introducing such a code could entail problems; it might be deemed to interfere with the independence of the Crown Prosecution Service. The CPS needs to decide whether to prosecute, taking all the facts of the case into consideration; it would not necessarily want to be bound by a code of practice that was imposed on it.

Mr. Ruffley: It is kind of the Minister to give way. I cannot yet read the record, so he must correct me if I am wrong, but in his earlier response to points about clause 330(5) he appeared to suggest that a person did not commit an offence under the provision if paragraph (a) or paragraph (b) applied. However, the clause provides that paragraphs (a) and (b) must be taken into account.

I must also repeat an earlier question: what constitutes a reasonable excuse?

Mr. Ainsworth: The court would decide what constituted a reasonable excuse. I was explaining that in response to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar. The prosecuting authorities will decide whether to take a case forward. If they decide to do so, the court will determine whether the excuse is reasonable. We are not trying to fetter the court.

The word "and" does not link paragraphs (a) and (b) of subsection (5). The word "or" is implied, although I accept that it is not stated. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, if he reads the subsection carefully, "or" is implied. The professional legal adviser does not therefore have to be covered by paragraph (a). He—I should emphasise "he or she" because of the hon. Gentleman's difficulties—does not need the reasonable excuse for which paragraph (a) provides.

Mr. Ruffley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman again. We are short of time, other hon. Members wish to speak, and we need to discuss other amendments before 6.7 pm. I hope that Government amendment No. 93 makes the clause acceptable to hon. Members, and I ask the Opposition to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Carmichael: I intended to make only one narrow point in an intervention, but I have become increasingly irritated as the debate has progressed and I now have a number of issues to raise. I shall, however, try to give hon. Members a lesson in brevity in so doing and I hope that it is well taken.

Mr. Davidson: Get on with it.

Mr. Carmichael: That is rich coming from the hon. Gentleman.

On new clause 7 and the "bad night" defence, which at first I thought was a reference to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), I declare an interest as the father of an 11-month-old son who is cutting his first set of teeth. The hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) made her point well. The Minister yesterday invited us to sympathise with the two families living next door to each other in a terraced street, one of which was hard-working and struggling—perhaps failing—to make their mortgage payments. Overnight, his attitude has changed and it seems that those are the very people he is trying to persecute. The Minister and Labour Members must accept that a substantial number of ordinary hard-working low-grade employees are going to be caught by the Bill's provisions, and there is an inequity in that. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) drew parallels with careless driving. I do not want to get into that except to place it on the record that his points are absolute mince.

Some hon. Members mentioned alternative verdicts. That is complex. There are various ways in which alternative verdicts can be returned. If knowingly and negligently are alternatives in the same offence, a sheriff and possibly a jury can convict under deletion. I accept that that is open to them. However, the Minister must be aware that it is sometimes difficult to get a jury to convict under deletion. Instead, we get a conviction for the whole offence. As the hon. Member for Redcar said, that can result from a misunderstanding between the jury and the judge over conviction and sentence. There is much to commend in the prosecutor having the option open to draft the indictment with the negligence offence as an alternative.

Let me deal with the comments that the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) made on amendment No. 175. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) was mistaken when he was uncharacteristically soft on the Scottish National party. The amendment states that someone

"guilty of an offence under section"—

whatever it is to be—

"shall be liable to a fine"—

that is a term of art known to Scots law—

"not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale."

The hon. Member for Angus should know that level 5 on the standard scale is a term of art that is to be found in chapter 46 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. He said that the standard scale is not specified. That is

[Mr. Carmichael]

not necessary in any piece of legislation that I have come across in practice and I see no reason why it is necessary in this regard.

Mr. Weir *rose—*

Mr. Carmichael: If the hon. Gentleman has something new to say, I shall give way.

Mr. Weir: The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) did not know the separate scales. The Bill does not specify the scale, and it can contain differences. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) makes a point about the Committee. Let me explain that amendment No. 175 is a Tory amendment. I support the Bill as agreed by the Scottish Parliament under the Sewel motion. Why should I table an amendment in the terms of amendment No. 175 in Committee or anywhere else?

Mr. Carmichael: I take it that the hon. Gentleman has nothing new to say. Section 225(1) of the 1995 Act refers to the "standard scale" in inverted commas. It is a term of art known to Scots law; it should even be known to a solicitor from Angus. I do not understand his problem.

5.45 pm

Mr. Mark Field: I, too, shall be brief.

I accept that it is in the interests of the City of London that it is not seen as a soft touch for money laundering. I had intended to speak at some length on the money laundering provisions, but I obviously do not have enough time to do so. Instead, I shall make a brief point on over-regulation in the broader sense, which has the effect of exporting jobs. That has been the history of the City of London and all other financial centres in the post-war era. One reason why the Eurobond market is firmly in London is because of strict regulation in New York by the Securities and Exchange Commission in the 1960s and beyond. We should all remember that important lesson when we propose regulations.

On new clause 7, a multitude of hon. Members spoke about the failure to disclose. When we were in Committee, it was understood that we should distinguish between the regulated and the non-regulated sectors, which goes to the heart of the point made by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe). I am worried, however, by the nature of the debate advanced by the Scottish mafia, the hon. Members for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) and for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), because they are looking at the entire matter from the point of view of their constituents who have suffered from drug offences and drug users. I understand their deep, honest and genuine concerns about that, but by throwing the book at anyone who could possibly be connected with money laundering we run the risk of inflicting great injustices. For that reason, new clause 7 is a sensible compromise in the circumstances.

There is a lack of understanding about the highly pressurised environment in which junior staff work in the City of London and the responsibilities that are placed on them. It is simplistic for the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok to suggest that every money laundering act will involve an individual turning up with a plastic bag full of tens of thousands of pounds. The reality is that hundreds, if not thousands, of transactions take place on a daily basis on the trading screens of City of London money brokers. Junior staff in particular who are not accustomed to working in such pressurised environments may unknowingly let things slip through the net.

Ian Lucas: Is it not important in such circumstances that the institutions have systems in place? Would not the offence encourage organisations and investment institutions to improve their systems that have failed so markedly?

Mr. Field: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point. Clearly systems will be in place. However, if they become compliance and regulation-oriented, there is a risk that we will lose a significant amount of business because a raft of large global financial organisations will decide not to continue to work in the City of London. I accept that a balance needs to be struck. We do not want London to be a soft touch for money laundering or other financial offences. I hope that that is clear.

The hon. Member for Wellingborough is a barrister. It strikes me that until recently barristers could not be found guilty of negligence, a decision based on public policy grounds because of the independence of the Bar. If we put in place a major new criminal offence that allows of negligence, that will bring with it the juggernaut of state controls exercised by the Assets Recovery Agency. That is not a fair balance. There is a public policy issue at stake. Those criminal sanctions should be applied only in the most extreme cases if someone has merely been negligent.

I am not entirely convinced by the plea-bargaining argument that has been advanced, but I fear that there may be something in it. If new clause 7 is accepted, junior staff might more easily be found guilty under the negligence provisions. Proof would be easier to establish in that regard, and the courts would also bring to bear a certain amount of sympathy if this option were open. Senior individuals who turn a blind eye to, or actively collaborate with, money launderers will surely feel the full force of clause 330. The provision suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) is therefore sensible, and I hope that serious consideration will be given to it, either here or in the House of Lords.

Mr. Grieve: This issue has given rise to an interesting debate and excited a lot of comment in the House, just as it did in Committee. It is with some regret that I say, however, that the further our debate has progressed, the more worried I have become. It became clear from the Minister's response—via his officials—that he envisages a single count on an indictment, with the two offences rolled together. Even under the Bill as drafted, it is technically possible to have two counts, but the policy view is clearly that the offence is a single offence. That worries me all the more, and leads me to believe that new clause 7, which would establish a separate offence and penalty for negligence, is the better option.

I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley), for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) and for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) for their contributions, and to other Members who made the same point. I am afraid that the Minister has not persuaded me, and I intend to press new clause 7 to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 184, Noes 306.

Division No. 172] **[5.52 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John (Hornchurch)
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim

Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Keith
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin

Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan

Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*

Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being more than two and a quarter hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [26 February], put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 329

ACQUISITION, USE AND POSSESSION

Amendments made: No. 91, in page 192, line 18, leave out "for" and insert "by".

No. 92, in page 192, line 18, leave out "help him" and insert—

'he knows or suspects may help another'.—*[Mr. Bob Ainsworth.]*

Clause 330

FAILURE TO DISCLOSE: REGULATED SECTOR

Amendments made: No. 93, in page 192, line 38, at end insert—

'(c) subsection (5A) applies to him.

(5A) This subsection applies to a person if—

(a) he does not know or suspect that another person is engaged in money laundering, and

(b) he has not been provided by his employer with such training as is specified by the Secretary of State by order for the purposes of this section.'.

No. 94, in page 193, line 16, leave out "a view to" and insert "the intention of".—*[Mr. Bob Ainsworth.]*

Clause 331

TIPPING OFF

Amendment made: No. 95, in page 193, line 42, leave out "a view to" and insert "the intention of".—*[Mr. Bob Ainsworth.]*

New Clause 4

CODE OF PRACTICE

'(1) The Secretary of State must prepare a code of practice as to the exercise by the Director and appropriate officers of functions they have under this Chapter.

(2) After preparing a draft of the code the Secretary of State—

(a) must publish the draft;

(b) must consider any representations made to him about the draft;

(c) may amend the draft accordingly.

(3) After the Secretary of State has proceeded under subsection (2) he must lay the code before Parliament.

(4) When he has done so the Secretary of State may bring the code into operation on such day as he may appoint by order.

(5) The Director must comply with a code of practice which is in operation under this section in the exercise of any function he has under this Chapter.

(6) An appropriate officer must comply with a code of practice which is in operation under this section in the exercise of any function he has under this Chapter.

(7) If the Director or an appropriate officer fails to comply with any provision of such a code of practice he is not by reason only of that failure liable in any criminal or civil proceedings.

(8) But the code of practice is admissible in evidence in such proceedings and a court may take account of any failure to comply with its provisions in determining any question in the proceedings.

(9) The Secretary of State may from time to time revise a code previously brought into operation under this section; and the preceding provisions of this section apply to a revised code as they apply to the code as first prepared.

(10) The following provisions do not apply to an appropriate officer in the exercise of any function he has under this Chapter—

(a) section 67(9) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (c. 60) (application of codes of practice under that Act to persons other than police officers);

(b) Article 66(8) of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (S.I. 1989/1341 (N.I. 12)) (which makes similar provision for Northern Ireland).'.—*[Mr. Bob Ainsworth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 12—*Code of Practice (No. 2).*

New clause 8—*Investigations: anonymity of Agency staff and others*—

'(1) Where the Director is satisfied that there is good reason to believe that the conduct of an investigation or the safety of a nominated officer might be prejudiced if the identity of that officer were known, he may determine that the nominated officer shall have the benefit of anonymity.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a nominated officer is—

(a) a member of staff of the Agency, or

(b) an accredited financial investigator.

(3) Where, apart from this section, a nominated officer may be required for the purpose of exercising his functions in the conduct of an investigation to produce or show any written authority or otherwise to identify himself, a nominated officer with benefit of anonymity shall—

(a) not be required to produce or show any such authority or to so identify himself for the purpose of exercising his functions, and

(b) be accompanied by a constable who shall, on request by a person affected, identify himself as a constable and state that he is accompanied by a nominated officer.

(4) Where a nominated officer with benefit of anonymity exercises his functions in the conduct of an investigation in writing, such function shall be exercised in the name of the Agency and not in the name of the nominated officer with benefit of anonymity.

(5) Any document relating to proceedings arising out of an investigation where a nominated officer had benefit of anonymity shall not reveal the identity or address of a nominated officer with benefit of anonymity.

(6) For the purposes of this section, "investigation" means any investigation specified in section 336 other than a money laundering investigation.'.

New clause 9—*Offence of prejudicing investigation by identifying nominated officer with benefit of anonymity*—

'(1) This section applies if a person knows or suspects that a nominated officer has the benefit of anonymity for the purposes of section [*Investigations: anonymity of Agency staff and others*].

(2) A person commits an offence if he publishes or causes to be published—

(a) the fact that an individual is or was a nominated officer with the benefit of anonymity,

(b) the fact that an individual is a member of the family of a person who is or was a nominated officer with the benefit of anonymity, or

(c) the address of any place as being the address where an individual who is or was a nominated officer with the benefit of anonymity or a member of the family of a person who is or was a nominated officer with the benefit of anonymity resides.

(3) A person does not commit an offence under subsection (2) if—

(a) he does not know or suspect that the identification of a nominated officer with benefit of anonymity is likely to prejudice the investigation, or

(b) the identification is made in the exercise of a function under this Act or any other enactment relating to criminal conduct or benefit from criminal conduct or in compliance with a requirement imposed under or by virtue of this Act.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (2) is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or to both, or

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or to a fine or to both.'.

Amendment No. 63, in clause 337, page 197, line 18, leave out "a civil recovery investigation".

Government amendment No. 108.

Amendment No. 67, in clause 352, page 206, line 11; leave out "either".

Amendment No. 66, in page 206, line 11, leave out "or at once".

Government amendments Nos. 98 and 99.

Amendment No. 167, in clause 384, page 222, line 3, leave out "either".

[Sir Alan Haselhurst]

Amendment No. 166, in page 222, line 3, leave out "or at once".

Government amendment No. 102.

Amendment No. 73, in clause 447, page 258, line 15, after "295(4)", insert ", 359(4)".

Government amendments Nos. 251 and 103.

Amendment No. 75, in page 258, line 26, after "295(4)", insert ", 359(4)".

Government amendment No. 253.

Mr. Ainsworth: Well done, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

New clause 4 requires the Secretary of State to issue a statutory code of practice on the exercise of the investigation powers in chapter 2 of part 8. It will provide guidance on how the use of such powers on confiscation, civil recovery and money-laundering investigations is to be conducted by the director. New clause 12 provides for a similar code for Scotland.

We acknowledge that the powers contained in part 8 are fairly intrusive. None the less, we believe that such powers are fully justified, because without them it is unlikely that the director of the new agency or others involved in law enforcement would be able to make any substantial improvement in asset recovery.

Similar schemes in other legislation include codes of practice to ensure that there is a measure of control. The code will be published in draft, put out for consultation and laid before both Houses and the Scottish Parliament. Any breach of the code would be admissible as evidence in criminal and civil proceedings.

It is entirely sensible to have a code that supports and guides the investigation powers in part 8. We intend that it should offer clear and helpful guidance on how the functions vested in the director and accredited financial investigators should be conducted. It will also be used as a safeguard to ensure that the powers are operated consistently.

Government amendments Nos. 102 and 103 provide that the order that brings the code of practice into operation will be subject to the affirmative procedure.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the Minister confirm whether the Government intend to publish a draft code of practice for consideration, as the Bill moves from the House to another place? He was very helpful in Committee in talking about publishing such drafts and, at all stages, the Government have tried their best to provide helpful, indicative guidance. Will he follow that example with the new code of practice?

Mr. Ainsworth: I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that we have made this proposal because of concerns expressed by him, his hon. Friends and others. I will try to ensure that people receive any draft so that they can see it in advance, but I do not know what the practicalities or the time scale for that will be.

Having confirmed that any such order will be subject to the affirmative procedure, I turn to the new clauses and amendments that the Opposition have tabled. New clause 8 would grant anonymity in certain circumstances to the agency's staff. The hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) is sitting in his place, and I welcome the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's latest report on the proceeds of crime, the recommendations of which are reflected in new clauses 8 and 9. The Government are considering the report very carefully.

We are aware that the Criminal Assets Bureau in Ireland enjoys statutory anonymity, and we are considering the position in the United Kingdom, as we want the agency's staff to be able to carry out their job effectively, to bear down on the proceeds of crime, without suffering from intimidation or reprisals in doing so. However, we must take into account the current provisions that apply to those who deal with the criminal fraternity.

Anonymity is currently only available to police and customs officers in very limited circumstances in investigating terrorism, and civilian staff working for the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office have no statutory right to anonymity. So it would be a big step to allow anonymity for agency staff, but I am fully aware of the situation in Northern Ireland, which perhaps differs from that in the rest of the jurisdiction. I am also aware of the worry that the agency should be able to attract good-quality staff and to do its job effectively in Northern Ireland. I want to reassure Members that, although I do not want to accept the new clause now, we are seriously considering the position.

6.15 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the Minister giving way on that point because not only did we discover that anonymity was effective in the Criminal Assets Bureau, which faces similar troubles, but we discovered today that there are those from England, Scotland and elsewhere who believe that anonymity is important if they are to fight organised crime, which is increasing not only in Northern Ireland but elsewhere. I welcome the Minister's acceptance of the issue, but I ask him not to give too much weight to the views of those who think that it impinges on civil liberties because we have to consider the liberties of the servants of the state who are trying to defeat organised crime.

Mr. Ainsworth: I was about to deal with the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises. Not only the agency's staff but those working for law enforcement and asset recovery bodies in Scotland will be involved, and they will do exactly the same job and be answerable to the Scottish Ministers or to the Lord Advocate, so we cannot consider only the agency's staff. Other financial investigators who operate outside the agency in other public bodies will investigate serious offences, and we would not necessarily want an automatic difference to be drawn between those who work for the agency and those other people.

Hon. Members understand some of the difficulties involved. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about not being too concerned about some of the civil liberties arguments. I absolutely recognise the particular circumstances that can apply in Northern Ireland and the fact that we may have to deal with people who commit offences in the rest of the jurisdiction that are as serious as those that need to be dealt with in Northern Ireland, and I seek to assure the hon. Gentleman that such issues will be considered properly and that they will be discussed in another place.

Norman Baker: Although I personally accept that it is sensible to provide anonymity for certain individuals who may be threatened—to that extent I welcome the new clause—does the Minister agree that, if that principle is accepted, a check needs to be put in place to ensure that that opportunity is not abused?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman points out some of the complications and difficulties that exist. We will announce our conclusions as soon as we reach them, having listened to everyone concerned and will, if necessary, table amendments in the other place.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I understand that people have a right of appeal if they think that such legislation is used unfairly. That protection would be acceptable, but given that we live in a world where two strikes are allowed before action can be taken, where people are acquitted by the courts and have gone free and where godfathers have not been brought before the courts, does the Minister accept that it is important to consider the lifestyle as well?

Mr. Ainsworth: Yes, and we have got to take seriously—not only in the Northern Ireland context—the cross-reference between organised crime, money-laundering offences and terrorism. If that was not apparent to all of us before the events of 11 September to the degree that it should have been, it certainly ought to be apparent to us now. Some serious issues therefore need to be considered. I do not promise the hon. Gentleman that I will be able to square the circle to his satisfaction and that of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, but we shall certainly consider those issues seriously, and we intend to table amendments if we can find a way through such things.

Opposition amendment No. 63 would exclude civil recovery investigations from the offence of prejudicing an investigation. The Government believe that there should be sanctions and that anybody who prejudices an investigation or a prospective investigation by making a disclosure about it or by tampering with documents relevant to that investigation should be subject to the possibility of penalties. I neither understand nor accept the justification or reason for the amendment, and unless I hear something very strange from Opposition Members, I shall be asking the House to oppose it.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will the Minister help the House by saying in which other circumstances anything so draconian is available in civil proceedings? I do not know of any.

Mr. Ainsworth: I respect the right hon. Gentleman's knowledge, but ask him to accept that we considered the civil classification and differences that apply under part 5 for many hours in Committee. In normal civil circumstances, the situation is straightforward: an allegation is made and tested in court, one to one. In these circumstances, the director needs some investigatory powers in order to be able to bring a case in the first place. We are not talking about a straightforward confrontation over an issue as usual in civil litigation.

Effectively, Opposition Members suggest in the amendment that people should be allowed to tamper or interfere with or prevent an initial investigation free from any chance of anyone taking action against them. I do not accept that that should be so. I believe that, broadly, we have cross-party support on bearing down on the proceeds of crime and that the proposed investigatory powers, which are essential to making the civil part of the Bill work, should not be tampered with.

Mr. Stinchcombe: Will the Minister confirm that there are occasions already where interfering with civil proceedings can lead to criminal offences—for example, trying to pervert the course of justice in a libel trial?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is more knowledgeable then me on the matter, but I can tell him that there are similar criminal sanctions associated with civil investigations in other legislation. For example, under section 177 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, a person can be fined or imprisoned if they produce false or misleading material to an investigator. So, as my hon. Friend's example also shows, the proposed provision is not entirely without precedent.

Government amendment No. 108 will extend the definition of judges who may hear applications in the Crown court in England and Wales. It was tabled in response to an issue raised in Committee. I assured hon. Members that I would revisit it. The amendment's wording is designed to exclude people such as the Lord Mayor of the City of London and aldermen, who are entitled to sit as judges in the central criminal court, but none the less widens the definition as suggested by Opposition Members in Committee.

Under Opposition amendments Nos. 66 and 67, the director of the Assets Recovery Agency would not be able to conduct an interview with an individual under a disclosure order with immediate effect. We discussed that point in Committee. The proposed disclosure order is modelled on the Proceeds of Crime (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which contains the word "forthwith". The Northern Ireland legislation contains a code of practice in relation to the exercise of the investigation powers. That is one of the reasons why we have proposed under new clause 4 to introduce similar guidance. We will try to address the specific point raised in Committee by covering the whole gamut of provisions, such as access to legal advice and the rest, in guidance.

Opposition amendments Nos. 166 and 167 would do the same in Scotland. Government new clause 12 will require Scottish Ministers to introduce a similar code of practice. I therefore hope that hon. Members will be able to accept that the same logic should be applied to jurisdiction north of the border.

Government amendments Nos. 98 and 99 are technical. I hope that I do not have to waste the time of the House in going over them. We had overlooked the fact that the powers of the High Court in Northern Ireland are more limited. Amendment No. 98 broadens the scope of clause 370, and amendment No. 99 excludes from the clause account monitoring orders made in relation to a civil recovery investigation in England and Wales, as the High Court of England and Wales already has the powers to deal with such applications.

I accept that Opposition amendments Nos. 73 and 75 would introduce similar provisions to those in paragraph 7(3) of schedule 6 to the Terrorism Act 2000, which are exercised under the affirmative resolution. We consider, nevertheless, that given the limited and technical nature of the definition of "customer information" in the Bill, the negative procedure is reasonable and will provide for appropriate parliamentary scrutiny.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

I invite hon. Members to withdraw new clauses 8 and 9 and amendments Nos. 66, 67, 73, 75, 166 and 167.

Mr. Hawkins: I welcome once again the way in which the Minister has responded to a number of the points that we made in Committee, and I thank him for his helpful response to my earlier intervention. We hope that it will be possible at least to see a draft form of the code of practice referred to in some of the Government amendments. I thank him for saying that he will investigate carefully the practicalities of that.

The fact that the operation of the guillotines prevents discussion of certain very important matters on Report has once again been demonstrated. Just before we began considering this group of amendments, the House was not given any opportunity to discuss two other groups, which included some amendments on which Opposition Members wished to vote. In effect, especially because of a large number of speeches by Government Back Benchers on a previous group of amendments—I do not blame the Minister—and the operation of the guillotine, just as many matters were never reached in Committee, they have not been discussed by the House. Important matters will go to the other place completely undebated by this House.

6.30 pm

I make that point because of an example that arose last night, which also relates to Northern Ireland. Opposition amendment No. 145 was not reached before the guillotine fell. It went to the same point as the excellent new clauses 8 and 9 tabled by members of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. All hon. Members accept the importance of the links between organised crime and racketeering in Ulster and the funding of terrorist paramilitary organisations. That is why I welcome the unanimous report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. I hope that Ulster Unionist party Members and others will speak to those new clauses, and I encourage members of the Select Committee to press them to a vote; if they do, Conservative Members will support them.

Mr. Ainsworth: First, I should like to firm up my offer and state that we can produce a draft code. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a timetable, but I can give a commitment that we will do that. Secondly, on the issue of time, I point out that our extensive debate before the knife fell on the first part of our debate today was an almost exact re-run of a Standing Committee debate that was described by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) as the longest single debate in the Committee. If that hon. Gentleman then spends more than half an hour moving his amendments, he must expect that we will run out of time and that other business will not be discussed.

Mr. Hawkins: I welcome the Minister's first point. It is helpful to know that it should be possible to see the draft code of practice, and I am grateful to him for firming up that assurance.

I think that the Minister would accept that his criticism of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) is unjust. My hon. Friend was dealing with important matters and he took many interventions from Government Back Benchers. *Hansard* will show that it was almost entirely owing to his generosity in responding to the points made by Government Back Benchers that the debate was extended. Furthermore, *Hansard* will reveal that a huge proportion of the total time spent on those important matters was taken by Government Back Benchers re-running previously made arguments.

Those who have read the Committee proceedings on the Bill will be aware that the Opposition have repeatedly stressed our concern about the crucial issues that relate to paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland. The Minister will agree that few matters relating to money laundering and associated offences affecting United Kingdom citizens are more important than the way in which such offences and similar racketeering operations occur in Northern Ireland. Although all money laundering is a serious crime, it is hard to imagine anything more serious than when it is done for the specific purpose of funding terrorist murder and other acts of violence.

I therefore welcome the unanimous report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. I draw the House's attention to paragraph 6, in which the Committee describes its visit to the Criminal Assets Bureau in the Republic of Ireland. I have discussed that with the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), and I know that he wants to reinforce some of the points made in the report. The report states:

> "The Republic of Ireland's Criminal Assets Bureau deals with sophisticated and dangerous criminals, some of whom have paramilitary connections. In a number of cases these individuals, prior to the establishment of the Bureau, had evaded the law enforcement agencies by verbal and physical intimidation of both witnesses and officials. We"—

that is, the Committee—

> "were told that on occasion extreme violence had been used. Officers working for the Bureau are dealing with cases which it would frequently be difficult to pursue through other means without exposing staff to considerable personal risk."

We all know that that sort of thing goes on. During one of our debates, I mentioned my great concern on being told that even senior officials working on the mainland for the Crown Prosecution Service had had to be moved because of threats from representatives of organised crime.

We recognise that members of the Select Committee, under the distinguished chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), have taken the opportunity to table new clauses 8 and 9 to try to put much tougher measures on the face of the Bill. Although the Minister is being helpful and has said that he is prepared to contemplate introducing similar Government amendments at a later stage, the issue is so important that I encourage those behind the new clauses to press them tonight. Both in Committee and in the House, the Opposition have often been accused of seeking to water down the Bill. There can be no argument that the new clauses would have that effect; on the contrary, they would toughen up the Bill in the same way as our amendment No. 145—sadly, not reached last night—would have done.

We welcome the fact that in several of their amendments the Government have responded to concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield, other Conservative Members and I raised in Committee.

Government new clauses 4 and 12, the second of which relates to Scotland, reflect the importance of the code of practice and are therefore welcome.

Government amendment No. 108 to clause 338 is, as the Minister explained, a specific response to concerns expressed by my hon. Friend and reinforced by other Conservative members of the Standing Committee. We argued that there should be an opportunity to define precisely the range of judges able to use the powers in the Bill when it is enacted, and the range of the jurisdiction they exercise. I ask the Minister to make it clear whether the new wording will allow those who sit as Crown court recorders, rather than as circuit judges, to exercise that jurisdiction. I understand why the Minister expressed his argument as he did and we accept his point in respect of those who are given the status of circuit judge purely in their ceremonial capacity, such as City of London aldermen. We thoroughly welcome his concession in response to our arguments.

Amendments Nos. 67, 66, 167 and 166 would remove the words "either" and "or at once". We regard the matter as important. I shall listen to the Minister's response in due course, but I signal now the possibility of our pressing the amendments to a vote, especially amendment No. 66. Our aim is to make the operation of a new draconian measure more reasonable. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said, draconian powers that require the organs of the state to demand instant action are not normal. Usually, even when serious allegations are involved, there is provision to allow legal advice to be taken.

I acknowledge the Minister's attempt to assist by saying that the matters may be dealt with in a code of practice, but we want to ensure that the procedure operates properly. The Government have said that the Bill complies in every respect with the Human Rights Act 1998—Ministers now have to certify that when they present a Bill. However, unless the Government accept a provision such as the one proposed in amendments Nos. 67, 66, 167, and 166, I wonder whether there is a danger that the procedure might be struck down in a future case. The Minister might say that the Government are prepared to risk it; I shall listen carefully.

Similar concerns prompt amendment No. 63 in respect of civil recovery investigations. We wonder whether it is appropriate for such draconian powers to exist in what my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal correctly says is a civil procedure.

Vera Baird: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He said that it had occurred to him that there might be a breach of the European convention on human rights as a result of the demand laid on someone to supply information or answer questions at once. If that is right, has he worked out which article of the convention he fears might be breached?

Mr. Hawkins: I am tempted to say that that is a question of which I might require notice. I shall give the matter some thought, and perhaps I shall be able to respond more fully in a later intervention on the Minister or on the hon. Lady, after I have discussed the matter with my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield.

I wanted to say that the Opposition welcome Government amendments Nos. 98 and 99. As the Minister said, such technical amendments are not expected to cause much debate. They are tidying amendments, and we recognise that the Government are right to say that the High Court jurisdiction in Northern Ireland was more limited. The Government have undoubtedly been sensible to respond to that. Again, Government amendment No. 202 is purely technical in relation to the code of practice.

Amendments Nos. 73 and 75 are more significant. They deal with the meaning of customer information, which is set out in clause 359(4). We feel that that matter should be referred to again in clause 447. Again, I shall listen to the comments of the Minister and other hon. Members on that. Government amendments Nos. 251, 103 and 253 are also technical, and we have no difficulty with them. I shall be interested to hear the contributions of right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): I want to speak on new clauses 8 and 9, which I tabled along with the Chairman and other members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. We do not intend to press the new clauses to a vote. None the less, they outline issues that are clearly worthy of serious debate.

Before I deal with the substance of those issues, I shall explain why I propose the new clauses. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee had a pre-arranged visit to Northern Ireland in pursuit of its inquiry into the financing of terrorism, and it was not anticipated that members of the Committee would return in time for this debate. Unfortunately, the timetabling of the debate was such that the original arrangements could not be altered. Having said that, some members of the Committee, whom I understand have taken an early flight back from Belfast, are present for this debate. Although I am still beholden to make our case, it is a reflection of the seriousness and concern with which they regard this issue that they have made such an effort.

The Committee's objective was to pinpoint the key sources of paramilitary funds, and to examine ways in which the Government and law enforcement agencies could cut off those money flows. The Committee is still taking evidence and I am therefore restricted in what I can say. However, I can say that we learned very early in our consideration of the subject that there is an increasingly strong connection between paramilitary organisations and organised crime. As a result of that discovery, the focus of our inquiry has shifted to a certain extent.

6.45 pm

We recognise that the Bill is directed at more conventional criminality than paramilitary-linked outrages. Nevertheless, the added benefit of the Bill is its potential for cutting off the finance that fuels the flames of violence in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has an Organised Crime Taskforce to tackle the problem, but the proposed Assets Recovery Agency will be an important and welcome addition and support.

Although the Committee's examination of these issues has been in Northern Ireland, there can be no doubt that some considerations are common to fighting criminality anywhere in the UK. Above all, those who are subject to financial investigations are likely to be ruthless and vicious people, whether or not they have paramilitary links. The closer that such investigations get to the targets,

[Mr. Adrian Bailey]

the more dangerous the targets are likely to become. That assumption lies behind new clauses 8 and 9, and it is one based on experience. The new clauses were prompted by recent visits to the Republic of Ireland, where we met and interviewed members of the Criminal Assets Bureau. The principal findings from our visit were published in our second report on 14 February, as previous speakers have mentioned.

The Criminal Assets Bureau is the Irish equivalent of the proposed Assets Recovery Agency. We were told that the formation of the bureau in the mid-1990s arose from widespread public concern about the growth of organised crime, and especially about the murders of a policeman, Garda Jerry McCabe, and the investigative journalist, Veronica Guerin. Those two murders illustrated most clearly the potential dangers of the work that must be done. Over and above that, we heard other tales of intimidation, threats and violence against officials working on issues such as drug trafficking and social security.

When inviting people to take posts as financial investigators or when staff of other agencies are involved in investigations, we must recognise that we are exposing people to risks for which they may never have been trained. The success of the agency will depend to a great extent on staff with professional skills who may never have envisaged being in the forefront of the fight against organised crime. In such circumstances, it is necessary to give them maximum protection. It seemed to the Committee that if we are to pursue serious criminals effectively, we need to provide officials who do so with a measure of protection. That protection will allow them to go about their work with confidence that no harm will come to them as a result. They and their families must also feel secure that no harm with come to their relatives.

In the Republic of Ireland, that protection has been provided to civilian staff of the Criminal Assets Bureau through the statutory provision of anonymity. When staff participate in searches, they may be identified to the respondent only as "a member of the bureau staff", provided that they are accompanied by a member of the local Gardai. When letters are sent out about unpaid tax under the revenue Acts, they can be signed off merely in the name of the Criminal Assets Bureau, and not in the name of the individual conducting the investigation. Furthermore, it is an offence to identify publicly any member of the bureau's civilian staff or any member of his or her family. Staff of the Criminal Assets Bureau and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform have stressed to us just how important they believe that protection is in enabling the bureau to pursue the recovery of criminal assets effectively.

The assets and money recovered are a measure of the bureau's success. So far, 50 cases brought under the Republic's proceeds of crime legislation have been taken through the courts successfully. As a result, 21 million punts have been frozen and a further 28 million punts taken in tax. Given the time scale involved, there will be further returns from assets that are currently frozen.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee recognises the potential for the Assets Recovery Agency to play a similar role in pursuing organised crime. We want it to be as effective as the Criminal Assets Bureau in the Republic of Ireland, if not better. Protection for the staff of the new agency will be vital, both in encouraging the right people to take up the work and, above all, in enabling them to concentrate on the work without fear of personal danger.

We tabled new clauses 8 and 9 because it was not apparent to us that such protection would be provided under the Bill. We do not claim that the new clauses provide all the answers to all the questions posed.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): I thank the hon. Gentleman for speaking to the new clauses so ably on behalf of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. I wrote to the Minister on behalf of the Committee when we published our special report and, as a result of receiving a generous response suggesting what he might say tonight, we discussed the issue when the Committee met in Belfast this morning. We concluded that his reply was as far as we could expect a Minister to go given the short notice and the circumstances. We welcome the suggestion that he will consider the matter closely and sympathetically. That is why the Committee decided that we should not press the new clauses to a vote.

Mr. Bailey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those comments. As a member of the Committee who was not in Belfast, I am glad that by a process of intellectual osmosis I was able to reach the right conclusion.

I welcome the assurances that my hon. Friend the Minister gave in his opening remarks and his constructive engagement with this issue. I accept his genuine desire to find a way forward to overcome some of the legal obstacles. On the basis of that, I thank him and hope that he will take seriously the comments made in the debate and will do everything within his power to address the issues that have been raised.

Norman Baker: I welcome the comments of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey). He put his case with moderation and probably convinced nearly everyone in the Chamber of the validity of his arguments. I also welcome the fact that the Minister has been good enough to say that he believes that there is merit in those arguments and that he will consider them. As the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) said, that is as much as we can expect of a Minister at this stage.

New clause 8 has considerable merits. Liberal Democrat Members support it and my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), our Northern Ireland spokesman, expressed his support when I discussed the matter with him earlier. It seems sensible not to press the new clause to a vote, and I must point out to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), with whom I worked on and off in Committee, that we are working under a guillotine. Therefore, if a Minister says that he will consider a new clause carefully, it is not a sensible use of time to spend 15 minutes in the Division Lobbies, not least because a Division now might persuade Labour to vote the wrong way when we want them to vote the right way after they have had a chance to consider the matter.

One point that I would make in passing about new clause 8 is that it is paramount that, if the safety of an individual is compromised or could be compromised, anonymity should be provided for the individual. Equally, checks and balances must be in place to ensure that the facility for anonymity is not misused. If there is a choice between accountability and safety, safety must come first. Let us make sure that the process is not misused if it i[illegible]roduced.

Another point occurs to me but it probably goes beyond this debate. It is important to ensure proper co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Criminal Assets Bureau in the Republic. If we are to make the Bill work properly, a concordat or a similar measure should be in place to ensure co-operation. Perhaps it takes place already, but Northern Ireland Members will know more about that than I do.

I am sorry to return to the arguments of the hon. Member for Surrey Heath, but it is not fair to criticise the Government for the time that they have allocated to the Bill. Such criticism is not appropriate. They provided 39 steps—if I may call them that—in Committee and a great deal of time. If members of the Committee did not reach the amendments that they wanted to discuss, we should look to ourselves and the way in which we used our time instead of blaming the Government.

I am not particularly convinced that amendments Nos. 67, 66, 167 and 166, which were tabled by Conservative Members, are the appropriate way forward. I am not sure that they make sense. Amendments Nos. 66 and 67 would delete the words "either" and "or at once" in clause 352(4)(a), which is the paragraph that deals with answering questions, but the same words also appear in subsection (4)(c), which covers the production of documents. As far as I can see—I might have misread the amendments—the words are not deleted in that paragraph. Therefore, if the Conservative amendments are approved, there would be no requirement to answer questions at once, but there would be a requirement to produce documents at once. That might be the intention of Conservative Members, but it appears a little inconsistent.

Mr. Hawkins: Answering questions at once is very different from having to produce documents forthwith. Much legislation already contains the requirement to produce documents forthwith, but there is a danger involved in forcing people to answer questions at once without their having any opportunity to take advice. This point also gives me an opportunity to respond to the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), because there is also the danger that the Government may face problems under articles 6(3)[b] and 6(3)[c] of the European convention on human rights when these matters are analysed in the courts.

Norman Baker: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has taken the opportunity to refer to the relevant articles of the convention. Perhaps the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), who knows more about these matters than I do, might wish to vouchsafe whether they are the relevant articles.

If it is inappropriate to require questions to be answered at once, it is even more inappropriate to require documents to be produced at once. After all, one can answer a question after one has received legal advice, and the Minister has referred to the safeguards that he wishes to introduce. I hope that he will provide more information on how the safeguards will work to ensure that people are not unduly forced to provide information if they have not received legal advice. He suggested that he was aware of the issue, and I would be grateful if he could pick up on that point.

A person can theoretically answer a question at once, but they could not necessarily produce a document at once, perhaps because it was elsewhere. In a sense, it is a more onerous requirement. In addition, clause 352(4(b) contains the requirement to

> "produce information specified in the notice, by a time and in a manner so specified".

The time specified could be immediately, so the deletion of the words "or at once" does not get round the problem that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) tried to identify. Unusually, the hon. Gentleman's amendment does not make a great deal of sense and is not coherent. It is not justified if the Minister has the safeguards in mind to which he referred. I shall be grateful if he expands on that.

7 pm

I am not convinced that the requirement to have answers at once, if there are safeguards, would breach the Human Rights Act. I shall be interested to hear whether the hon. Member for Redcar has a view on that. I am keen to invoke the 1998 Act wherever possible. It is good legislation and one of the best things that the Government have done. I am struggling to find a means by which it could be applied in the way that the hon. Member for Surrey Heath would like to see.

Let us allow the Minister to leave the House and think about new clause 8. I am happy, for the sake of appearing not to be too supportive of the Conservatives, to disagree with their amendments in the group that is before us.

John Robertson: I am pleased that new clauses 8 and 9 have been accepted in principle, if not in their entirety. I am glad that I will not have to decide which Lobby to pass through, as it seems that the proposals will not be put to a vote. The Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs should be congratulated on the work that it has done.

I shall move on to amendment No. 63, and I hope that I will be intervened on when I ask my questions. Why do the Tories not want an offence of prejudicing investigation in the context of a civil recovery investigation? It might be said that it is a draconian measure, but draconian to whom—the victims of crime, or those who profit by crime? To me, a draconian measure would suggest that everybody suffers. But the only people who appear to me to be suffering at present are the victims of crime.

I am in a quandary yet again in relation to amendments Nos. 66, 167 and 168, which are basically the same. Those amendments would seem to be advantageous to those who in the director's opinion have information. Why would we not want to gain information, and why would we not want to obtain it quickly? Criminals can move vast sums quickly, so surely we would want to get hold of them immediately. As I mentioned earlier in terms of the Drug Enforcement Agency in Scotland and Strathclyde police, the point was made on several occasions that we must seize assets quickly and, if possible, obtain the relevant information even more quickly. Why are we seeking to introduce measures that would lengthen the time during which we secure information? Perhaps the Opposition's spokesman will answer these questions for me in his summing up.

Mr. Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman will be glad to know that I shall leave the summing up to my Front-Bench spokesman.

[Mr. Mark Field]

It is easy to see these things in black and white, and I think that what we have tried to do throughout is to look at them in shades of grey. The innocent parties who concern the Conservatives and whose interests need to be protected are on the whole—though not exclusively—innocent members of the public who find the juggernaut of a new state agency up against them. It is against the background of the almost Kafkaesque world in which it would seem some Labour Members try to live that we have tabled what we hope are searching amendments. That is not to say that the general thrust of what is being proposed is not supported by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is developing into a speech.

John Robertson: I understand the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's questions, but it is time that the juggernaut to which he refers got to grips with crime. The Conservative Government were in power for a long time but they did not get to grips with it. The Labour Government have been in power for more than four years, and we have not properly come to grips with it. The Bill is the best measure that I have seen to enable us to get hold of criminals and their ill-gotten gains—assets that have been taken from those who have become drug addicts, or from organised crime in large cities or smaller ones. Perhaps we have got to the crux of the matter as regards Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, as I think they call themselves. Perhaps they have become total oppositionists who feel that they have to oppose every Bill that the Government put before the House and to advance reasons for so doing. That is sad.

Mr. Wilshire: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Opposition oppose only for the sake of it, will he explain why it is that when we have opposed certain things those on the Government Front Bench have agreed with us, accepted our opposition and brought forward amendments? Surely that undermines the hon. Gentleman's argument.

John Robertson: There is always the exception that proves the rule.

We listen. We have become a listening Government, much to the annoyance of the Opposition. The fact that we may have listened to some of the arguments and found something worth listening to probably surprises me more than anyone. The fact remains that the Opposition oppose everything that the Government put before the House, and especially this Bill.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments, given that I intervened earlier. I share the concern that has been expressed by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) about dealing with drug addicts and about smuggling in Scotland. The lesson that has been coming through is that the best way to tackle these folk is to hit them where it hurts, and that is through their finances and by dealing with the crimes that they are committing. Like the hon. Gentleman, I do not believe that there is a juggernaut directed against the citizens of the United Kingdom. If anything, it is a juggernaut against those who have been growing rich on the poverty and misery of others in the UK.

I speak as a Northern Ireland Member, but I have always thought of myself as a British Member of Parliament. When Northern Ireland Members illustrate our experience, I regret that it is thought that we are dealing only with Northern Ireland. I understand that recently in Yorkshire there was a vast smuggling expedition, which had an impact on the Treasury. There might have been some people from Ireland, but at this stage I cannot comment emphatically.

The Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs took the opportunity, as the Bill was passing through Parliament, to highlight some gaps. We welcome the fact that the Government are ready to examine these matters. I trust that before the Bill leaves the House, some amendments will be accepted and fine tuned. There is some time to go.

As I have said, some gaps have been noted. For example, people speak of the relationship between Northern Ireland and southern Ireland. In the Northern Ireland courts, recently, we were able to imprison a person who was retailing illegal petrol, but we could not deal with the person in the Republic who supplied it. Why was that? The answer is that in international terms there seems to be no legislation that allows for extradition for fiscal charges.

It seems to me that ultimately all crime comes down to fiscal issues. There is the person in poverty who steals because she wants to feed a child and has not the money to do so. That is a fiscal problem. The Government must consider the issue with their colleagues in the European Union and perhaps elsewhere to ascertain whether something can be done to cross frontiers.

When members of the Select Committee visited the Republic, we discovered that perhaps one of the greatest benefactors of what has been going on possibly lives in the east end of London. It is an interesting world that we live in. Anyone who thinks that the Bill has been introduced simply because of Northern Ireland or, for that matter, the Republic, should think again.

I regret to have to say that in the House some years back, a former Minister in the Northern Ireland Office defended the fact that social security was provided for a person who had a job in this place that he would not take up. He would not take up a job, yet the family was getting social security. Why? Because otherwise some social security staff might have been endangered. That is why the concept of anonymity must be tackled seriously. I urge the Government not just to consider the matter, but to press ahead with the necessary legislative changes before the Bill returns to us in this place.

Vera Baird: I join colleagues who have complimented the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, particularly its Chairman, on the convincing, honest and straightforward way in which the Committee presented its arguments.

I shall deal briefly with amendments Nos. 66 and 67, which would amend clause 352, under which a judge can make a disclosure order which might require someone to answer questions at a time specified in a notice at a place specified in a notice, or at once. I agree with the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) that amendment

No. 66 does not deal with the problem, if problem it be, because even if the words "at once" are removed, as long as one leaves in the power to specify a time and a place in the notice, one can specify the time and place of delivery of the notice, which is the same as "at once".

Mr. Grieve: I am listening carefully to the hon. Lady, but I disagree with her slightly. If the words "at once" were removed, the court would have to infer reasonableness in the way in which the order was defined. I would consider it unreasonable for an immediate demand to be made, when it is clear from the rest of the clause that a time and place to be specified ought to give the person at least time to prepare himself. Removing "at once" removes a mischief.

Vera Baird: I take the hon. Gentleman's point—he does have a point—but bearing in mind the tenor of the power in clause 352, I am less sanguine that the courts would necessarily connote that reasonableness involved the opportunity to delay. That is my concern about the entire clause. Whether the power to order answers at once is express or implied, that difficulty arises. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can help me with that.

I do not believe that there is a breach of the human rights convention and article 6.3. There is no human right not to answer questions. What matters is the use to which the answers are put thereafter. Of course, under clause 49 the director can pass on information which has been obtained by means of those unique powers. That may cause a difficulty, but it is the subject of a later debate.

Mr. Hawkins: Both my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and I are listening carefully to the hon. Lady. Does she recognise that those of us who have practised in the courts are familiar with the many occasions on which the standard police warning—the caution—is given: "You are not obliged to say anything, but anything you say will be taken down and may be used in evidence"? The new procedure has no provision for cautioning. Does the hon. Lady consider that if we leave the words requiring somebody to answer questions at once, without taking any advice at all, there is cause for concern? I appreciate that, in part, she supports us on the matter.

Vera Baird: It is obviously a long time since the hon. Gentleman was in practice, if he thinks that the caution takes that form any more, or has done for the past decade. I do not accept entirely what he says about caution and the absence of a caution from the clause. There are powers in the financial services provisions and in the fraud provision to require answers without the need for caution. The limitation is on what the answers can be used for.

The dilemma is this: whether, at common law—leave out human rights entirely—there ought in all realism to be a right to take legal advice. Even my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) does not imagine that the wealthy criminals whom the Bill attacks keep their lawyers in a box, drinking wine and waiting in case the director should come to call. How will the power to demand answers at once—whether that power is express or, as I suggest it would be, implied—be consistent with giving people their basic right to be advised? The Minister will recall that the matter was raised in Committee, but it was never resolved. That remains my anxiety.

7.15 pm

Mr. Davidson: I do not intend to answer the question, "How many lawyers should fit in a box?"

I shall follow on from the earlier point about the interrelationship between crimes. Just as the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee explored the subject of petrol smuggling in Northern Ireland directly, so indirectly did the Public Accounts Committee. That discussion made clear the extent to which drugs, petrol smuggling and other crimes were all tied in together and all involved money laundering. Interestingly, it also showed how the outwardly respectable are clearly involved in illegal activities.

In the case of petrol smuggling, there is no doubt that the large oil companies are major players in the field. They supply enormous amounts of fuel to petrol stations just over the border in the Republic, knowing that such quantities of fuel will not be consumed in the immediate area. They are, so to speak, fuelling the smuggling trade by providing enormous quantities to those who they know, or ought to know, are using it for illegal purposes, in the same way as the tobacco companies collaborated in smuggling in various locations.

The words "at once" are an important element of the clause, in terms of providing both documents and answers, but particularly documents. Over the years, I have been surprised by the number of businesses in trouble which have fires in their offices. That is obviously entirely coincidental and nothing whatever to do with any suggestion of malpractice, but if the police or other authorities have an interest in documents, it is clearly important that they are produced at once, before they spontaneously combust.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman may have been temporarily absent when it was made clear that we have not sought to amend the provisions of the Bill in relation to documents. The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) said that to be consistent, we ought to have done so, and we pointed out in response that there is a difference. It is perfectly well understood in the law that one must produce documents at once. Our amendment seeks to avoid the obligation to answer questions at once.

Mr. Davidson: I was sure that even the Conservatives would not have the gall to suggest that documents should not be provided at once in the circumstances, even though, from their conduct in the Committee, it seemed possible that we were moving in that direction. All the parties represented in the Chamber, with the nationalists, who were not on the Committee, will be aware of the approach that the Conservatives generally took.

I return to the matter of providing verbal answers at once. I have a difficulty with the prospect of people being tipped off that the authorities want to investigate some matter, and preparing an alibi and the lies that they will tell. That is as true of lawyers, accountants and bankers as of anyone else. There should be a provision for answers to be demanded at once. I fear that to delete such a provision would in some circumstances be to draw the teeth of the legislation. I accept that, if possible, it would be better to allow people time to prepare and to lift their lawyers, who may or may not have been drinking wine, out of the box, but there will be circumstances in which that is not in the public interest. The provision should be

[Mr. Davidson]

allowed to remain as it stands, the better to protect the people whom many of my colleagues and I represent, rather than the crooks and shysters for whom the Opposition want to find loopholes.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I shall be brief. I am not seeking to offend anyone, but as the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) read his prepared script and appeared not to have listened to any of my comments on the amendments, I do not see any reason why I should say the same things again. The hon. Gentleman asked whether recorders were covered. That is precisely what was sought in Committee; they are covered, so they will be available and able to help.

We discussed the term "at once" in Committee and I accept that it is exercising people. I do not want to go into detail on what the guidance will cover; indeed, I do not think that I can do so. The guidance that we envisage in new clauses 4 and 12 is designed to deal with the concerns raised in the amendments. That is our purpose and intention. It is not our intention to override people's rights to representation. However, some hon. Members appear to be encouraging me to preclude the ability to question people at once. Such questioning can be a very useful tool and I want to try to leave it available for use in appropriate circumstances, but yes, I also want to make certain that people have the right to advice, representation and the rest. Those are exactly the issues that I shall seek to cover in the code.

Mr. Grieve: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment; I notice that his hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), who raised concerns in that regard, is temporarily out of his seat. Disclosure orders cannot lead to criminal proceedings, so some of his comments were unnecessary and uncalled for.

Mr. Grieve: Clearly, the code of practice has the potential to be very helpful. However, if, as I think is likely, the code says that somebody who is required to answer questions should be given time—it may not be very long; even half an hour might be specified—to understand and check their legal position, will not that be the most compelling of reasons to remove from the Bill the extraordinary two words, "at once"? The term is simply unnecessary and imposes a fetter through its insistence on immediate replies—an insistence that could turn out to be incompatible with the guidelines that I suspect may be produced.

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall try to satisfy the hon. Gentleman at some point during the Bill's passage that the sort of issues that he raises are unreasonable and unacceptable, and that we will seek to cover such concerns in other ways. I do not want to preclude in all circumstances the ability to require somebody to give information at once, and I shall try to avoid doing so.

John Robertson: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in half an hour, millions, if not billions, of pounds could move between one country and another? Should not such matters be dealt with immediately, and not in half an hour's time?

Mr. Ainsworth: I agree with my hon. Friend that such events can occur. However, it is not reasonable to demand information there and then in all circumstances without access to advice and all the rest of it. None the less, my hon. Friend raises a genuine issue and we will try to cover it.

On the issue raised by members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, I am trying to get the balance right. I do not want to indicate that this is a done deal or that I can satisfy them completely. I hope that I have explained that there are considerable hurdles, while impressing upon them that I am not attempting to fob them off in any way; that I recognise the issues; and that I shall do my level best to ensure that we can do something that is effective if that is in any way possible. I am trying to get the balance right: I do not want those hon. Members to walk out of the Chamber thinking "We're okay, we've done it; there aren't any problems", but neither do I want them to walk away with the opposite view. I am trying genuinely to say that I do not want my officials or anybody else to think that this is not a serious issue that wants serious examination. If we can find ways and means of giving such useful protections, we should seek to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 12

CODE OF PRACTICE (NO. 2)

'(1) The Scottish Ministers must prepare a code of practice as to the exercise by proper persons of functions they have under this Chapter.

(2) After preparing a draft of the code the Scottish Ministers—

(a) must publish the draft;

(b) must consider any representations made to them about the draft;

(c) may amend the draft accordingly.

(3) After the Scottish Ministers have proceeded under subsection (2) they must lay the code before the Scottish Parliament.

(4) When they have done so, the Scottish Ministers may bring the code into operation on such day as they may appoint by order.

(5) A proper person must comply with a code of practice which is in operation under this section in the exercise of any function he has under this Chapter.

(6) If a proper person fails to comply with any provision of a code of practice issued under this section he is not by reason only of that failure liable in any criminal or civil proceedings.

(7) But the code of practice is admissible in evidence in such proceedings and a court may take account of any failure to comply with its provisions in determining any questions in the proceedings.

(8) The Scottish Ministers may from time to time revise a code previously brought into operation under this section; and the preceding provisions of this section apply to a revised code as they apply to the code as first prepared.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 14

PERFORMANCE OF FUNCTIONS OF SCOTTISH MINISTERS BY CONSTABLES IN SCOTLAND (NO. 2)

'(1) In Scotland, a constable engaged in temporary service with the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Part may perform functions, other than those specified in subsection (2), on behalf of the Scottish Ministers.

(2) The specified functions are the functions conferred on the Scottish Ministers by—

(a) section 373(1) (production orders),

(b) section 375(2) (entry orders),

(c) section 379(4) (supplementary to production and entry orders),

(d) section 380(1) (search warrants),

(e) section 384(1) (disclosure orders),

(f) section 389(4) (supplementary to disclosure orders),

(g) section 390(1) (customer information orders),

(h) section 396(4) (supplementary to customer information orders),

(i) section 397(1) (account monitoring orders),

(j) section 401(4) (supplementary to account monitoring orders).'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 338

JUDGES

Amendment made: No. 108, in page 198, line 17, leave out "Circuit judge" and insert—

'judge entitled to exercise the jurisdiction of the Crown Court'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 343

FURTHER PROVISIONS

Amendments made: No. 64, in page 200, line 3, leave out from first "material" to end of line 4.

No. 109, in page 200, line 8, leave out subsection (3).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 349

FURTHER PROVISIONS: GENERAL

Amendments made: No. 65, in page 204, line 17, leave out from first "material" to end of line 18.

No. 110, in page 204, line 22, leave out subsection (3).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Clause 352

DISCLOSURE ORDERS

Amendment proposed: No. 66, in page 206, line 11, leave out "or at once".—*[Mr. Hawkins.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 124, Noes 318.

Division No. 173] **[7.27 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Hoban, Mark
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin

Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ewing, Annabelle
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Keith
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We seek your ruling on an incident that has just happened, in which the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) entered the Division Lobby after the doors had been closed, by going past the Tellers. I understand that he was not counted in the vote, but could you perhaps inform the House that it is not allowable for anyone to enter the Lobby by any means after the doors have been closed, and that hon. Members should be aware of that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) for having come to the Chair to confess his sin. He made an error that should not be perpetrated by hon. Members, and I assure the House that his name has not been counted in the tally that we have just heard, and that it will not be shown in the record of the vote.

Clause 356

FURTHER PROVISIONS

Amendment made: No. 111, in page 207, line 42, leave out subsection (5).—*[Mr. Foulkes.]*

Clause 370

CONFISCATION AND MONEY LAUNDERING

Amendments made: No. 98, in page 214, line 10, leave out subsection (1).

No. 99, in page 214, line 28, at end insert—

'(8) This section does not apply to orders made in England and Wales for the purposes of a civil recovery investigation.'.—*[Mr. Foulkes.]*

Clause 376

FURTHER PROVISIONS

Amendment made: No. 165, in page 217, line 9, leave out from "privilege" to end of line 10.—*[Mr. Foulkes.]*

Clause 408

MODIFICATIONS OF THE 1986 ACT

Amendment made: No. 100, in page 233, line 26, leave out paragraph (c) and insert—

> '(c) any property in respect of which an order under section 131(3) is in force;'.—*[Mr. Foulkes.]*

New Clause 10

RESTRICTION ON DISCLOSURE FOR OVERSEAS PURPOSES
(No. 2)

'(1) Section 18 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (restrictions on disclosure of information for overseas purposes) applies to a disclosure of information authorised by section 429(1)(a) or (b) or 433(1)(a) or (b).

(2) In the application of section 18 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 by virtue of subsection (1) section 20 of that Act must be ignored and the following subsection is substituted for subsection (2) of section 18 of that Act—

"(2) In subsection (1) the reference, in relation to a direction, to a relevant disclosure is a reference to a disclosure which—

> (a) is made for a purpose authorised by section 429(1)(a) or (b) or 433(1)(a) or (b) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, and
>
> (b) is of any such information as is described in the direction.".'.—*[Mr. Foulkes.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Foulkes: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 69, in clause 429, page 249, line 37, leave out paragraph (a).

Amendment No. 70, in page 249, line 39, leave out paragraph (b).

Government amendments Nos. 237 to 250, 252 and 254.

Mr. Foulkes: I am pleased to be at the Dispatch Box, even at this late hour. I was beginning to feel a bit redundant—almost superfluous, even a supernumerary. However, I am glad that I now have the opportunity to move new clause 10.

New clause 10 would bring the powers in clauses 429 and 433 to disclose information for the purposes of an overseas criminal investigation or overseas criminal proceedings within the scope of section 18 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. Section 18 of that Act provides power for the Secretary of State to issue a direction to restrict disclosure of information for overseas purposes. The power may be exercised when it appears to the Secretary of State that the overseas investigation or proceeding relates to a matter in which it would be more appropriate for any investigation to be carried out by the authorities of the United Kingdom or a third country.

We believe that if the Secretary of State makes such a direction in respect of the bodies covered by the 2001 Act, the restriction should also apply to the director, the Lord Advocate or the Scottish Ministers when they make a disclosure in relation to overseas criminal investigations and proceedings. It would not be consistent to allow for such a disclosure to be made under the Bill, when other bodies might be prevented from disclosing information.

The new clause specifically provides that section 18 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act applies to disclosures by the director under clause 429(1)(a) or (b) and clause 433(1)(a) or (b).

I now come to Opposition amendments Nos. 69 and 70.

Mr. Wilshire: Very good!

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman, who migrates between being a Whip, a Back Bencher and a Parliamentary Private Secretary—he is a multi-purpose Tory Member—says that the amendments are very good.

Mr. Wilshire: Having given me three roles, would the Minister care to tell the House which one I am best at?

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, I would. I think that he is probably best as a Back Bencher.

Mr. Carmichael: He has a better future as a Back Bencher.

Mr. Foulkes: Indeed he does. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), as I was in Committee, for giving me the opportunity to respond more effectively.

Clause 429(1) sets out the purposes for which the director may disclose information. Amendments Nos. 69 and 70 would delete the paragraphs that would allow the disclosure of information for the purposes of a criminal investigation or for criminal proceedings, whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

When we discussed this issue in Committee, the concern was that clause 429(1)(a) and (b) would mean an increase in the powers of the law enforcement authorities, in particular that they could be passed information obtained under powers that were not available to them but were available to the director. I recall that debate, as I am sure that the hon. Member for Spelthorne and others do. We said in Committee that we would reflect further on whether this concern was covered by the judicial approval that is required for the exercise of the director's powers.

7.45 pm

I can now tell the House that we are not convinced that there is the scope for abuse suggested in Committee, in terms of cases being referred to the director with the intention of the director using his powers for the benefit of the law enforcement agencies. There will be memorandums of understanding about the cases to be taken on by the director, and any abuse of the powers would soon become evident. The director can only act within his powers, so he can seek the part 8 orders only to help with the exercise of his functions. All these orders are subject to judicial oversight—an extra safeguard—and it is very unlikely that an order would be granted if it were sought for the wrong reason.

We certainly do not agree that the director should be prevented from disclosing any information for the purposes of a criminal investigation or proceedings, which would be the effect of the amendments. That would prevent the passing of information obtained through means unavailable to the law enforcement agencies, which seems unnecessary. But—having, perhaps, been unhelpful to Conservative Members on that matter—we accept that there is concern that, under the Bill as it stands, information obtained by the director under a disclosure order could be disclosed to the law enforcement authorities.

The disclosure order is a particularly far-reaching power; it is granted to the director alone, solely for use in confiscation and civil recovery investigations. We accept that there is an issue with the idea that information that the law enforcement authorities could not have obtained through the exercise of their own powers might be made available to them through disclosure by the director. We therefore propose that restrictions should be placed on the disclosure of information that the director has obtained under a disclosure order, so that it could not be disclosed for the purposes at clause 429(1)(a) and (b). I can tell the Conservative spokesman that we will consider further whether such information obtained under a disclosure order should still be disclosed for the other purposes set out at clause 429(1).

It has not been possible in the time between Committee and Report to table an amendment to achieve this. We need, for example, to ensure that any amendment takes account of the limited uses to which information disclosed in a disclosure order can be put in criminal cases by virtue of the provisions of part 8 of the Bill. But I can assure hon. Members that we intend to table such an amendment in another place. I hope, in the light of that, that hon. Members will not press amendments Nos. 69 and 70 to a vote.

Amendments Nos. 237 to 250, 252 and 254 all relate to how the information disclosure provisions in part 10 will operate in Scotland. I shall start with amendment No. 237 as it stands. *[Laughter.]* I am sorry. I was slightly distracted then. I was about to say that I was pleased to see the three hon. Members from the Scottish National party here today, as we did not see them in Committee.

Mr. Weir: I am sorry that the Minister has interrupted his speech to make such a cheap shot, but I am not at all surprised. This just proves that he was quite correct to predict his redundancy at the start of his speech.

Mr. Foulkes: How shall I respond to that? I think that I shall ignore it.

I return to amendment No. 237, and this time I shall get it right. As it stands, clause 430 provides for the exchange of information between the Lord Advocate and the Scottish Ministers in connection with their respective functions under parts 3 and 5 of the Bill. However, clause 433 already provides that the Lord Advocate and the Scottish Ministers may disclose information to each other for the purposes of their functions under parts 3 and 5. As most of clause 430 is already covered by clause 433, our intention is to delete clause 430 and amendment No. 237 would achieve that.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. We have some sympathy with the complexity of the Minister's brief, but what just happened to him reminds me of the newsreader who announced, "The time is 7 pm Greenwich. Meantime, here is the news."

Mr. Foulkes: I am sure that I will find another, more appropriate occasion to use that.

There is only one aspect that is not currently covered by clause 433. Clause 430 provides that the Lord Advocate can disclose to the Scottish Ministers information that he has obtained in connection with the exercise of his functions under chapter 3 of part 5 of the Bill. That chapter deals with the recovery of cash and that the procurator fiscal has a role in the initial detention of the cash. If there is not to be a criminal prosecution, the matter passes to the Scottish Ministers to consider forfeiture. It is clearly important that any information the Lord Advocate has obtained in the first stages of the cash seizure be disclosed to the Scottish Ministers so that they can consider forfeiture. Amendment No. 243 therefore adds an appropriate reference to clause 433.

Amendments Nos. 238. 240 to 242, 244 and 245, are purely drafting amendments. I could explain what each of them does, but in view of the time that would not be sensible.

After the intervention by the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) about Sewel motions, I suddenly realised why yesterday's exchange was so unfruitful. The hon.

Gentleman completely misunderstands the nature of Sewel motions. He seems to think that once a Sewel motion is passed, and the Scottish Parliament knows what is in the draft Bill that is agreed on Second Reading, that is that, and there can be no further changes and that once it has been approved by the Scottish Parliament, a Bill is immutable.

Surely the whole purpose of a Sewel motion is to return to Westminster the power to legislate on devolved areas. That implies that when provisions are considered in Committee and on Report, particularly in relation to Scottish matters, amendments can be considered and, if necessary, agreed to. That is inherent in the nature of the exercise.

Mr. Carmichael: I understand the Minister's analysis of Sewel motions. Does he agree, however, that the process raises some difficulties, particularly in view of the consequences? It is important that we should not be left with unamended and improperly considered legislation. Of course amendments should be made in Committee, but that raises difficulties. Will the Minister return to the point that we need some mechanism whereby we can have proper dialogue between parliamentary scrutiny here and the Executive functions in Edinburgh?

Mr. Foulkes: I agree. Of course there needs to be dialogue. I was saying simply that we need the flexibility to consider amendments in Committee and on Report.

Mr. Weir: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Foulkes: I am still replying to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael).

After yesterday's exchange, I discussed the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We are looking again at the way in which Sewel motions work, we shall discuss it with the Scottish Executive and no doubt we shall have an opportunity to report back to the House. I hope that that will be helpful.

Mr. Weir: I thank the Minister for giving way, but I think that it is he who misunderstood the point. If he reads the minutes of the meeting of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs last November when we discussed the matter in great detail, he will find that I made the same point that I repeated yesterday—that if there are substantial amendments, the Bill should go back to the Scottish Parliament. The Minister agreed with me in November. I asked him yesterday when he had changed his mind and he still has not answered that question. What he is saying today does not change anything. I never argued that Westminster could not change legislation, but whether major changes should go back to the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman is a nitpicker even when there are no nits to pick—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister gave the hon. Gentleman the opportunity to pick the nit.

Mr. Foulkes: You are absolutely right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall take your advice and be very careful in future.

I have answered the hon. Gentleman's question on two previous occasions. It does not need to be answered a third time. I am glad that I made my positive and substantive points in response to a Liberal Democrat Member rather than to one of these awful interventions from the SNP.

I invite hon. Members not to press amendments Nos. 69 and 70 in view of my explanation and support new clause 10 and amendments Nos. 237 to 250, 252 and 254.

Mr. Grieve: I greatly welcome the Minister's remarks about our amendments Nos. 69 and 70 to which I shall return in a moment. I also welcome new clause 10, which provides a measure of definition about what can be disclosed for overseas purposes on a subject which caused quite a lot of anxiety in Committee, as the Minister will recollect.

Reading the particular clause of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, I am not entirely persuaded that it lays down any criteria about the danger of an exchange of information in the circumstances that we discussed in Committee, where it might be used for purposes that were highly prejudicial to the individual concerned and where, for instance, the right to a fair trial might not be obtainable. I hope that the Minister understands my point. That may be something that can properly be the subject of guidelines and codes of practice.

I also appreciate that it is difficult for Parliament to legislate a framework that will stand the test of time. Some countries might slip in and out of the levels of acceptability that we would expect in terms of their judicial procedures, for instance, but I hope that the Minister will take on board that there is a legitimate area of anxiety that in exchanging information the director must have regard to the rights of the individual whose confidential information he is handing over to a foreign authority.

Of course, in the desire to seize assets that is a perfectly acceptable activity, but it will not become so, and the whole framework will be brought into disrepute, if there is any suggestion that that information is not really being used for a legitimate purpose but, potentially, to persecute the individual in terms of his private wealth and finances in that country. This is a serious problem and one to which the director will have to be alive. I raise it because amendments Nos. 69 and 70 would have prevented disclosure to a foreign power in terms of criminal investigations elsewhere so it dovetails slightly with Government new clause 10. The two issues are linked and have been correctly grouped by the Clerk.

I certainly will not press amendments Nos. 69 and 70 as the Minister has given some important assurances which I shall not repeat. He has clearly completely understood the point that was made in Committee that we are giving the director substantial powers, which in many respects appear much wider than those of any ordinary law enforcement agency. The purpose of that—as the Minister rightly said—is to seize the proceeds of crime, not to prosecute people. If a situation arises in which that information is handed over to another Government law enforcement agency for the purpose of prosecution, where that information would not have been available to it under its ordinary powers, there is an important issue.

8 pm

Although I accept the Minister's point that the way in which the legislation is framed could not make the director the poodle of that other law enforcement agency—because the director's powers are circumscribed to the obtaining of information for his own purposes; nevertheless it is likely that in the course of obtaining information for his purposes the ARA could obtain information that might be used for the purposes of a criminal prosecution.

I realise that that raises a difficult issue. It is legitimate for people to say that if the information shows the commission of serious crime and if it could be useful for the prosecution of an offender, it should be used—no matter how it was obtained. However, that gives rise to an important point. In those circumstances, is it proper to hand over information when Parliament has not seen fit to provide similar powers to the law enforcement agency—which is likely to be the police or the Customs—in the course of the agency's own inquiries? The guidelines will have to be considered carefully and amendments may have to be made in another place. However, mindful of the Minister's assurance, I shall not press the amendments to a vote.

Mr. Carmichael: I warmly welcome the assurances given by the Minister on the use of disclosure orders. Those provisions are especially draconian and in the case of such powers it is incumbent on the state agencies charged with their execution to do so with every care. It is also incumbent on us to circumscribe as far as possible the manner in which such powers are executed. I look forward to hearing from the Minister the restrictions that he proposes and the manner in which he envisages that they will be carried out.

I also welcome the hon. Gentleman's remarks about Sewel motions. With the indulgence of the Chair, those points might be developed at slightly greater length during Third Reading, which is nearly upon us.

Mr. Davidson: I want to raise a couple of points. The first relates to the passage of information to foreign regimes. There must be a balance. We need to bear in mind the fact that some foreign jurisdictions are deeply corrupt and thus cause major difficulties for people who want to combat international drug dealing and money laundering. On the other hand, we must avoid giving guilty people the opportunity of playing off one regime against another by making civil or human rights arguments. I hope that any guidelines will reflect that.

Secondly, will the Minister clarify whether the effect of the Conservative amendments Nos. 69 and 70 would be to stop any information at all—not merely that under disclosure orders—being passed to the authorities? If a person had confessed to a range of offences, including murder or arson, could that information be passed to the appropriate police or judicial authorities? It would not be the case that none of it was "handable overable"—if I may use that made-up phrase—*[Interruption.]* I think it is a good one.

There was an interesting discussion of Sewel motions. Did the Minister—as I did—interpret the interventions of Scottish Nationalist Members as an excuse? Thus, although we originally thought that sloth and idleness had prevented them from attending the Committee debates, in fact they did not attend because they thought that they would have the chance to deal with these matters in the Scottish Parliament. As the provisions are extremely tough, presumably any intervention hon. Members would have made would have weakened them and would have been much to be deplored.

Mr. Foulkes: The debate has been interesting. We are grateful to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), who spoke for the official Opposition, for his welcome. It was indicative of the way that the Bill was dealt with in Committee and on Report. As many hon. Members have said, there has been to-ing and fro-ing. I have not served on a Standing Committee for a long time—

Mr. Wilshire: That is obvious.

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, it is very obvious. When I was last a member of a Standing Committee, a different Government were in power and we were not given nearly as many concessions or nearly as much sympathy and understanding. We shall of course take note of the points made by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield and return to them at a later stage.

We always take into account the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson). I hope that he understands that we need to exchange information to comply with our international obligations. That is clear from the framework of those obligations to which we are a signatory. We shall bear it in mind that although the disclosure of information to certain regimes would not be appropriate, it would be in the case of democratic Governments with whom we have ordinary and good relations.

The debate has been a good one. I am glad that we were able to get to it and that we could participate so fully. As has been said on several occasions, we are deeply delighted that those SNP Members who were unable—

It being four and a quarter hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [26 February], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 447

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

Amendment proposed: No. 229, in page 258, line 29, leave out "or 431(6)" and insert ", 431(6) or 446".—*[Mr. Salmond.]*

The House divided: Ayes 172, Noes 262.

Division No. 174] **[8.8 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alistair Carmichael and Pete Wishart.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil

Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

Question accordingly negatived.

Remaining Government amendments agreed to.

New Clause 6

ENACTMENT

'In this Act (except in section 448(1)) a reference to an enactment includes a reference to—

(a) an Act of the Scottish Parliament;

(b) Northern Ireland legislation.'.—*[Mr. Bob Ainsworth.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Order for Third Reading read.

8.22 pm

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

As I did not have the opportunity to say the usual words at the end of the Committee stage for reasons that are understood—we can blame nothing but the system—I should like to record my thanks to a few people at the start of the Third Reading debate. This is the first Bill for which I have had responsibility and it has been like jumping in at the deep end. I want to thank my hon. Friends for their considerable support in Committee. The outrider, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), was ever reminding me of the need for these measures and tried to ensure that I did not go soft or make them ineffective. I also thank my other hon. Friends who have considerable legal experience and brought their expertise to the Committee.

I genuinely thank both the Opposition parties that were represented in Committee for the way in which they handled matters. We have had our differences, which I will touch on briefly, but we gave the Bill proper scrutiny and have made a number of amendments. I am enormously grateful for their work and effort. I know how hard it is to do so from the Opposition Benches and the amount of time and effort needed to give such a measure proper scrutiny. I thank my officials and the officials of the House as well.

I should like to remind the House of the need for the Bill. The Bill is about crime. Catching criminals and putting them away is not enough—if crime is profitable, they are quickly replaced. Unless hon. Members are content to allow that situation to continue, they must support effective measures to remove the profit from crime. Recovering the money deprives crime of its working capital, increases the deterrent by taking the profit away and addresses the lack of public confidence in the rule of law.

It is to everyone's detriment that over the years this country has been lacking in terms of recovering the proceeds of crime. The majority of offenders go through the criminal justice system with little or no attempt made to apply confiscation. Only 1,200 drug traffickers and fewer than 200 other offenders had confiscation orders made against them in 2000-01. Enforcement of confiscation orders is poor. In the same year, orders to the value of £50 million were made and receipts were only

£20 million. Restraint is rarely used—about 250 orders per annum were made. It is not available early enough, so prosecutors often wonder what on earth is the point as the money will have disappeared.

In the absence of criminal proceedings, there is no means of challenging the possession of criminal assets, no matter how blatant or powerful the evidence. The 1999 survey of law enforcement agencies showed that £440 million of suspect assets was held by 400 individuals. If that is evenly distributed, we effectively have 400 criminal millionaires living in our midst.

Much organised crime is still based on cash. The police are often unable to intervene when they can identify suspect cash being carried or on premises. The seizure of such cash and its forfeiture in summary civil proceedings can have a major disruptive impact. That measure is currently not available other than at borders.

Financial investigators need more help to trace criminal proceeds and gather evidence. Customer information orders and monitoring orders will help us to even the odds in the fight that we need to carry to the criminal fraternity.

Money-laundering regulations offer unnecessary loopholes. Defendants are hardly ever prosecuted and even when they are, acquittal rates are well above the average for many countries in similar situations.

There is continuing evidence of slackness in the reporting of suspect transactions. Last year's report to the Financial Services Authority on the Abacha case proves the point. The UK cannot comply with a request to freeze criminal assets until criminal proceedings are imminent in the requesting jurisdiction. That factor impeded the UK's ability to assist the Nigerian Government in the Abacha case.

Because of the powers that we are taking, we have tried to ensure that we have given sufficient concessions and safeguards. I believe that the Bill is now effective and balanced. We gave a commitment this evening to look at protecting the anonymity of staff in the Assets Recovery Agency in appropriate circumstances, as proposed by the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. It will not necessarily be easy, but it is worth examining the matter seriously.

I was surprised by the position taken by Conservatives Members, and I continue to be so. I was convinced that the Liberal Democrats would adopt the position that they did indeed adopt, but I was surprised at the position of Conservative Members, which perhaps goes to show that naivety can continue well into one's forties—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about myself.

I entered into our consideration of the Bill believing that the main thrust of the Conservative Opposition would be that it is not as effective as it should be and that some measures should be strengthened. I was therefore surprised by the tabling in Committee of substantive amendments that would have weakened the Bill. *[Interruption.]* I happily acknowledge that some of the proposals that were made in Committee were useful and potentially make the Bill more effective, easier for us to pass into law and more compliant with the European convention on human rights. However, others would have punched great holes in our confiscation and assumptions proceedings. Measures in existing legislation that were enacted when the Conservative party was in power were suddenly considered to be too draconian and in need of watering down.

In response to debate, we have undertaken to insert the proposed list of lifestyle crimes into the Bill, retaining the power to update it from time to time by order. For unlisted offences, the Bill raises the number of convictions that are required before the burden is placed on the defendant to show how his assets are not the proceeds of crime. We are retaining the serious risk of injustice proviso—the measure to which the House of Lords attached such great importance in rejecting last month's appeal on the Rezvi and Benjafield cases.

Mr. Davidson: I thank the Minister for saying that, like many of us, he was surprised by how soft the Conservatives appeared to be on collaborators with crime. They consistently sought to weaken the Bill in various ways and threatened to try to get measures reversed in the House of Lords. Does my hon. Friend welcome the fact that the Opposition Front-Bench boss has now arrived, hopefully to keep the apprentices in order and to ensure that they support the Government more fully in future? Does he think that the shadow Home Secretary was probably unaware that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) was descended from sheep and cattle thieves and therefore had a domestic interest in the matter?

Mr. Ainsworth: More importantly, the shadow Home Secretary was fully aware of the position that was taken by Conservative Members on the Committee on behalf of their party, and is therefore largely responsible for it. My lips are sealed about the source of that information, and will remain so until such time as I come to write my memoirs, if I ever do. It is all part of the touchy-feely operation that the hon. Gentleman is putting in place on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am most grateful to the Minister for his charming efforts to introduce me into the conversation. I hope that he can satisfy himself that he was not unduly naive. He is merely wholly misinformed about the view taken by myself and my hon. Friends about the role of a responsible Opposition. We believe that the only way in which the rule of law will be preserved is if people have sufficient confidence in our legal system, and that that will exist only if there is an appropriate balance between the rights and the protection of the innocent and the pursuit of the guilty. The Minister and I should be joined in that view.

Mr. Ainsworth: I totally agree. That is exactly what we tried to achieve through the way in which we managed the Committee proceedings and listened to the genuine concerns that were raised by Conservative Members and Liberal Democrats.

I remind the shadow Home Secretary that there are two classes of innocents. First, there are those who wind up being accused of crimes that they did not commit or who face having profits taken from them which are not the proceeds of crime. Secondly, there are the victims in our constituencies who wind up living with the consequences of money laundering, drug peddling and other organised crimes and the profits that flow from them. I sometimes feel that Conservative Members want to give that a lower priority than do I and my hon. Friends.

I do not want to prolong the debate or to prevent any hon. Members from having an input into Third Reading. I could go through different parts of the Bill to point out

[Mr. Ainsworth]

the need for the measures that are being taken and to show how we have tried to ensure that they are balanced and proportionate. We have heard the views of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, some of which did not take into account the full balance of the issues concerned. For example, it was prepared to come down against aspects of the assumptions proceedings without fully considering the safeguards that the Bill provides. It suggested, without the support of recent case law, that the provisions on civil recovery are wrongly classified.

We have safeguarded the traditional position of the matrimonial home in Scotland, leaving ourselves open to allegations about the regime in England and Wales. That issue was flagged up by the Human Rights Committee. However, it did not properly address the fact—it will have to do so—that the provision deals with the position of families who find themselves in danger of potential action against their matrimonial home as a result of measures against the proceeds of crime. Families may often find themselves in that situation during the normal course of their lives owing to debts or loss of work.

I shall draw my conclusions to a close. I hope that we have sent the Bill to another place in a better state. I am pleased that we received so much support for many of its provisions. I sincerely hope that we can all look back many years from now with a degree of satisfaction that the measures have been effective and have made a difference. In Committee we looked back at comments made by Home Office Ministers of many years ago about the effectiveness of the measures that they were introducing. In many cases, we have had years of experience of seeing that they have not been effective. We bring our democratic process into disrepute if we introduce measures that promise effective action on things that are important to the people we represent which are not capable of delivering the change that is expected. I hope that we have made the Bill sufficiently effective so that it makes a difference and so that we can be pleased with our role in bringing it into effect.

8.38 pm

Mr. Grieve: I echo the thanks extended by the Minister. I had a brief opportunity in Committee to thank the officials of the House and the civil servants who helped us, but I should like to repeat that tonight and in addition thank all hon. Members who participated in the Committee, not just my hon. Friends. I was mindful that throughout the proceedings the Minister and the Minister of State, Scotland Office, went to a great deal of trouble to ensure that our concerns were properly addressed and, if they were thought to be legitimate, acted on. Above all, there was the spirit of co-operation that I had hoped for when I said on Second Reading that our conduct in Committee might be a model of its kind. I am aware that we did not always get things right—certainly the guillotine sometimes came down at the wrong time—but there was an effort to ensure proper scrutiny. I hope that the Bill has been improved as a consequence.

I assure the Minister that we are at one on the key issues. We know why the Bill is needed. We understand the pernicious problem of criminality which, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has made clear many times, affects the poor much more than the wealthy. It destroys communities, especially in respect of drugs, and the most disadvantaged are usually at a greater risk of the predatory activities of those who make money from crime. We are mindful of that and have no hesitation in believing that the Bill is necessary and desirable. Indeed, as the Minister acknowledged, the genesis of many of the measures that we have considered was under Conservative Governments.

It is equally clear that during our deliberations on this enormous Bill, which now stands at 450 clauses, we changed what had been an add-on to the normal criminal justice system into an administrative law system for the confiscation of criminals' assets. At no time should an Opposition be more resolute in its defence of civil liberties and the rights of the individual than when the state takes upon itself, for whatever good reason, such enormous extra powers. I make no apology for the fact that in Committee we spent our time probing, asking and trying to understand what the Bill's consequences might be in practice, and making suggestions when we thought that it could be improved.

I disagree entirely with the Minister on one thing: the Bill's efficacy in seizing the assets of criminals would not have been reduced one iota had he accepted the amendments that we pressed to a Division. He might care to reflect on that if he re-reads the amendments. I am prepared to concede, however, that if the Bill is properly administered—for which the Executive and the director of the Assets Recovery Agency will have a great responsibility—some of the fears that are reflected in our amendments may not be realised. I distinctly hope that they will not be. We have tried to ensure throughout the process that the framework provides a balance between the desire to seize assets and the civil rights of individuals, not just those from whom the assets are to be seized, but the third parties, be they spouses, children, partners, business associates or, in some cases, innocent bystanders who are caught by the procedures.

The Bill has undoubtedly been improved. I thank the Minister for the amendments tabled on Report. They ensure that the problem of legal professional privilege, which was overlooked in some parts of the Bill, has been properly addressed. The restrictions on disclosure of information to foreign Governments, which the Minister has undertaken to consider further, are important because some Governments have mixed motives when they decide to pursue individuals for assets and do not have the standards of probity that we enjoy in this country. The provisions on confiscation increase the duties of the director to provide information in cases of injustice. That went a long way to meeting many of our concerns in Committee.

That said, anxieties remain and the Minister will forgive me if I highlight them as a reminder. We need to be sure that part 2 offers adequate protection to prevent injustice. The lack of safeguards in respect of families, spouses and children pains me, and the amendments that we tabled yesterday in that regard were modest. A similar system exists in Scotland, and Scottish MPs—even those on the Government Benches—have made no attempt to gainsay it or to get rid of it, which suggests that it provides good protection. I hope that, even at this late stage, that issue might be reviewed in another place. The law can be very hard, and tempering such harshness is one of our responsibilities as parliamentarians.

I am also concerned about compensation. I heard what the Minister had to say on that, but because compensation will be available only in cases of serious default, and not of negligent default, those who are wrongly taken through a process and subsequently found blameless will be obstructed in their efforts to recover any resulting consequential losses. Perhaps that issue should be examined further.

On civil recovery, we need to consider compensation for third parties in respect of the actions of receivers. I find it difficult to understand why we cannot require the director, before initiating proceedings, to have reasonable grounds for believing that there are assets to be recovered. It has struck me throughout that that modest measure would provide reassurance and remind the director of his duty. Is it not the responsibility of Members of Parliament to remind those who execute its authority of where their duty lies? If we do not do that, nobody else will.

Although the part of the Bill that deals with money laundering is undoubtedly one of the most important—indeed, I hope that it will reap great dividends—onerous duties and requirements are, as the Minister knows, nevertheless being placed on law-abiding and blameless individuals who seek through their work in the financial and regulated sector to help others in a perfectly proper way. I am sure that they will wish to shoulder those burdens cheerfully, but it is sometimes difficult to do that when a sword of Damocles is hanging over one's head, and one slip after a bad night—however innocuous or innocent—could lead to a five-year prison sentence. That is one aspect of the Bill that has given me particular cause for concern.

On the part of the Bill dealing with international matters, it is absolutely vital, as I have said, that the system of co-operation be transparent. First, the House must be aware of what is being done, which gives rise to the question of affirmative and negative resolutions—we did not have time to discuss them today—and the framework established by Order in Council. Secondly, there should be some monitoring of the way in which the system works, to ensure that foreign Governments do not use it for unintended purposes. Parliament has a duty to ensure that the rights of individuals are protected against foreign Governments who may not have our standards.

That said, I congratulate the Minister on his Bill. He has handled it cheerfully, skilfully, with good humour and—I am satisfied—with the best of intentions. In that regard, I am also satisfied that the Government's intentions are transparently honest and correct, and that the aspiration that underpins the Bill is worthy. For that reason, we give it our support, mindful that it may be possible to reconsider and correct in another place some of the aspects that I have touched on, and which continue to give us some cause for anxiety. On that basis, we welcome the legislation and give it our support.

8.49 pm

Mr. Stinchcombe: I, too, welcome the Bill, and I do so warmly. I believe that it could lead to a sea change in the fight against acquisitive crime. For that reason, I was delighted to serve on the Standing Committee. I [illegible] pleased to have been able to participate in the debates on Report, and I am grateful to the House for the opportunity to make a brief contribution on Third Reading.

Throughout our deliberations, we have heard much from Tory Members about their concerns for human rights and the need to ensure that the Bill properly reflects the Human Rights Act 1998 and properly respects the European convention on human rights. I share some of their concerns, as I made clear in Committee, but I would give greater credence to the arguments that have come from their mouths if any of them had voted for the Human Rights Act in the first place. Many Conservative Members vehemently oppose that Act. At least one of them supported it, but he did not have the courage to vote for it—the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), who has led for the Opposition in the debates on the Bill.

I spoke in favour of the Human Rights Act 1998, and I voted for it. If called upon, I will vote for this Bill, and I would do so for an identical series of reasons. I genuinely and passionately care about human rights. I believe that they should be protected against violation, but that the most important of our fundamental human rights is not the right to protect the secrecy that surrounds our dodgy deals, but the right to live free from fear and free from crime. The Bill will do more than virtually any other measure that has been enacted while I have been a Member to tackle our fear of crime and protect that fundamental human right.

In the past two months, I have visited an old lady in my constituency whose skull had been caved in during broad daylight by a young thug with a golf club. I was visited by another elderly lady whose arm had been broken when a bag was wrenched from it, again in broad daylight. I have talked to the police about a phone call received in the evening from an eight-year-old boy who was concerned because his father had been marched upstairs at gunpoint.

Why do my constituents—in middle England, in Northamptonshire—suffer from such crime and why do they live in such fear? I believe that it is because 10 per cent. of the young adults in my constituency from some of the estates are addicted to drugs, because heroin is available at £5 a wrap, because crack cocaine is now found in my constituency, because of the needles that I can find everywhere and because many of my constituents have to steal to feed those habits. We have made it harder for them to burgle, so they have now taken to street crime.

It is imperative that, in the House as well as elsewhere, we do everything that we can to fight that crime and street violence. We have to do so in many ways—by getting more policemen on the beat, by intelligent policing and probably by using more tagging—but we also have to tackle the drug trade itself, and we have to do so at both ends: the supplier and the user. As for the users, I want more to be done about drugs rehabilitation than we have ever tried to do, especially in prison. As for the suppliers, I want the profit to be taken out of crime, so that they cannot make their millions, or even their thousands, by peddling their filth and ruining the lives of innocent people. The Bill will help to tackle that, which is why I welcome it so warmly.

8.53 pm

Norman Baker: Parliament has dealt with the Bill in an exemplary fashion. If it were to approach other Bills similarly, we might all end up with better reputations outside the House than we probably collectively have at present. May I pass on my thanks to the staff and officers of the House for their help with the Bill? I also thank the Minister, who has been willing to respond to legitimate points. He has been polite and cheerful throughout and has been the sort of Minister whom one would hope to be responsible for a Bill.

[Norman Baker]

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and his colleagues. The hon. Gentleman in particular has given the Bill a great deal of his time and raised a number of legitimate issues, and the Bill is better as a consequence of some of the amendments that he moved. I also thank my own colleagues, of course, including my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), who has kept me busy and otherwise helped me during the debates on the Bill.

I also pay tribute to Labour Members, who raised legitimate issues and took a real interest in the Bill. I particularly mention the hon. Members for Redcar (Vera Baird) and for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe), who managed to raise issues about which the Government did not necessarily want to hear, but did so in a constructive way that was loyal to their party. It is not always easy to strike that balance, and that should be recognised.

My colleagues and I have always supported the principle of the Bill. I do not think that there will be a Division on Third Reading, but if there is we shall support the Bill. We support its principle because it takes the profit out of crime. I bear in mind the fact that two thirds of crime is motivated by profit, and that we must ensure that crime does not pay. That very old slogan needs some teeth, and this Bill gives it teeth. We are much better at convicting people than at depriving them of their ill-gotten gains. If the Bill goes some way to addressing that, it will have achieved a great deal. If we follow the money, we will end up getting the criminal, and that is a welcome change from traditional methods of approaching such matters.

The principle of the Bill is agreed, so proceedings in Committee were largely about detail—or, perhaps, tensions. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield referred to some areas of concern, some of which I share and others I am less concerned about. I have identified four tensions that I will take to my colleagues in the Lords as areas of difficulty.

The first tension is the key one: the balance to be struck between the power of the state and the rights of the individual. The Bill undoubtedly contains several heavy weapons to try to deal with serious crime committed by very clever people who may have expensive lawyers—or whatever the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) wants to attribute to them—and have escaped the traditional methods of justice and existing law. We must deploy heavy weapons against those people. I recognise that, even if it causes some trepidation. The other side of that coin is that we need strong shields to ensure that the innocent are not swept up in the process.

As the Minister said, there is more than one kind of innocent person. There are innocent people who are the victims of crime, about whom we rightly heard from the hon. Members for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) and for Glasgow, Pollok. Innocent third parties can be swept up unwittingly and unfairly by such heavy legislation unless there are safeguards to enable them to escape it legitimately.

There are also those who are guilty of negligence, who we do not want to treat the same as those who are guilty of deliberately seeking to launder money. Both are problems, but they are not on the same scale. We need to ensure that there are shields for the innocent and that the penalties for those who are guilty of lesser crimes are not the same as those for major crimes.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield referred to the loss of the family home, which was discussed yesterday on Report. That brings me to the second tension that was evident during our proceedings in Committee: that between what happens north and south of the border. In the case of the family home, the Bill is very much Scotland 1, England 0, which cannot be right.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is that a full-time result?

Norman Baker: It is a half-time result, as the Bill is yet to go to the other place—but the score may stay that way. How can it be right for a spouse to lose her home if she lives in Berwick but not if she lives in Galashiels? That worries me.

Differences between legislation north and south of the border are inevitable. Indeed, I am a keen supporter of devolution, as are all my colleagues. We recognise and rejoice in the fact that there are differences north and south of the border, but I prefer the differences to occur in matters of policy and priority rather than in essential justice. The example of the loss of the home is a matter of essential justice. I regret that we have a different solution in Scotland from that in England.

There have of course been moves to eliminate such differences. As the Minister will remember, it was proposed that courts in Scotland have discretionary power to make confiscation orders although such power was mandatory in England and Wales. That has now been evened up—the wrong way, in my view. It is a pity that the evening up did not go the other way, with the Scottish model imported into England.

The third tension is between those who legislate—us—and those who interpret the law, namely the judiciary. As we have gone through the Bill, I have asked to what extent it is legitimate for Parliament to constrain the judiciary. Parliament has a right and a duty to legislate, and courts have a duty to interpret. The courts are an important backstop to ensure justice. In the past century, we find instances in which the courts have intervened to protect justice when Parliament has got it wrong; juries, too, have acted in that way. We can all think of cases that have led to changes in the law. The judiciary is an important feature of our democracy and it must be given the elbow room it needs to perform that function.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok made it plain in Committee that he does not trust the judges. His solution, without wanting to put it too crudely, was as far as possible to write them out of the script in terms of the scope available to them for interpretation. As he does not trust the judiciary in its current form, he wants judges to be servants of Parliament, but that is a dangerous road to take. I agree that there is a need for reform in the legal system, but that is an entirely different proposition from cutting them out of the script altogether.

That is one of the reasons why throughout proceedings on the Bill my colleagues and I have been keen to ensure that the judiciary is not written out of the script, and that judges are given the appropriate flexibility to interpret the law. That is why attempts were made to amend clause 6 to give the courts greater flexibility of action. The clause starts: "The . . . Court must proceed". Many wanted to replace "must" with "may", and the Liberal Democrats suggested inserting "normally" after "must". On Report, a further attempt was made to qualify the provision and give the courts elbow room to act if they detected a real risk of injustice.

The Government were not keen on those amendments or on providing elbow room. I think that they should adopt a more relaxed attitude and realise that it is in their long-term interests not to constrain the judiciary too tightly, as they tend to do throughout the Bill. Their motives are of the best, but I conclude that ultimately the right balance has not been struck between the two elements.

The fourth tension is between the need—perceived and actual—for the far-reaching heavy measures in the Bill and the requirements of the European convention on human rights and the Human Rights Act 1998. I am happy to concede that Government Members are as keen on the Act as I am, and that they acknowledge that it was a big step forward and is an important part of this country's legislation. I am glad that the Minister referred to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, if only to disagree with it, because it shows that he recognises the importance of responding to the issues that the Committee raises.

Incidentally, the report with which the Minister disagrees was agreed by all members of that Committee representing all three main parties and both Houses of Parliament. That does not mean that the report is necessarily right, but there is a substantial body of opinion, which includes hon. Members present tonight, that the recommendation and the wording of the report were appropriate. There will always be tension, but it is important that the Government pay proper attention to what the Joint Committee on Human Rights says. The Government themselves created that important body and its words should be heeded.

I am not sure that the Minister entirely understood or accepted my point that there is an absolute requirement that each Bill introduced by the Government be consistent within itself with the Human Rights Act. On the front of the Bill was a statement that it is so consistent and that its provisions are compatible with convention rights. The Minister will remember that the Committee learned that the clause headed "Requirements for making of production order", originally clause 335, replicated provisions within the Drug Trafficking Act 1994, but without the Act's public interest protection provisions. The explanatory notes to the Bill said that that was because judges are required to act in a way that is compatible with the convention, and that the public interest protection provisions were therefore no longer necessary. That is a fundamental point. Those public interest protection clauses should have been included in the Bill, irrespective of the existence of the Human Rights Act.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The area on which we disagreed—or on which I failed to understand the hon. Gentleman—was in relation to his apparent insistence that it was not good enough for us to say that this measure in no way cuts across people's rights under the European convention on human rights. Even when we said that, it was not good enough for him.

Norman Baker: If that is the opinion that the Minister formed, I am happy to clarify matters, as the Secretary of State for Transport, local Government and the Regions might have said in one of his illuminating statements. If the measure itself does not cut across the Human Rights Act, of course it is compatible with it. However, if the mirroring safeguards that would have been included in legislation previously are not included in this Bill, it will have fewer safeguards, by definition, because of the existence of the Human Rights Act.

I shall not take very much longer, as other hon. Members want to contribute. I shall just raise one other point that I raised on Second Reading—which I do not think has been dealt with since by me or anyone else—about the hierarchy. Throughout the Committee, the Minister clearly explained how the hierarchy would work and gave several assurances for which I was grateful and which the Committee accepted. However, my one residual concern relates to the situation in which somebody is charged with a criminal offence and acquitted, and the lesser method—civil recovery—kicks in. The danger would be that, in the case of a high-profile acquittal, the public at large—who would not understand the hierarchical system—would view such recovery as persecution of an individual. That poses dangers to the credibility of the Bill.

If such a conclusion were reached, the authorities might in turn be encouraged to engage in the equivalent of plea bargaining—which nobody in this place wants—and to opt immediately for civil recovery rather than a criminal charge. Of course, the threshold for civil recovery is lower than it is for a criminal charge, so that option will be tempting. In the same way, authorities sometimes pursue the charge of driving without due care and attention rather than the charge of dangerous driving.

Overall, however, this is a good Bill, and Liberal Democrats are pleased to support it. We wish it well in the Lords and we shall table one or two amendments to deal with residual matters of concern. I thank the Minister for the considerate and helpful way in which he has ensured the progress of this Bill.

9.7 pm

Mr. Davidson: The Minister said that this was his first time piloting a Bill in Committee. He was not nearly as bad as we expected for an ex-Whip seeking to rejoin the human race. He was perhaps over-keen, on occasion, to compensate for his previous form. Nevertheless, he conducted himself with good humour throughout the Committee, as did most hon. Members. I was frequently phoned by the press, who asked for a list of members of the Committee broken down by age and sex. I replied, "All of them." That was a fairly easy response, but still a good one.

In relation to the Opposition parties, it is worth while to remark that there were three Liberal Members on the Committee, but they were never present at the same time. I wonder how many other people noticed that. Even

[Mr. Davidson]

tonight, there are only two of them, and one is sitting on the Front Bench and the other is behind him. That demonstrates their addiction to questions of hierarchy.

Mr. Carmichael: The reason why there were only ever two of us was that—notwithstanding the difference in the numbers of Liberal Democrat Members and Labour Members—the sheer force of our arguments, if we had all been present, would have been overwhelming. Although the hon. Gentleman may not have raised many issues in Committee, he raised a number of laughs. Regardless of what his colleagues have said about him, I always thought that he was okay.

Mr. Davidson: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman speaks on that point. He told us earlier that his 11-year-old son was cutting his first teeth. Children always use an especially hard type of stone in Orkney and Shetland for such purposes.

I see that the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) has rejoined us. It is interesting that after many absences in Committee he has obviously been told to stay away, which seems eminently sensible. He spent much time in Committee signing his books. I understand that he had not completed colouring in some of them. He was sent away for Ugandan conversations at one stage. Given that he is a Member who has newspapers to sell, it is understandable that he was not always in Committee. I find myself hurrying past "Big Issue" sellers in case it is the hon. Gentleman—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Despite the general appreciation of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, we should return to Third Reading.

Mr. Davidson: You are correct, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We would have had a much better political exchange in Committee had nationalist Members served on it. As they did not volunteer, that obviously was not possible.

Mr. Salmond: I have recently been studying some figures. It seems that the hon. Gentleman has spoken more in the past two days than he has spoken in the Chamber since the last general election. That is remarkable. I want to apologise to him, because yesterday I implied that his participation record in the Chamber was miserable. That is not true. The figures show that it is not miserable; it is just not very good. He is 27th out of 55 in the activity rate among Scottish Back Benchers, which I suppose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are on Third Reading.

Mr. Salmond: In consideration of the Bill that is before us, and others, the hon. Gentleman's activity rate is just above relegation level.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Ian Davidson.

Mr. Davidson: I am aware that we are on Third Reading, Madam Deputy Speaker, so it would be inappropriate for me to say that even though my record in the Chamber might not be particularly good, I still have a better voting record than that of the older nationalists on the Bill and on other issues.

One of the strengths of the Committee was that a range of views were expressed by Labour Members. The Labour party that I joined was a broad church, and that was a good thing. One of the things that has caused me most unhappiness about new Labour is the way in which it has sought to narrow the range of acceptable opinions.

The Tories have stressed their support for the Bill on Third Reading, but words are cheap. There were many occasions in Committee when they procrastinated and deliberately spun out discussion so that some clauses were not reached. It was made absolutely clear that those parts of the Bill could be dealt with in another place.

We must see what the Conservatives seek to do to the Bill in the other place. They will be judged by their actions there. There is a real danger that they will try substantially to weaken the Bill, which will be to the detriment of our people.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davidson: I give way to the Member for sheep stealing.

Mr. Grieve: I fear that the hon. Gentleman is beginning to suffer from the paranoia that starts to infect Governments after their first term. It is uncharacteristic of him to have succumbed because he has always been rather semi-detached. I can assure him that consideration in another place will be as constructive as we have tried to make it in this place.

Mr. Davidson: If that were true, I would welcome that. I recognise that there are still some issues that would benefit from some rubbing and polishing, but that has not been the impression that I have gained from Conservative Members in Committee. We shall see.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, no matter how ameliorative he was in Committee, will not be prepared, in enthusiasm to get the Bill through Parliament, to accept from the other place things that we were not prepared to accept in Committee or in the Chamber.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman spoke about procrastination. I remember an occasion in Committee when he caused a series of Divisions entirely on his own, to the astonishment and horror of his Whip. Was that part of his crusade against the nationalists, or something to do with procrastination?

Mr. Davidson: No, that was nothing to do with procrastination. It was a result of the operation of the Sewel motion and the fact that we were unable to debate some clauses dealing with Scotland because the hon. Gentleman and his Conservative colleagues had spent so much time on earlier clauses spinning out the debate. I do not remember whether they spun out an entire part of the Bill or just a day's debate, but they clearly wasted time—the Whip intervened on several occasions to keep things going—with the deliberate intention of preventing us from reaching some provisions applying to Scotland. I made my point reasonably well by forcing a number of votes. For the benefit of those who were not in Committee, it is fair to say that I lost them all, but that was not a surprise.

This is not the end of the road. We must consider implementation. I very much welcome the new unit that is to be established in Scotland and the announcement made by the Minister of State, Scotland Office. We must make sure that we have adequate resources for the police specialist units and the professional help being provided to them and to the Procurator Fiscal Service.

If we are to have confidence in the legal system in Scotland and in England and Wales, we need to tackle its modernisation as a matter of urgency. I recognise that that is an area in which there are substantial vested interests and where there is producer domination. However, if we genuinely want the modernisation of our society, we cannot just be hard on soft targets. We must be hard on some of the real vested interests.

I was asked earlier whether I wanted to reflect on my view of lawyers and the law. Yes, I probably do. On a number of occasions, I was not nearly hard enough. The more people bring me examples of the sort of behaviour to which I object in the law, the more I believe that more hon. Members should take up these issues in the interests of our constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) expressed more eloquently than I could the motivation behind my participation in the debate on the Bill in the House and in Committee. It has been a long slog, but I believe that if hon. Members representing areas such as mine are not prepared to put a substantial effort behind measures such as the Bill, we do a disservice to our constituents.

We must protect those whose lives are cursed by drugs and crime in their communities. I have mentioned several times before, and I make no apology for mentioning again, the families who are unable to go out together for an evening or at any other time because they are afraid to leave their house unoccupied. We must take action against the society that allows that to continue. I hope that the Bill goes some way towards creating a better Scotland and a better Britain.

9.18 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words. My interest was sparked many years ago when I brought to the attention of the then Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Sir Kenneth Newman, a scam using stocks and shares to pass money to terrorist groups. It took some years before anything began to happen.

I understand the comments of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve). When a previous discussion was going on, my erstwhile colleague Enoch Powell expressed concern that we were interfering too much with civil liberties. However, the harsh reality of life is that society has changed dramatically. On behalf of my colleagues on the Select Committee, I express our thanks to the Minister for the reception that he gave our report, and to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) for his kind words.

For far too long, law enforcement bodies have not worked together. The Bill should help them to move together. It is amazing how long it is since income tax legislation brought Al Capone to justice. It is also amazing how often we fail to realise that various law enforcement officers must come together to make a difference.

In that context, I should like to say something about lifestyle. A glazier who was doing some work in my office said to my secretary one day, "What is going on in this world? I am driving an old banger and doing my best to make an honest living, but I saw one of those godfathers driving into the petrol station the other day in a Mercedes." Fascinatingly enough, the papers began to refer to such lifestyles, and we saw the same person who drove the Mercedes pay tribute to his financial adviser, who helped him to invest wisely, although he earned only £3 a week in his prison days. I have yet to find out who that financial adviser is; I could do with him.

Lifestyle means something. On reclamation of income tax, £10 million has already been restored through the Criminal Assets Bureau in the Republic to the Treasury—money that would never otherwise have been lifted in income tax. Some £20 million is waiting to be dealt with; it must be done legally and appeal methods can be involved. None the less, the reclamation of that money is a reflection of what is going on in our society.

I welcome the movement that the Bill represents and I wish it speed through the other House, although I also welcome the fact that the Government will have the opportunity that has been given to successive Governments, whatever their hue, to be made wiser by the second opinions given in that place. I look forward to improvements being made. In Northern Ireland, the Bill is not only about terrorism—a subject to which some people keep returning—but about a whole change in our society. When we consider the courts, I think about the problem of drug pushers and other criminals in Ballymena, who are brought to the courts and remanded on bail so they can go out and make enough money to pay any fine that is imposed. While the judiciary must be careful in sentencing, it must realise that its job is not only to see that the law is not administered in a draconian way, but to ensure that the victims are protected.

9.23 pm

John Robertson: I thank the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) for his speech. What happened in his Province today is an example of why we need to tackle the proceeds of crime. The people of Northern Ireland know full well what happens with such proceeds in terms of terrorism and intimidation, and I should like to thank him personally for his contribution.

In giving my own thoughts and feelings, I shall keep my remarks as short as possible. The Bill is a 301-page document with 450 clauses and nine schedules, so I can assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the Committee stage was a long slog. It seemed more like 139 steps than like 39. While I might not have the same experience as other hon. Members—especially those in the legal profession—I have always tried to put victims first. I make no apology for that; the criminals will always be second. The people who perpetrate crime will always have to be taken care of, and I see the Bill as a way of ensuring that that happens: it is a start in allowing us to attack the Mr. Bigs, the money men; or, for that matter, the Mrs. Bigs—I do not want to be sexist.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) is in his place. He gave a good example of the way in which the official Opposition have conducted themselves throughout the Committee stage and in this debate. In Committee, he tried to justify

[John Robertson]

the money laundering of the City of London. At one stage, he actually said "We need the money in London; otherwise it will just go somewhere else".

Mr. Mark Field *rose—*

John Robertson: I would be very disappointed if the hon. Gentleman did not wish to intervene at this point.

Mr. Field: I think that I have made it clear, as has the Minister, that it is crucial to the City of London that we should not be seen as a soft touch in terms of money laundering or any of the other problems raised in the Bill. The hon. Gentleman rightly puts his constituents' interests first. The City of London is part of my constituency, and it is right for me at least to put the arguments against the problems of over-regulation and over-compliance, which are important to exporters. I do not suggest that those arguments should override all those advanced by the hon. Gentleman, but they should at least be heard.

John Robertson: If those in the City of London and people like them had put their house in order in the past, I would not be attacking the hon. Gentleman now. I feel, as do the police and the Drug Enforcement Agency—which I mentioned earlier—that such people must be brought to book. Lawyers have rules, and they have not stuck to them.

I will not attack lawyers and bankers, unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson)—I certainly could not do it as well as he did—but, as I have said, these people must be brought to book. They seem to feel that they can turn a blind eye to the passage of illegal money through their hands. It is nothing to do with them; they are just doing their job, and they are well paid. No one can tell me that a lawyer in such circumstances does not know that someone is making a living from a criminal lifestyle. I am sorry to say this, but lawyers are not going to the police and telling them about such people. Indeed, lawyers defend them and get them off when they knew fine well from the outset that they were guilty as sin.

The Liberals, who may be described as the unofficial Opposition—

Norman Baker: The effective Opposition.

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman would say that, wouldn't he? Anyway, the Liberals are very nice men. Unfortunately, criminals just love very nice men. I know that their hearts are in the right place, because they told me so, but they cannot sit on the fence for ever. They will become sore after a while if they do. We know that: we tried it for long enough.

May I say a word about the nationalists? I will not say anything about a Committee on which they did not sit—and I mentioned the fact that they did not ask to sit on it—because I would be ruled out of order if I did. I will say, however, that it is a pleasure to see them tonight. I am glad that they made an input today—I think—but whether it was effective is another matter. The leader-in-waiting made a slight input, but it was so slight that I will not even mention it.

The Committee stage was excellent. We had some fun. Members on both sides acted in good faith, for what they believed to be right. It just so happens that we are right and Opposition Members are wrong.

9.29 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I am grateful for the chance of intruding a few comments into the dying moments of the debate. I take my leave of the Bill in the immortal words of Geoffrey Howe, who referred to

> "the tragic conflict of loyalties with which I have myself wrestled for perhaps too long."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 465.]

My loyalties are divided, as are my instincts, following 39 fun-filled sittings.

I have listened with great care to the passionate and sincere speeches of the two Glasgow Members. They plainly want to devise a Bill that creates a great money-extorting machine that will put every criminal inside it and squeeze them until the last bawbee—if I have the right term—drops from their pockets. I want to say how sincerely I agree with them in that ambition. I have listened to the hon. Members and I think that they are right, although I sometimes think that the landscape of Glasgow that they portray is a trifle too depressing. Not a single innocent sunbed-owner, and not a single innocent suntan—save, perhaps, that mantling the brow of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok—escapes their attention. None the less, I share their general prejudice against the criminals who inflict great misery on people not only in their constituencies but in those of all hon. Members, including my own.

It has been a privilege and an education for me to listen to the Ministers and to the many learned and distinguished Labour and Liberal Members, all of whom have shown remarkable command of their subject. I have also been profoundly impressed—of course, I would say this, but I mean it—by the wisdom and humanity of our own Front-Bench Members. It became clear to me as our deliberations went on that, no matter how vehemently we agree with the ends, it is our duty as conscientious legislators sometimes to dissent from the means, particularly if the means that we are advocating will frustrate the very ends that we have in view.

Let me risk the disapproval of some of the most learned Labour Members by trying to grasp this great Bill by its fundamentals. I shall not dwell on the minor points, but a problem still extant in the Bill is that some foreign Governments could decide that the legitimate property of London Bond Street salerooms was the proceeds of crime. I am thrilled to see that the Home Secretary has arrived at this critical point, and I hope that he will address his vast brain to this question. It is still a problem that those salerooms could be the object of the jealousy of a rapacious foreign Government who might want to repatriate an artefact—an image resembling the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe), perhaps—on the ground that it resembled Hammurabi, for instance. They might contend that it had been stolen by some British archaeologist in the 1920s.

I shall leave those concerns on one side, however, and pass on to the guts of the Bill. I want to put an end to the Minister's perplexity by explaining what the Conservatives were trying to do during the 39 Committee sittings. We were right to take the line that we did, not because we want to water the Bill down, but because we want it to work. I stand to be corrected, but my understanding is that the Bill appears to mean, in a nutshell, that if a convicted criminal—who could have been convicted of anything—can be shown, under the nebulous terms of clause 75, to have a criminal lifestyle, the court must order the confiscation of their assets unless they can show that they are not the proceeds of crime.

That is a terrifyingly powerful engine for getting money out of criminals. I can see why the eyes of Labour Members glitter when they contemplate it. All I can say is that there seems to be a risk, in some of the language, that the measure could be used not just against the Mr. Bigs—whom we all oppose—but against the innocent, such as the relatives of whom my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) spoke so movingly, and the mules—the victims of the drugs trade who are more likely to end up in the hands of the police.

Time after time, Conservative Members have tried to ensure that the rights of the innocent are protected. That is not, as I have said, because we want to attenuate the Bill, but because we want to make it more legally robust and more successful. Unless the Bill is intelligently and humanely drafted, it will fail in its objective. It will net no assets, and all the glitter and excitement in the eyes of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok and his friends will be frustrated, and they will be disappointed.

I shall give an example of what I mean. As the Minister knows, in 2000, the courts convicted one Robert McIntosh. I think that he was from Glasgow; he might even have been a constituent of one of the hon. Members here tonight. He was a very bad man—he is a very bad man; I think that I can say that without fear of contradiction. He was a drugs dealer and the court ordered £18,000 of his assets to be confiscated. The money was confiscated, but the decision was overturned by the Court of Appeal in Scotland because it involved the assumption, without any proof, that those assets were the proceeds of crime. That is exactly the way in which we are formulating the Bill and it will be a great shame if it fails to net the assets that we all want because, as the Scottish Appeal Court found, that means of the state getting its hands on the proceeds of crime conflicts with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Surely the hon. Gentleman is aware that there has been recent case law, particularly in the case of Rezvi, that has upheld the use of the assumptions in confiscation and not just in drug money.

Mr. Johnson: I am grateful to the Minister for that important clarification. I am of course aware of it, but I have only to look around the Chamber tonight to see legal brains of the kind of rarity and skill that could easily use the Human Rights Act 1998 to frustrate the very purposes that we have been trying to advance day in, day out and week in, week out during our consideration of the Bill.

In conclusion, the Bill has been improved by the efforts of hon. Members on both sides of the House, to protect the rights of the innocent because that is the way to make it—

John Robertson: A juggernaut.

Mr. Johnson: The hon. Gentleman said that it should be a juggernaut, but the problem with a juggernaut is that it tends to crush the innocent and the guilty alike. It would be much better if the Bill were transformed—and I think that it has been—into a subtle and relentless octopus that picks the pockets of the guilty alike.

Mr. Davidson: Would it be helpful if I pointed out to the hon. Gentleman that although the McIntosh case was overturned by the Scottish Appeal Court, the conviction was finally upheld by the Privy Council?

Mr. Johnson: I am more than grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point, but I think that I have already addressed it. Nor am I sure whether what he says is accurate. In fact, I think that he is trying to spoil my conclusion by making things up on the spur of the moment.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend may have been confused by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) talking about the Privy Council when he may have meant the House of Lords. Does my hon. Friend agree with the words of a distinguished former Member, Sir Alan Herbert, also a journalist and distinguished playwright? He said:

> "As far as I am concerned, Scotland can govern itself for ever, but I hope the Scots never govern us. I have come back from one week-end in Scotland, and I must say that I found that there the laws were more barbarous in some respects than any laws which I expected to exist in these islands."—[*Official Report*, 9 May 1945; Vol. 410, c. 1945.]

Mr. Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that very good point.

In conclusion, let the Bill be a subtle and relentless octopus, not a juggernaut which crushes the innocent and guilty alike. I think that we have done a good job in ensuring that and I hope that the other place will continue our work.

9.38 pm

Ian Lucas: I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) who is glancing at his watch. Clearly, he wants to go and put *The Spectator* to bed and I am sure that he will do it very well.

I want to make two brief points. The first is about the process. I speak as a new Member who was elected last June. Somewhat to my surprise, I have been impressed by the process and the way in which the Bill has proceeded. The main reason for that is that there was excellent input from all members of the Committee on which I was proud to serve. Everyone expressed their views freely and sincerely. I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) who has worked extremely hard on the Bill. Today, I was amazed to see the hon. Gentleman lose his rag for the first time, when he was baited by Scottish National Members. I did not believe that that would ever happen, but he was pushed to that extent.

I have been impressed by the way that the Bill has proceeded. The measure is important and goes to the heart of what may be the major problem facing this country. I hope that, when Labour Members talked about the communities that they represent, Opposition Members learned more about those communities than they knew before the introduction of the Bill. I suspect that they have done so.

[Ian Lucas]

The official Opposition and the other Opposition have also helped by tabling amendments so that the Bill is better than it was on Second Reading. We all agree about that.

One continuing misapprehension about the Bill is that it contains no safeguards. I confess that I am a former lawyer so I instinctively followed some of the arguments made by Opposition Front-Bench Members. However, I have studied the Bill closely and it includes an extraordinary number of safeguards. Some of the drafting has not assisted in understanding the measure, but the Bill strikes the right balance. Balance is the key word. The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) referred to tension. That is present throughout the Bill.

A strong voice has spoken from the Chamber and from the Committee—a voice that represents people in the communities afflicted by the serious problems associated with drugs. As politicians we must speak out for those communities. The people who must listen to us are in the other place—especially the lawyers who will regard the Bill in a certain way. I suffered from that disease in the past, but as a new politician I have learned that I have a responsibility to look at legislation differently—in a way that reflects the problems and fears in the community that I represent. That voice will not be represented in the other place, but it is important that Members in that place hear from us about these grave matters and are assured that we have considered the Bill closely and that it must be taken forward.

The Bill is already having an effect. I am sure that my very hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) will be delighted to know that two or three weeks ago the front page of the Law Society *Gazette* warned lawyers to be on their guard because the Proceeds of Crime Bill was on its way.

9.43 pm

Annabelle Ewing: I join hon. Members in supporting the Bill's Third Reading. We were happy to join the Government in the Division Lobby to support them on various issues during the past two days. It is clear that strong measures are needed to tackle the serious problems associated with drugs and other organised crime, which have cast a blight on communities the length and breadth of Scotland and throughout the rest of the United Kingdom.

Before the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) takes up his barracking again, I want to agree with him on the important issue of resources. It is all very well to create new agencies and powers for—in Scotland—the procurator fiscal service, the Crown Office and so forth and our police force, but if there are no resources the new powers are not worth the paper on which they are written. I hope that issue will be addressed.

Mr. Davidson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I shall not give way. I want to speak briefly as I know that other Members want to contribute before the debate ends.

I and my colleagues are very disappointed to note that new Labour Members voted against our amendment No. 229 tonight. It would have ensured that part 3 of the Bill, which went through substantial change in this House, would have been referred back to the Scots Parliament.

John Robertson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Annabelle Ewing: No. I want to be brief and allow other hon. Members to speak.

In the debate on Report, all parties agreed that there had been major changes to part 3 of the Bill. The Minister of State, Scotland Office, told the Scottish Affairs Select Committee on 7 November that, if substantial changes were made, there would be a political imperative to refer the matter back to the Scots Parliament. Those changes have been made, but new Labour Members tonight voted against that referral. That action must be regarded as indefensible, undemocratic and an attack on the very basis of the Scots Parliament. Scots Labour MPs, in particular, should be thoroughly ashamed of their conduct tonight.

My last point is that the Sewel motion issue clearly remains unresolved. In his comments over the past few days, the Minister of State repeatedly confused the Scots Parliament with the Scottish Executive. The issue needs to be resolved. The substantial number of votes that my party garnered from other parties in the House—our amendment gained 172 votes—shows that there is an imperative to resolve the matter properly, in a way that respects both the spirit of the Scotland Act 1998 and democracy in Scotland.

9.46 pm

Mr. Carmichael: There were 39 sittings in Committee on this Bill, and we have spent two days on Report and Third Reading. One would have thought that everything would have been said by now but, remarkably, there remains something to add.

I turn first to the question of Sewel motions. That matter was touched on by the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) and by the Minister of State, Scotland Office in his earlier statement. The Minister's statement is to be welcomed. There is no manual for dealing with Scottish legislation going through Westminster in the post- devolution context, especially when it arrives here as a result of a Sewel motion. The experience has been instructive for me and for other hon. Members from Scotland who served on the Standing Committee.

There is a need to define the role of Scottish MPs, post devolution, in this House. I do not object to the Sewel process in principle, but there are aspects that need to be refined. It encourages a dialogue between Government and Executive that bypasses the important role that can be played by Parliament, both here and in Edinburgh. Those matters must be taken seriously.

For example, it was drawn to my attention that any subsequent amendment to the Bill passed by the Scottish Parliament will be capable of being struck down by a court if it is not found to be consistent with the terms of the Human Rights Act 1998. The principal Bill can be given only a certificate of human rights incompatibility, and a number of other, similar issues that will have to be addressed.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) and other hon. Members have said that a degree of legal expertise has been brought to bear on the Bill. I am a new Member of Parliament. The Standing Committee considering the Bill was the first on which I have served, and I was struck by how remarkably easy it was to be dubbed an expert.

However, I and other hon. Members—such as the hon. Members for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) and for Redcar (Vera Baird)—did bring to the Committee's deliberations a certain amount of experience of the criminal justice system. We all approached the debate from the point of view that all the different constituent parts of the criminal justice system—the judiciary, the prosecutors, defence solicitors, social workers, police—do an excellent job, often in very difficult circumstances. We only ever hear about the occasions when they get it wrong. We do not hear about the many occasions when they get it right and things go smoothly.

It is apparent, with all these constituent parts, some of which are conflicting, that a system of checks and balances has to be in place. Liberal Democrat Members remain concerned that a number of checks and balances are not present in the way that they might be. I am concerned that the Lord Advocate in Scotland now has yet another function to perform. I hope that the Scottish Executive will keep a close eye on the manner in which his functions, provided in part 5 of the Bill, are to be executed and that, if necessary, setting up a separate Scottish Assets Recovery Agency may be given serious consideration at a later date.

It is apparent that the days of the Lord Advocate as a Minister in the Scottish Executive are numbered. The number of functions that he has in terms of his prosecuting role and the additional responsibilities provided by the Bill must make that position more difficult to maintain. I say that as someone who has a great regard for the office of Lord Advocate. It is a very important one, but in this post-devolution age there should be no sacred cows. If the reform of an ancient office is necessary, so be it. Let us go ahead.

Liberal Democrat Members have accepted the need for the Bill. We accept that it is broadly good and wish it well. I shall watch its progress through the courts with great interest. It has been a pleasure and an honour, as a new Member of this House, particularly as a Scottish Member, to be part of these proceedings. We wish the Government well in their dealings with it in the other place.

9.51 pm

Mr. Mark Field: It will be a very brief speech indeed, Mr. Speaker. It is lovely to have the last word; I wish it were like that all the time in politics.

I wish to associate myself with many of the comments about the consensus on the Bill. I fear that that is the last word. [*Laughter.*]

Mr. Speaker: It certainly has been brief.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

GOVERNMENT TRADING FUNDS

That the draft ABRO Trading Fund Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 25th January, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Funds Payments) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 6th February, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Public Entertainment Licences

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

9.52 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak about public entertainment licences. Many archaic parts of the law have somehow survived unrepealed, and some have a sparing connection with reality. Under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847, for instance, it is still illegal to fly a kite or slide on ice in a public place. Happily, it is not often enforced.

The problem with the public entertainment licence laws is that although they are archaic and in many respects foolish, they are vigorously applied by many local authorities. Many hon. Members will be aware of the ridiculous "two in the bar" rule. I spoke about this most recently on 3 December when I asked a question of the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting and mentioned Madonna duetting with Michael Jackson. Let me give another illustration: if Kylie Minogue and Elvis Presley—if he were still alive, as some believe he is—were to do a gig in a pub, they would not need a public entertainment licence, but three folk singers from Somerset would. I do not believe that the attendance would be comparable, and I put that case to the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting.

I mean no disrespect to the Minister for Sport—I am delighted that he is to reply to the debate—but I hoped that I could give his colleague an opportunity to redeem himself in the eyes of every good west countryman and every adherent of folk music in the country. His reply on 3 December brought unprecedented opprobrium down on his head from the west country. He may have subsequently regretted his comments, and I should have liked to give him the chance to redeem himself.

Some may believe that I am motivated only by my deep and lasting affection for Adge Cutler. However, although I am interested in and enjoy traditional and contemporary folk music, it is not the only form of entertainment that is affected by the rules. They affect jazz, pop, rock and every form of live music, and public houses and the licensed trade. Restrictions on the ability to perform live music on such premises often have a knock-on effect on tourism.

Not only licensed premises are affected. Many people do not understand that it is a criminal offence for a brass band to play at a village fete in a vicarage garden because it is private land without a public entertainment licence. It is also a criminal offence for morris dancers to perform in a public house car park without such a licence. Last week's court case of the London borough of Southwark *v*. Sean Toye showed that it is an offence not only for a performance to include more than two people singing or playing at the same time, but for people to perform sequentially. If one person stands up, sings and sits down and is followed by a second and then a third person, that requires a public entertainment licence.

Legal actions show that the "performance" does not even have to be advertised to the public to require a licence. We know that people do not have to pay money for such a licence to be required. However, people indulging in singing on licensed premises also appears to need a licence. That was the crux of the case that Weymouth and Portland borough council brought against The Cove inn. I note that the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) is in his place. He may know more about that case. The council relied on case law from 1793 to establish that singing on the premises was potentially a criminal offence. For the record, the case was Clarke *v*. Searle.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): The hon. Gentleman is correct about the case in my constituency. The Cove is a fine pub, which I recommend to hon. Members. It has a superb view over Chesil beach. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a shame that my constituents and council officers have spent disproportionate amounts of time corresponding with each other and arguing the toss about arcane legislation? As he said, it is a silly law, and everyone appears to be confused about how strictly to enforce it. It is unfortunate that, in the case that we are considering, it was decided to enforce it strictly. That has left everyone, including me, with a huge burden of correspondence.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman is right, and he has my greatest sympathy for the casework that has been generated. It shows how ridiculous the law is. The guidance that the licensees give recognises that. The British Institute of Innkeeping's "Handbook for the Entertainment Licensee's National Certificate" states:

> "Where community style singing to music is encouraged to take place, the entertainment will be licensable."

We might have guessed that. It goes on to say:

> "If, however, the singing is spontaneous the council is unlikely to take action, although technically there is a breach of the law."

If someone gets up in a pub and has the temerity to start singing—it has been known—he is technically in breach of the law. I do not know what the landlord is supposed to do about it: dash out and get a public entertainment—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Mr. Heath: No doubt the publican would be required to call time and close the public house.

Jim Knight: About nine months ago, when I lived in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, everyone in the pub just down the road from me broke spontaneously into song after one or two people turned up who had been rehearsing their musical instruments. I confess that perhaps I broke the law when I joined in. I hope that he will forgive me for doing that in his constituency.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman was a distinguished member of the local district council and would have had to take action against himself in those circumstances.

There is a large coalition of interests against this nonsensical law. The Minister knows that the Arts Council, the Church of England, hon. Members on both sides of the House, the Musicians Union and publicans want the law changed. Indeed, the Government want it changed, as they have said several times. We need to change it because the rules are archaic and arbitrary. The interpretation and the costs that can be applied to the person who wants a licence from the local authority are arbitrary. There is a disproportionate penalty for the so-called criminal offence. The fine can be up to £20,000 and it is possible to receive six months in prison for breaking the law. Not only can it criminalise those who hold licences for public houses and other venues and those musicians who may simply be ignorant of the rules, which is often the case with amateur organisations, but it over-regulates many premises that then face huge compliance and regulatory costs.

In addition, the law reduces the amount of live music that is available in this country, which is a great shame. I should like to stimulate the performance of much more live music. Many places used to allow live music performances. Over the past 20 years or so, the number has decreased and less than 5 per cent. of public houses now hold a public entertainment licence, which is regrettable.

The regulations are not in effect because of the number of people who are expected to attend a performance or the capacity of the venue. The rule is simply arbitrary. I would be the last person to argue that there is a case for abolishing the regulations if it meant that public safety was endangered or we risked allowing public disorder, but the authorities have other powers at their disposal in those circumstances.

The Government produced a White Paper in April 2000 in which they said that they wanted to change things. Sadly, since the general election, and despite the famous text messages that we have heard so much about which were sent to young people on the morning of the election, there was nothing in the Queen's Speech to that effect and no such legislation is pending.

There is a crying need for legislation to change the regulations. That does not mean simply abolishing the "two in the bar" rule because it would obviously be more restrictive if we made it a "one in the bar" rule. We need a complete change. If the Minister cannot give a date for when the Government will legislate, will he at least issue guidance to local authorities on how they should exercise the powers at their disposal so that their decisions are not so arbitrary? That would remove the enormous disparity in costs that exists between one local authority and another. Local authorities need to know what they are doing so that the public, event organisers and licensees of premises know what to expect.

The Department, which has been asked to provide information on its website, has not been very helpful in that respect. I have a copy of a letter from Philippa Drew—the Department's director of education, training, arts and sport—to the director of the National Campaign for the Arts. Among other things, it states:

> "We are extremely reluctant to place general information on our website which may alarm ordinary and honest people unnecessarily when their local authority may adopt a policy of non-enforcement or the practice of waiving requirements in certain circumstances."

The Department is arguing that it will not give guidance because people might worry that they will face the penalties that they may indeed have to face. That does not seem a credible position for the Government to adopt.

I ask the Minister to reconsider the matter and give a real commitment that legislation will be brought before the House in short order. Irrespective of whether that happens, I ask him to provide proper guidelines for local authorities and the public, so that everybody knows where they stand. A less arbitrary and fairer system might stimulate the public, the entertainment industry, live music, licensed premises, tourism and the general well-being of the population.

10.6 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on raising these issues tonight. A few weeks ago, he put a question on the matter to the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), who unfortunately cannot be here this evening. He is in the United States, battling for Britain by arguing that it is a good tourist destination for Americans, and by promoting our hospitality and leisure and tourist industries in this golden jubilee year.

Contrary to popular belief, it is not true that all that my hon. Friend wanted to do was get away from "Wurzelgate". I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman had anything to do with the door-stepping of my hon. Friend when he visited the west country on the Friday after the question was asked. My hon. Friend was confronted with the Wurzels, who presumably got a tremendous amount of free publicity out of the incident. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport told me that she had to attend the folk singing awards to smooth troubled waters, as it were.

Mr. Heath: The Minister might like to know that the *Western Daily Press* ran a headline stating, "Wurzelgate: the row that is rocking the Commons." It is true, therefore, that his hon. Friend has a certain notoriety.

Mr. Caborn: As I said, my hon. Friend was door-stepped.

Jim Knight: I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) is promoting British folk music while he is in the United States. He would be interested to know that my local paper, the *Dorset Echo*, has published correspondence from Americans who say how much they look forward to visiting this country to listen to folk music, what nonsense the "two in the bar" rule is, and that they are now fearful of joining in with such music.

Mr. Caborn: I have no doubt that they will enjoy it, and I shall text my hon. Friend across the pond to ensure that he mentions the matter in his speech to the Americans in the next day or so.

I am pleased to reply to this debate because we have a fairly good story to tell. In calling for reform of the public entertainment licensing system, the hon. Gentleman is, as he suggests, pushing at an open door. The Government are firmly committed to reforming and modernising our archaic licensing laws, which have been well described as occasionally just plain daft. As he said, a manifesto commitment was made in that regard. We take it very seriously, and I shall explain how we hope to see it through.

The hon. Gentleman does not have to persuade us that many aspects of our existing laws on public entertainment are at times perverse. As he said in the House in December, it is ridiculous that, in theory, Madonna and

[Mr. Caborn]

Michael Jackson could perform together unlicensed in a local pub, while three Somerset folk singers could not. That is why we are firmly committed to the abolition of the two-musician rule, but the issue goes much wider than that. The hon. Gentleman was absolutely right to use that example at Question Time to illustrate how stupid the licensing laws are.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we published the White Paper "Time for Reform" in April 2000. Before setting out our proposals to reform the licensing laws, it pulled no punches about what was wrong with the existing licensing arrangements. It identified the main problems with current public entertainment licensing, and I shall refer to some of the main issues. There is too much scope for inconsistencies in the approaches of different licensing authorities, which cannot be justified by real local differences.

The hon. Gentleman asks whether we can give guidance to local authorities. I do not think that we can, but I take on board the point that he makes, and I shall speak to officials tomorrow to find out whether we can produce some guidance. If that can be done, I will ensure that it is. I shall also consider the issue that he raised about the website. As a matter of interest, I looked at the hon. Gentleman's website, on which he has given the world the text of the speech that he has made this evening. I suppose that that is one way of ensuring that he is well known in his constituency—he does not miss a trick.

The hon. Gentleman suggests that an individual who joins in a singalong with a friend in a pub could be prosecuted under the public entertainment licensing laws and that many law-abiding citizens are breaking the law every day. I am informed that that is not true. The organiser of any public event and the manager of the premises where the event takes place may be prosecuted for breaches of public entertainment licensing law. However, my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) would not have been prosecuted in the case that he explained because people involved in spontaneous outbursts of singing hymns or rugby, football or folk songs may not be prosecuted. So there is obviously a difference of opinion, but I shall not debate that further.

Jim Knight: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way yet again. He and the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) were right to raise the guidance issue—I am sure that everyone will be grateful to them if they consider it further—but I recall circumstances in which the police may have been advised to give some things less priority than others. I am told that Belper folk club was recently raided by the police. A three-person group was playing at the club, which is run as an all-member club. The police were allowed into the club as new members to avoid the entertainment licensing laws, but they then pursued the matter further. So police time was used in pursuing a case that involves what everyone would regard as a silly law. Will my right hon. Friend consider whether police authorities could be advised that we all regard that law as silly and that we shall change it in due course? I look forward to his explaining when that will happen, as that would also be helpful.

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend makes a sensible suggestion, and I am sure that my officials will take note of it. If we can clarify the issue so that police time, which is valuable in keeping our communities safe, is not wasted trying to police silly licensing laws, it would be far better, so he is right to raise that issue.

The second issue raised in the White Paper is that separate licensing systems for theatres, cinemas and music and dancing produce unnecessary complexity when the main purposes of the regulations are essentially the same. Again, we shall consider that issue in new legislation.

Thirdly, the White Paper said that there is too much scope for local licensing authorities to impose disproportionate and burdensome requirements on venues—a point that the hon. Gentleman made. Fourthly, there is duplication of the requirements of fire safety and health and safety regulations. Again, we believe that those requirements can be modernised so that they are more effective. Fifthly, there is the problem that fees are set at the discretion of local authorities, with some evidence of excessive charging. That shows that the operation of the law is very wide and that it can be abused to some extent.

Public entertainment licensing law currently gives the licensing authorities enormously wide discretion, and levels of enforcement vary considerably around the country. Some local authorities are zealous in their application of the law and others are not. The White Paper was about finding solutions to those and other problems across the licensing field.

The White Paper proposed a single, integrated scheme for licensing premises that sell alcohol or provide public entertainment or late-night refreshment, sweeping away a considerable amount of red tape at a stroke, and proposed a new system of personal licences, which will allow holders to sell or serve alcohol for consumption on or off any premises. It also suggested new measures to back up restrictions on underage drinking.

The White Paper proposed a new form of premises licence, which will set out operating conditions relating to the impact on crime and disorder, public safety, and public disturbance. Licence conditions should protect against those threats, but not interfere in other ways with how premises are run. It is proposed that the conditions attached to such licences should be set locally on the basis of striking a balance between the operator's requirements, residents' views, and police and fire authorities' assessments.

To counter and minimise public disorder resulting from fixed closing times, the White Paper proposed that flexible opening hours be introduced as a condition of the premises licence, with the potential for some venues to operate for up to 24 hours and to open seven days a week, but subject to consideration of the impact on local residents. It was suggested that children be allowed access to any part of suitable licensed premises at the personal licence holder's discretion, but that licensing authorities have powers to restrict or deny access for children to unsuitable licensed venues.

It was also proposed that the new personal and premises licences be issued by local authorities, providing greater democratic accountability to the community, and that licences be supported by a flexible range of sanctions, including temporary closure and temporary reduction in opening hours, instead of the present single, all or nothing sanction of loss of licence. That is a radical package of measures, which we remain convinced strikes an important and necessary balance between the needs of business, including tourism in rural areas, and the concerns of local residents.

The hon. Gentleman is concerned too about the impact on performers—musicians, singers, dancers and the like. The White Paper proposed the abolition of the two-musician rule because, as he clearly said, any individual playing with modern amplification can easily cause as much disturbance as any four, five or six musicians. Indeed, a single live acoustic guitar amplified by a microphone and boosted through a modern public address system can, as we all know, generate quite extraordinary sound levels.

Live performers have no reason to fear our proposals. We consulted widely on them. The consultation was not limited to the powerful alcohol interests; we included groups representing the interests of folk and jazz musicians. I shall quote one response to the White Paper. It came from the Association of British Jazz Musicians, which said:

> "Remarkably, these reforms could benefit everyone: the brewers and landlords, as well as the present and future employees in the industry; and of course there will be increased opportunities for entertainers, particularly musicians. The reduction in regulation, with consequent savings to brewers and individual licensees, should also mean that there will be more money in the system for the payment of entertainers at a proper level."

In May last year, we confirmed our intention to implement the reforms by means of primary legislation as soon as parliamentary time permits. The hon. Gentleman knows that I cannot anticipate a future Queen's Speech, but I assure him that work on the preparation of the necessary Bill is ongoing. That work includes further detailed consultation with all interested stakeholders. In recent weeks, a draft of the instructions for the Bill was sent to organisations including the Musicians Union and the Arts Council. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Arts Council has a working party on licensing reform that includes representatives of musicians and festival organisers.

Like all of us, the hon. Gentleman would like reform to be introduced sooner rather than later. Public entertainment licensing law is enshrined in primary legislation and deals with important issues of public safety and disturbance, so primary legislation is needed to bring about the necessary reform. The House will want to debate those matters very fully indeed, because the law affects all our constituents.

In December, the hon. Gentleman stressed the importance of live music in pubs and inns to the recovery of tourism in rural areas. I entirely agree with what he said then and tonight. Licensing reform will be good for business because it will sweep away a great deal of expensive red tape which no longer serves the purpose of protecting the public, and sometimes deters licensees from staging musical events on their premises. Reform will be good for consumers—citizens and visitors to this country alike—especially families, offering them more choice and safer surroundings in which to eat and drink and watch performers. Finally it will provide a much needed boost for both urban and rural tourism after a difficult and demanding year.

Again, I warmly congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising some important issues tonight. We are singing from the same hymn book, whether licensed or not. I assure him that we take those issues seriously. A reform Bill, if we can persuade the House authorities to introduce one, would serve an extremely useful purpose, and I hope that that can be achieved sooner rather than later.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 28 February 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL

Order for further consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 7 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

EU Growth and Stability Pact

1. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): If he will make a statement on the operation of the EU growth and stability pact. [35742]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I request to answer that question at the end of Question Time, so that we may have a fuller debate on it.

Stamp Duty

2. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): If he will make a statement on stamp duty exemptions. [35743]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): New investment, new businesses and new jobs are the key to regenerating our high unemployment communities. In the pre-Budget report is a special measure to help the slowest growing and highest unemployment areas of Britain. The Government have abolished stamp duty in 2,000 wards in constituencies throughout the country, for all transactions for homes and business properties worth up to £150,000, leading in the first three months to 5,000 claims for purchases worth £450 million—an average saving of £900 per transaction. As my hon. Friend is aware, the qualifying areas include two wards in her constituency. In the Budget I propose to legislate so that we can take more business property transactions out of stamp duty in these areas.

Shona McIsaac: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. The measures certainly have been welcome in the two wards in my constituency and the three wards in neighbouring Grimsby. I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that he will extend these welcome exemptions, but will he also consider including more of the deprived wards in that exemption? Residents in the neighbouring wards to the two in my constituency would certainly like to benefit from these measures as well.

Mr. Brown: The definition that has been used for choosing the wards is that they are the 15 per cent. most deprived wards in the country, and that has led to the choice that we have made, based on the most up-to-date information. My hon. Friend has welcomed our plans to extend that scheme involving business properties, and I hope that they will be welcomed on both sides of the House. What we are proposing here is a move from the old strategy, which was either providing girocheques to people who were unemployed or providing only property subsidies. The stamp duty exemptions go side by side with changes in policy to reduce VAT for conversions in high streets, for transferring businesses into houses; the community investment tax credit, which we are introducing in the Budget; and the community investment fund. All these measures are designed to help the creation of small businesses and the development of economic activity in communities that have hitherto been high unemployment communities.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Have the United Kingdom Government made a state aid notification on stamp duty exemptions to the European Commission, and if so, what response has the Commission made?

Mr. Brown: We believe that our proposals will be acceptable to the Commission. We will go ahead with our proposals on that basis. I will announce further proposals in the Budget on that basis. The hon. Gentleman should be particularly pleased, because 42 per cent. of areas in Wales qualify under our proposals. I emphasise that the help that is available now to start small businesses in those areas, including advice and help from the Small Business Service in England and the relevant services in Scotland and Wales, should enable us to bridge the gap whereby, in Britain, only half as many small businesses are created as in America, and only one small business is created in the poorest areas for every six created in the richest areas. Therefore we will go ahead with our proposals.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Chancellor aware that, welcome though it is that there has been a 1 million cut in unemployment and that we have the highest level of employment throughout the country, he is right to concentrate on those areas that need to be revitalised after the massive attacks—pit closures, textile closures and so on? Will he therefore bear it in mind that the new £24 million development in Shirebrook in the north Derbyshire area is important, as is junction 29A, which will revitalise three constituencies in north Derbyshire? Will my right hon. Friend, together with what he is about to announce today, ensure that that type of programme continues, because there will be not only economic benefit but electoral benefit from acting in this fashion?

Mr. Brown: Our policies for both stability and economic regeneration have led to the creation of

1.3 million more jobs in this country over the last five years. At the same time we have the lowest inflation and the lowest long-term interest rates for 40 years.

I should have thought that among the Conservatives there would be at least one Member wishing to intervene to thank us for introducing these measures because the shadow Chancellor has four wards in his constituency that are benefiting from the stamp duty exemption, and that is one of the reasons why we have cut unemployment in his constituency by 50 per cent. over the last five years. It is about time that the Conservatives abandoned their policy to get rid of the new deal and supported our policies for both stability and prosperity.

Management Costs

3. **Mrs. Patsy Calton** (Cheadle): What studies his Department has undertaken of the management costs of *(a)* PPPs and *(b)* conventionally procured public sector projects. [35744]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): Studies have focused on overall value for money rather than the specific components to which the hon. Lady refers. National Audit Office reports have shown, of course, that that value for money is being achieved. Management costs in private finance initiative projects do of course cover items like whole-life maintenance, which are not typically provided for in conventional procurement.

Mrs. Calton: My question is about the cost of monitoring London Underground's public-private partnership. Transport for London has argued that the attribution process for London Underground's PPP is so complex and bureaucratic as to be practically unworkable. Given the Treasury's intimate involvement with London Underground's PPP, what estimate has the Treasury made of the cost of monitoring the 1,000 service disruptions and 350 facilities faults a week? Is the Chancellor aware that London Underground will have to monitor the performance of the infracos down to the amount of time it takes to fix a light bulb? How many people—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's question is far too long.

Mr. Smith: As was committed by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the House regularly receives reports on the costs of the consultancy involved in carrying forward London Underground's PPP. If we are talking about value for money, as we must, and the much-needed modernisation of the London underground, let us not forget that the PPP involves £16 billion of investment during the first 15 years of the project—the equivalent of six Jubilee lines will be constructed—and it is £2 billion cheaper than the public sector comparator. That is much-needed investment for London. London Underground remains responsible for the trains, ticketing, stations and has overall responsibility for safety, while we give world-leading companies the responsibility of carrying out that much-needed investment to world-class standards. Let us get on with it.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): In addition to comparative costs, capital costs, economic efficiencies and so on, do not we also have to taken into account the Keynesian aphorism:

"In the long run we are all dead"?

In Dudley, we would be on a waiting list for a new hospital; as a result of the PFI, we are getting a new hospital now.

Mr. Smith: My hon. and learned Friend makes a very good point. The crucial thing is not only that the PFI and the PPP are bringing forward much-needed investment, but, with this Government, that investment is additional to conventional public sector investment, whereas the Conservative party used it as an excuse to cut public investment.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): If the Treasury is so proud of its PPP programme for London Underground, why was a Treasury Minister not sent to the inquiry into that very subject of the Transport Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions? Have the Government got something to hide?

Mr. Smith: There is a well established precedent that we do, of course, attend Select Committees, including the Transport Sub-Committee, when the matters under consideration are the lead responsibility of the Treasury. The DTLR has lead responsibility for the items discussed in the case to which the hon. Lady refers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a very good report to the Committee.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Is my right hon. Friend aware of a very successful—in fact, an award wining—PPP in Glasgow under which 10 of the city's secondary schools have been completely rebuilt and a further 19 have been refurbished? Can he tell the House what plans the Government will put in place to safeguard the security of tenure and the wages and conditions of those employees who move from local authority employment to that of private companies?

Mr. Smith: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating those responsible for introducing such a radical improvement to the school facilities available to young people in Glasgow. Those schools are among the 500 throughout Britain that are benefiting from PFI investment. On the important point that he makes about staff, not only will the Government act, but we have already acted to improve the pension protections for staff in guaranteeing the application of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and in mandating consultation with the staff involved. That will continue to be the case.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Is the Chief Secretary aware that the draft contracts for London Underground's PPP contain absolutely no provision for terminating the contract if an infraco fails during the first seven and a half years? Is he happy to have no termination rights in that draft contract?

Mr. Smith: I am satisfied that, as I said earlier, the PPP represents best value for money. It enables us to mobilise world-leading engineering expertise satisfactorily, as it must be to complete the much-needed investment in the London underground. The people of London will be very interested that the Liberal Democrats want to carry on scoring political points about that, whereas we want to get on with the investment.

International Debt

4. **Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): If he will make a statement on his recent initiative for relief of international debt. [35745]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): This week, Ghana reached decision point, qualifying for $3.7 billion of debt relief from the international community, including the United Kingdom, writing off 100 per cent. of the $200 million of debt owed by Ghana. That means that 25 countries—21 from Africa—will benefit from $60 billion in debt relief with potentially $100 billion of debt relief in prospect. Our plans support greater flexibility in debt reduction as part of a global new deal. In return for countries pursuing corruption-free policies that will encourage stability, trade and investment, we will raise development aid worldwide in cash terms and as a proportion of national income.

Mr. McFall: I commend the Chancellor on his speech in New York in November and on his Marshall plan for global poverty alleviation. In his New York speech, he mentioned the sheer lack of investment in poor countries. On my visits in the past few years to Zambia in Africa and Peru in Latin America, I have seen regression on the ground instead of progression. Will the Chancellor say what structural changes should take place with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to ensure that countries that are grindingly poor at the moment have a better future?

Mr. Brown: Our proposal is for a trust fund of $50 billion a year. That would mean the effective doubling of international aid so that we can meet the 2015 development targets, whereby every child of primary school age should have free education, infant mortality is cut by two thirds, and, at the same time, poverty is halved. As for the changes that are necessary, first, we believe that countries must pursue stability-oriented polices and must therefore agree to new codes and rules for governing their financial, monetary and economic policies. Secondly, we must push forward on the Doha trade agenda. Thirdly, we must create a better environment for private as well as public investment. In return, we will make available additional resources. The next stage of that is the Monterrey conference in Mexico—the finance for development conference—at which I hope that other countries will also put up additional cash to support our proposals.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I welcome the Chancellor's commitment to assisting developing countries. Will he say more about the corruption-free policies that go hand in hand with relief of international debt? He may not know that the International Development Committee is visiting Ghana next week. We have seen throughout Africa and elsewhere that corruption makes poor people poorer and harms the poor people in the world. Without corruption-free policies, international debt relief will have little effect on their lives.

Mr. Brown: I hope that we will have all-party support—and that that may be reflected in an intervention from the Opposition Front Bench—for what we are trying to achieve at Monterrey. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that one of the factors that has blighted the development of Africa and has made it difficult for people to justify additional aid, has been the amount of corruption that has taken place in a number of regimes throughout that continent. One of our proposals is designed to remove that possibility in the future as far as possible. Each country must agree to abide by the international rules of the game, and publish exactly what they are doing in their monetary, fiscal and general financial policy. Their accounts must be transparent and available for people to see. Additional expenditures or the siphoning off of money can therefore be investigated properly by the authorities. That demands a bigger role for the IMF and the World Bank in the surveyance of the financial activities of those countries and in insisting on structural reform.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also agree that our domestic legislation to prevent people from being able to claim bribes as part of tax relief is another measure that offers a way forward. I hope that there will be all-party support for what we are trying to do at Monterrey. That means that in return for pursuing those policies, we are prepared to put more money into solving intractable problems in Africa, which, with the international community working together, we can begin to address.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the heavily indebted poor countries debt relief conditions were based on an export growth rate of about 6 per cent. The World Bank's report stated that the growth rate was only about 4 per cent. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the Government will press for greater flexibility in the debt relief conditions to ensure that we do not end up with re-emerging problems of debt unsustainability?

Mr. Brown: That is why we insisted at the last meeting of the IMF committee that we include in our communique the commitment to be far more flexible on the terms under which debt reduction is available in future and to take account not just of the loss of exports by many countries, but of the general decline in world trade. The year before last, world trade grew by about 13 per cent.; last year, it barely grew at all, and the position of countries in Africa worsened as a result. That is one flexibility that we are including in future attitudes to debt relief.

The other flexibility relates to countries that are moving out of conflict. In Africa in particular many countries are denied debt relief because they are in conflict. Countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique and Sudan which have the possibility of coming out of conflict could be more readily eligible for the debt relief that is necessary for restructuring. That is our second proposal for flexibility in debt relief.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I first welcome and support the Chancellor's efforts to develop policies on international debt relief. His work will command the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House. Can he confirm that the World Bank report published just last month forecasts that the 24 poorest countries will, after debt relief, still have to pay about $¼ billion more in debt service in 2005 than in 2002? Can he also confirm that the sustainability of the repayments depends, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) explained, on forecasts for growth and exports, which a number of expert observers think are over-optimistic? How certain is he that the present debt relief initiative programme will have the beneficial results that we all want?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support for the debt relief initiatives. With the Monterrey conference next month, the IMF and World Bank meetings in April, the children's conference organised by the United Nations in May and the Johannesburg summit in September, this is the year in which we must make progress on meeting the millennium development targets. Whatever support comes from all parties in the House to back up the efforts of churches and non-governmental organisations throughout the world will be significant.

The hon. Gentleman rightly refers to the latest World Bank report. It is not necessarily the case that the figures, which he correctly says will be difficult for the poorest countries to meet, will be realised. The greater flexibility that we are offering in debt relief, the chance to create the new trust fund and the greater effort that the Prime Minister is putting into providing more funds for Africa could come together to reduce the burden that countries are under in meeting debt relief.

I acknowledge the efforts of the previous Chancellor to move the debt relief policy forward, but when we started on debt relief in 1997 only one country was likely to get it; now 25 receive debt relief. When we said $100 billion could be relieved, people said that that was impossible, but $60 billion has been agreed. If conflict countries such as Sudan and the DRC can come into the debt relief process the figure would be $100 billion. I am optimistic that if we work together we will make progress on an agenda that is vital for dealing not just with poverty and poor economic prospects in such countries, but with ill health and illiteracy among millions of children.

Primary Education

5. **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): What steps he is taking to encourage his counterparts in other countries to provide funding to ensure that all children worldwide receive primary education by 2015. [35746]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): On 12 March, the Government will launch the Commonwealth education fund. It is shocking that 113 million children still do not have the chance to go to primary school. Two thirds of those are girls and in the Commonwealth more than 70 million children are still denied education. By helping civil society to strengthen the quality of national education plans, the fund will support the achievement of universal primary education in the poorest Commonwealth countries. That is also supported by £600 million in education funding from the Department for International Development. Our proposals for a new international trust fund would mean $10 billion to $12 billion extra a year from the international community to promote universal primary education.

Valerie Davey: I thank my right hon. Friend for the positive response. Many of my constituents write regularly about global inequalities and their concerns about that. They would want me to take this opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend for his international leadership. Are the G8 educational task force and the World Bank committed in their support of primary international education to ensuring that it is provided equally for girls?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the issue. I applaud her work as a constituency MP in raising it locally and her work internationally, as she worked in Africa for some time. Our proposals would help most of all the two thirds of girls who are denied primary education. They form 80 million of the total denied primary education at the moment.

It is worth pointing out that there has been some progress in recent years, which is a signal for us to want to do more. In Uganda, primary education numbers will double as a result of the debt relief provided. In Malawi, enrolment has increased by 60 per cent. since 1995. It is moving forward in many other African countries, too, but it is still too little, and we will not meet the target of every child receiving primary education by 2015 unless we put more funds in now.

The G8 initiative taken at the Canadian summit will be important to that, but at the end of the day, each donor country must be prepared to put more resources into overseas aid development. We will do that, and we hope by our actions to persuade others to do so. I am grateful for the chance during these questions for the House of Commons to debate these important issues.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): I also welcome everything that the Chancellor has said this morning. However, does he accept that primary and secondary education and other public services have been deeply damaged by the IMF structural adjustment programme, particularly in Rwanda, where there was a direct link between the IMF's intervention and the destruction of education and the massacres that followed? Will he assure the House that he will bring maximum pressure to bear on discussions with the IMF and other international bodies to ensure that such measures are not repeated?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He should know that the operation of the structural adjustment facility by the IMF has been abolished as a result of a decision that it took over the past period. We now have poverty and growth facilities, and plans have been drawn up that involve the communities as well as the Governments of individual countries. More money is being put into education and health as a result. Our target is a far higher proportion of each country's budget going into education and health. As a result of pressure from my hon. Friend and many others, the old structural adjustment policy has been abolished, and the IMF and the World Bank are working together under the new proposal to tackle poverty.

Euro

6. **Mr. David Laws** (Yeovil): On what date his Department started the preliminary technical work for evaluating the five economic tests for euro membership. [35747]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): After the first detailed assessment of the five tests in 1997, we said that our policy was to prepare and decide and to make an assessment early in the Parliament. The assessment of the five economic tests has not started, but last year we set out the necessary next stage of preliminary and technical work. That preliminary and technical work includes the cyclical behaviour of the United Kingdom economy relative to the euro area and relative responses to economic shocks; the mechanisms by which product, labour and capital markets adjust; the impact of the single currency on the costs and availability of capital; the effect of the single currency on financial services; and the impact of the single currency on trade, competition, productivity and employment.

Mr. Laws: I thank the Chancellor for that very full answer. On the investment test, will reform of the growth and stability pact be necessary before Britain is willing to sign up to the euro? I ask specifically in relation to the document that he is launching today about reform in the European Union. Does paragraph 1.13 of that document mean that reform of the growth and stability pact is a pre-condition to entry to the euro?

Mr. Brown: There is no sixth test. I have just explained the five tests and the work that we are doing to examine them. I hope that all Members would agree that the growth and stability pact is in need of improvement in three separate areas. First, it should be reformed to take account of the economic cycle. In other words, there should be flexibility when the world economy and, indeed, the European economy are in downturn. Secondly, it should be reformed to take account of public investment, which matters to us here because health, education and transport investment are absolutely crucial. However, that matters throughout Europe in the rebuilding of the infrastructure in many countries.

Thirdly, the pact should be reformed to take account of debt sustainability. What is relevant to a country with a debt to GDP ratio of 110 per cent., such as Italy or Belgium, is not relevant to a country such as Britain where, as a result of efforts in the past few years, the ratio has been reduced to 30 per cent.

I believe that those reforms are gaining support within the European Union, and we will continue to push them. Our assessment will be made on the five tests that were set down in 1997, repeated by the Prime Minister in 1999, and repeated in the document to be published later today.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important not only that his Department continues the preparations for the evaluation of whether the tests are met, but that the House is well informed? Will he affirm that the preparations for the euro group—comprising those who lead on Treasury matters for all the parties represented in the House—constantly seeks ways in which we can prepare for joining the euro in the event of a yes vote in the referendum? It is not a group that promotes the euro, but one that monitors progress in banking, retailing and the public sector.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the group's most important other function is to make sure that the Government do not spend money on promoting the euro? Given those facts, is it not a wonder that still the Conservative party is the only party in the House that has not joined the committee and did not come to the meeting this week?

Mr. Brown: When we set up the committee, I sent an invitation to all political parties in the House of Commons. The standing committee on euro preparations, which I chair, includes the Governor of the Bank of England, the head of the Confederation of British Industry, the head of the British Chambers of Commerce, and representation from small business and the British Bankers Association—all relevant bodies concerned about economic and financial matters in relation to the euro and economic policy in Europe.

To complement that committee, a standing committee was set up in the House of Commons. We sent an invitation to sit on the committee to every political party in the House of Commons. The invitation was accepted by every political party with only one exception: the Conservative party. That is because the Conservative party has ruled out discussion of those issues as a matter of dogma. That everyone else, including the whole of British industry and British commerce, is prepared to discuss those issues shows how far apart the Conservative party is from business today.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Is the Chancellor aware that most of the business men who support entry into the euro believe that it will first be necessary for the Government to engineer a devaluation to a more competitive exchange rate? Is he also aware that every Government who have devalued the pound have been defeated at the subsequent election?

Mr. Brown: He should know. It is difficult to take lectures from the Conservative party about the running of exchange rate policy given the ignominious exit from the exchange rate mechanism that occurred when the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Cabinet. [HON. MEMBERS: "You supported it."] Now the Opposition blame us when we were in opposition for the policies that they pursued in government. I know that it is the fate of the Opposition to become irresponsible, but the Conservatives should take responsibility for the policies that they pursued in government, when the shadow Chancellor and the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) were members of the Cabinet.

The fact is that we will assess the five tests and report to the Cabinet; if we make a yes decision, we will then report to Parliament and the country. For the first time, a decision on those matters is to be made after fundamental, rigorous and comprehensive examination of the economic issues. One thing is clear about 1990 and the ERM: the Conservatives made no examination of the proper issues.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): If the German fudge shows us anything, it is that sustained cyclical convergence is impossible without deep-rooted structural convergence. Does the Chancellor agree that, given the huge differences between us and Europe in trade mix, housing finance, pension finance and company finance, we are further away than ever from meeting the economic convergence criteria that he so frequently spells out? Are we not therefore several years—perhaps it will not happen until deep into the third term of an Administration led by him—from a referendum that will resolve those matters?

Mr. Brown: I have always said that I will not give a running commentary on the five tests—nor on any other matter. The five tests include whether sustainable and durable convergence can be achieved, as well as an examination of employment, investment and flexibility—all the matters that are relevant to a proper and rigorous economic assessment.

We are determined that the decision will be made in the national economic interest. The real divide in politics is between us, who would make a decision based on the national economic interest, and the Opposition, who have ruled out a single currency even if it were to be in the national economic interest. Theirs is an irresponsible position.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Who is in charge of all this—Mr. Ed Balls or the Minister for Europe, the right hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain)?

Mr. Brown: I shall present the economic assessment, as I presented the 1997 statement to the House of Commons and chair the standing committee on euro preparations. It is a matter for the Treasury to present its economic assessment and we will do so, as we said, before June 2003. The fact of the matter is that the statement that we made in 1997 remained unchanged in 1999; it is exactly the policy that we are pursuing now and it is the policy of the entire Government.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): As my right hon. Friend knows, more than half our exports of goods go to other European Union countries. Does he acknowledge that in certain regions the figure is far higher? For example, in my area in the north-east the figure is 76 per cent., which is perhaps why many businesses there favour entry into the euro. Does my right hon. Friend therefore agree that it would be crazy, given those facts and, when it takes place, a satisfactory assessment, to rule out membership of the euro, as I assume is still being advocated by the Opposition?

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend is right; 750,000 businesses trade with the euro area. It is crucial that we have the best relationships between the United Kingdom and Europe. It is for precisely those reasons that we have said that the decisive test—it would have to be clear and unambiguous—is the economic case for entry; that is what we have to examine and that is why the detailed work that I mentioned to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) is being done rigorously and comprehensively. The assessment will be made public at the end of that time.

My right hon. Friend is right; it is a mistake to rule out on grounds of dogma what may be in the national economic interest. I have noticed that, during this Question Time, whereas on issues of urban renewal and everything else no Conservative Members have sought to intervene, on the issue of Europe just about every Conservative Member wants to intervene. The leader of the Conservative party has said that Conservative Members will not go on talking endlessly about the euro because they are not monomaniacs and have more than one issue, but it is not clear today that they do.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I am most grateful to the Chancellor for providing me with my cue. May I begin by welcoming him on his return to the Dispatch Box? He will know that he has the sympathy and personal good wishes of hon. Members from all quarters of the House.

Is it not extraordinary that this morning the Chancellor should play ducks and drakes with the Order Paper, deferring consideration of Question 1 without any explanation and for a reason about which we can only speculate?

On the question asked by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), does the Chancellor agree with Gus O'Donnell that the economic case for joining the single currency can never be clear and unambiguous?

Mr. Brown: Mr. Gus O'Donnell has said that he has no recollection of saying those things. As for Question 1 on the Order Paper, as I understand it, we are responding to a request from the Conservative party that we should deal with it at the end of proceedings. As for the whole question of the euro, I think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will agree that it is important to look at those matters in detail. We have said that the economic case must be clear and unambiguous, which is why in July last year, and then in September, we published a list of all the studies that we are undertaking.

I should have thought that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would have thought that that was a sensible course of action. Of course, the difference is that when the Conservative Government joined the exchange rate mechanism, they did so as a political act without taking in hand the necessary economic preparations. They did not make the necessary economic assessment and the result was their ignominious exit from the ERM in 1992. The shadow Chancellor must take full responsibility for the actions of that Government.

Mr. Howard: Indeed, I do, but it is important to note that that decision was supported by all parties in the House, by the Chancellor personally at the time, by the Liberal Democrats, by the Confederation of British Industry and by the Trades Union Congress. I certainly do accept my share of responsibility.

Mr. Gus O'Donnell was quoted as saying:

> "Economics can never be clear and unambiguous",

and he has not denied that statement. Is it not the case that all the evidence shows that joining the single currency would be likely to have devastating consequences for the jobs, homes and livelihoods of the people of this country? Why does not the Chancellor accept that, put this distraction to one side, and concentrate on dealing with the crisis in the public services of our country?

Mr. Brown: Mr. O'Donnell has made the position clear. On the question of the euro, our policy, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman well knows, is exactly the policy that we set out in 1997. It was repeated in 1999. It is repeated now by me. The reason that that is the right policy, and I can show it to be the right policy, is that we are doing the work that is necessary for the economic assessment to take place.

There is one school of thought in this country that says, "We would rule out a single currency, even if it were in the national economic interest to join."

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Brown: That is exactly the position of the Conservative party, and the shadow Chancellor himself has ruled out the single currency in principle. He said it when he stood for the Conservative leadership in 1997. I know that it got him only 12 votes at the time, but he said that then, and his leader has repeated ever since that the Conservatives are against the single currency in principle. What they are saying is that even if it were in the national economic interest to join, they would not do so, as an act of dogma.

Our position is the sensible position. If a single currency is in the national economic interest, and proved to be so by the five tests that we are assessing at present, we will make a recommendation to the country. That is the sensible position for jobs, business and the economy as a whole. The Conservatives are locked in the past and we should take no lectures from a Conservative party that was responsible for our ignominious exit from the ERM, which the country will never forget.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): On the question of the devaluation of the pound, does my right hon. Friend agree that one way of engineering such a devaluation would be to put up domestic taxation, thereby achieving a better balance between monetary and fiscal policy?

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend was in the Treasury in the 1970s. There were a number of Budgets at that time which put up taxes, but I believe that he did a very honourable job in the Treasury at that time. As regards our policy, we will announce our tax measures in the Budget, we will make the economic assessment in relation to the euro at the appropriate time, and all the facts and figures will be brought before the House. The assessment that we must make is whether a single currency would be good for investment, whether it would be good for jobs, whether there is sufficient flexibility in the economy, what would be the effect on the financial services, and whether there is sustained and durable convergence. Those are the questions that we are examining and on which we will make an assessment.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): First, may I associate myself and my right hon. and hon. Friends with the comments of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) to the Chancellor? He is welcome back and we feel strongly for him.

The Chancellor has repeatedly said that he does not want a running commentary on the economic assessments. That message does not seem to have got through to his colleagues at the Foreign Office. Could he therefore end the running commentary by making clear the time scale on which those tests are in fact being carried out, as compared with the Foreign Office version, with which he seems to disagree?

Mr. Brown: The position is as I set out at the beginning of this Parliament and in my speech to the CBI in October: we will make an assessment, which will be completed before June 2003, and we will publish the results of that, as we did with the 1997 assessment.

The Liberal Democrats are in a difficult position. Only a few days ago, the Liberal Democrat leader named the day on which he thought there should be a referendum. One can adopt the position that we will join irrespective of the assessment of the economic tests. One can name the day, and the Liberal Democrats have also named the exchange rate. Surely the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor), in his new exalted position, calling himself shadow Chancellor, in competition with the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard)—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it is a good competition. The one respect in which they are not competing well is with those on the Labour Benches. In his new position, surely the hon. Gentleman should consider this issue: if we decide that the single currency is in the national economic interest, it should be on the basis of compelling evidence, and the five economic tests that we have set down are the right basis on which we should make the decision. Far from naming the date and the exchange rate, the hon. Gentleman should look at the more detailed issues that are involved before that decision can be reached.

Terrorist Organisations

7. **Mr. Jim Murphy** (Eastwood): If he will make a statement on the progress made by Customs and Excise in tracing the assets and bank accounts of proscribed terrorist organisations. [35748]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Customs and Excise is one of the many investigative and law enforcement agencies that are actively engaged in the fight against terrorism—in particular, by disrupting and cutting off the finances of terrorist organisations. Since 11 September, the Government have ordered the freezing of the assets of more than 200 individuals and 100 organisations, undermining and preventing access to the sources of terrorist financing. We will continue to give priority to closing down all sources of such financing.

Mr. Murphy: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and pay tribute to her and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for the leading role that they are playing. She will be aware that one of the difficulties faced by the international community is the different interpretations of what is a proscribed terrorist organisation. For example, the UK rightly proscribes Hezbollah, but the European Union does not as yet do so. Can she tell the House whether the moneys seized from these terrorist organisations are being retained by the Treasury? Would not a more sensible course of action be to ensure that the money seized from al-Qaeda is invested in Afghan reconstruction and that money from Hamas is used to help

Palestinian poverty reduction? I believe that such measures would be constructive and very welcome indeed.

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. As he knows, it is incredibly important to track down terrorist financing, whatever its source. The UK remains committed to doing exactly that, but of course, we also remain committed, for example, to the reconstruction of Afghanistan—one of the good causes to which he drew attention. We stand ready, together with our neighbours, to provide all the assistance and humanitarian relief that Afghanistan needs.

My hon. Friend also drew attention to the use of funds that are frozen by the Treasury. Those funds are not the property of the UK Government and we certainly cannot decide arbitrarily to use them for good causes. However, we must, in conjunction with the international community, regularly review whether such freezing orders should still apply. I can tell the House that the UN sanctions committee decided last month to review the asset-freezing sanctions against the central bank of Afghanistan. It is our intention to work urgently and closely with the new, legitimate Afghan Government to return the bulk of the £70 million that had been frozen against the country's Government previously.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is it not reprehensible that a terrorist organisation that is probably the most murderous in the world and has killed tens of thousands of people and kidnapped many more, including most recently the brave presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt in Colombia—namely, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—is not a proscribed organisation under the terms of the Terrorism Act 2000? Nor is any murderous terrorist organisation in Latin America, such as Sendero Luminoso, proscribed under the 2000 Act. Is that not a scandal, and does it not fatally inhibit the vital work of Customs and Excise in freezing the assets of this murderous organisation, which is involved in drug dealing and kidnapping?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that a UN sanctions order must be carried out by consensus among the 15 members of the Security Council; it is, in effect, a political decision to freeze the assets of individuals, organisations or states and can be appealed against in the usual way by individuals or organisations. We must gain an international consensus in that forum to take such measures. That is what we are committed to doing against any organisation, individual or state in respect of which we can prove a link to terrorist financing, and we remain at the forefront of international efforts in that regard.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister will be aware that the distinction between proscribed and other terrorist organisations is a shambles anyway, because non-proscribed organisations are also in receipt of such funds. We should congratulate those forces in our country that are doing something about this matter. May I press her on whether there have been discussions at an international level dealing with fiscal crime—primarily, such crime is money laundering in the name of terrorism and organisations—and on whether we can now obtain extradition orders to bring back to this country those who are guilty of some of the crimes that we are fighting?

Ruth Kelly: Before 11 September and subsequently, the United Kingdom has been at the forefront of measures in the fight not only against terrorism but money laundering in general. We are working with the G7 in the international arena to develop measures and encourage countries to fulfil international standards against money laundering and terrorist financing. We are also working with our overseas territories and Crown dependencies to ensure that they meet the tough international standards.

Hon. Members know that we completed consideration of the Proceeds of Crime Bill last night. It will enable our authorities to take tough action against money laundering and reduce the complexities that were inherent in the system. We are therefore working domestically and internationally to crack down on money laundering and terrorist funding wherever it occurs.

Investment

8. **Paul Holmes** (Chesterfield): What estimate he has made of the level of public sector net capital investment as a proportion of national income over the period of the first comprehensive spending review. [35749]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The figures, including the projection for the current year, which is the last year covered by the first comprehensive spending review, were set out in the pre-Budget report. They show that public sector net investment increased from 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1998-99 to 1.3 per cent. in 2001-02. That is an increase of £5.6 billion in real terms.

Paul Holmes: I am sure that the Chief Secretary agrees that the Chancellor was right to criticise the Conservative Government for their shameful level of investment in public services between 1992 and 1997. However, Treasury figures show not only that the average percentage of GDP invested in public services was 1.5 per cent. a year from 1992 to 1997, but that that average was 0.6 per cent. between 1997 and 2002. That is less than half the Conservative Government's investment. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if the Conservative record was shameful, the Labour record in the past five years is a disgrace, and that it is no wonder that public services such as the national health service and transport are in such a mess?

Mr. Smith: We inherited a legacy from a Conservative Government who cut net public investment year on year. In our first five years, we doubled net public sector investment. This spring, such investment will be twice the level that we inherited. The hon. Gentleman has experienced the benefits of that in his constituency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said earlier, the junction 29A development has brought £47 million of new investment to the area. Shirebrook has meant £27 million of investment, generating thousands of jobs in north Derbyshire. It is the biggest investment in the area since the pits were sunk, thanks to Labour government, not Liberal Democrat opposition.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Hon. Members could bring an unending list of projects worthy of capital expenditure to my right hon. Friend's attention. I shall present a petition for funding in my constituency to him next week. Nevertheless, doubling percentage expenditure, which my right hon. Friend mentioned in his initial answer, is an exceptional achievement of which we should be proud. The development of junction 29 is a phenomenal improvement to provisions in Chesterfield, North-east Derbyshire and Bolsover. Those improvements are much needed and are now being provided. Will he simply refuse to listen to moaning minnies who put an alternative viewpoint?

Mr. Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and commend him on his energetic efforts on behalf of his constituency. That is resulting in the benefits and schemes that he described. The contrast is simple: it is between a Government who believe in public investment and are substantially increasing it and a Conservative Government who cut it by an average of 15 per cent. a year in their last term in office. We are increasing it by 40 per cent. a year. That is a sharp contrast between Labour investment and Tory neglect.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Since 1997, the Government have raised an extra £130,000 million in taxes, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that the lowest levels of net public investment as a share of national income since the second world war have occurred in the same period. Why?

Mr. Smith: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have started by thanking us for all the tax cuts that this Government have brought in, notably the 3 percentage point cut on business. On levels of public investment, I make no apologies to the House. It is the Conservative party that should apologise. After five years of Labour in government, public sector net investment will be more than double the level that it was when the Tories left office. The reason for that is that we are increasing that investment, whereas they were cutting it. The Conservatives cut net investment by an average of 15 per cent. a year in their last term; we are increasing it by 40 per cent. a year.

The people of this country are seeing the benefits of that investment not only in the programmes to which I have referred, but in the 245 modernisation schemes for accident and emergency units throughout the country that had been neglected by the Conservatives, in the 17,000 schools that have had repairs carried out, and in the 50 road schemes that are now under way. There is a very clear contrast between our investment and the Conservatives rundown.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The Chancellor told the House a little while ago that Government debt was now around 30 per cent. of gross domestic product, compared with the Maastricht criterion of 60 per cent. of GDP. Does my right hon. Friend agree, therefore, that the lack of availability of public capital should not be a factor in determining the value for money of private finance initiatives?

Mr. Smith: The private finance initiative and public-private partnership programme is additional to conventional public sector investment, which, as I have said, we have doubled during this spending review period. On the level of debt that we inherited, the 44 per cent. of GDP that the Tories left us was crippling the country through debt interest repayments. It is because we took the tough decisions that we did, and because we will stick to our tough fiscal disciplines, that we are saving £8 billion a year on the cost of debt interest. That is enabling us to make the record investment in public services from which health, transport, the fight against crime and our other front-line priorities are benefiting.

Business Taxation and Regulation

9. **Patrick Mercer** (Newark): What recent representations he has received from the British Chambers of Commerce regarding business taxation and regulation. [35750]

10. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): What recent representations he has received from the Federation of Small Businesses regarding business taxation and regulation of small businesses. [35751]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): As is normal in the run-up to the Budget, the Government have received a number of representations from business organisations, including the Federation of Small Businesses and the British Chambers of Commerce.

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful to the Minister for her reply. Whenever I am in the chambers of commerce in either Retford or Newark, I receive constant questions about the burden of red tape that is being imposed on small businesses. May I remind the Minister of the Chancellor's promise given before the last election? He said:

> "We will not impose burdensome regulations on business, because we understand that successful businesses must keep costs down."

Has that promise been kept? Has the level of red tape risen or fallen?

Dawn Primarolo: The answer to the—*[Interruption.]* I thought that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) was going to get up again. He bobs up and down all the time, and he confused me. If he will allow me to answer the question first, I am sure that he will be able to come in later.

The promise has been kept on a number of fronts. First, on the lowering of tax burdens and the lowering of pressure on small businesses through regulations, the Government have cut the tax bill for those small businesses and made a number of reforms. For example, we announced in the pre-Budget report the flat-rate payment for VAT, which will be enormously helpful to 300,000 small businesses. Furthermore, the Carter review, which is currently out for discussion, takes forward the discussions on how we can ensure that small businesses can operate efficiently with the minimum amount of requirements on them to comply with legislation.

Mr. Baron: As the number of new business regulations introduced by the Government stands at a record high, and as the findings of a survey last year by the largest employment firm in the country showed that employers spend on average the equivalent of one and a half days of the working week administering employment law and dealing with personnel issues, will the Minister accept the CBI's charge that the Government are a regulatory Government?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman does not mention that many regulations are about decent wages for employees, paid holiday and time off for employees to attend to family matters, and that many of them are requested by businesses to help them in their environment. The Government must strike a fair balance between the rights of employees, which are good for small and large businesses, and ensuring that businesses can operate efficiently without the burden being too great.

As the hon. Gentleman well knows—he might care to check the Inland Revenue website—a massive programme of regulatory reform is under way. It is examining everything that is requested of business to see whether it is still necessary, whether it can be streamlined and how we can ensure that the rights of business and employees are respected, and that businesses can flourish in an environment that is suitably regulated, not over-regulated.

EU Growth and Stability Pact

3.30 pm

1. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): If he will make a statement on the operation of the EU growth and stability pact. [35742]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The United Kingdom believes that a prudent interpretation of the disciplines of the stability and growth pact should take into account the economic cycle, sustainability of debt and the important role of public investment. Our proposals for that and for reforms in European labour, product and capital markets on which we seek to make headway at the Barcelona summit are contained in the paper on European economic reform that the Treasury published today. Reforms are necessary so that Europe can successfully meet the challenge of large-scale employment creation, internal enlargement and global competition. Copies of the paper are already available in the Vote Office.

To increase competitive pressures and drive down prices for everyday goods across the European Union, we propose measures to open up markets in energy services, agriculture and the financial sector, and for a more rigorous, modernised competition policy and a reformed state aid regime. To tackle the low levels of venture capital in the EU and the high costs of banking for both individuals and businesses, we urge the creation of a single financial services market and a risk capital action plan to improve the provision of finance to small and start-out companies. To adopt a more strategic approach to research and development across the EU, we should develop better links between the science base and industry, and introduce an innovation-friendly Community patent.

We propose a debate at Barcelona on how best to reform EU labour markets, to gain the conditions for full employment and to tackle social exclusion. To expand transatlantic economic partnerships, we propose a Ceccini style report that would set out in detail the basis for growth, prosperity and jobs on both sides of the Atlantic, including a wide-ranging effort to end the remaining industrial tariffs multilaterally, remove unnecessary non-tariff barriers, and increase competition and develop more effective ways of pre-empting damaging transatlantic trade disputes.

Those measures complement our proposals to reform the stability and growth pact. As the White Paper says, being in Europe and leading in Europe is right for Britain and for British interests.

Mr. David: I thank my right hon. Friend for his full statement, and congratulate him on advocating a more flexible and prudent interpretation of the growth and stability pact. Does he agree that what is required is sustainable economic growth throughout the whole of the European Union? Will he give more details about precisely what the Government will argue for at the Barcelona summit?

Mr. Brown: If the world economy is to grow faster over the next few years, every continent must make its contribution. America must keep markets open, Japan must have structural banking reform and Europe must have the modernised labour, capital and product markets that we suggest. If we are to move ahead, there should be the reforms in the stability and growth pact that we propose. One of the messages that I took from the last European Council summit, where we were successful in overturning the Commission's recommendation against the United Kingdom and other countries, is that most countries now see the advantage of taking into account public investment, debt sustainability and the economic cycle in making decisions about what is essential for stability in the fiscal regime. I believe that Europe is ready to make reforms in that direction as well.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Is it not utterly disgraceful that a substantial White Paper such as this, setting out what the Chancellor clearly regards as an important policy initiative, should not be the subject of a separate statement in the House, allowing a proper opportunity for questioning and scrutiny and subject to all the normal courtesies such as advance notification of what is contained in the statement? That would have enabled us to begin to engage in the intelligent and open debate about the future of our relationship with the European Union for which the Government constantly call, for which the Minister for Europe called on the radio this morning, and which the Government do everything to talk about but nothing to provide or facilitate.

Is this not utterly inconsistent with the Government's very recent undertaking to the House and to you, Mr. Speaker, following the publication of the third report from the Select Committee on Public Administration, that they would no longer issue documents of this kind without first making full and comprehensive statements to the House? Is it not yet further evidence of the Government's complete contempt for the House of Commons?

As for the substance of the document, have we not heard all this before? After the Lisbon summit, the Prime Minister, no less, claimed:

> "The Council marks a sea change in European economic thinking. It points Europe in a new direction—away from heavy-handed intervention and regulation, towards a new approach based on enterprise, innovation and competition."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 2000; Vol. 347, c. 21.]

Before the Stockholm summit, the Government claimed:

> "All member states will press the Commission to take action that will make a difference to the way Europe is regulated. Reducing red tape for business start-ups and encouraging more people to become entrepreneurs means more new businesses and more new jobs."

Yet, as we know, despite all those warm words nothing meaningful—nothing of any significance—happened. Indeed, the Commissioner responsible for the single market, Commissioner Bolkestein, himself said:

> "We're seeing too much poetry and not enough motion. It is not enough to issue these elevated statements and then not act upon them."

Is the Chancellor not even remotely aware of the irony of the fact that he and the Government call, in this document, for the European Union to cut unnecessary and expensive regulations, when the Government of whom the Chancellor is such a prominent member introduced into this country last year—according to the House of Commons Library—4,642 new regulations? That is not just a record number of regulations, but a 50 per cent. increase on the number introduced in 1997. Is it any wonder that the British Chambers of Commerce has said:

> "The bottom line is that the sheer quantity of red tape on business is damaging our economy, stifling enterprise, job creation and economic growth"?

How can the Chancellor have the gall to lecture the European Union on the need to reduce regulation in this document, when his Government impose burdens on business in this country that cripple its ability to create the wealth on which we all depend?

Mr. Brown: I shall be delighted to answer the shadow Chancellor's points, although it seems that the Conservatives wish to avoid the subject of foxhunting by discussing Euro-baiting.

There is a lack of proportion in the shadow Chancellor's complaints. We sent the document to him an hour before Question Time, as we sent it to the Liberal Democrats. We have made it clear in the document that we are bringing together the announcements made by Ministers in past months in the run-up to the Barcelona summit. It is a bit much for the shadow Chancellor to complain that there is nothing new in the document, and then to say that there must be a statement because a statement is about new policy.

As far as the shadow Chancellor's individual points are concerned, we are the Government who secured changes in European policy—on taxation, with the savings directive, on value added tax on e-commerce, and on moving forward the single market in financial services. He should welcome the Lamfalussy report, which made a number of recommendations on that matter. We have persuaded the European Commission to look again at the question of state aids, and it is looking again at the question of competition policy. The takeovers directive is being re-examined as a result of actions that we and other countries have taken.

Therefore, as far as economic reform and the single market are concerned, we are pushing forward with the agenda necessary to opening up the single market. Conservative Members supported the start of the single market in the 1980s, and they should support the measures that we are proposing to complete it. However, whenever the word "Europe" is mentioned, Opposition Members say that they are against anything that is being done. They cannot bring themselves to support positive measures. They should welcome the fact that we are going to Barcelona with an aggressive and dynamic agenda for a job-creating Europe that is socially inclusive, and that opens up labour, product and capital markets to the benefit of British jobs, businesses and people.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Will my right hon. Friend say how far the stability and growth of European economies depend on recovery in the world economy? In particular, what would be the impact if Japan sank into a 1930s-type depression, as foreseen in yesterday's edition of *The Guardian*? That newspaper ran an article headed "The Crunch: Japan's Credit Rating Could Fall Below Botswana's".

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is a member of the Select Committee on the Treasury, and he has looked at issues concerning the global economy. It is absolutely clear that we need the radical structural reform of the banking sector that the Japanese Government have promised. It is also clear that America must keep markets open. Those in America who wish to resort to protectionism in certain sectors should be dissuaded from doing so.

However, it is also clear that we must balance pro-expansion fiscal and monetary policies with structural reform in the European Union. That is why it is important that a message is sent by European leaders at Barcelona that they will move ahead with opening up the energy and financial services markets, and the utility markets as a whole. I believe that we will get that message from Barcelona.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Is not it obvious that the Chancellor should have made a statement to the House and not adopted this awkward procedure, by which the Government have messed around with Question Time? That was made all the more obvious by the Chancellor's speed reading as he tried to get through a substantive statement in a matter of moments. The Chancellor's speed reading was exceeded only by that of both sets of Opposition spokesmen. We had to try and get through four documents that we received only a matter of minutes before the Chancellor made his statement—not the hour that he suggested. Moreover, we received notification that a statement was to be made only through the pages of *The Times*.

The document contains, in paragraph 1.13, a substantive apparent change in Government policy, in connection with the Government's approach to the growth and stability pact. Previously, the suggestion was that the Government supported the pact, but a rather different interpretation appears in the document, which is that the Government will support the pact only if it is interpreted in what they call a "prudent" way. Presumably, that means a way that suits the Chancellor. If it does not mean that, will he explain what is meant by the word "prudent", and how it differs from any previous interpretation placed on the matter by others, not least the European Union? Will he specify what is meant by the passage that states that the UK continues to discuss the matter with its EU partners?

Are the Government seeking reform of the growth and stability pact? What is the interpretation on which they are seeking agreement? What meetings have the Government had, and when does the Chancellor intend to report to the House either about what he is seeking to achieve, or whether he has achieved it?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the Liberal party's shadow Chancellor. The Government offer statements to the House of Commons when new policy is being announced. There is no new policy in the document, which brings together all the announcements that we have made in relation to the Barcelona economic reform summit. I believe that that will be to the benefit of the House, and the country, as we proceed to Barcelona. He is utterly wrong about the growth and stability pact. Since 1997, I have been making it clear, and I believe that he should support this, as his party supports increases in public investment, that we want a pact that takes account of the economic cycle, promotes public investment—and therefore, in certain circumstances, borrowing to support that—and deals with debt sustainability. When Italy, for example, has debts that are 110 per cent. of gross domestic product, while Britain's amount to only 30 per cent., it is clear that the treatment given to each country under the pact will and should be different.

I spoke about the three reforms of the growth and stability pact at the European Council only this week. More and more countries recognise that the procedure adopted by the Commission a few days ago was not the best way forward. Our position arises from the principle that these are matters that can improve the pact, and I believe that we are making progress. In trying to claim that this is new policy, when I have made it absolutely clear over the past few years that there was a need for reform of the growth and stability pact, the hon. Gentleman shows that he is out of touch with what is happening in Europe.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I am grateful to the Chancellor for his statement, and I understand that there are two key elements to the stability and growth that he envisages for Europe. One is the reform of state aid in other countries. How does he think that we can tackle the anti-competitiveness in certain countries' shipbuilding industries, for example? Will he also consider the financial services markets, which are the other key element in the pact? We want a single financial services market, but how, when there are regulators such as Dr. Müller in Germany, who completely goes against the risk-based approach that this country has adopted and that is being so ably promoted by the Economic Secretary and the Financial Services Authority, can we achieve—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Questions should be brief.

Mr. Brown: Commissioner Monti has agreed to a further review of state aid, with a view to modernisation in line with the practices of the modern world. I believe that that is long overdue.

I hope that all parties will welcome the Lamfalussy report. A few days ago, a new report from the business community said that the gains from opening up financial services could amount to about 0.5 per cent. additional GDP across the European Union. British insurance firms, banks and financial services firms would benefit from the opening up of the industries in other countries, and we, with our great success in that field, are in a position to gain maximum benefit. We will continue to pursue the reform of the financial services industry, as my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Why does the document call for greater transparency and accountability in the World Trade Organisation, for example, but not mention the more essential issue of accountability at the European Central Bank? Does the Chancellor recall making a speech on this subject last spring? Has he now dropped it from his agenda?

Mr. Brown: No, we have also discussed the future of the European Central Bank and I have welcomed the fact that the bank, which did not use to publish comprehensive minutes of its meetings is now doing so, in line with the practice of the Bank of England. Increasingly, it is making itself more accountable to both the Governments and the people of Europe. It must, of course, remain an independent central bank. Those of us who supported the making independent of the Bank of England recognise the importance of the European Central Bank being independent of the decision-making processes of politicians.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Is it not self-evident that we need rules relating to ourselves and our European partners on debt, and that those must take account of debt sustainability, and is not the essential point that, if we have political influence in Europe, we can renegotiate the rules to favour the interests of our country, and is it not the case that the Government can do that, whereas the Opposition can only squeal and squawk from the sidelines? In doing so, not only are they not acting in this country's interests, but they are being profoundly unpatriotic.

Mr. Brown: Indeed. At the European Council only a few days ago, we wrote into the German and Portuguese conclusions the importance of the debt reduction that they had agreed. Debt sustainability is now being recognised by the European Council as a major issue that must be tackled. I would have hoped that both sides of the House would support our proposed reforms of the growth and stability pact. They are good for growth, good for jobs and good for public investment. Of course, it was the previous Conservative Government who negotiated the stability pact in the first place. That pact needs reforming, and I hope that both sides of the House will support such reform.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): I congratulate the Chancellor on the part that he has recently played, as I urged him to do, in undermining the so-called European growth and stability pact. Of course, to apply it in a recession one has to burn the books of Maynard Keynes and rescue the shroud of Philip Snowden from the Labour mausoleum. Does the

Chancellor agree that strict application of the growth and stability pact's rules during a recession would make it much more difficult for a British Government to deal with rising and serious unemployment, as Germany is finding today?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who, in considering the economic events that should form part of our discussion, has yet to mention the return to the gold standard in 1925.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My hon. Friend knows all about it.

Mr. Brown: It is a lesson for economic policy making.

As far as the growth and stability pact is concerned, I agree with the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell) that, as Keynesian economics teaches us, the pact should be reformed to recognise the economic cycle. The important point is that last summer, when the stability pact code was rewritten, account was taken of the economic cycle for perhaps the first time in the Council's deliberations on that matter. That is one reason why the Council felt unable to take action against Germany and Portugal in the past few days. Reform of the growth and stability pact is now accepted more widely than just in the United Kingdom, and such reform should extend to recognising the importance of public investment. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is not one of those Conservative Members who use growth and stability pact discussions simply to push anti-European prejudices.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Britain can take the lead in Europe in economic reform, and the reforms that he has discussed will be strongly beneficial to British companies and jobs and the British economy—not least in areas where we have a comparative advantage, such as energy and financial services. In looking to make those structural changes, will he also continue to press—as he said that he would—to make the stability pact more flexible? Does he accept that many on the Government Benches will say to him that we did not liberate this country from years of cuts in public services imposed by the Conservative party only to see public investment restraints reimposed as a result of the growth and stability pact?

Mr. Brown: It is by pursuing sensible monetary and fiscal policies that we achieve both growth and future prosperity through rising investment. In addition to our proposed reforms in the growth and stability pact, our management of monetary policy, the European Union and the past year's interest rate reductions have also been very important in creating the conditions for the re-establishment of growth. We should remember not only that public investment is rising at the right time, which the Opposition have opposed throughout; we have also had the fastest growth in the G7 in the past year, the lowest inflation and interest rates for 40 years, and for the first time since the second world war, unemployment in Britain is lower than in Japan, America and Europe. I hope that both sides of the House will welcome that.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): In the context of the White Paper, could the Chancellor explain why the United Kingdom has fallen from ninth to 19th in the world competitiveness league since 1997?

Mr. Brown: Under the Conservative Government, we were 23rd in the world competitiveness league to which the hon. Gentleman referred. *[Interruption.]* It is important to point out what happened under the Conservatives. I could quote all the surveys conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers and other companies in the past few months, which show that we are the leading location for investment in Europe. The hon. Gentleman asked his question in the way that he did because he cannot escape the fact that we have had the fastest growth in the G7 in the past year, the lowest inflation for 40 years and employment rising in a way that it is not in other countries.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is an irony that it was Germany that insisted on creating the growth and stability pact and is now in danger of being bitten by its own dog? Does he also agree that it is an irony that he himself intervened, very sensibly, to prevent the growth and stability pact strictures from being applied to Germany, and avoided its being criticised? Does he also agree that if Germany is to get out of its present recession—today's figures show that its output actually fell in the fourth quarter—it will have to break through the constraints of the growth and stability pact, which shows that the pact is nonsense as currently formulated?

Mr. Brown: No, I do not accept that. We support the growth and stability pact. We support the co-ordination of fiscal and monetary policy—that is absolutely essential—but we support the prudent interpretation of the stability and growth pact. [Hon. Members: "Ah!] Exactly. Unfortunately, Conservative Members did not insist on that interpretation when they were in government.

The reason that a prudent interpretation of the growth and stability pact is now being accepted is that, in our interpretation, it does recognise the importance of public investment, of the economic cycle and of taking debt into account. The growth and stability pact that we support is one that will take all these things into account. Therefore I am not against a growth and stability pact. I am in favour of a growth and stability pact, and one that takes account of public investment.

Business of the House

12.56 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I should be delighted. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing us to take his time for the question.

Monday 4 March—Remaining stages of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill.

Tuesday 5 March—Opposition Day for the minority parties. Until 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Government Support for Mr. Mittal and the Domestic Steel Industry" followed by a debate entitled "Process of Consent for New Nuclear Power Stations in Scotland and Wales". Both debates arise on a motion in the names of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru.

Wednesday 6 March—Remaining stages of the Office of Communications Bill *[Lords]*.

Thursday 7 March—Estimates [2nd Allotted Day].

There will be a debate on policy on environmental taxation followed by a debate on the deployment of Ministry of Defence resources in the war against terrorism.

At 7 o'clock the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

Friday 8 March—Debate on police on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

Monday 11 March—Progress on remaining stages of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

Tuesday 12 March—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*.

Wednesday 13 March—Opposition Day [11th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

Thursday 14 March—Debate on women and equality on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Friday 15 March—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that on Monday 18 March there will be a debate on hunting. In the Queen's Speech we promised that we would enable a free vote to take place on the future of hunting with dogs. The Government will table a motion enabling the House to express its view in a free vote between the three options. A similar vote will take place in the House of Lords.

Following those votes my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs intends to bring forward, before the Easter recess, our proposals to resolve the issue.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 13 March, there will be a debate relating to European transport policy in European Standing Committee A and a debate relating to cosmetic products in European Standing Committee C.

[Wednesday 13 March 2002:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union documents: 11932/01, Commission White Paper; European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide. 12597/01, Draft Decision amending Decision No 1692/96/EC on Community guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-xv, (2001-02).

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union document: Unnumbered EM submitted by DTI dated 14 November 2001; Amended draft Council Directive amending for the seventh time Council Directive 76/768/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to cosmetic products. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 152-vii; HC 152-xix (2001-02).]

Finally, may I make a personal statement regarding my answer at last Business questions to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) a fortnight ago? At the time, I said that

> "there was no disagreement . . . between Mr. Sixsmith and Jo Moore",

which I accept is difficult to reconcile with all that we have since learned. More seriously, I said that

> "there was no such e-mail".—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 314.]

The Mirror has since recorded that it was misled as to the contents of the e-mail and that it was not addressed to Jo Moore. But there was an e-mail. I would not have used those words had I been aware of that at the time.

I enjoy our Thursday exchanges and I always seek to be accurate, if combative, in my replies. I regret that on the last occasion I was not in possession of accurate information. I apologise to the House for having, in all good faith, misled it, and to *The Mirror* for having done it an injustice.

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the future business. I also thank him for what he has just said so graciously, but may I suggest, to round off that little matter, that he may want to come to the House on another occasion, following the inquiries that I have no doubt he is continuing to make as to the source of the misinformation that he was so regrettably given and the actions that he and the Cabinet propose to take to ensure that such things do not happen again? That would serve not only the House, but the Government—not to mention the right hon. Gentleman himself.

We have heard the announcement that the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill will be debated on Monday. We have been told that one day is being allocated to consider that Bill on Report and Third Reading. The House must be aware—if not, it is about to become aware—that 32 clauses and seven schedules to that Bill were not even considered in Committee, and that some 68 amendments have already been tabled for debate on Report stage of what is a 92 clause and 13 schedule Bill.

Will the Leader of the House reconsider, even at this stage, whether one day is remotely adequate to consider that number of amendments to a Bill of that size? Will he also give an undertaking that, if any Government amendment is tabled to that Bill between now and Monday, further time will made available properly to consider any such amendment? I hope that he will give that issue very serious consideration, because that important Bill contains some very controversial elements and it must receive proper consideration.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, you said:

> "It is not a rule of the House, but a courtesy, that Ministers give as much warning as possible of any statement that they are going to make. I encourage Ministers to do that. If there is any difficulty or short notice in future, I can use my discretion, but I would rather encourage Ministers to give out their statements well in advance."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 709.]

Already, less than 24 hours after you said that, Mr. Speaker, we have had the unedifying spectacle of a humiliated Chancellor, who, having tried to slip out a White Paper under the guise of Question Time, was then obliged to turn a question into a pseudo-statement; but even then he gave no advance warning to my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor of the contents of what he was going to say, which he then garbled and babbled out at the Dispatch Box in a properly embarrassed manner.

What on earth can you now do, Mr. Speaker? In your typically generous way, you suggested to the House yesterday that you expected Ministers to respond to what you had said, but you said that you could use your discretion. Not only do I ask the Leader of the House to give an undertaking that he will use his influence to ensure that we do not have any more of this, but I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to look again at the discretion that you said you might use, because the House is now being abused on a daily basis by the most senior members of the Government who seemingly do not care any more whether the conventions of the House are adhered to. That is regrettable and demeaning to everyone involved, not least to the Chancellor himself on this occasion.

We have now heard the confirmation of what has been widely speculated on in press: we will have debates on the subject of saving foxes, hares and failed Secretaries of State. The debate will have to take that form, will it not? We now know—I want the Leader of the House to confirm or to deny this—that there is a causal link between the parliamentary Labour party's support for the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the not coincidental announcement almost immediately afterwards that some raw meat is to be thrown to the parliamentary Labour party.

Will the Leader of the House confirm categorically and on the record that there is no question of any link whatever between the support given by the parliamentary Labour party to the Transport Secretary and the almost immediate announcement of a debate on hunting? If it were ever to emerge that there was any truth in that, it would be seen as the most cynical ploy. It must be a perfect example of the countryside being sacrificed to a Secretary of State at bay.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Let me deal with his points one at a time.

First, I will continue to reflect on anything useful that I am told with regard to the matter that I dealt with in my statement. However, the matter has been discussed exhaustively in the past three days. I am a humble man and there is nothing that I can usefully add to what has already been said.

On the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, many of the amendments that have been tabled for next week are in the Government's name and are of a technical character. Indeed, in some cases, they are on issues that have been raised by others, to which we want to respond positively. We are confident that the Bill can be properly dealt with in one day if the House is businesslike in its approach. I hope that we can deliver on that next week.

I am strongly in favour of making statements when it is appropriate and necessary to do so. However, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that in the four and a half years since 1997, this Government have made more statements to the House than were made in any four-and-a-half-year period under the preceding Conservative Government. When I was the shadow spokesman on international affairs, they frequently produced documents on Europe without even the courtesy that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has just given the House of an additional half-hour of questioning.

I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman, who is fecund in his imagination, on having managed to bring the Secretary of State for Transport into the discussion on hunting. *[Interruption.]* I would not deny the right hon. Gentleman the credit for having done so. On this occasion, he is hunting a red herring—not worthy of me, but I could not resist it. I assure the House that the decision was taken last week, well before anything was said by Mr. Sixsmith to *The Sunday Times*, and well before any discussion in the House on the Secretary of State.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): May I draw attention to early-day motion 901, on biochemical weapons?

[That this House calls for the Government to come to an agreement with NATO to declassify the information regarding biochemical weapons taken from the aggressors during World War Two which were dumped off the shores of several European countries around the North Sea and in the Baltic; notes that the 50 year period under which such information is kept private is now finished; calls on the Government, other European countries and other responsible nations to make considerable efforts to combat the pollution that is caused by the sunken vessels which are affecting marine life around European shores; notes that the Russians are already taken action on this issue, and believes that the British Government should do likewise.]

I understand that more than 50 years ago, the Americans, the Russians and the British, after seizing trophies from the aggressors in world war two, put biochemical weapons into 65 ships and dumped them all over European waters, some in the Baltic sea, some in the North sea and some off the shores of Sweden and Denmark. As the 50-year period of classification is over, is it possible to have a debate on getting NATO to agree to declassify this information? The Russians have already taken action and found that some of the vessels are leaking Yperite, which is mustard gas, into the marine environment. They are very concerned about it. If that is allowed to continue it could affect three or four generations.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue, which is clearly of real concern to him. I shall convey his comments about declassifying the documents to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I saw some of the documentation when I was in my previous post and the consensus of international scientific advice is that dumping on the sea bed does not pose a threat to the

[Mr. Cook]

environment. That in part reflects the judgment on the extent of dispersal, should there be leaks of the kind to which my hon. Friend refers. I shall draw the question of declassification to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I congratulate the Leader of the House on his gracious apology. I hope that other members of the Cabinet will follow his good example in future. Does he recall that in the debate on the Committee on Standards and Privileges report on 13 February, he promised, at column 222, to reflect on the issue that I raised with him about the compatibility of the ministerial code with the code of behaviour of Members of the House? Is the right hon. Gentleman yet in a position to make a statement on his reflections? Can he give us any indication of when he may be able to make a statement on that review? Who is undertaking the review of the code of ministerial conduct? Can we be assured that there will also be a parallel review of the code relating to ministerial special advisers?

In view of the admission on Tuesday by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions that he intervened to stipulate the departure terms of Mr. Martin Sixsmith, insisting that Mr. Sixsmith was not to be in receipt of any employment in the civil service in future, does the Leader of the House accept that there is a potential conflict even with the existing code, let alone with the statements made since about the code, particularly in relation to the obligations of a good employer? In view of the substantial evidence that has been added to today that the Secretary of State insisted on equality of treatment as between Jo Moore and Martin Sixsmith, can the Leader of the House tell us whether a similar stipulation was applied to her resignation—that is, that she should never be employed in the civil service again?

Mr. Cook: I of course recall the promise that I made to the hon. Gentleman during our debate on the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Indeed, I predicted this morning that the hon. Gentleman would be vigilant in reminding me of it. This is not a matter that can move overnight; as I told the House, we wanted time to consider carefully the serious points that the hon. Gentleman raised. I assure him that I am certainly reflecting on it—indeed, I hope that it is not an offence to the English language if I say that I am actively reflecting on it. When I am ready to say something, I will come back to the House and make sure that the hon. Gentleman is advised about it.

As for the Government being a good employer, of course all members of the Cabinet are under an obligation to be good employers in their Department. However, all Members of the House—particularly Conservative Members, with their knowledge of business interests—are also aware that the duty of a good employer is to make sure that the Department can function and is not undermined by any employee within that Department. In addition, a good employer is required, perfectly reasonably, to make sure that people in the Department are fulfilling the contract to which they signed up. The resignations the other week have been trawled over extensively. I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at the statement by the permanent secretary, Sir Richard Mottram, to which it would be unwise for any of the rest of us to add.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Although I welcome the debate on hunting with dogs, is my right hon. Friend aware that most Labour Members—certainly not Conservative Members—would like, by the end of this Parliament, to have in place a ban on hunting with dogs, a barbaric practice that should have been banned long ago? If, at a later stage, this House votes for a measure that the House of Lords will almost certainly vote against, would the Government be willing to use the Parliament Act? Even if only a minority of people in the country were in favour of a ban, the view of my colleagues and me would be no different, but there is a large majority in favour of such a ban. It is in this Parliament that such a practice should come to an end.

Mr. Cook: I am well aware that this issue arouses strong feelings on both sides of the House. I also fully respect the strong views of my hon. Friend which he has held sincerely and deeply for a long time. That is why the Government are providing the opportunity, which we promised in the Queen's Speech, of a free vote to enable the House to express its view. I recognise that it is unlikely that the House is likely to express a different view from when it last voted. It may or may not be the case, however, that in the House of Lords a different conclusion is reached when the Lords consider the three options. After that, the Minister for Rural Affairs will consider how to take the matter forward and find a way of reaching a conclusion, which was the commitment that we made in our manifesto. Until we have made that progress, it would be unwise to speculate on what we will do in the event of failure.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Leader of the House accept that there is one item of unfinished business arising from the Jo Moore affair, and I do not thereby refer to the impending reshuffling of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions? I refer to the leak inquiry which was commissioned many weeks ago to find out who did the public service of revealing to the world the appalling e-mail that Jo Moore put out on 11 September, from which everything else flowed. May we have a statement from the Cabinet Office as to how this leak inquiry is progressing? May we know whether, if the culprit—so-called—is eventually identified, that person will suffer the same fate as Martin Sixsmith for daring to expose the truth about the twisters in the DTLR.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying that only one matter remains from the Jo Moore affair. I will hold him and his entire party to that statement.

It is my understanding that there was no particular inquiry within the Transport Department. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] I merely—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh.] It could be that I am over-extending myself, but I would not expect such an inquiry to produce a particular result. What is important is that we make a success of ensuring that the Transport Department works together to meet the needs of the travelling public. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is that, rather than a leak last September, that concerns people.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): The suggestion that the debates on hunting are a sop that has been flung to the Back Benches is journalistic tosh and demeaning to many people both in the House and outside who have campaigned for years to get a ban on hunting with dogs. It was in our manifesto and the Queen's Speech. To link it to the Secretary of State for Transport is fanciful in the extreme and total nonsense.

The process of having debates on hunting is getting rather boring. As my right hon. Friend said, we know the will of the House of Commons. Why cannot we just revive the Bill that went through the House in the last Session? We could do that quickly and move it to the House of Lords. If it decides to reject it, it will not be Government who invoke the Parliament Act because it will automatically come into force. If my right hon. Friend or any of his colleagues think that there is a soft option called the middle way, they are deceiving themselves.

Mr. Cook: Knowing my hon. Friend as well as I have for many years, I assure him that I would never imagine that he would accept a sop, and no one is dreaming of offering him one. He has genuine and sincere views, which I respect. I ask him, though, to respect the views of those of us who genuinely and sincerely support the middle way.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Has the right hon. Gentleman had a chance to read to the interesting report published by the highly prestigious and authoritative National Audit Office, which shows that Labour's policy on the new deal is a complete flop? Will he arrange for a debate, with the Prime Minister present, on the matter so that the Government can apologise for the enormous waste of taxpayers' money that is so clearly set out in the report today?

Mr. Cook: I have seen a summary of the NAO's conclusion. I remind the House that more than 250,000 young people have entered employment through the new deal, as is set out in the report. The NAO makes highly speculative calculations about how many of those were a result of the new deal. If the figures are as low as it claims, it is difficult for me to reconcile them with the experience in my constituency. If the figures are right, they must relate to West Lothian only and nowhere else in Britain. The new deal has been important in delivering one of the remarkable achievements of the Government, which is a cut in youth unemployment by two thirds from the level that we inherited from the Conservative party. Against that figure, we will take no lecture from the Conservative party on youth unemployment.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): On hunting, one must presume that a Bill will be introduced either in this Session or the next. My right hon. Friend told us that it will be decided on a free vote. Can he assure us that that will be the case and that Government Whips will not ask Ministers to go through the Lobbies?

Mr. Cook: I can unequivocally give my hon. Friend that assurance. Indeed, if he looks at the voting record in the last Parliament, he will observe that Ministers voted on two of the three options. I suspect that that will be the case this time.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Can the Leader of the House give me guidance on the crisis that is developing at the heart of the Government's policy on energy, especially as it is reflected in Scotland? This week, the Minister for Industry and Energy, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), is quoted as saying that the building of a power station in Scotland

> "will be a matter for the Scottish Executive to determine. End of story."

Conversely, the Minister of State, Scotland Office, the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), said:

> "it wouldn't be for a legislature which has powers devolved from Westminster to then thwart the policy of a UK government on areas which are clearly reserved to Westminster, such as energy".

Scotland cannot afford that developing crisis. How does the right hon. Gentleman intend to resolve it?

Mr. Cook: I anticipate that we will have a full opportunity to explore those issues next week, at which time the hon. Gentleman can put his questions to my colleague who will be taking part in that debate. Whatever the legal and constitutional position, surely the important issue is that Westminster and Edinburgh work together to ensure that they find a solution.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): The President of the United States of America seems inevitably to be moving towards war against Iraq, and this morning the Prime Minister made a statement in support of the President's "axis of evil" speech. May I ask that, before any decision is taken on this country joining military action, there will be a parliamentary debate and that any action will be the subject of a vote of this House?

Mr. Cook: It is important to remind ourselves that, despite the best efforts of the media to confuse the point, no decision has been taken in the United States or anywhere else on the question of military action. Indeed, if my hon. Friend looks closely at what the Prime Minister said in that interview, he will see that my right hon. Friend indeed supported action against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, on which I would imagine all Members would support him, but made no commitment to military action in that connection, either against Iraq or anywhere else. Of course, in the event of the kind of outcome on which my hon. Friend speculates, there would be full discussion in the House. It is not something that could be done in secret, and would not be done in secret.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): The Leader of the House will recall the exchange on Tuesday between the Transport Secretary and the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) on the subject of congestion charging, in which the hon. Lady called for "this ridiculous plan" to be subject to

> "a full public inquiry and environmental audit".

In his response, the Secretary of State said:

> "under the terms of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 we are not allowed to deal with it."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 573.]

[Angela Watkinson]

I understand that the Government have a range of powers under that Act, not least including the matter of exemptions. Will the Leader of the House say when the Secretary of State will return to the Chamber to enable the matter to be debated fully?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend will be answering questions next week, and obviously that question can be put to him. The hon. Lady will be aware from her research that the Government's role in this is very limited. It is a matter for the Mayor to bring forward his proposals, but as she may also be aware, we have expressed the view that it would of course help to ensure full public consultation and consensus around the proposals if the Mayor, as is open to him, were to hold a public inquiry into them.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I look forward to joining my right hon. Friend and hon. Members on both sides of the House in voting in due course for a total ban on hunting. However, on this occasion I would ask whether he could find an opportunity for the House to address itself to another matter: sex and death. He will know that the incidence of chlamydia in this country is terrifyingly high, and that the Government have carried out very useful pilot schemes on screening for the disease. Does he also know that chlamydia ruins fertility, destroys marriages, and because it causes ectopic pregnancy, kills up to 10 women a year? Can we find time to debate the issue and Government action against this silent killer?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a profound and real danger to so many of our young people. The growth in sexually transmitted disease among young people is a matter of concern to all parties in the House. That is why the Government produced only a few months ago their national sexual health strategy. I know that my hon. Friends at the Department of Health are pursuing that vigorously, and I shall draw their attention to my hon. Friend's interest.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Is the Leader of the House in a position to tell us who will respond for the Government in the Opposition day debate in the name of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru on nuclear power, given that we have heard that there is confusion at the heart of government between the Minister of State in the Scotland Office and the Industry and Energy Minister? Perhaps I could helpfully suggest that one opened the debate and the other closed it, and we could see how the debate develops.

Mr. Cook: Since it was at 10.15 this morning that, rather late, the SNP and Plaid Cymru informed us of the subject of next week's debate, I am not in a position to answer the hon. Gentleman's question about speakers. If next time they have an Opposition day they give us the normal notice, the night before, I will be able to answer in good time.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Licensed killing for fun is simply unacceptable. My right hon. Friend may support the middle way but, with respect, he is in a tiny minority. Why do we need to march the troops to the top of the hill yet again when the view of the House of Commons is as plain as a pikestaff? On 18 March, instead of having a completely useless and meaningless indicative vote, why do we not take the Bill passed by the House of Commons in the last Session, debate it, vote on it, and send it to the House of Lords? If the Lords reject it, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) says, it would automatically become law in this Session. We should not continue the farce until 2003–04, when people outside the House and the majority of those inside it want the matter resolved now.

Mr. Cook: I have been pressed repeatedly in business questions for several weeks to schedule a debate on hunting, and I cannot say that I have been overwhelmed by gratitude for having responded to the demand. As for my position, my hon. Friend and I have in our time both been part of tiny minorities; that did not make us feel at the time that either of us was necessarily wrong. It is entirely possible that when he considers the options, my hon. Friend will feel that the Bill that was presented in the last Parliament is the way forward, and no one has excluded it as such. However, many of those who were involved in the debate on that legislation, including some who pressed for a ban, have perceived ways in which that Bill could be amended. That will require further consideration and should not be ruled out at the start.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Leader of the House accept that to many people the debate on 18 March shows a Government with the most extraordinarily twisted priorities? At a time when the Government are about to dismantle the Fleet Air Arm, the transport system is in chaos, there is a serious shortage of teachers, and the hospital trusts and social services in my constituency are underfunded to the tune of more than £20 million and unable to deliver the services they should, is not this spiteful and reckless attack on the rights of minorities a total waste of time and an irresponsible delusion of public opinion?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman and I have both been Members of Parliament for a long time and we both know that those on either side of the House can produce their own list of important matters that the House should debate. I would like the House to have more opportunity to debate the fact that this country has the fastest growth of any of the major economies, the lowest inflation in Europe, the lowest unemployment for a generation, and the biggest investment in health and education of any of the G7 countries. The totality of a parliamentary year provides opportunities for us to debate matters of deep public concern, and whatever view he takes of hunting, I am sure that he, as a fair-minded Member, admits that it is the subject of genuine public concern.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): On 14 February, Channel 4 transmitted a programme that showed the application within the national health service of futile care theories. That is when medical staff make subjective judgments about their patients that can lead to death by dehydration and starvation—procedures legitimised in 1993 by the Bland judgment. Rather than the courts and the medical profession leading the debate, is it not high time Parliament began to debate that difficult area of policy?

Mr. Cook: That sensitive and delicate issue has been raised on a number of occasions. I fully understand the sincerity with which my hon. Friend raises the question, but I have always taken the view—it must be a personal judgment—that such decisions are best left to the discretion of the medical doctors involved, who in hospitals throughout the country are daily faced with difficult judgments. I am not sure that high-profile political debate would assist them to make those difficult judgments.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Following the passing of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, Her Majesty's Government promised the House a regular debate on London issues. The Leader of the House will have heard the excellent question of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) on congestion charges. Surely the House should be consulted on the merits of that iniquitous scheme, which will weigh particularly heavily on Londoners at a time when their public transport has been steadily run down? Will the Leader of the House now assure us that we will get that early debate, preferably before Easter?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that it is a good use of the House's time to debate matters over which the Government have no legal powers. Our main angle on congestion charges is whether the revenue from them is used to improve public transport; that is the locus of Government. We do not have a locus to prevent the use of the powers that the House has given the Mayor of London. However, I am sensitive to the need for a debate on London, and I said in the last business statement that I shall keep under review the opportunity for a debate on London issues.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): May I raise a matter of interest to my north-east constituents in Hartlepool? We had been led to expect that the White Paper on devolution to the English regions would appear in the new year, then March and then by Easter. However, according to a report in today's *Financial Times*, it has been postponed by the Government until a future date. Can my right hon. Friend say whether or not that is the case and, if it is, offer an explanation? Will he give an undertaking to the House that that will not mean that the Government's legislative timetable, whatever it is, will not slip?

Mr. Cook: Of course, no date was ever given for publication of the White Paper on the regions, so it is difficult to understand the allegation in the press that there has been a delay in a publication date that was never set. The bottom line is that all in the Cabinet want to introduce a White Paper on the regions. As my right hon. Friend, who follows these matters closely, will know, there are difficult issues to be resolved; they are being actively worked upon in repeated meetings. As soon as we can produce a White Paper, we shall do so.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I feel sure that the Leader of the House will agree that the situation in Zimbabwe is deteriorating dangerously. I was grateful a few weeks ago for his assurances that Ministers would come to the Dispatch Box to keep us informed of developments. Does he think it appropriate, when the Leader of the Opposition and other Opposition politicians there are clearly being intimidated ahead of the presidential election, to have a statement next week?

Mr. Cook: I wholly agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the gravity of the situation in Zimbabwe. As he seeks a Government statement, I can say that we fully deplore the way in which the Leader of the Opposition there has been treated: on all the alleged evidence produced so far there is obviously no motivation other than a political one for the charges that have been brought against him.

I will indeed keep under review when it may be appropriate for a Minister to make a statement at the Dispatch Box. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the elections, a week on Sunday, will take place very shortly; the House will obviously want to consider what happens after those elections. Whether it would be helpful in the context of those elections to have debates which would be relayed within Zimbabwe is another matter.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): There were excellent exchanges today during Treasury questions on international debt relief and educational developments in the third world. Has my right hon. Friend noticed early-day motion 885 on tackling global poverty?

[That this House notes that international currency transactions total more than $1 trillion a day and that the vast majority of this is unrelated to the real economy of tangible trade goods and services; believes that such enormous speculative flows have contributed to serious economic damage to countries and regions such as Mexico (1994), Southeast Asia (1997), Russia (1998), Brazil (1999) and Argentina (2001); further believes that a small levy on such currency speculation, the Tobin tax, named after the Nobel Laureate who originated the concept, could both dampen down the scale and scope of speculation and raise substantial revenues, potentially in excess of $50 billion each year, for projects targeted towards ending global poverty, is pleased that this initiative now enjoys the backing of a number of governments and parliaments across the world, including France, whose parliament recently passed a law authorising its implementation; is heartened by the words of the Chancellor that innovative ways need to be urgently found, including currency taxes, to finance development; wishes the Chancellor a successful mission to the UN 'Financing for development' conference in Monterrey, Mexico; urges him to take steps towards the introduction of a internationally co-ordinated currency transactions tax, with the proceeds ring-fenced for international substantial development objectives; and further urges the Chancellor to ensure that these proceeds do not replace either existing international aid disbursements or agreed commitments to increase international aid.]

The first six signatories to the motion are from different political parties in the House and are concerned about introducing an international tax on international currency transactions and ring-fencing the money for third world development. Can we have a debate on that, which perhaps could be tied in with Monterrey and discussions on financing development, whether before or after the conference?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter, and welcome his reference to the useful

[Mr. Cook]

exchanges during Treasury Question Time. The United Kingdom has been very much in the forefront of international debate on this issue and, in fairness, the last Conservative Chancellor was active on the matter too.

The Monterrey conference provides a useful opportunity to refocus international energy and interest on providing finance for development, which has not been sufficiently prominent in international affairs. I can assure my hon. Friend that my colleagues attending the conference will do all they can to make sure that a successful outcome is secured. That may not involve a Tobin tax, which has its own serious technical problems, but must involve equivalent ways of helping the third world.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): As one of those involved in the Middle Way Group option which seeks to offer an alternative to the rather entrenched positions of the pro and anti-hunting with dogs lobbies, and given that polls indicate that the public are moving away from criminalisation of hunting with dogs towards regulation, may I ask the Leader of the House whether, in the event of the Commons and Lords disagreeing with regard to the options in the Bill, he would consider setting up some sort of three-way dialogue so that, with some generous listening and mutual respect, we might be able to find a workable and fair solution that is accepted by a majority of the British people?

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman will be talking to himself, then.

Mr. Cook: I hear what the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) says, and I gather that some of my hon. Friends did, too. I have just announced that there will be a vote in both Houses in some two weeks, and we need to wait and see the outcome of those votes before we consider the next step. The Government go to bed every night in the hope that they may wake up and discover that both Houses have voted for the same thing.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): On the subject of hunting, I welcome the debate but this will be the fourth debate and free vote on the subject of hunting with hounds. We have had crushing majorities on all three previous occasions. Is it not about time that a Bill was introduced? Contrary to what the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) just said, if the Bill is passed in this place and goes up the Corridor to the other place and the Lords decide to sabotage it, the Parliament Act would automatically be invoked—we would not need any commission—and the legislation would be passed. Then we could get on with abolishing the House of Lords.

Mr. Cook: I am not sure to what extent my hon. Friend's final remark will provide an incentive to their lordships in the other place to be co-operative. I recognise the logic of his argument in terms of the application of the Parliament Act, but that would depend on all sides being satisfied with the precise terms of the Bill in the last Parliament. Some people, not necessarily those who are in any way friendly to hunting, have suggested ways in which that Bill could be improved. That, of course, cannot be done within the terms of the Parliament Act.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Leader of the House will know that the European Scrutiny Committee has been conducting an inquiry into democracy and accountability in the national Parliaments. In the context of the constitutional convention that is taking place in Brussels today and in future months, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure, so far as he is able to do so, that the Minister for Europe comes before the House regularly so that proper questions can be put to him and we, and representatives of all parties in all parts of the House, can be properly informed about what is going on there? There is a strong feeling in the House that the disproportionate direction in which the convention is going could severely limit future democracy in this country.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman knows as well as anyone else in the House that the convention meets for the first time today, so it may be a little premature to say what direction it is travelling in. He will have noted the speech of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary setting out a perspective quite distinct from that of some of the other countries that will be participating in the convention. I am not sure that all the rest of the House would share the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for regular statements on progress in the convention, but it is a matter of legitimate interest, which I am sure will be aired. I look forward to the report from the European Scrutiny Committee on how we could improve our procedures in this House.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the establishment and inauguration of the convention on the future of Europe which, by bringing together national Parliaments with the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, will provide a unique opportunity to involve civil society and the people of Europe in a discussion and debate about the future limits and future direction of Europe? Does my right hon. Friend agree, first, that we should give central importance to the work of the European Scrutiny Committee, both in assisting our representatives on the convention to report back to the House, and in monitoring the progress of the convention, and secondly, that in parallel with the report of the Modernisation Committee on the work of Select Committees, this is a good opportunity to review and upgrade the work of the House in scrutinising European legislation? Perhaps we could consider some small experiments such as appointment by the European Scrutiny Committee of a rapporteur on the convention, or larger ideas such as the establishment of a Grand Committee on European affairs. Thirdly, does he accept that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Twice is enough.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes some very interesting proposals, and I would be very happy to discuss with him privately whatever else he was about to propose. On the question of appointing a rapporteur, the Modernisation Committee suggested in our report on Select Committees that they could make more use of rapporteurs. Of course, it is open to the European Scrutiny Committee to consider that possibility. I am pleased that the House is well represented on the convention and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) on her election by the convention to its collective presidency. She will be able to play a major role in shaping its direction and procedures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) touched on the key issue: the convention should be not merely a body of politicians talking to each other, but a forum that can liberate and allow civil society and the public of Europe to take part in the debate about their future. Ultimately, we have to find a solution that is acceptable to the public and supported by them.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the accuracy of communications? Has he had a chance to consider early-day motion 904?

[That this House notes the report in the Evening Standard of 26th February that the Shooting Stars Children's Hospice has not yet been built; and consequently calls upon the Liberal Democrat honourable Member for Richmond Park to justify her press release stating that 'It was an honour to meet the brave children at the hospice. The work the doctors and nurses do at the Shooting Stars Children's Hospice is second to none'.]

The motion refers to comments by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) about visiting the Shooting Stars children's hospice, but unfortunately, as it says, the hospice has not yet been built.

There are other occasions in respect of which the Leader of the House could consider the need for a debate about communications. I notice that the 22 February edition of *Liberal Democrat News* announces that there is to be a by-election in Matlock on Hurst farm. A number is given for contacting helpers, and the announcement states:

> "Party defending seat: Liberal Democrat. Cause: Resignation."

As of yesterday morning, there had been no such resignation. Could we have a debate on the accuracy of the information that is being circulated?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman memorably raised a matter concerning communication by a Department last time, so I am immensely relieved that he is being non-partisan. He has not yet attacked the Conservative party about communication, but no doubt he will have many opportunities to do so in future. I am pleased to say that I have no ministerial responsibility for these matters, but the House will have heard his remarks.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My right hon. Friend may have seen a recent BBC poll on the national health service, which showed that the No. 1 popular priority was free, long-term care for the elderly. Subsequently, he may also have seen a report by the Institute for Public Policy Research saying that such care should be a priority for the Government and was popular with the electorate. He will have noticed early-day motion 351, on the Right to Care campaign.

[That this House welcomes the launch of the Right to Care Campaign; believes that the formation of a campaign grouping involving 20 major campaign groups, charities and trade unions is testament to the depth of feeling surrounding the issue of long-term care felt by the members of these organisations and by many members of the public; is concerned that distinguishing between personal and nursing care is impractical and will prove unworkable; further believes that these differences in policy between regions of the UK are creating major disparities in the type and levels of care available to elderly and disabled people; and urges the Government to fully fund personal and nursing care that is free at the point of use for all who need long-term care, wherever they live throughout the UK.]

The motion has the signatures of 122 hon. Members, the majority of whom come from the Labour Benches, and calls for free long-term care for the elderly. Will my right hon. Friend make time for another debate on this subject in the very near future?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a profoundly important issue that will one day affect all of us in this Chamber. It is also a matter of real and legitimate public debate. I have noted the reports to which he referred and will bear in mind this topic among the many others for which there are bids for discussion in the House. I remind him and the House that the Government have acted by providing for the first time that all nursing care in private residential homes will be provided for free. We have honoured that commitment and it is making a genuine difference.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will agree that the forthcoming debate on the armed forces and terrorism will be an opportunity to acknowledge the professionalism, ability and skill that the armed forces have shown in the fight against terrorism. Will it not also be an opportunity to commit ourselves to providing the armed forces with the resources that they need to fulfil their task? It is especially important that, as some personnel have been wounded and injured or have become sick as a result of their service, we continue to look after them afterwards. I remember from my parish days in Belfast that the prisoners whom we cared for were often far better looked after than the soldiers whom we sent to protect the citizens.

Mr. Cook: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and many others will wish to use the debate to record the House's deep debt of gratitude to those who serve us in the armed forces and our appreciation of their professionalism and dedication. They are repeatedly demonstrated to be among the finest anywhere on the globe, and we can take pride in them.

The Ministry of Defence goes well out of its way to try to provide help for those who have been injured in the line of duty and to protect and help bereaved families, as it did—exceptionally so—in the case of the bombardier who was killed in Sierra Leone. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about specific cases, I shall be happy to transmit them to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I am sure that the Leader of the House will be delighted to hear that I wish to help the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to do his job properly by calling for a debate on transport as soon as possible. During that debate, we could consider the success story of Chiltern Railways, which has just been awarded a new 20-year franchise; the progress of crossrail; the difficulties of Central Railway; and the appalling mess of the London underground, which is severely affecting my constituents. Perhaps the Secretary of State could explain to us why his mind was not on his job the other day when he appeared not to know that the Metropolitan line, which runs into

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

my constituency, is the worst line on the London underground. He could also give us the guarantees that we seek—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should not like the hon. Lady to anticipate her speech in such a debate.

Mr. Cook: It always worries me when Opposition Members say that they are going to be helpful. However, I agree with the hon. Lady about the success of the Chiltern line. I noticed that it has been decided that it will now be a classless line with one single class. That flatly contradicts the prediction of a previous Conservative Minister of Transport, who said that privatisation would bring in several classes, including a cheap and cheerful class for typists. I am sure we are all glad that they were wrong about privatisation in that respect, as in so many others.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I thank the Leader of the House for the charming and gracious way in which he corrected the record from two weeks ago. However, in line with "Erskine May", is it good enough to have to wait two weeks for the correction? It became clear at 4 o'clock on the afternoon on which he made his statement that he had been misled and had therefore inadvertently misled the House. I raised that on the Floor of the House before 6 o'clock that evening and again last Monday. Does two weeks meet the requirement of correcting as soon as possible inadvertent misleadings of the House?

I invite the Leader of the House to correct the reply that he gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). The Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill has 68 amendments tabled for Monday, all of which are in my name and in those of my hon. Friends. I am grateful to the Leader of the House for confirming that there will be Government amendments. I understand that they may be substantial amendments arising directly from our debates in Committee. The fact that we did not debate 32 clauses and seven schedules, yet finished with time to spare, must be taken up by the Modernisation Committee. We must be able to do our job as legislators properly.

Mr. Cook: On the time taken before correcting the record, I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that from 7 o'clock that day until Monday the House did not sit. This is the first business statement since then, and I have corrected the record at the appropriate time to the appropriate audience.

As regards the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, I am sorry if I was wrong about the composition of the 68 amendments to which the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst referred. I understand that technical Government amendments will be moved to fulfil the commitments that we made in Committee.

I am not entirely convinced that the hon. Gentleman's revelation that all the amendments are in his name makes a compelling case for another day's debate. However, we shall reflect on that in the light of what happens during the debate. If we take a businesslike and professional approach, I am sure that we can do it in the one day.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I wish the Leader of the House a happy birthday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Can he find time in the near future for the Secretary of State for Defence to explain to the House, through a debate or a statement, exactly what is intended for the Fleet Air Arm and the Sea Harrier force? I understand that a press conference will be held at the Ministry of Defence this afternoon. There has been further speculation in the press this morning, which has been enormously unsettling for the people I represent at the royal naval air station at Yeovilton—the pilots and their families in particular. It would appear that significant changes are being made to the Ministry of Defence's assessment of the economic case for moving the Sea Harriers away from Yeovilton, without any explanation. As the Member representing that constituency, I have not been given the normal courtesy that I receive from the Ministry of an explanation of what is intended. Will the Leader of the House make it plain to the Secretary of State for Defence that it would be extremely helpful to the members of the Royal Navy who serve this country well if they were given a clear understanding of what is intended?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Brevity would also be helpful.

Mr. Cook: In fairness to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, it is my experience that the Ministry of Defence is one of the most punctilious Departments in making statements to the House. Its Ministers have probably made more statements than those of any other Department during the course of this Session. In the spirit of the good wishes that the hon. Gentleman has offered to me, however, I shall certainly draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend and suggest that he contacts the hon. Gentleman to clarify the situation.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Can we have an early statement on the disposal of school playing fields? As the right hon. Gentleman will recall, his Government were elected five years ago on a pledge to stop the sale of school playing fields, yet we now know that, in spite of the comment by the Prime Minister as long ago as 1999 about the disgraceful waste of sporting talent due to the loss of school playing fields, the Government have done nothing about this. I also know, from a written answer that I received this week, that of 100 applications received since the Government supposedly tightened the rules only two have been rejected. The Government clearly have no intention of keeping their promise on this matter. The National Playing Fields Association has said that the Government have not kept their word. Can we have a statement on this, so that Ministers can explain why they have not kept their word?

Mr. Cook: I would remind the hon. Gentleman that the Government acted quickly after 1997 to change the regulations and guidelines under which they would grant licences. Indeed, the number of applications for transfer has declined, because local authorities—very reasonably, having seen what the Government said they would and would not agree to—do not submit applications when they know that they will get a negative response. That is why we should not read significance into the fact that the applications that are submitted are then granted, because that does not take into account the much larger number that are not submitted because they know they will be refused.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): This week has seen the publication of the latest edition of Members' voting records, which many of our constituents use as a measure of the diligence of Members of Parliament. The Leader of the House has also announced another free vote—one of a number that we are expecting in the next few months. Will he give some thought to making available a desk in one of the voting Lobbies, so that Members who wish to do so can formally register an abstention which will then go on the record?

Mr. Cook: I am not entirely sure whether, given three options to vote on on Monday 18 March, anyone would really need to abstain on all three options. I personally deprecate the use of the voting record as conclusive evidence of the activity or contribution of a Member.

Mr. Forth: Why?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman asks why. I think that I had the third-lowest voting record during the last Parliament, for the very good reason that I spent so much time going around the world. Hon. Members are entitled to have their contribution judged in the round, rather than having it reduced to one simple statistic.

Points of Order

1.53 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): On a point of order that may possibly even be helpful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I distinctly heard my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House say during a reply that, following the indicative vote and the process of consultation by the Minister of State, the Government would introduce a Bill before Easter. I am sure that that is exactly what I heard, whether or not it is subsequently corrected in *Hansard*. I have also just seen a reply from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which says that after the process I have just described, the Government will make a statement on the way forward. The question is whether there will be a Bill or a statement. Perhaps we can take this opportunity to clear this matter up before we get into further confusion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Perhaps I can give the Leader of the House the opportunity to respond to that, although I think that the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) might possibly have misheard him.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I would not wish there to be any doubt about what I said to the House. I have in front of me the words that I used in my opening statement:

> "Following those votes my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs intends to bring forward, before the Easter recess, our proposals to resolve the issue."

I believe that that is what I repeated subsequently in my answers, but if there is any conflict, I am happy to confirm that that is certainly the position.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The record will show what was said.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I refer you to column 563 of the *Official Report* of Tuesday 26 February, and to the personal statement of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which is entitled "Resignation of Martin Sixsmith"? You may recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Mr. Sixsmith went on television that night to say that he had not resigned, and that negotiations were in train for him to secure his acquiescence to his proposed dismissal, perhaps involving a large sum of taxpayers' money.

Hansard is always regarded as an accurate record, and historians and serious students of politics look to it for a precise and accurate record of what occurred. In this case, it should have said "the so-called resignation" or "the alleged resignation", or even "the desired dismissal", but at that stage—and, I believe, even now—Mr. Sixsmith had not resigned.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter on which the Chair can adjudicate, other than to observe that *Hansard* was no doubt recording the manner in which the point was announced, and it can do only that. If the hon. Gentleman has a substantive point, he knows that there are other ways in which to pursue it.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand why you were not able

[Roger Casale]

to allow me to pursue a line of questioning about the future of Europe convention through business questions, but will you accept that if the House is to make its full contribution to that important convention we need more procedures than are currently available?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's interest in this matter, but he must not try to pursue his uncompleted supplementary question through a point of order to the Chair. I am sure that he will have opportunities to pursue that important matter.

BILL PRESENTED

COMPANIES ACT 1989 (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Austin Mitchell presented a Bill to prevent the sale by auditors of other services to audit clients: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 April, and to be printed [Bill 104].

Welsh Affairs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

1.57 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): The Welsh day debate first took place in 1944, when Aneurin Bevan, then the Member of Parliament for Ebbw Vale, and other famous Welsh politicians spoke. It is an important feature of the parliamentary calendar that every year we have this unique opportunity for Members of this Parliament who represent Welsh constituencies, and those who do not but have an interest in Welsh matters, to debate, deliberate and discuss any matters that affect the Welsh people.

Since last year, several events have occurred, the most recently significant of which was the arrival in the House of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies). We welcome him and, if he catches your eye Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will be able to listen to his maiden speech. He replaces Sir Raymond Powell, and those of us who were friends of Sir Raymond for many years will recall that this was a special day for him. He would be responsible for gathering the daffodils for the debate, and ensuring that every Member who wished to do so would have one to wear.

Sir Raymond's contribution to the House of Commons was, however, much greater than that. When I entered the House in 1987, I had to share accommodation with seven other Members of Parliament. New Members entering the House today do not have to do that. The fact that there is accommodation befitting a modern Parliament is largely due to Sir Ray Powell. He was a great servant to his constituency. Especially significant was the help he gave shopworkers, as a member of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers.

We miss Sir Ray Powell today, but, as I have said, we welcome my hon. Friend in his place. He won a significant victory in the recent by-election. Although we may consult opinion polls from day to day and from week to week, the only polls that truly matter are the real polls, and the result achieved by my hon. Friend was significant in many ways—perhaps above all because, as a person from the south Wales valleys, he will be able to represent a very diverse constituency.

Since our previous debate on Welsh affairs, there has been another election: the general election. I am tempted, and will succumb to the temptation, to refer to what was said in March last year by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), whose daffodil looks splendid today. He said:

> "Labour will not be given another chance at the general election."—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 53.]

His crystal ball must have misted over. He made some other predictions, which I will list in the order in which he uttered them. He said that there would be Conservative victories in Monmouth, Preseli Pembrokeshire, Vale of Clwyd, Conwy, Cardiff, North, Vale of Glamorgan, Clwyd, West, Cardiff, Central, Brecon and Radnorshire, and Montgomeryshire.

At that point, however, a glimmer must have shone through from the spirit world. The hon. Gentleman correctly predicted that Plaid Cymru would lose Ynys Môn, which it did—but not, as the hon. Gentleman forecast, to the Conservatives. He also predicted that he would become Secretary of State for Wales. I am delighted that I am here and he is over there.

I hope that we shall hear a further round of predictions from the hon. Gentleman today. If we do, I shall head straight for the bookmakers with my copy of Mystic Nigel's Tips for the Top. I shall resist the temptation to use the Welsh block, big though it is. I will put some of my own money on anything and everything not endorsed by the hon. Gentleman.

We fought the general election robustly. We fought it on the basis of our economic record, our plan to reduce unemployment and poverty, and the need to invest in and reform our great public services. The Conservatives also fought the election in Wales, of course, although no Conservative MP was returned there. They tried to do what I suspect the hon. Member for Ribble Valley will try to do later today: they tried to wipe from the public memory the record of 18 years that were so shameful and damaging for the people of Wales. The Conservatives ran down our public services, introduced botched privatisations—the classic example being the railway privatisation—and managed a boom-and-bust economy.

At the eve-of-poll rally for my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was the main speaker—and a great speech he made, too. It was a classic defence of everything that the Labour Government had done. In that speech, he said, "You can't have socialism if you're skint." He is right. To do what we want to do—in Wales, through the National Assembly—to improve services for those whom we represent, we must first have a strong economy.

All that is done in Wales to ensure the provision of public services is done against the backcloth of a strong economy, the fourth strongest on the planet. If inflation and mortgage rates were not the lowest for decades, and if unemployment—especially among young people—were not at its lowest for years in every Welsh constituency, the Assembly could not do what it must do to provide those services for our people.

We ended the Conservative practice of using mass unemployment as a means of controlling inflation. We have used money that was squandered on paying dole money to those who wanted work, to help eliminate poverty. That has been the key to the first few years of a Labour Government. It has meant that devolution can work in the provision of services.

Our strong economy has also meant that 90,000 people in Wales benefit from the minimum wage. Thousands of young people who were unemployed now have jobs. Welsh pensioners are better off than they have ever been. By April, the poorest pensioner households will be more than £1,000 a year better off in real terms than they were in 1997; the average pensioner household will be £840 a year better off than it was in that year, as a result of tax and benefit changes; and an extra £6 billion a year will be spent on pensioners, £2.5 billion on the poorest third. Far less than that would have been delivered by the link with earnings.

Working families tax credit and other tax breaks have helped thousands of Welsh people. Child poverty in Wales has been reduced. The personal tax and benefit changes introduced in the last Parliament mean that 1.2 million fewer children are in poverty in the United Kingdom than would otherwise have been the case. As a result of personal tax and benefit reforms since 1997, households with children are on average £1,000 a year better off. The number of children living in workless households fell by 300,000 during the last Parliament. Is it any wonder that, at last year's general election, the people decided once more to put their trust in Labour to run our country?

Moreover, we invested in our public services. We have heard a lot about public services of late. We have heard that some are not working well, and that this is happening while that is not happening. The first thing we had to do, in fact, was to ensure that money went into those public services. Any expert examining the comprehensive spending review presented by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the last spending round will know that billions of pounds were given to Wales in addition to what it would normally have been given, for health and education in particular but for other services too.

Furthermore, for the first time, Wales has had an objective 1 programme that is, properly, additional to the block grant. Nearly half a billion pounds extra went into the coffers of the Assembly. In all the time that the structural fund has existed, that has never happened before. My right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Prime Minister said that they would not let Wales down, and they did not.

Investment, however, is not enough; there must be reform as well. Sometimes that takes time. Sometimes teachers, nurses, doctors and others must be trained, and that will not happen overnight. Sometimes, naturally, people become impatient. But the reform is happening, and Labour Members remain fully committed to a health service free at the point of use and funded through general taxation.

By far the fairest way to fund health services is though the tax system. As long as the Labour Government remain in office, the tax system will be the essential means of funding our health service. Obviously, it is for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to make his decisions about what level of tax is required to pay for essential investment in public services, but we remain firm on that basic principle.

No doubt we shall hear later how the Opposition propose to fund any changes in the NHS, and how that will fit in with what they have said in past months about levels of expenditure. However, we know that it would not be possible for the Opposition to fund the health service—or the Welsh block that in turn funds the health service—if they did not commit themselves to proper expenditure. Therefore, we shall listen with great interest to what the hon. Member for Ribble Valley proposes to do with regard to funding our public services.

However, the Opposition should be reminded of what happened when a previous Conservative Government introduced a new tax and abandoned progressive taxation. That Government in the end had to abandon the community charge—or poll tax—because it was so unpopular. The importance of what the Opposition propose is so great that I am sure that all hon. Members will be waiting with bated breath to hear what the hon. Member for Ribble Valley has to say.

In the end, the reform of public services in Wales is a matter for our colleagues in the National Assembly. The Government provide the resources, but the Assembly

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

decides how those resources are spent. There has been some debate about the use of private money in funding our services. The Government and my colleagues in Cardiff have always said that any private money used in funding public services would be additional to public funding.

That is a matter not of ideology, but of common sense. In some constituencies—and the hon. Members representing those areas are in the Chamber today—certain items of public expenditure have been bolstered by the use of additional private money. Projects that have benefited in that way include schools, hospitals, council offices and waste management schemes, and they have been set up in local authority areas controlled by parties other than the Labour party. Examples include a school in Maesteg, a secondary school and a road in Caerphilly, a secondary school in Ceredigion, schools in Conwy, council offices in Denbighshire, hospitals in Monmouthshire, roads and schools in Newport, primary and nursery schools and local authority offices in Pembrokeshire, community activity in Rhondda Cynon Taff, and integrated waste management schemes in Wrexham.

I am not saying that the use of private funds is to be the main, core means of funding our public services, but there must be innovation in how we deal with reforming and investing in those services, which are vital to every part of Wales. Sometimes, an artificial distinction is made between rural Wales and urban and industrial Wales. Yet the matters to which I have already referred—the benefits to pensioners, the minimum wage, the working families tax credit, the changes in taxation—are as significant and important to people living in rural mid-Wales as they are to people in my south Wales valley constituency, or to people in the city of Cardiff.

The police, health, education and transport services are as important in rural Wales as they are elsewhere. Last year, we held our debate just as the scale of the foot and mouth outbreak was becoming clear. For many in the Welsh countryside, the past year has been appalling. If the foot and mouth outbreak taught us one central lesson, it was that tourism and other elements of the rural economy are as important as farming when it comes to providing jobs and prosperity to rural Wales.

The decisions that we took to protect farming were supported by hon. Members of all parties and had widespread effects that went well beyond farming. Although it must be our hope that we will not see another foot and mouth outbreak in our lifetimes, we must recognise that no one can offer any such guarantees. That is why it is so important to learn lessons very quickly, and to be as diligent as we have been over past months. That diligence extends to the issue of food imports, which was raised only yesterday.

It is important to put on record what the Government, and especially the National Assembly, have done over the past year to help rural areas. The Government have set up the rural taskforce, granted deferment of tax, value added tax and national insurance, and offered business advice through Business Connect. We have allowed businesses suffering from cash flow problems to apply for loans worth up to £250,000 from the small firms loan guarantee scheme, and we have encouraged banks, building societies and insurance companies to offer sympathetic treatment. We have also made available nearly £160 million of agrimonetary compensation. In addition, the £65 million in Cardiff's rural recovery plan includes help for marketing, tourism, environmental projects, and so on.

I suppose that it will be quite a long time before the full effects of foot and mouth on our rural economies are properly known. Only one Welsh constituency has no farms, so I am sure that all hon. Members with constituencies in Wales are conscious of what has occurred in the past year.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): All the areas affected by foot and mouth value the rural recovery plan, but is not the Secretary of State disturbed to hear that tourist businesses outside the areas covered by objective 1 and 2 funds find that state aid laws prevent them from obtaining substantial funding from the Wales tourist board? For instance, a person in my constituency has a project to build a leisure centre costing £750,000, but the grant aid available to him is limited to less than £50,000.

Mr. Murphy: I hear what the hon. Gentleman has said. I know that foot and mouth disease has caused serious difficulties in his area. He and I attended a service in Brecon cathedral some months ago, which was attended by representatives from all the different walks of life in his constituency. I shall certainly make sure that what the hon. Gentleman has said is put to the Ministers for Rural Affairs and for Finance, Local Government and Housing in Cardiff. However, I know that the Welsh Assembly has given substantial help to tourism, and only last week my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced another package to ensure that tourism comes into Wales, both from within the UK and from overseas.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): The Secretary of State rightly highlights the need for vigilance, especially with regard to contaminated meat imports that could bring foot and mouth back to Wales. However, Customs and Excise and the other agencies trying to patrol the ports report severe manpower shortages. Will the right hon. Gentleman say what measures he is taking to correct that shortfall of officers?

Mr. Murphy: It is not for me to take those measures, but I shall certainly make clear to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and to colleagues in other Departments how important it is to liaise with Customs and Excise, local authorities and other agencies—and with the Assembly, too, where that is relevant—to ensure that there is a programme to deal with imports of illegal food. Much greater vigilance is necessary at airports and ports, as is a good public information programme. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that the Government are aware of the points that he has made.

The difficulties of the past year have not been confined to rural areas, but have been experienced too in some of our urban areas. Not long ago, the Welsh Grand Committee met in Cwmbran to debate the future of manufacturing industry in Wales.

Of course, we have had the difficult news about Corus and there have been other examples of industries moving to eastern Europe and elsewhere, but the issue is whether those industries are being replaced in Wales.

Many of us can remember, because we are that old, a time when our valleys were dominated by coal and steel. I remember, 30 years ago, when those industries were declining, how they had to be replaced, sometimes by heavy engineering and other forms of manufacturing. In my constituency, 12,000 jobs that had replaced the jobs in coal were lost in 20 years, but those in turn are now being replaced by jobs in information technology, computerisation and so on. That, added to the measures that the Government have introduced for the benefit of the people of Wales in their hugely successful new deal programme, means that there is not a single constituency in Wales that cannot point to an improvement in its unemployment figures.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Of course we agree that, as heavy industries decline, they must be replaced by more modern ones, but surely it only accelerates the process of the decline of heavy industries such as steel in south Wales when the Government give encouragement and active assistance to someone like Mr. Mittal to help competitors in places such as Romania.

Mr. Murphy: We will have the opportunity to debate these matters in greater detail next week. I look forward to that debate, in which I will take part. I will comment briefly on the hon. Gentleman's points—he knows Wales reasonably well—but I want first to finish the point that I was making.

The way in which our industries change and we skill up our people to work in the new industries is the key to their future. Why did we get objective 1? The whole purpose is to bring the Welsh economy up to the standards of those of other countries in Europe, so that we can follow the lead of the Irish economy and become, in a matter of 10 or 20 years, one of the most successful regional economies in Europe.

We have example after example of new industries, factories and plants being established in constituencies throughout Wales—Ford in Bridgend and BAE in Broughton are just two examples.

The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) knows that I had to spend a great deal of time speaking to the chief executive and chairman and other people at Corus to try to find out what it would take for them to retain those 3,000 jobs in Wales, and 6,000 in the rest of the United Kingdom. Time after time, I asked Brian Moffat and the others whether the Government could do anything to change their minds about their intentions for the steel industry. The answer was no. I rather suspect that they had made their minds up at the time of the merger.

On every single day of those negotiations, I was in contact with the steel unions. The Iron and Steel Trades Confederation will certainly agree with what I am saying. Time and time again, we said that we would like to offer various measures of assistance, but Corus was not willing to change its strategy, so we had to ensure that, when those decisions had been taken—they affected my constituents far more than the hon. Gentleman's: at least 1,000 of mine lost jobs at Llanwern and Ebbw Vale—something was done to replace the lost jobs.

The Government and the Assembly put together tens and tens of millions of pounds to regenerate our local economies. For example, there is the railway from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff, which has long been needed. I worked in Ebbw Vale for 17 years, so I know a little bit about the situation in Blaenau Gwent.

On the point about Mittal, it is wrong to say that Corus would have changed its mind or done anything different because of the Prime Minister's letter to the Romanian Prime Minister. It would not have made a ha'porth of difference. Why is it always said, whenever the Government, or any other European Government, help an economy that needs help, be it in Asia, Africa or eastern Europe, that we are harming our own economy?

Some of my colleagues have sent trade delegations to Romania that have included Welsh companies. When we help to bring up to modern economic standards countries such as those that want to join the European Union, which is what we do as a developed country, of course we run the risk of creating a competitor, but we also ensure that trade with that country improves, allowing Wales to export to an economy that is much sounder than it was. That is the reason behind the Prime Minister's letter and that is why we wanted to ensure that the industry and economy in Romania were up to scratch.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The Secretary of State will have seen the letter from Graham McKenzie of Allied Steel and Wire to the Prime Minister. Does he agree with Mr. McKenzie's assessment that Mr. Mittal's acquisition of the Sidex plant in Romania was detrimental to the interests of the Welsh steel industry, because it will result in direct competition and endanger jobs in Wales?

Mr. Murphy: There are very strict regulations in Europe on dumping, and the Government have strict policies on protectionism, including for the United States. We will debate these matters in greater detail next week, but the hon. Gentleman and his party very much agreed with objective 1 funding, the whole idea of which is that the wealthier countries in Europe, including Germany, should provide funding to improve the Welsh economy, among others.

I cannot understand how a party that has said that is fundamentally for Wales and Europe—it did not say much about Britain until this latest episode—can object to assistance to Romania, which although not part of the European Union, is a struggling country trying to become part of it. The hon. Gentleman is saying that every time we help such a country it is to the detriment of Welsh industry.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): My constituents, including those at Llanwern, are deeply appreciative of the energetic efforts that my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor made to try to find ways of helping Corus when it was contemplating the discontinuation of steel making at Llanwern. They did everything that they could to ensure that that disaster did not take place, but Corus proved hard to help, as my right hon. Friend said. I thank him also for his unwavering commitment to ensuring that Newport, which is not an objective 1 area, got effective assistance, including, for example, through the urban regeneration company which the First Minister has promised us. It would be enormously helpful if we could have the Minister's continuing support to ensure early clarification

[Alan Howarth]

of the urban regeneration company's scope and terms of reference, and so that we can get it up and running. At present, a mass of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. That has gone way outside the confines of an intervention.

Mr. Murphy: It was a nice intervention, if too long, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments, and I obviously agree that it is very important to regenerate our communities following the loss of jobs in the steel industry. That is why next week, we and the Welsh national party should debate how to regenerate the Welsh economy. That is much more important than the old rubbish about which we have been hearing.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I do not want to prolong the debate on the Mittal affair, which I presume will continue next week, but regardless of misgivings that might exist, does my right hon. Friend agree that the argument that we have just heard—that because Mr. Mittal purchased a Romanian steelworks, it is in direct competition with Corus—is one of the weakest? If Usinor, the French company, had purchased that steelworks, it would still be in direct competition with Corus. Similarly, a steelworks in Slovakia that a major American company bought is now in direct competition with Corus.

Mr. Murphy: I agree. Of course, those who work in the steel industry in south Wales could argue that the greatest threat to it was the original merger with a Dutch company.

Dr. Julian Lewis *rose—*

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) *rose—*

Mr. Murphy: Given that we shall discuss the matter next week, and given that many right hon. and hon. Members want to speak to the debate, it is wise to move on.

Mr. Llwyd *rose—*

Mr. Murphy: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Llwyd: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I hear what he says and I am sure that his comments about the packages that were put forward are accurate. However, the truth is that it was common knowledge for some 18 months to two years beforehand that Corus was losing billions of pounds. Where were the Government then?

Mr. Murphy: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Corus had been telling us repeatedly for many months that the biggest problem it faced was the exchange rate. It subsequently changed its mind somewhat, but that is what it said for months and months. Then it said that the problem was capacity, and then it said that the problem was something else. Who knows what the ultimate problem was? As the hon. Gentleman knows—I have reported the matter to the House before—I attended the relevant meetings and the Government did all that they could to ensure that the industry remained in south Wales. Indeed, the steel unions themselves acknowledged that fact.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Murphy: No, I really must move on. As I told the hon. Gentleman, 1,000 people who work in the steel industry in my constituency have lost their jobs—we will talk about that on Tuesday—and that is probably 1,000 more than have lost jobs in his constituency. Those issues will be discussed in greater detail in the debate that Plaid Cymru has called for next week, and the hon. Gentleman and others can make their points then.

As many Members wish to speak, I shall conclude by discussing the functioning of the House of Commons and the way in which the devolution settlement works with the procedures of the House to ensure that the 40 Members representing Welsh constituencies, along with others who take an interest in Welsh matters, can affect the lives of Welsh women and men.

In the years since the setting up of the National Assembly, we as a Parliament and a Government have worked with it to produce measures of enormous significance to Welsh people. For example, the fact that we have the first children's commissioner in the United Kingdom is a direct result of our working with the Assembly and across parties. The Assembly is using Education and Learning Wales—ELWa—to transform post-16 education and lifelong learning in Wales. That initiative is the result of legislation that this Parliament and this Government passed, in conjunction with the National Assembly.

We gave the Assembly in Wales the functions of the National Care Standards Commission in England; we gave the local government ombudsman the power to investigate alleged misconduct of councillors; we enabled the Assembly to administer the system governing the conduct of councillors—and so on. In this Session, we are dealing with the health service and the education service in Wales through primary legislation, and some of my hon. Friends and other Members have taken part in those debates. The House of Commons is working with the Assembly to change the face of those services.

After Easter, draft health legislation for Wales will hopefully be published and will come before us for consideration. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales twice visited the National Assembly to talk to the relevant health and education committees about dealing with the scrutiny of legislation. When that legislation comes before us, the House of Commons and the National Assembly will have their own ways through which they can scrutinise it for the benefit of Welsh people. To that can be added the good work of the Welsh Affairs Committee, the Welsh Grand Committee and the many other ways in which Members of Parliament can help to improve the lives of Welsh people through this place.

Let no one therefore say that Welsh Members of Parliament have no role to play in improving the lives of the people whom we represent jointly with members of the Assembly. It is that partnership—team Wales, one might call it—between a Labour Government and a Labour-led Assembly that has alone led to enormous change in the lives of our Welsh people in the past five years. It is because of those policies that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore was returned with such a good majority. Devolution itself would not have happened under any party but the Labour party. If it were not for the Labour party, there would be no Assembly and we would not have objective 1. *[Interruption.]* Now we will hear what the Liberal Democrats intend to do.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I should point out to the Minister, who doubtless made a slip of the tongue, that the Liberals invented the concept of devolution. However, we were delighted that the Labour-led Government felt entitled to adopt that policy, and we will always be happy to lend our good policies to the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues.

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention—indeed, his inventions, for they are many.

In addition to devolution and objective 1, we are helping old and young people. The Assembly has agreed much the best concessionary fares in the United Kingdom, and museum charges will be abolished so that our young people can visit all the museums in Wales. As a result of a Labour Government, we have the biggest ever police force in Wales, including in the Rhondda.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I agree that one of the most significant changes to tourism in south Wales was free entry to national museums, as applies in the rest of the United Kingdom. However, local authority-run museums such as the Rhondda heritage park are presented with a problem. People have to pay to visit such places while entry to Big Pit is free.

Mr. Murphy: I suppose that I should declare an interest, as Big Pit is in my constituency, but I shall certainly take the matter up with the relevant Minister in Cardiff.

The partnership between a Labour Government in Westminster and a Labour-led Assembly in Cardiff has resulted in a quality of life for Welsh women, men and children that is infinitely better than it has been for 100 years. Wales is now a more civilised, compassionate, caring, prosperous and democratic place in which to live and work.

2.39 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): It is always a joy to take part in the St. David's day debate, and I heard what the Secretary of State had to say about my predictions in the last one. He had no willpower and could not resist rubbing my nose in them. He also told the House that he is ready, wad in pocket, to rush down to the bookies on any prediction that I care to make to bet the other way. I shall make only one prediction today: Wales will beat Italy in the rugby international on Saturday. I can see the headlines now—"Secretary of State for Wales backs Italy in international against Wales". Shocking.

Lembit Öpik: The headline will surely be, "The hon. Member for Ribble Valley destroys Wales's chances of winning".

Mr. Evans: I will allow the hon. Gentleman that intervention, if—I hope—no other in the rest of the debate.

I join the Secretary of State in congratulating the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), who fought a valiant campaign during a wet three weeks in Ogmore. We all got drenched—some more than others—but I welcome him to the House. We look forward to his maiden speech, if he can catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I also endorse the Secretary of State's comments about Sir Ray Powell. We all remember Ray with nostalgia. I was a great supporter of his and I remember the collection of the daffs. He was also the accommodation Whip and if he took a dislike to anyone, it was some time before they moved from a desk in a corridor. Indeed, Ken Livingstone had to wait a long time before he got a room from Ray Powell.

I see that many Labour Members are sporting daffodils. I remember that when I was at Dynevor school with my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis)—several years apart, I hasten to add—some of us would wear leeks on St. David's day, instead of daffodils. I was amused to note, although it is a serious issue, the latest ruling from the European Union on the standardisation of leeks. I was aghast when I read it, because we used to wear leeks of all shapes and sizes. We as consumers were king, and I declare an interest as someone with a retail business in Swansea that sells many a leek.

Leeks will be classified as from tomorrow, which is the final insult. If it had happened on 1 April, I could have understood it better. They will be classified into two classes. The regulations state that leeks in class I must be

> "of good quality . . . The white to greenish white part of the leeks must represent at least one-third of the total length or half of the sheathed part. However, in early leeks, the white to greenish white part must represent at least one-quarter of the total length or one-third of the sheathed part . . . Size is determined by the diameter measured at right angles to the longitudinal axis above the swelling of the neck . . . The minimum diameter is fixed at 8 mm for early leeks and 10 mm for other leeks. For Class I, the diameter of the largest leek in the same bundle or package must not be more than twice the diameter of the smallest leek."

I always thought that the growing of leeks was God's work but now the EU has come to his aid with some useful advice on the growing and selling of leeks.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Is not it a shame that with all the opportunities facing Wales now, such as objective 1 and its bright economic future, the only thing that the hon. Gentleman can rant about today is the sheathing, swelling and length of his leek?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman will not have to wait long before I get to the meat. I just thought that I would start with what should be humorous but is all too serious. People will find it strange that, given all the problems that exist, bureaucrats in Europe are setting out rules and regulations that will lead to people going round shops with tape measures, making sure that leeks are the right size. I agree that that is a ridiculous waste of money.

I shall stay on agriculture, because the Secretary of State had much to say about it. The past twelve months have been the direst time that agriculture in Wales and elsewhere has seen. I raised the issue at Welsh questions yesterday and there has just been a scare of another outbreak of foot and mouth disease in north Yorkshire. Thankfully, that has not happened. Wales had 118 cases,

[Mr. Evans]

with more than 35,000 cattle, 304,000 sheep, 5,900 pigs and 121 goats being slaughtered. The outbreak also had a ripple effect on tourism and allied industries. The cost was enormous. It was estimated at £500 million in Wales alone.

I agree with the Secretary of State that the full implications and ramifications of foot and mouth have yet to become fully known. I therefore find it strange that after an outbreak that devastated and blighted two industries and affected many others, the Government did not agree to a full and independent public inquiry. Much could have been learned. As hon. Members may have gleaned from my earlier remarks, I am not the greatest advocate for everything that the EU does, but I find it amazing that we now have to rely on it to set up an independent inquiry, which will visit Wales. It will gather information from farmers in Wales and elsewhere and make its own recommendations. It is shameful that our own Government could not have done that.

Farmers dearly want the cessation of the importation of substandard meat, but that will take more than putting a few posters up at the ports. The Secretary of State showed some sympathy on the subject yesterday, and I hope that he will have talks with the Minister for Rural Affairs and any other Ministers with influence on the policy, so that we can have strict controls on its importation. If that is how we believe that the last outbreak started, let us take action now to ensure that it never happens again.

The Secretary of State mentioned public services and dwelt at some length on health. While that is a devolved matter, he is right that the money is raised by this Parliament and passed on to the Welsh Assembly. The primary legislative powers also still reside here. However, I am staggered that he made no reference to the appalling state of some aspects of the health service in Wales. I do not implicate those dedicated hard-working nurses and doctors who work in an intolerable atmosphere, but the figures for patients waiting more than 18 months are shocking. In 1997, the number was 1,402, but today it is 4,248. The number waiting more than six months for a first out-patient appointment in Wales was 5,956 in March 1997, but by the end of December 2001, it was 68,000.

I am sure that many hon. Members will have constituents who come to see them or write to them regularly about problems with the national health service. We are burying our heads in the sand if we refuse to wake up to the real problems. A senior surgeon at the Royal Gwent hospital has criticised the increase in waiting times in Wales. He said that they were

> "cruel, inhumane and intolerable . . . the problem is a lack of everything . . . There are no surgeons, insufficient staff in training, there aren't the facilities for them to work in, there aren't the operating theatres, there aren't beds, there aren't enough anaesthetists . . . the whole of the Health Service is in such a poor state".

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: Yes. I am sure that the senior surgeon at the Royal Gwent hospital will be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's response.

Mr. Bryant: What is the hon. Gentleman's response to the litany that I am sure he is about to give us of what is wrong with the NHS? Does he believe that taxation should go up to pay for the NHS or down? If it should go up, by how much should it do so?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman can give no explanation, but I will answer his response by quoting a headline from the *Western Mail:* "NHS is wasting millions, says former minister". I am talking about the former Minister—

Mr. Bryant: Should it go up or should it go down?

Mr. Evans: If the hon. Gentleman will listen for a second, I will quote a former Labour Minister, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), who said that about £500 million could have been saved if the Government had followed some of the recommendations that he made when he was Minister.

Part of the problem is that there are differences between hospitals in Wales in the cost of operations. For instance, a Caesarean section would cost £547 at Glan-y-Mor hospital in Swansea but £1,945 at Wrexham Maelor. Hip and femur replacements cost £2,589 in Pembroke, yet at Llandough hospital in the Vale of Glamorgan each operation set its budget back by nearly £8,000. There are enormous differences in the cost of routine operations done in different hospitals. I am sure that the hon. Member for Bridgend, who is in his place, will have some contribution to make on the health service. He has said many interesting things in the past, and I am sure that he will say one or two more about that.

Enormous savings can be made by seeking ways to improve best practice. We should listen to practitioners in the health service as well, instead of coming back with some of the spin that we are used to from the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) and his party.

Mr. Bryant: Answer the question.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I give way again to the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane).

Chris Ruane: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way on this issue. He complains about the length of waiting lists to see consultants and surgeons. Is he aware that it takes between 10 and 17 years to train a surgeon or a consultant, and that these people should have been put in place 17 years ago, under the previous Conservative Government?

Mr. Evans: When the Labour party first got elected, we were told that we had 24 hours to save the NHS. We have now been told that it takes 17 years. When the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was Secretary of State for Health, he was told that it would take some time to turn the tanker round. The Government ditched that particular captain well before it was.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I give way to the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards).

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Royal Gwent hospital and identified some problems in waiting times. They affect my constituents and I am well aware of them. Does he agree that at the Royal Gwent and throughout the national health service, there is also the problem of a lack of consultants who devote their time fully to the NHS? Will he therefore commend the present Government's attempts to negotiate new contracts with consultants to reward them as they deserve to be rewarded for devoting their time full-time to the NHS?

Mr. Evans: What I will not do is commend the Labour Government for cruelly raising expectations in 1997 that everything could be sorted out if only a Labour Government were elected; that clearly has not happened. Devolution was supposed to be the answer to everything. We know from some of the plans that have emerged from the Health Secretary that the reforms will be great news for pen-pushers but certainly not great news for those who work in hospitals. The hon. Member for Monmouth will also remember—I raised the issue the other day at Welsh questions—that he was at the bottom of a very long list to try to get on an NHS waiting list for a dentist in his constituency, because there were no dentists whose list he could get on to immediately. The Government are failing not only him but many of his constituents.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I will give way once more, to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan), and then I had better move on.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He would do well to recognise some of the successes of the health service in Wales. For example, he might go with me to Velindre hospital in my constituency, the cancer hospital for my area, which leads the United Kingdom in trials for cancer care and is an exemplary model of treatment in every way for people suffering from cancer. Perhaps he might help the hard-pressed workers in the health service by recognising their successes in Wales, where they lead the UK.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Lady must recognise that I started by praising those who are dedicated and committed and work in the national health service. It is they who have to put up with this intolerable Government and the promises that they make. Indeed there are enormous successes in the NHS, whose staff perform miracles daily. My brother had a cancer operation in Singleton hospital in Swansea more than three years ago and the staff performed an absolute miracle on him, so I have great praise for those who work in the NHS. However, I have enormous reservations about some of the problems caused by Government policy.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: No; I want to move on. There are several issues to discuss and many hon. Members want to speak.

I mentioned the National Assembly. We know, with some of the changes that have taken place and with the Mike German affair going from farce to fiasco, that it is a shambles on the inside and a shambles on the outside. When the Secretary of State for Wales says that we need to ensure that money is efficiently spent on the public services, I wonder whether he still believes at this late stage that he could perhaps inform the House of his views on the Assembly building. That is one farce that has certainly carried on—a pantomime that has run way after the Christmas period.

The Secretary of State knows that, when we were discussing devolution, we were told that the whole thing would cost between £12 million and £17 million. When it reached £40 million, the First Secretary decided to put a stop to it. We have ended up with a hole at a cost of £8 million, and the National Assembly is so embarrassed by it that it has now put a fence around that hole in Cardiff at a cost of many thousands of pounds; at one stage I was going to ask the Secretary of State whether he would look into it for me. I am not going to do so, but is he not embarrassed by the enormous waste of money? Would it not have been far better if that money had been spent on the national health service, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, North was saying, on some of the excellent services that are available and on improving those services throughout Wales?

I am also concerned about the delay of local elections in Wales until 2004. That means that the people of Wales will now have to wait another 12 months before they can pass judgment on their elected councillors of any persuasion. Surely the Secretary of State has a view about that. We were told that the local elections could not be held on the same day as the elections to the National Assembly in 2003 because it would lead to confusion. But in Scotland the date of the local elections has been altered so that they can be held on the same day as elections to the Scottish Parliament. Is the Secretary of State really saying that the people of Scotland are more intelligent than the people of Wales? I do not think so, and it is a gross insult that we are being told that because the people of Wales will be confused, the elections have been deferred until 2004.

The last part of my speech deals with the economy in Wales and the meltdown in manufacturing, about which I am extremely concerned. There have already been many job losses in manufacturing. Sony cut 220 jobs in Bridgend. GEAES, an aircraft engine manufacturer, cut 350 jobs on top of the 450 cut last year; the Corning optical factory in Deeside closed, and Dow Corning cut 40 jobs in Barry.

However, the most disturbing name in all this must be Mittal. I know that on Tuesday there is to be a debate on the subject, but I must mention it because manufacturing is so important to Wales. Manufacturing accounts for a disproportionately high percentage of jobs in Wales. Yes, we want the service sector to improve and know that in a number of service jobs, employment has increased. In the Welsh Grand Committee, I mentioned Swansea airport, where an investment has been made. Air Wales now flies from Swansea to Cork and Dublin. That has been an enormous success, and the projection is that about 300,000 jobs—

Kevin Brennan: Would the hon. Gentleman care to remind us how many manufacturing jobs in Wales were lost in the first five years of the Conservative Government

[Kevin Brennan]

after 1979? Would he also care to confirm that, as we speak, unemployment in Wales is at its lowest for 25 years?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman reminds us of a time when the Labour party spoke regularly about manufacturing decline. Anyone listening to Labour Members' words during the period 1992 to 1997, when I was first elected, might just have thought that if a Labour Government had been elected in 1997, the rot, as it was called, would stop, and there would be an increase in manufacturing jobs.

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): The number of jobs in Wales has increased.

Mr. Evans: No. There has not been an increase in manufacturing jobs in Wales but a decline.

The hon. Gentleman should remember that the Labour Government are in power. We are looking to them to improve the manufacturing sector in Wales, but that simply has not happened.

I am talking about the service sector jobs at Swansea airport, and I hope that the Secretary of State will do his bit to ensure that that airport improves. That would be a great boost to west Wales, and I hope that it would open up parts of that area, which has had some difficult times because the decline in agriculture. Some 1.5 million passengers use Cardiff airport every year, but more could do so if the infrastructure—the roads from the airport to Cardiff—were better, so we also want improvements to take place there. However, manufacturing is the bread and butter of the Welsh economy, so I should like to refer to it.

Mr. Prisk Is my hon. Friend aware that, although manufacturing in Wales has already been in recession for one year, the Trades Union Congress today intends to publish the fact that it foresees no recovery in manufacturing in the coming year? Indeed, it does not foresee a recovery in manufacturing in Wales until the beginning of next year. So there will be two years of manufacturing recession under Labour.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): That is the TUC's forecast.

Mr. Evans: As my hon. Friend suggests, that was said by the TUC—I thought it was a friend of the Labour Government. The fact is that my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) exposes some of the deep concerns that, surely, all hon. Members have about what is occurring. Indeed, a total of 300,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the United Kingdom since 1997.

During the past 12 months, the House has rightly concentrated on the problems with steel and Corus. Hon. Members will remember the questions, debates and statements in the House that related to the job cuts at Corus just over a year ago. The chief executive, Sir Brian Moffat, said that action was needed because of the huge excess in capacity in its strip mills division. It was announced that 6,000 jobs were to go—3,000 of them in Wales. That was a devastating blow to an immensely skilled and productive work force and their families.

The Government said:

> "We will do everything that we can to turn the situation around, and I hope that even at this late stage the company will be prepared to sit down and talk with us."

The Liberal Democrat, Richard Livsey, described Sir Brian as a butcher. Barry Jones, when a Member of Parliament, said that

> "our communities are now being put at risk by a cynical, brutal, thoughtless, profit-mad company".

He added:

> "Our people gave everything to the board and have received nothing back but a kick in the teeth. They believe that they are being sacrificed on the altar that represents profit".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 7 February 2001; Vol. 362, c. 241-42WH.]

The hon. Member for Monmouth referred to Sir Brian as "the silent assassin". People were being sacrificed, but the silent assassin—if that is what Sir Brian was—was assisted in his work by those in Downing street. The job losses were appalling. Llanwern, Shotton, Ebbw Vale, Bryngwyn all suffered losses in addition to the 3,000 job losses elsewhere.

On 28 March 2001, the Prime Minister said:

> "We also stand ready to help in any way that we can with those . . . people . . . I hope the company will listen to them; we certainly will."—[*Official Report*, 28 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 961.]

We now find that he was listening to someone else. Less than two months later, £125,000 was donated by an Indian steel magnate, Mr. Lakshmi Mittal, to the Labour party. His wife had previously supported the Labour party with a more modest £5,000 donation to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), but I am sure that the donation did not go unnoticed at Millbank. The £125,000 donation was received with thanks.

Mr. Mittal is a steel man and has been very successful, from 1976, when ISPAT Indo was established in Indonesia, to the purchases in Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, Canada and Germany. In 1995, he moved his headquarters to London, with the expansion into Kazakhstan and Ireland continuing.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that, unlike the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Wales is indeed a pretty straight kind of guy. Does he find it rather strange therefore that the Secretary of State told the House early this afternoon that this was all about helping a poor country such as Romania? If that is the case, why did not the arch spin doctor at No. 10 say so? Why did he instead try to pretend that Mr. Mittal's company was British?

Mr. Evans: No doubt we will hear more about that issue on Tuesday, but the fact is that, as I hope to show, Mr. Mittal's company is anything but British.

Chris Ruane: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: No. I want to say a little more.

Mr. Mittal was expanding his company throughout the world. He bought the Irish company in 1996, but he closed it five years later, on 15 June 2001, with substantial debts of £40 million. The Irish Government and the

European Coal and Steel Community have had to pick up the redundancy costs, but that closure had wider repercussions, as I am sure the Secretary of State for Wales knows. Allied Steel and Wire—which operates in Wales and employs more than 1,300 in the United Kingdom, more than a 1,000 of whom work in Cardiff—has to find another £5 million because the credit that it was accustomed to being given was adversely affected by the fact that that company closed, leaving debts of £40 million.

Graham MacKenzie has written to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, but I want to know what sort of assistance will be given to companies such as his that employ people in this country and pay taxes here. Is it not time that we started to bat for the companies which have been affected? The amazing thing is that the buy-out of that company is similar to the one that took place in County Cork, where a commitment was given that no redundancies would take place for five years. With the closure in Ireland, the redundancies took place after five years and two weeks, and the same commitment has been given.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South) *rose*—

Chris Ruane: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: No.

On 23 July 2001, the Prime Minister sent his famous letter backing the deal to the Romanian Premier, Adrian Nastase. It said how the buy-out would help Romania with its accession to the European Union, which, I believe, the Secretary of State for Wales has intimated. Of course, we all know why the Prime Minister signed that letter within weeks of thousands of Welsh, and British, steel jobs being cut. Moreover, other people who now work in the steel industry must be aghast at what is going on.

We are told that the letter was written because Mr. Mittal is a British business man. That was later revised to a business man with British interests. We are told that his headquarters are here, but a leap of imagination is now needed to understand how the Prime Minister possibly thought that he was doing Britain a favour. It then transpired that DFID supported a bid from the company for extra help as well, because it was a British company. [Hon. Members: "DFID?"] Yes, DFID—the Department for International Development. Is that okay?

The company is British, but the fact is that 99.9 per cent. of its work force were overseas. However, it was to receive a £70 million soft loan from the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, which described the LNM bid as "a very good project". What do hon. Members think those who have lost their jobs in Corus must think now? What do they think anyone who works in the steel industry in Wales thinks now?

Mr. Martyn Jones *rose*—

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Evans: We are told that the Prime Minister writes letters all the time for British companies, but what is a British company? I shall refer to a letter that David Davies, the Assembly Member for Monmouth, wrote about a company in Wales. He wrote to the Prime Minister asking for some support on 18 February 2002:

> "I am writing on behalf of a family business, Morgans of Usk, which employs 60 people in my constituency, a rural area which has been badly hit by foot and mouth and the closure of the Corus steelworks in nearby Newport.
>
> For ten years this company has been fighting for the release of £35,000 held by the Bank of England. The money was earned through work done on an Iraqi contract by Glantre Engineering prior to the Gulf War.
>
> Release of this money could not be considered of benefit to Iraq. It is money held for payment to a British steel firm. Morgans of Usk is a reputable British company employing people in an area where such jobs are hard to come by.
>
> You have stated that your intervention on behalf of a British steel company, Mittal, was not influenced by the large donation made to Labour Party funds.
>
> I would, therefore, be grateful if you would sign a letter for the Bank of England, authorising them to release the money which could provide further employment to a steel firm which has not made a large contribution to party funds.
>
> I look forward to the same swift and personal response for a British steel company with 60 employees as you were willing to give to a 'British' company owned by Lakshmi Mittal.

I now have the response to Mr. Davies from 10 Downing street—not from the Prime Minister, I am sad to say, but from somebody called Kathy McCann in the Direct Communications Unit—dated 22 February. It says:

> "I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your letter of 18 February . . . The Prime Minister has asked me to arrange for a Minister in the National Assembly For Wales to reply to you direct."

What is the difference between a company that employs 60 people in Wales, and LNM, which employs fewer than 100, and employs 99 per cent. of its work force abroad? It is shocking that the Prime Minister has not decided to support that company.

The water becomes increasingly murky in regard to whether LNM is a British company when we understand that a French company, Usinor, was also bidding for the Sidex plant in Romania. We now know that that French company employs three times as many workers in the United Kingdom as does Mittal's company. It has been in Britain since 1923, not 1995 as in LNM's case, and has a head office in St. Albans and subsidiaries in Birmingham and the west midlands. To use the Prime Minister's definition of what is British, that French company is three times more British—but clearly not as generous in its donations to the Labour party as Mr. Mittal's company. Even the Romanian chamber of commerce publishes LNM holdings as a Dutch company. In any event, Mittal's LNM subsidiary bidding for Sidex is based in the Dutch Antilles in the Caribbean, as we all know.

First, we were led to believe that the Prime Minister had not met Mr. Mittal. Later, however, we learned that the Prime Minister had attended a function at Downing street to thank Labour party donors, and Mr. Mittal was one of the biggest. Yesterday we learned from "The World At One"—this is on the programme's website—that the so-called controller of fundraising when Mittal made his first donation in 1997 was Jonathan Powell. We also know, according to the programme's website, that the original draft of the letter to Adrian Nastase, the Romanian Prime Minister, included the word "friend" to describe Mittal's relationship with the Prime Minister,

[Mr. Evans]

but that it was crossed out by Jonathan Powell, the chief of staff. Are we now to believe that Jonathan Powell placed his revised version of the letter without talking to the Prime Minister about it at any stage, or that the Prime Minister did not know who Mittal was despite having met him recently? What entered the Prime Minister's head when he signed a letter on behalf of a company based in the Dutch Antilles which directly competed with steel plants in the United Kingdom? It was shedding jobs in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom at the time too.

Even the Foreign Secretary intervened last week. He asked: "If you asked those 100 people"— Mittal's employees—

> "whether they feel better about being employed than being on the dole they'll tell you that they'd rather be employed here in Britain".

The Foreign Secretary might as well ask the 6,000 people who lost their steel jobs in the United Kingdom whether they prefer to be on the dole while the Prime Minister supports competitors in Romania.

Mr. Martyn Jones *rose—*

Mr. Evans: Even worse news for Wales and for steel production is that Mr. Mittal has actively campaigned in the United States of America for barriers to be erected against foreign steel entering that country. The decision will be made by President Bush on 6 March. Not only does that hit Welsh and United Kingdom steel exports, but even worse, the extra capacity from other countries that is turned away from the United States might end up being dumped in the United Kingdom market. A Labour peer, Lord Paul, has described the letter as "unfortunate" and a "slip-up". He said:

> "There is no doubt that perhaps the Prime Minister had been feeling that this was a British company . . . but it just turned out to be it wasn't a British company."

Lord Paul believes that this country is at risk from steel imports.

A huge number of unanswered questions relate to the Mittal affair. The premier's chief of staff, Jonathan Powell, seems to be the link man, judging by his talks with his friend, Richard Ralph, the British ambassador in Romania, the redrafting of the letter, the signing of the letter and the invitations to donors to come to No. 10. The sell-out of Welsh jobs is not just naive but incredibly damaging. The stench that pervades the whole affair is nauseating. The evasion is sinister, and the drip, drip of information damning.

From Ecclestone to the Hindujas, from Vaz to Byers, this Government have no shame. Mittal is the latest in a long list. Only an independent inquiry will finally put the issue to rest. If the Government have nothing to hide and nothing to be ashamed of, let us have that inquiry now.

3.15 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): First, I heartily endorse all the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales about my former colleague and neighbour, the late Sir Ray Powell, and also the words of encouragement for my new neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) who, I am sure, will be my colleague for a very long time. There is no truth in the rumour that both of us were two inches shorter at the end of the by-election campaign than we were at the beginning, or that we were beginning to develop webbed feet, although there was a lot of rain in those three weeks.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) is right to say that I want to talk about the heath service in Wales, if only to correct one or two slightly false impressions and the spin that was given to remarks that I made to *The Western Mail* a couple of weeks ago. This House is responsible for the money that goes to the Welsh Assembly for spending on public services and promoting prosperity in Wales. In addition, this House passes the primary legislation that the Welsh Assembly implements in Wales.

I want to consider the health service in particular because it is fundamental—good health is what people want most of all. In simple money terms, the Government's record is excellent. Since 1997, the rate of increase in spending on the health service year by year has not been far off 10 per cent. Under this Government, and certainly since the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, spending on health in Wales has been three or four times above the rate of inflation. Spending has risen from just over £2 billion in 1997, when we came to power, to almost £3.5 billion this year. Next year, it will be almost £3.75 billion.

A lot of money is spent on the health service in Wales—more per capita than in England. In Wales, we spend about 13 per cent. more per capita than is spent in England. Of course, that has implications for how the Barnett formula works. I shall not make that the thrust of my remarks—I merely point out that it is an issue.

Mr. Wiggin: I am curious about how the Barnett formula works. I visited my local hospital and found that at least 10 per cent. of patients in the hospital in Hereford had come over the border from Wales. Is it not true that not only has health spending gone up in Wales but that there is a multiplier effect as Welsh patients are not going to hospital in Wales?

Mr. Griffiths: This is a united kingdom, and there is a flow of patients from both sides of the border. There is no district general hospital in Powys and for many patients the closest hospital is in Hereford. I do not think that we need to make too much of that.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that as that has been the situation for many years, it would not distort the figures in the way that the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) suggests?

Mr. Griffiths: Not at all. The fundamental issue is that more is spent on health care per capita in Wales than in England, which needs to be considered in the context of the Barnett formula.

I am not revealing anything new today. I first raised the subject more than two years ago, but I am pleased to come back to it because of the remarks of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley. We also need to consider some of the comparisons between the health of people in Wales and in England. For example, hospital admissions are 18 per cent. higher in Wales than in England and admissions to accident and emergency units are 17 per cent. higher. Some 20 per cent. more prescriptions are issued in Wales per capita than in England. There are 19 per cent. more visits to doctors in Wales than in England. Reporting of long-term illness is 28 per cent. higher in Wales and the mortality rate, adjusted and unadjusted, is also higher. There are 19 per cent. more cancer registrations of men in Wales than in England, and 14 per cent. more for women; and deaths from heart disease are 19 per cent. higher in Wales. It is therefore not surprising that we spend more on health care in Wales.

This illustrates the difficulty that we have in dealing with these problems in Wales. However, we are spending more money and there are a lot of good news stories about the health service in Wales. Tomorrow I believe that the new St. David's hospital will be opened in Cardiff, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan). In November of this year a new district general hospital will be open on the Baglan moors in the Bro Morgannwg health trust. The trust covers my constituency but the hospital will primarily serve Aberavon and Neath. A new community hospital has at last been agreed for Porthmadog—we were talking about it when I was a Health Minister in 1997–98—and there will also be a new community hospital in the Rhondda. That is about £35 million worth of investment.

Some £4.5 million has been allocated to the second phase of the children's hospital once the magnificent fund-raising effort has put into place phase 1, which has almost been achieved. There is £6.3 million going towards medical undergraduate facilities at Swansea. To illustrate how long all this takes, the decision was made in 1997–98 to increase the number of medical undergraduates in Wales, and that has to be planned for.

There are more nurses and midwives training and more will be finishing their training over the next few years than ever before. In the professions allied to medicine, there are increases in the numbers in training. The diatribe and criticism of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley cannot be accepted because when the Tories were in power, the number of beds in Wales was reduced and the number of nurses also took a dive. When the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was Secretary of State for Wales, he almost reached the point of asset stripping both the physical and intellectual infrastructure of the health service. He left the Welsh health service in a deplorable state.

We are spending £10 million on the upgrade of the cancer facilities at the Singleton hospital at Swansea, with £5.5 million going to the accident and emergency unit at Morriston. Wherever we look, there is a tremendous increase in spending. Things are improving and more staff are coming on-stream, but we must accept, in the words of Dr. Bob Broughton of the British Medical Association, that we have had 20 years of under-investment and it will take a bit of time to turn the ship around. Some 88 additional consultant posts have been made available for Wales and £9 million has been allocated to the new clinical school in Swansea this year.

This year, 10,000 more patients have been treated in the health service than the year before. However, we have to accept that waiting lists in some areas are increasing. Fortunately, we can see a chink of light at the end of this gloomy and difficult tunnel: in areas where the Welsh Assembly has begun to target the waiting lists for heart disease and cataract operations, there has been a small reduction. Because I know that the Welsh Assembly is focusing on other areas as well, I am confident that over the next few years we will see a gradual improvement. I emphasise that it will be gradual because it takes time to get the staff in place for this work to be done. Even today there are many consultant posts in Wales waiting to be filled, not because they have not been advertised but because it is difficult to find the people to fill them. We need to be patient.

The Western Mail has said that £500 million more could have been available to spend on the health service in Wales over the past five years. Instead of saying that those figures are calculations of my own, it might be more accurate to say that I dumped all the information published by the NHS Executive on the cost of the 100 most popular hospital in-patient and day-case treatments on my assistants and asked them to work on those figures. What they came up with is that in 1996–97, if all hospitals in Wales had reached the average for just those treatments carried out in every hospital, there would have been a saving of about £24 million which could have been invested in the health service. If all hospitals had reached the average of the best three, the saving would have been almost £100 million which could have been invested in the health services in Wales.

I was trying to tell *The Western Mail* that if the Welsh Assembly were to look carefully at where hospitals were most efficient and effective in carrying out their work, it would be possible to have substantial additional funds available to spend on the health service in Wales and make a significant impact on waiting lists. In fact, I have already put that point to the Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt. Over a five-year period, I guess that between £400 million and £500 million could have been invested in the health service in Wales. The Welsh Assembly is looking at these specific problems and I am sure that we will see an expansion of the hospitals which are proving to be the most effective in Wales. Therefore, I am encouraged by what is happening. Despite some of the gloomy headline statistics, I believe that the chinks of light showing in matters such as heart disease and cataracts will be rolled out across other specialisms. I am confident that in four or five years we will see a much improved health service in Wales that we will be happy talking to our constituents about.

Mr. Wiggin: What does the hon. Gentleman think about the increased bureaucracy? I appreciate that he did not research those figures himself, but the principle is laudable. I am curious because the five health authorities will be abolished in April next year to be replaced by 22 local health boards with similar powers. Those will be backed by as many as 12 partnerships and three area offices. The latest plan for health in Wales is to replace the five existing health authorities with 37 organisations. It is hard to understand how the Government have managed to increase spending by so much and achieve so little. In the words of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies)—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Interventions are meant to be short.

Mr. Griffiths: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the additional spending has resulted in 10,000 more treatments a year in Wales. That is significant. On restructuring the health service, he might know that I do not think that the plan is right at the moment. However,

[Mr. Griffiths]

his description of it traduces what is meant to happen in Wales. There is a commitment that no more money should be spent on bureaucracy. I remain confident that we will make progress and that better health care will be provided year on year.

3.31 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I welcome the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) to the Chamber and congratulate him on beating the Liberal Democrat candidate, Veronica Watkins. I only regret that I do not know enough about him to take advantage of the fact that he cannot intervene prior to making his maiden speech. I simply pay tribute to his predecessor, Ray Powell. Some said that he was an unguided missile or a loose cannon, and he was described as a wild man by the media and uncontrollable by the Whips. I have every hope that the hon. Gentleman will continue in that tradition and perhaps one day join the Liberal Democrats.

Kevin Brennan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lembit Öpik: I cannot resist it.

Kevin Brennan: As my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) cannot intervene, perhaps the hon. Gentleman can explain to me why a leaflet on which his picture appeared on the day of the by-election called my hon. Friend "London's Labour lackey"? Is not that typical Liberal Democrat politics—sneer locally, creep nationally?

Lembit Öpik: It hurts me to the core to have offended the hon. Gentleman and, believe it or not, I have something to say about that kind of politics, and not just to Labour Members, but to Members of my party too. I hope that hon. Members will be greatly interested in my comments.

It has been a good year for the Liberal Democrats in Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) took over from his predecessor and we made good progress elsewhere. Indeed, I managed to win a hotly contested election to lead my party on Welsh matters and prevented splits in the parliamentary party by immediately appointing my hon. Friend as my deputy, having considered the alternatives.

I said that the comment by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) was poignant. My speech is directed not just at Welsh politicians or the Welsh public, but at the Welsh press. I ask all three groups to think seriously about the concepts that I am about to advance. Politicians are doing something wrong. If we get things right, perhaps we will help to resuscitate the lost confidence in the trade that we have chosen as our career.

My speech is also directed at other parties, including my party in Wales. I want people to think seriously about the potential for turning politics into a competition, not a war. I question the way in which we run down the character of our trade and then feign surprise when people do not turn out to vote or disappointment when the media imply that we are all on the make and that we do not act in the interests of the people who elected us.

At a press conference in the Cardiff Assembly last Monday, I was accused of patronising the Welsh press. Most of the journalists were interested in the story relating to Mike German and the possibility of a reshuffle. They asked the same question again and again. After we answered it, I suggested that the issue lacked resonance with the Welsh public and that people really wanted to talk about things that made a difference to them. It got quite heated. It seems I had disturbed a hornet's nest by questioning the ability of the press to report news that matters. The journalists thought that I was suggesting that they should not report on the matter that interested them.

Afterwards, I went to the media floor in the Assembly to make amends with one of the people who felt most patronised. She told me that she also regarded me as naive—[Hon. Members: "Name names."] I will not because Jo told me not to. She claimed that I was angry with her, to which I shouted, "No, I'm not", and proved her point. It struck me later that the exchange was the opposite of what I had in mind for a new agenda in Welsh politics. It is with humility—I take some of the responsibility on myself—that I suggest that right hon. and hon. Members seriously consider launching a campaign in Wales, ahead of anywhere else in the United Kingdom, to change the way in which we do politics.

As I think about the accusations of naivety and being patronising, I realise that they were said in response to a problem that we have created. For whatever reason, the agenda has become so set in convention that aggression, opposition, spin and negative briefing about each other have become so acceptable that efforts to try a new way of doing things are dismissed as naive and even idealistic. Is the new focus on politics in Wales so unfeasible that we are not going to make a difference? Is Welsh politics so doomed to remain as it is that my speech today might again be regarded as naive?

Mr. Wiggin: Does that mean that the hon. Gentleman's party will no longer be in a coalition with the Labour party in the Welsh Assembly?

Lembit Öpik: The context of that question is so odd that I am unable to understand why the hon. Gentleman thinks that a positive new style of politics would prevent parties from working together. Surely he realises that if politics is a competition and not a war, one works in league with other people and other parties when that best serves the public interest. Obviously one maintains a healthy critical capability when appropriate.

Wales has another golden opportunity to lead the way in conducting politics differently. At the heart of the new agenda, about which we talked so optimistically when the referendum was held on the Welsh Assembly, must be the concept of focusing on outcomes rather than process. The public do not care much about the political process. Why should they? Those who are most interested in the political process get involved in it. The rest pay tax in the expectation that we manage the political process to achieve the outcomes that we were elected to achieve. That is the point of paying the tax that enables politicians to be employed. We often forget that and settle into the comfortable arguments that take place in the House, perhaps drawing the media into that club at the same time. We forget that the true client of our activities is getting switched off by what we say and disillusioned by the fact that politicians seem more interested in attacking each other than working together in the interests of Wales.

I have given the matter a great deal of thought and have decided that the failing of the system is really a failing of politicians to lead the thinking of the nation of Wales. We fail to provide a motivating, inspirational, powerful and visionary agenda that the media naturally gravitate towards. We should be talking about an agenda that is likely to succeed—a vision that is secondary to the people driving it, who are focused on the results that it can achieve.

That is the big point for me. With the focus in the press on individuals, scurrilous stories and questions of corruption, we have begun to reap the consequences of our attitudes and behaviour towards each other. Very rarely do the great achievements of the human race rest on the memory of an individual. The great achievement of the Apollo moon landing was travelling to the moon, landing a man on it and returning him safely to earth. The individual concerned happened to be Neil Armstrong, but the triumph was collective.

Mr. Bryant: Is it not ironic that, despite his fine sentiments about it being more important for us to talk about outcomes than processes, so far, apart from mention of the moon, which was a little dangerous coming from him, he has talked solely about processes and not said anything about the conditions facing the people in Wales?

Lembit Öpik: I recognise that I was taking a risk in trying to talk about the character of politics in Wales and that it is unconventional of me to try to reintroduce an element of soul and a different modus operandi in Welsh politics. The hon. Gentleman can listen to the rest of my speech to determine whether I should refer explicitly to health, education and so forth. This seemed too good an opportunity to lose to share my thinking on what I consider to be an important matter. I shall certainly respect further interventions from the hon. Gentleman and others on the point.

Kevin Brennan: I respect the sincerity with which the hon. Gentleman is putting his case, but is he telling the House that, from now on, locally delivered Liberal Democrat "Focus" leaflets will contain the high-minded moral politics that he is advocating? Will he make that pledge now?

Lembit Öpik: I can most certainly give the hon. Gentleman the pledge that all the "Focus" leaflets that I personally write will be exactly along those lines, but let me make a serious point. I said at the beginning of my speech that I am not condemning other parties for their lack of vision or for succumbing to the temptation to demean Welsh politics, but that I am speaking to, among others, members of my party. Indeed, as the leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, I invite my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire, who has not been dragged to his place because he is some prime offender in the party, to engage in that process. I emphasise, for exactly the reason to which the hon. Gentleman referred, that I am speaking to my party and inviting Welsh Liberal Democrats to consider the points that I am making. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend has already read my speech; his presence indicates assent—*[Laughter.]*

I return to examples of great triumphs that are not associated with the names of the individuals concerned. Lloyd George, who of course created pensions, was not remembered by most members of the public who receive pensions as having done so. We have heard about Nye Bevan and the national health service, although I would point out that the great Liberal, William Beveridge, gave him the idea in the first place. Examples of individuals being associated with personal triumphs or personal armies of visionaries are rare.

On account of his obsession with leeks, the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) might be remembered for an army of leekers who go around the country swapping metric measures for imperial ones, just as Robert Peel is remembered for creating the police—peelers. Indeed, constables are called bobbies in honour of his first name.

Mr. Evans: What has name-calling got to do with the first 10 minutes of the hon. Gentleman's speech?

Lembit Öpik: I was hoping that the hon. Gentleman would take my remarks in the same jovial spirit in which he made his comments. It was a tentative joke; I should have known better. I apologise to the House in order to avoid having to make a personal statement later because he did not laugh.

In talking about the difference between outcomes and focusing on individuals, I should like right hon. and hon. Members to consider two crucial and fundamental points. First, the obsession with gossiping about each other in the press and attempts to drag down individuals has arisen because ideology in Welsh and, indeed, British political life has evaporated. We cannot blame the media for taking on the agenda that we have set.

We saw a good example of that when the hon. Member for Ribble Valley sought to criticise the Government on the continuing Mittal matter and to imply a degree of wrongdoing on their part. Although it is perfectly legitimate for any Opposition party to raise such matters—indeed, perhaps it is our responsibility to do so—emphasising them for a third of a speech is very tricky when the speaker comes from the same political party that has been tarnished time and again as a result of bringing the name of politics into disrepute. It is just possible that the Conservative party can score some points from the Labour party on the matter, but there is little doubt that the ultimate loser is our profession, because the public do not make the fine distinctions that we are able to make in debates on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Evans: What about Mike German?

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman mentions Mike German and is no doubt referring to the continuing police inquiry into alleged matters with regard to that individual. What is the political benefit to us as serious politicians of implying guilt when an inquiry is being conducted exactly to establish such circumstances? Every individual in the House surely accords in their heart with the principle of innocent until proven guilty. There is no benefit or upside to implying the guilt of an individual before an inquiry has even been done. The hon. Gentleman highlights exactly the kind of thing that we do to each other and have all done from time to time. Ultimately, however, the true loser is Welsh political life.

Mr. Bryant: I wholly agree with the hon. Gentleman that in all matters it is right for politicians, as in any line

[Mr. Bryant]

of business, to be judged fairly and, indeed, swiftly. In the incident to which he has referred, I wish that there could be a swift resolution of the police proceedings, as slow justice is no justice for a politician. However, does he think that it is right or wrong for politicians to try to intervene on behalf of people in their party in processes in which the police are engaged?

Lembit Öpik: I assume that there is a deeper intent in that question. The hon. Gentleman can be more explicit if he wants me to answer a specific question. It seems self-evident from what I am saying and from what we all believe that it would not be right to try in any way to corrupt an investigation. I do not think that anyone would disagree with what he and I have just said.

I turn to the important distinction between taking a more positive and perhaps more principled attitude to politics, and maintaining the critical faculties that the Government and Opposition parties must maintain. It is fair to criticise the Government for their ineffectiveness in, for example, fixing rundown public services, but we do not engender any faith or confidence in the public by running down other political parties when one's own party has not done any better. It is all very well to criticise the failings of any individual organisation, but it is incumbent on the critic to indicate a better way of proceeding.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley was asked a direct question about taxation while criticising the Government on the matter, but he was not willing to answer it. He suggested that savings and best practice would be a way of finding the extra money in the health service, but I do not know of a single political party that stood for the 2001 general election suggesting that worst or second-best practice was acceptable.

In the serious debate, once we get into it, we have to provide serious alternatives if we suggest that there is a different way to do things. [HON. MEMBERS: "What would you do?"] Conservative Members ask a good question. They can see what I would do. As the House knows, the Liberal-Democrat-led coalition in Cardiff is doing tremendous work and achieving significant outcomes for the people of Wales—everything from implementing a more equitable student funding arrangement to securing effective economic performance, from achieving what I believe was a better performance than the UK average in response to the foot and mouth crisis to introducing the Children's Commissioner for Wales, from abolishing museum charges to introducing free school milk. All those things show that it is possible to work with another party in the interests of the public while simultaneously maintaining an independent identity. Right hon. and hon. Members have busily campaigned for the new sort of politics. Part of that is accepting that in the competition of multi-party politics, one can still work in league in a positive fashion and deliver results that are far more meaningful to the public than much of the debate held in this Chamber.

That does not mean that one has to abandon one's ability to criticise. There is currently a big debate going on in the House about taxation. Personally, I believe that direct taxation is the fairest form of taxation, but there are differences of view in both my party and the Labour party. However, we will never make progress in that debate if most of the time the issue is used as a political battering ram by different political parties. People are switched off by such an approach.

I believe that it is probably necessary to increase taxation a little bit to achieve a better health service. However, my saying that raises the danger that, instead of a rational debate in the pub—*[Laughter.]* Fair enough—I meant to say that instead of a rational debate in the public domain, all that happens is that the arguments are reduced to a simple yah-boo debate about whether one is in favour of increasing taxation or reducing it. That is patronising to the public, who would be far more interested in hearing the arguments for or against. That is shown by the example of my party, which was the only one that went into the general election explicitly committed to increasing direct income tax; we gained more seats than any other party in the 2001 general election.

Of the two crucial points I want to highlight, the first is balance and the second is that, as long as we continue to be sceptical about our ability to change the way in which we conduct politics, that change will not happen. I was asked to whom I am addressing my remarks today. I am saying to members of my party in Wales, and to right hon. and hon. Members present today and members of their parties in Wales, that it is up to us to decide whether to carry on with the same old tired yah-boo politics with which the public are clearly disillusioned, or to give a different type of politics a chance.

I entered politics because I believe that politics can perform a positive and important function to improve the quality of people's lives. I did not enter politics to slam, rubbish and run down people in other parties who are themselves genuinely committed to the same goals. I became a Member of Parliament because I believed—my belief has been confirmed—that thanks to our proud democracy, some of the best brains and most sincere and committed individuals in the country end up here. I am of course pointing at the Liberal Democrat Benches.

Mr. Bryant: There is only one person there.

Lembit Öpik: Madam Deputy Speaker, you will have to rule on whether two people constitutes "some", but I am willing to accord the compliment to other hon. Members present.

The House knows exactly what I mean. We have wonderful debates, and honest and sometimes sincere conversations that would make us politically vulnerable if others heard them, when we are outside the Chamber. Sadly, we sometimes leave our mutual respect at the door and take any opportunity to run down each other's party because we believe that we will derive political advantage from doing so. We can carry on doing that if that is what we want to do; we can carry on messing about, and then getting the business done when we are not in the Chamber. Alternatively, we can start trying to discover what the Welsh public want to hear from Welsh Members of Parliament, and what sort of outcomes would restore the Welsh people's confidence to the extent that they vote in higher numbers. We can decide whether we want to continue to behave in a manner that has made it acceptable in the media to say things like, "This MP was proved to have lied, but what do you expect from a politician?" Alternatively, we can challenge that and say that we are, on the whole, honourable individuals who are genuinely trying to do the right thing.

I recently wrote an article in which I asked what is missing from politics? That question prompted many responses from around the country. Zöe Phillips said compassion; Derek Phillips, conviction; Fred Davies, openness and initiatives; Prue Bray, trust; Paul Wheeler vision and passion. Funnily enough, none said that there should be more short speeches, although one said that what was needed in politics was more people like me. Few Estonians are likely to stand at the next general election, but I have noted the comment. A chap called Bill Schardt offered three answers: issues, community and solutions.

However cynical Members of Parliament might be about my choice of subject, I ask them to take my words seriously. It was not an easy choice to tackle what lies at the heart of the disillusionment in Welsh political life—especially given that I know that there will be a degree of doubt about the nature of my contribution to the St. David's day debate—but if I had not done this, no one else would have. If I am not prepared to say to my party and others that we should start to focus on the outcomes that matter to people, there is little chance of change.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, there you have it. My deal with other Members of Parliament is that I will do what I can to make sure that "Focus" publications across Wales reflect the approach that I have described today. I am not a dictator—I cannot force people to do that—*[Interruption.]* A rebellion is breaking out behind me. I will also try to ensure that the high principles I have outlined are reflected in the activities of Liberal Democrat politicians in Wales. I cannot promise to succeed, but I can promise the House this: if we all work together, we will succeed. Perhaps, just once, we could all be a little more high minded than to try to score points when other people are doing their best to serve this country and Wales. Were we to do that, we might actually be thanked by people who believe that it is too long since true vision guided politics. Through our efforts in Wales, we might make 21st-century politics a little less disappointing to the people who pay our salaries.

3.58 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): I am grateful for this opportunity. It is with great pride and not a little humility that I rise to make my maiden speech. My pride is not of a selfish kind: it is born of the recognition of the proud history of Labour socialist parliamentarians from Wales, past and present, who have fought for working people, fought injustice in all forms, and fought for a better future for all regardless of chance of birth or of privilege. I feel humility as I take my first few faltering steps as a Member of Parliament, because I know that I have an immense debt to repay to the people of Ogmore who have placed their trust in me. I will strive to serve them to the best of my ability at all times and in all my actions.

Before progressing, may I add my own tribute to those already made today to the late Sir Ray Powell, a loyal servant of the Labour party who represented Ogmore in Parliament from 1979? He championed the rights of grandparents in the Grandparents Rights Bill, which was a major influence on the subsequent Children Act 1989. He championed the rights of shop workers during the Sunday trading debates and was influential, as we have already heard, in the development of Portcullis House. I never met Sir Ray Powell, and I am sure that if I had, we would not have agreed on everything, but his reputation as an outspoken parliamentarian on behalf of the people of Ogmore and a true champion of his communities is a legacy in which his widow Marion and his daughter Janice Gregory, Assembly Member for Ogmore, can take great pride. Let us honour Sir Ray Powell and all those parliamentarians and advocates of social justice and opportunity for all who have represented Ogmore since 1918, including Walter Padley, Vernon Hartshorn and others.

I also take the opportunity to pay tribute to my uncle, the late Ifor Davies, Member of Parliament for Gower for many years and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales. He spoke many times in the Chamber, and was a man of dignity, intelligence and vision, a thoroughly decent and truly honourable man. He is fondly remembered by his family and all those who knew him; I hope am a credit to him in the House, as well as to my parents, my wife and all those who sent me here.

I have the immense privilege of representing the people of Ogmore, a landlocked community of diverse character; it ranges from the former mining communities of the Garw, Llynfi and Ogmore valleys, not forgetting the communities of Gilfach Goch and Evanstown. It also stretches down, as has been mentioned, to more rural areas and the busy communities of Pencoed, Tondu, Llanharan and Sarn that border the M4. In the hinterland, the communities of Bettws, Llangeinor, Blackmill and Shwt nestle at the base of the three valleys. Ogmore is a diverse community.

Ogmore is also the home of many myths, legends and heroes. In Llangynwyd at new year the skull of a horse with a white shroud—the Mari Llywd—is paraded to fend off evil spirits. My colleagues back in Ogmore have said it has worked politically since 1918. Llangynwyd is also the home of the famous tragedy known as the "Maid of Cefn Ydfa" and the romantic protagonists are buried at Llangynwyd church. Llangeinor was the birthplace, in 1723, of the radical thinker Dr. Richard Price, whose treatises on liberty and the American revolution were influential in the development of the American constitution. He was renowned for walking to London at the age of 18. I will not try to emulate that trek, but I shall travel regularly by train. [HON. MEMBERS: "It will take the same time."] Indeed. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for attempting to reverse the shameful fiasco of rail privatisation and under-investment over many years.

A fortnight ago, a Welsh Sunday paper curiously speculated that my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) and I were jointly to coach the Welsh team after the sudden departure of Graham Henry. As we approach Dydd Gwyl Dewi—St. David's day—and the Welsh international against Italy, I hope that the spirit of our local legendary rugby heroes will inspire the Welsh team. J. J. Williams, Chico Hopkins, John Devereaux, Scott Gibbs, Alan Bateman and many others show the formidable talent that we have on the sporting field in Ogmore.

The legacy of song is powerful, as the Welsh national anthem "Hen Wlad fy Nhadau" is thought to have been first sung in public in a chapel in Maesteg in 1856. In addition to our excellent local choirs, it may come as a surprise to hon. Members that we lay claim to Kylie Minogue, whose mother and grandmother reside in the Ogmore constituency. The legacy is continued as new

[Huw Irranca-Davies]

talent emerges. Big Shiny Cave, a local band of youngsters, are soon to be in the national televised finals of a contest for bands. I wish them the best of luck and look forward to welcoming them to Westminster.

Names of famous collieries are testament to the mining heritage of the area and resonate down the years: Ocean, Wyndham, Western, and others. The seam opened by the Wyndham colliery brought forth coal known as "Best Admiralty Large" which fired the Navy's steamships in world war one; it was regarded as the best seam of such coal in south Wales, if not the world.

As a keen hill walker, I can testify to the rugged beauty of the hills and valleys of Ogmore, and the picturesque settings of the country parks and lowlands. After extensive reclamation after the years of heavy industry and mining, the valleys are returning to their natural beauty. With my background as a lecturer in tourism, I cannot fail to see the potential for tourism and recreation in Ogmore, which is rich in natural beauty, industrial heritage, culture and folklore. Tourism is not the only way forward, but it adds a vital spark to the regeneration of an area, and can transform the image of a region.

The classic film "The Proud Valley" was filmed in the Garw valley and starred Paul Robeson, the famous African-American athlete, singer and actor, and a keen advocate of civil rights. He rightly regarded the film as his finest. More recently "Very Annie Mary" was filmed in the Garw valley in 1999, featuring one of our best local choirs, the Ogmore Valley male voice choir.

There is a link to the future too. Paul Robeson and the film industry are relevant as we look and hope for the development in the near future of a major film complex on the site of a former opencast mine. I will lend my full support to the relevant Labour Member in the Welsh Assembly in that endeavour, and invite my fellow Welsh MPs to do so. Not only would the complex lead to direct job creation: it would transform the image of a region and a country through the powerful medium of movies. The impact on tourism is well understood.

One of the most exciting aspects of community life in Ogmore is the role that voluntary groups and regeneration partnerships play in holding communities together, particularly as they go through transformations, with an ageing and declining population, the relocation of jobs and the challenges of leisure provision for youngsters and the aged. Grassroots organisations often best understand local demands, and need our encouragement and moreover our practical support. The Blaengarw Workmen's hall and the Berwyn centre in Nantymoel, and all the activities that take place there, epitomise the success story of community regeneration that is seen throughout Ogmore.

Volunteers and dedicated staff on limited funds are pulling together to make a real difference to their communities. There are drop-in centres in Llanharran and Maesteg, the latter achieving excellent results with youngsters who dropped out of the education system and the establishment. The youth group in Nantyffyllon repairs vandalised benches and bus shelters. At the Boys and Girls Club in Nantymoel, which I have visited, 80 youngsters meet four times a week; I saw them hanging from the rafters and engaged in a range of activities. Much valuable work goes on and deserves praise and credit. I appeal to the Secretary of State for Wales to liaise with our colleagues in the National Assembly and relevant agencies further to develop the funding mechanisms that would reward the success stories of the voluntary and charitable sectors, especially those that work in our poorest communities, by encouraging the streamlining of applications for lottery funding and other grants and building on the generational funding that is such a success in the Communities First programme.

Ogmore is diverse, not only in landscape and people, but in prosperity and life chances. Some parts have experienced inward investment, infrastructure development and population growth; it is vital to continue that growth, as it benefits the whole constituency. However, we also have pockets of multiple deprivation, with more children living in poverty, lower levels of educational attainment, lower pay, poor-quality housing and higher numbers of people on income replacement benefits. Those factors combine to give a lower quality of life, a lower life expectancy, and a higher rate of mortality. It does not have to be that way; it should not be that way. I am determined that that will not continue, and I know that my Labour colleagues are equally determined.

I am proud to represent the Labour party, which has established a national minimum wage that some Opposition parties could not find time to support. That, combined with the working families tax credit, has put £30 per week on average into the purses of the poorest families in Ogmore. It is not a fortune, but it makes it pay to work, and it puts more food on the table.

I am proud to represent the Labour party that has delivered an above-inflation and above-earnings increase in pensions, and provided the £200 winter fuel payment for all pensioner households and free television licences for over-75-year-olds.

I am proud to represent the party that has agreed the largest ever compensation settlement in western European history in respect of miners' compensation, after years of prevarication and denial of liability from the Tories. Let me assure hon. Members present that I shall be working with fellow Labour Members of Parliament representing mining communities throughout the UK to ensure that full and final payment is made as swiftly as possible and in every single case.

As a GMB member, I am proud to represent the party that has a long tradition of co-operation with the unions and promotion of the public sector. Long may it continue, and long may we continue to work together with the unions to promote the best interests of the public who receive our services, and the workers who play such a crucial role in delivering those vital services.

On these and many other issues, I am proud to represent a party that delivers social justice in a real and pragmatic way, but there is more to be done. Nye Bevan described himself as a pragmatic idealist. He believed in getting things done to improve the lot of other people, and that meant dealing in reality, not in utopian visions. I will strive to work with the Labour Government in Westminster, and in close liaison with the National Assembly and local authority, and with all the agencies and the voluntary sector to bring real improvements to the lives of the people of Ogmore.

Let me finish by thanking again the people of Ogmore for their trust, and acknowledging the supreme efforts of my team, who fought a positive campaign and worked hard to present a positive message for the future of Ogmore, and the future of our children and grandchildren.

The Ogmore by-election was the 10th since Labour's massive mandate in the general election in 1997. It was the 10th to take place, and the 10th that Labour has won, and won decisively. I make these simple observations in closing: there are still no Tory MPs in Wales, and apart from the special circumstances surrounding the by-election caused by the death of our late right hon. Friend Donald Dewar, this was the worst result of any nationalist challenge since 1997. That is echoing so loudly through the valleys of south Wales that it can be heard in Scotland as well.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to address the House with my maiden speech, particularly on the occasion of the Welsh day debate. I look forward to many other occasions when I may catch the Speaker's eye, and further the concerns of my constituents and the cause of social justice in Wales, the United Kingdom, and worldwide. Thank you. Diolch yn fawr.

4.13 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) on a confident and interesting speech—erroneous in parts, but a good speech well delivered, which I am sure augurs well for him.

I also visited Ogmore, of course, unsuccessfully, and I got wet a few times as well. I come from Snowdonia, so I know what rain is all about, but with such rain every day, I could not understand why the Ogmore farmers do not grow rice. I found that the Conservative candidate was terribly wet. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ogmore sincerely on his speech.

I shall speak about objective 1 funding in Wales and the forthcoming comprehensive spending review. One of the main issues that has concerned the National Assembly and been highlighted in recent weeks is the disparity in funds allocated to the 15 local partnerships. Evidence from the funding allocated to the 447 projects approved thus far demonstrates clearly that some of the more prosperous—if I may so describe them—parts of the objective 1 area seem to be doing well in terms of allocation per head, but those in the most deprived areas are doing badly. It is extremely worrying that the funds are not getting through to the areas most in need. That might well create a problem in achieving the increases in gross domestic product that it was hoped would result from objective 1.

I consider, as does my party, that ways must be found to achieve a more balanced allocation, so that every part of the objective 1 area benefits more equitably from the funding. That is why Plaid Cymru, the party of Wales, highlighted the need to set more regional economic targets for the Welsh economy. Regional targets are essential if we are to ensure more balanced development. Adopting targets only for the objective 1 area as a whole and for the non-objective 1 area will not succeed in gaining the necessary increase in GDP. Ways must be found to target the most deprived areas.

One relevant factor is the quality of the local partnerships and the varying amounts of experience in preparing applications for European funding. Action such as more training for local partnerships that are under-performing must be undertaken urgently. What is the Welsh European Funding Office doing to address the problem?

The current financial position is that by the end of December 2001, commitments totalling £288.5 million have been made. However, the indicative financial allocation set for the end of December 2001 in the single programming document was £347.92 million. There is thus a shortfall of more than £59 million. The programme is about £60 million behind schedule.

The reasons given for that do not stack up. In a paper recently presented by WEFO to the Economic Development Committee of the National Assembly on 16 January, it was stated that

> "a key factor in not yet allocating funds up to the level of the Indicative Financial Allocation set out in the SPD was the decision by the Infrastructure Partnership and the Business Assets Strategy Partnership to spend sufficient time developing an Infrastructure Strategy before allocating grant."

The truth is that it took two years for an infrastructure partnership to be set up in the first place. In 2000 the Labour Government in Cardiff instructed the Welsh Development Agency to set up seven regional partnerships to use objective 1 money, but three crucial sectors were omitted: energy, transport, and infrastructure for information and communications technology.

Over the past two years the matter has been brought up time and again, but the Executive have done nothing about it. As a direct result, it was impossible to apply for money for projects in those sectors during the first two years of the programme. We hear in this place how important infrastructure and ICT are, but we are being held back.

In the course of my speech, I shall put numerous questions to the Secretary of State. I do not expect that he or the Minister who winds up will be able to address them all, but I would appreciate a response in the form of a letter in due course. I do not mean to be unreasonable, but I am sure that these are matters of common interest to all who are concerned about the Welsh economy.

As I said, applications could not be made for money for the three sectors that I specified. The delay became unacceptable and has undoubtedly contributed towards increasing the gap between the indicative financial allocation and the commitments already made up to the end of 2001. That demonstrates the incompetence of the Government in Wales in running the objective 1 programme.

It is estimated that more than 30 partnerships and committees are directly involved in administering the programme. There are 15 local partnerships, 10 regional partnerships, one programme monitoring committee and four strategy partnerships. On 18 January, the chair of the monitoring committee announced the establishment of two new groups—a monitoring group and an advisory group on implementation. With so many bodies, it is no surprise that people are confused about the whole process. Apparently, the private sector had had enough months ago, when the Confederation of British Industry decided that it would not actively participate in the programme, saying that business people did not have the time to attend meetings and spend hours attempting to find their way through the process.

I know that the issue has a resonance across the political spectrum and there is a need to simplify matters in order to proceed as quickly as we can. There is a danger

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

of the whole process being hijacked by local authorities. It seems that those who know how to play the game, as it were, are doing well, but the danger of that for small organisations is that if they are out of favour with a local authority, there is not much chance of their being successful in their applications.

It is unhelpful to compare our performance with that of other UK regions that are in receipt of objective 1 assistance. Such comparison is unfair and pointless because each area has different problems and a different way of tackling them. However, we should be comparing the performance of our programme with our targets, as set out in the single programming document. As the failure to reach the indicative final allocation anticipated by the end of 2001 shows, it is evident from such comparison that we must improve our performance, and fast.

There is significant under-commitment in priority 5 of the programme, which concentrates on rural development and sustainable use of natural resources. Several hon. Members have mentioned problems in rural areas. The problems should be highlighted and we should deal with them urgently. Measure 7 of that priority, which targets enhancement and protection of the natural environment and countryside management projects, is seriously under-committed. Will the Secretary of State liaise with the WEFO and the First Minister about that? We need to encourage the establishment of quality projects under that aspect of the programme, and the need is greater now because of the fallout of foot and mouth, and so on.

We must emphasise the need to establish a wider sense of ownership of the programme. Action needs to be taken to ensure that some of the big players, such as the WDA, do not feel that they own it. The process tends to be finance-driven rather than policy-driven, and there is genuine fear that that will continue, as the new regulations introduced for 2000 to 2006 exert annual pressure to demonstrate that money is being spent and require proof of spending at the end of every two years. The whole programme may well be preoccupied with the need to spend, and concentrate on that instead of quality. There is a need to shift from a finance-led approach to a policy-led approach.

We also need to de-bureaucratise the process. It must be dug out of the realm of civil servants. There are concerns that elected Members of the National Assembly and the Economic Development Committee in particular do not have a sufficient role in the process, and that it is dominated by the Government of Wales and officials. Of course, the Assembly as a whole should have a role. Perhaps it could undertake an annual review to consider how EU programmes are progressing. That work could be done in a wider framework of considering domestic performance policy as well. Such an arrangement would obviously provide an opportunity for approved integration and cohesiveness between the European Union and domestic programmes of the sort that has been lacking in the past, and would also avoid duplication. The Assembly as a whole should have overall control of all European Union programmes, as it should ensure that objective 1 contributes to overall economic development in Wales. A lack of overall strategy in the objective 1 SPD, with the lack of adequate baseline data and cohesion between strategy, priorities and the measures within them, directly resulted from the fact that no overall national economic development strategy was in place. Such a strategy should have been in place at the beginning of the National Assembly's work. It would have guided the preparation of objective 1 and other important programmes.

That leads me to the comprehensive spending review. As we know, the Chancellor's CSR is due for publication later this year. It will set out the funding arrangement for 2004 to 2007, and will therefore cover the second half of the objective 1 programme. In effect, it will determine how much funding Wales will receive not only as part of Barnett, but—we hope—in the form of additional resources to cover EU funds.

Will the Secretary of State guarantee that Wales will receive additional resources over and above Barnett to meet the EU funds that we are entitled to draw down? What discussions has he had with the First Minister about the need to ensure that Wales will receive the full amount of resources, in addition to the block grant, to cover all EU funds that we are entitled to draw down? What discussions has he had with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on this issue? Last time, we did not receive the full amount necessary to draw down all the European funding or any additional resources to match fund the projects, so we must call for an additional allocation on top of the block grant. I am fully aware that the Secretary of State knows that, and I hope that he will lobby as hard as he can. I know that it is a difficult issue and that there are other competing claims on Treasury moneys, but I ask him please to listen. This is an opportunity that Wales must not miss, for the good of the whole objective 1 area and beyond.

The mid-term evaluation of the objective 1 programme in 2003 offers the opportunity to reconsider the priorities and measures and the financial allocations that they contain. What discussions will the Secretary of State have with the First Minister on the mid-term evaluation of objective 1 funding? What discussions has he had with the Department of Trade and Industry in relation to the next round of European structural funds from 2006 onwards? What guarantees can he and the First Minister give that they will ensure that the interests of Wales—it has to be said that they differ from those of the UK Government—will be heard? It is not in the interests of the UK Government to argue for increases in the amount of structural funding that is allocated to the UK, because, as we know, the Fontainebleau agreement acts as a disincentive. Welsh interests differ from those of the UK Government as far as the next round of funding is concerned. My party believes that the principle of additionality must and should be applied to each individual programme, instead of only at the member state level, to ensure that structural funding is additional to domestic funding. The baseline for the future financing of the structural funds should be increased from the current 0.45 per cent. of EU gross domestic product to at least 0.65 per cent. The money could be found by moving resources from the common agricultural policy. However, we would oppose any moves to renationalise regional policy, as there must be a strong regional dimension in cohesion policy.

Since the last comprehensive spending review, Wales has received, on average, an extra £140 million a year above the Barnett block to cover the extra cost of EU grants. Of course, that is welcome. It has gone fairly far, but it has not gone far enough to pave the way for drawing down all the European structural funds and using them to their full potential. Of course, extra money is welcome, but we need more money again. I know that the Secretary of State hears such views all the time, but in the context of this particular debate, I must point out that it is absolutely vital for a substantial addition to be made to the Welsh block grant. I am not telling him anything that he does not know himself; but it is none the less vital.

Some petty politics has been going on on both sides of the House. Some claim that the extra money is the much-needed match funding, but unfortunately, it is not. This is the money that is given to Wales by Europe. Unfortunately, it has to go through the Treasury first. In order to use the money, it is necessary to match the amount in addition to its usual budget—the infamous match funding. Unfortunately, we have not seen a penny of that money from the Treasury, and it has to be drawn down from the various departmental budgets, which are already stretched to their limits in the National Assembly. I doubt whether any match funding will be provided by the Treasury in the next CSR unless the Secretary of State and the First Minister lobby hard to urge upon the Financial Secretary and the Chancellor the need to provide these much-needed funds so that the European grants can be used to their full potential and the National Assembly does not have to rob Peter to pay Paul. I congratulate the Chancellor on providing the European component of grants in addition to the Barnett block in the last CSR. I urge the Secretary of State to ask the Chancellor to continue that precedent by doing the same again this year.

We are approaching a make-or-break period for the structural fund programmes. They have been slow to start and it has taken some time to get the infrastructure in place. Academics, economists and politicians on all sides realise that we are now in the middle of the seven-year process and that this is an important time. The last CSR covered two to four years of the European funding programme and provided a welcome £140 million on top of Barnett. During the middle years of the programme, most of the grants come from Europe. We therefore hope and expect that there will be a significant increase in the funds that are made available in this year's CSR. Plaid Cymru's Professor Phil Williams AM, has carried out research estimating that an additional £62 million a year will be needed to cover the increased level of European grants allocated to Wales in the next few years.

The Secretary of State obviously appreciates the importance of the issue. I urge him to lobby his colleagues along the lines that I have suggested and ask him to bear in mind the special needs involved in the programme. I know that he is aware of them; I am merely reminding him. Will he make objective 1 a real success throughout Wales?

4.31 pm

Mr. Martin Caton (Gower): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) on his excellent speech. He clearly has a valuable role to play in the House in future. I felt proud as I listened to him because he is from Gowerton stock in my constituency. He may be Ogmore man today, but he was Gower boy. That is why I know that he will be especially interested in the subject that I shall talk about in the few minutes that I have. [HON. MEMBERS: "Cockles."] Correct.

Tomorrow is St. David's day, and many restaurants, hotels and pubs in the Swansea area will offer specifically Welsh menus—many of them very imaginative and extremely mouth-watering, and some of them involving Welsh cockles. Unfortunately, however, they will not be local Penclawdd cockles, because as I said at Welsh questions yesterday, since last July the Burry inlet cockle shellfishery has in effect been closed.

I guess that if one asked most people who live in Swansea and the surrounding area, or even tourists who have visited it, to list the things that they associate with Gower, cockles would be fairly near the top of most of those lists. Many, when that came to mind, would not think of a small bivalve mollusc. They would have a mental picture from before the war of hardy cockle women from Penclawdd and other north Gower villages, swathed in layers of shawls, leading their ponies and carts on to the estuary at low tide, taking out their wooden rakes and gathering the finest cockles in the world for sale in local markets, perhaps for consumption with local laverbread and bacon for breakfast.

That mental picture, although from a bygone age, is not so very different from what one would have seen if one had gone out to watch the cockle gatherers in the Burry inlet before last July. Certainly, the pony and cart would have been replaced with a Land Rover, some of the women would have been replaced with menfolk and almost all the shawls would have been replaced by more suitable outdoor gear, but the actual gathering of the cockles would have been exactly the same—using a wooden rake and a great deal of back-breaking work.

The shellfishery has a record of environmental and economic sustainability that is probably unparalleled anywhere else around the coast. In recent years, that sustainability has been maintained by regulation through the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee, so that only a limited number of licensed gatherers can collect cockles in the Burry inlet and the amount that each of them can take is limited, as is the size of the cockles taken. That system ensured that cockles could be gathered in the Burry inlet throughout the year, except when short-term prohibition orders applied as a result of pollution spills or other health hazards. That is largely because it has not, like other shellfisheries, started to use heavy equipment from boats or large tractor rakes, but has stuck with the hard work of the hand rake.

Until last July, the operation had provided a good living for more than 40 families in north Gower. It had led to the development of a sizeable co-operative cockle and laverbread factory and other family processing units in the Penclawdd area, provided a central focus for Swansea's excellent market and given birth to our regular cockle festival in the city. The Burry inlet cockle beds do not provide a living only to some of my constituents. There are also cockle gatherers on the other side of the estuary, in Llanelli and Carmarthenshire. I know that hon. Members from those constituencies share my support for the industry and my concern for its future.

Sadly, what many of us thought of as this most environmentally friendly and sustainable of industries, applauded by conservation groups throughout Wales and beyond, has been closed down for nearly eight months. Since last July, both sides of the Burry inlet have continued to return positive results for diarrhetic shellfish poisoning, which, as its name suggests, is a poisoning caused by the consumption of infected shellfish that

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induces diarrhoea and various other nasty symptoms. To protect public health, the Food Standards Agency and the local authorities therefore imposed temporary prohibition orders to stop cockle gathering.

That has left the cockle gatherers' families in a desperate situation. They have lost their only or main source of income for two thirds of a year. Their savings have been eaten up and many have been forced to extend their overdrafts or to borrow from other sources. What is worse, they have no idea when they will be able pursue their livelihoods again. That depressing uncertainty has grown week after week. At first, everyone from gatherers to environmental scientists expected the problem to disappear, because in the past DSP has come and gone in a matter of weeks in shellfisheries around the coast. That led to a growing awareness that something was different and more virulent about this outbreak than previous outbreaks in the area and around the coast of Britain.

Then, about a month ago—seven months after the fishery was first closed—we learned that the DSP positive test results in the Burry inlet are not due to what the Food Standards Agency calls "classic" DSP toxins. The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science at Weymouth has found that the toxicity of the affected cockles from the Burry inlet is more acute than normal. Even at this stage, we know little about what is causing these positive results. We know that heat treatment does not kill it, as it does some bugs responsible for other shellfish-induced illness. Work is going on at CEFAS and other institutions. Similar results have been shown in other locations such as the Wash and the Thames estuary. There is also evidence from Ireland and Canada of similar phenomena. As we are so far away from identifying the cause, we are even further away from identifying the factors that have allowed it to develop, be they pollutants or other environmental changes in the estuary.

The distress is greatest for the cockle gatherers, especially for those with no other source of income, but it is not confined to them. Others are suffering, albeit to a lesser extent—for example, those involved in processing who have to pay the extra costs of transporting cockles from other parts of the UK and abroad, and people who sell cockles, especially in the markets, who no longer have a local product and can see the concern about the safety of cockle consumption putting off their customers. Cockle gatherers in south-west Wales who do not work the licensed Burry inlet have had their shellfisheries around the coast, at places such as Laugharne and Ferryside, threatened with overfishing by the displaced gatherers and then closed down to protect stocks.

So what needs to be done and who should be doing it? First, a compensation scheme should be set up for cockle gatherers unable to gather their product in the inlet. There is a strong case for such a scheme. These families have seen farmers whose livelihoods were undermined by foot and mouth disease receiving Government compensation and help being provided to affected parts of the tourist industry. That is quite right. However, these people have not just had their livelihoods undermined—they have had the rug pulled from under them and have so far received no help. Indeed, for most of the eight months they have had to keep paying their licences although they cannot gather their cockles.

When I make that case contrasting the treatment of cockle gatherers with that of farmers, I am accused of comparing chalk with cheese. People argue that cockling, as a form of fishing, is hunter-gathering, and that if stocks run out in one place hunter-gatherers move on to another location. That is probably true around most of the coast. In places such as the Wash, the Thames estuary and the Scottish coast, cockle gatherers do exactly that. If they get a prohibition order they simply move their activities outside its boundaries. That is not an option for the cocklers at the Burry inlet shellfishery, who are tied to their estuary. They are not really hunter-gatherers, but husbander-gatherers, and hence much more similar to farmers and without, in the main, the option of looking to new cocklebeds.

So: who should provide the cocklers with support? The question of how to do that is complicated. When my colleagues and I ask the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, we are told that this is entirely a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. When I ask the National Assembly, it explains that, while responsibility for the inshore fishery has been devolved, it has no powers to compensate cockle gatherers.

When I ask why the Assembly cannot use the wide power in section 40 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, which states that the Assembly

> "may do anything . . . which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of any of its functions",

it is pointed out that the closure of the fishery is not an exercise of one of the Assembly's functions. It is the action of the local authorities on behalf of the Food Standards Agency. Therefore, the Assembly is, apparently, unable to pay any sort of compensation.

A Treasury scheme exists for compensation when a pest or disease has affected a fishery. Apparently, however, diarrhetic shellfish poisoning does not count as a pest because it results from the shellfish ingesting toxins present in the microscopic algae on which they feed. I do not know why the definition of "pest" has to be drawn so tightly as to rule this problem out. We either need to widen the definition or expand section 40 of the Government of Wales Act to allow the Assembly to provide support. Alternatively, we need to find a way of operating through food safety laws to provide compensation to these people, either through UK Government agencies or the National Assembly. Somehow, we should find a way to provide support to these families from the public purse. That is getting pretty urgent for some of the families involved.

It is even more urgent, now, that we get on with sorting the estuary out, identifying the problem and its causes and taking the necessary remedial action to ensure that the estuary environment can once again support a sustainable cockle industry. For the Loughor estuary to be rescued, I believe that we are going to need more geographically specific research that looks not only at the microbiology but at the wider ecosystem in the estuary.

As well as the problem caused by algae toxins, other problems have been identified in the inlet: eutrophication caused by excess nitrates; silting up and encroachment; and an increasingly anaerobic environment. All these have been seen in parts of the inlet and all—as well as the DSP problem—will affect the quantity and quality of collectable cockles.

We are fortunate that Swansea university has the expertise to carry out the sort of research that needs to be done. Dr. Kevin Flynn at the university is an expert in the field of algae biotoxins and is prepared to get such a research project under way. However, that research needs to get going as quickly as possible. The phytoplankton that will be a central part of the investigation starts growing in spring. Research should begin as soon as possible if valuable information is not to be lost for another year. I congratulate both Carmarthenshire and Swansea on having put in money to begin that research, but I hope that the Food Standards Agency and the Environment Agency will see the sense in diverting some of their research budgets to this project.

Too often in the history of south Wales, people have been expected to trade off environmental quality in exchange for jobs. This is a case in which improving the environment and saving jobs—even creating new ones—go hand in hand. To do this in time will take political will at every level of government.

4.43 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) on his speedy race through the fascinating subject of cockles in Gower. I look forward with some enthusiasm to further discussions on that in the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. I also join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) on his maiden speech. Perhaps unlike other Members who have to delve a long way back into their memory to remember what that experience is like, as a new boy I did it only about eight months ago. It involved a peculiar mix of terror and excitement which slowly eased away, leaving me with the realisation that I had to sit here for another half an hour or so to be polite. I therefore understand the hon. Gentleman's situation. I also congratulate him on getting Kylie Minogue and J. J. Williams into the same sentence; that is quite a remarkable achievement in a maiden speech. So—congratulations all round.

I want to focus on an issue about which I feel strongly, namely the condition of and prospects for the Welsh economy. Doing business in Wales has much to commend it. It is often said that the sign of a good economy is a high number of overseas investors prepared to put their money where their mouth is. Inward investment is a good example of how an economy is doing. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Welsh Development Agency was tremendously successful. We saw about £13 billion worth of inward investment during that period, and some 200,000 jobs were either secured or created.

One of the most interesting aspects of the structural reform of the Welsh economy in that period was illustrated by the fact that four of the world's six largest and most successful electronics manufacturers were based in Wales. That was a real vote of confidence in the Welsh economy in that period.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the workers in Wales, and to their often excellent record of loyalty and commitment. In particular, I want to pay tribute to the many small business men and women who form the heart of any economy and, particularly, form the heart of the Welsh economy. It is often true to say that politicians do not take the opportunity often enough to say thank you. I would like to say thank you to the thousands—indeed, millions—of small business men and women across the United Kingdom, and particularly those in Wales. They are the ones who create the wealth; they create jobs for other people, and have the confidence to provide us with the services on which we rely. I am sure that all hon. Members share my gratitude for the hard work and dedication of small business men and women across Wales.

It is with regret, therefore, that I have to say that the confidence of those business men and women in Wales is at an all-time low. It is certainly much lower than the confidence of many businesses in the rest of the United Kingdom. We are all aware that manufacturing has been in recession for a whole year. We have seen 9,000 manufacturing jobs lost in Wales in that time. The trade deficit for the United Kingdom as a whole is also at a record level.

The Trades Union Congress said today that it did not foresee the recovery that has been heralded by some Ministers taking place this year in Wales. It does not foresee the recovery taking place in manufacturing until 2003. That means that we face two consecutive years of recession. The recession in manufacturing will have a devastating effect on the businesses involved and on the communities that support them.

I hope that the TUC is wrong in this instance, and that things will recover more quickly. However, its view is also shared by many entrepreneurs in Wales. I refer to a recent report published by Barclays on business start-ups. These start-ups are an important indicator, because they show the confidence that people have in the future of an economy, locally or nationally. The figures for the last year show a noticeable fall in the number of business start-ups planned in Wales. That is not unusual in a recessionary period.

The fall, however, is much greater in Wales than it is in the neighbouring English regions. In the west midlands, the fall in business start-ups in the last year is 6 per cent., but in Wales—right next door—the figure is not 6 per cent. or 12 per cent. but 19 per cent. That represents a fall of nearly one fifth in the number of business start-ups in Wales in the last year. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) will understand this point particularly. In a region such as the west midlands, including the delightful county of Shropshire, the fall of 6 per cent. was not good, but it was certainly not devastating. Just across the border in Powys, however, there has been a fall of 19 per cent. That is worrying because it bodes ill for the Welsh economy and suggests the danger of a greater gap between the Welsh and English economies, which would be in no one's interest.

What is the problem, and what is the difference in Wales? I have talked to business men and women and their representatives, including the Cardiff chamber of commerce and the Welsh Federation of Small Businesses. They have identified a number of factors, and I shall raise two of them.

The first relates to the burden of regulation and the administrative costs of the regulations that fall on small businesses in Wales. Last year, the extraordinary number of 4,672 new regulations were introduced, which is a record since regulations have been counted. That is not my figure: it comes from the House of Commons. That comes on top of the £15 billion costs of red tape that the British Chambers of Commerce has identified from Labour's first four years in government. Unfortunately, there is little sign that the pace or scope of regulation is likely to diminish.

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A number of small business men and women have told me that they hope there will be change and a realisation by the Government that the burden on small businesses is disproportionate. I spoke to them today, and as regards the figure of 4,672 new regulations they have said to themselves, "We can kiss that money goodbye. The chances of those figures falling is very small."

The reality is that the average small business in Wales spends up to 31 hours each month complying with or administering Government regulations. That is the equivalent of four working days a month—another working day a week—merely to ensure that the business is complying with and administering the regulations. Is it any wonder that the productivity of businesses in Wales, or in the United Kingdom as a whole, is collapsing? The sad fact is that four years ago we were the ninth most competitive nation in the world, but we are now the 19th, and the danger is that Wales and the UK as a whole will fall further.

The second factor that businesses have mentioned to me and that has been highlighted in a number of surveys is the lack of confidence that Welsh businesses have in local and national authorities. Individual business owners have expressed to me their frustration in dealings with local councils and agencies from the Assembly or from Whitehall—indeed, in having to deal with all three when the different levels do not communicate effectively with one another. That has been borne out most recently by a comprehensive survey entitled "Barriers to Growth and Survival", published by the Welsh Federation of Small Businesses.

I shall pick up on a couple of brief points made in that survey which merit consideration. Across the United Kingdom, 33 per cent. of small firms said that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with Government-funded business advice, but in Wales the figure was 51 per cent.—over half. People singled out the quality of business advisers, the co-ordination of services, grant funding, loan funding and training grants. If local authorities think that they escape criticism, I have bad news for them. Local support for small businesses also attracted criticism, with almost three quarters of firms in Wales saying that they were dissatisfied with their local authority as a whole. Moreover, 60 per cent. of them were fed up with local economic development departments—I hope that the new Assembly Minister dealing with that aspect will take note of that if he has time—and 40 per cent. were unhappy with the way in which local planning applications are carried out. That is a sad indictment of how the public sector is perceived by one of the crucial communities that it exists to serve. It clearly shows a breakdown in the confidence of those businesses in many of their public authorities, and a breakdown of communications and trust.

People may wonder why things have got to this stage. I shall give a simple example. As a chartered surveyor, I am relatively familiar with this issue, although not an in-depth expert, so I look forward to being corrected by Labour Members. As I understand the current situation—Labour Members will be happy to remind me of this—businesses in my English constituency will be able to veto any proposal from a local authority to create a supplementary or additional business rate, whereas businesses in the Welsh constituencies of Labour and other Members will not have that veto and their voice will not count in the same way. That is wrong, because it discriminates against Welsh businesses, and it makes many of them second-class citizens.

Some people may say—sadly, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) is not present to say it, but I am sure he would if he were here—that with devolution there will be differences of opinion and different approaches. That may well be, but from the perspective of the small business man or woman, it puts them and their business at a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis their English neighbours. That is probably the worst possible signal about the nature of the devolution settlement that we could give the engine of the Welsh economy, and it is one of the saddest aspects of how devolution has been allowed to spin out.

In my lifetime, the Welsh economy has undergone a radical transformation. That is in no small measure due to the hard work and the willingness to change of the people of Wales. Small business owners and managers want and need better business support. They want less regulation, and resent the complex political and bureaucratic hurdles that they have to tackle. Understandably, they resent the fact that they are now required every month to spend the equivalent of four working days simply complying with Government red tape.

I believe that small businesses in Wales deserve better, not just because they create local wealth and local jobs, important though they are, but because entrepreneurs embody the essential ingredient of a decent society. No matter who a person is—whatever his background, class, colour or creed—if he has the ability, skills and will to work, he can be his own boss and make his own way in the world. That is a vital message of hope for all, in whatever part of Wales. That is why small businesses matter in Wales, and why I believe that they deserve our full support.

4.57 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): I am pleased to be able to speak in the debate, not least because St. David's day is my birthday, which is good for a Labour politician in Wales, but also because about five weeks ago I thought for a split second that I would not be able to speak ever again, when someone in another car in Cardiff decided to share my side of the road for a few seconds, and lost. I want to say publicly how well the emergency services of Cardiff and south Wales dealt with the accident, especially the accident and emergency department. Despite the doom and gloom that we hear from Conservative Members, A and E did a magnificent job for me and for the poor occupants of the other vehicle. The doom and gloom that we keep hearing about is not relevant. The police, the fire brigade, the ambulance service and the A and E people did a magnificent job for everyone involved.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), who made a magnificent speech. The constituency problems he described are similar to those I experience: both constituencies are landlocked, and in both cases the ending of a mining tradition has left a legacy of poverty and deprivation. I think we are all here to try to put that right, and I wish my hon. Friend luck.

I want to raise two issues of specific interest to north-east Wales, and relating directly to Wrexham. I represent roughly half that area, but my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), who is present, may wish to speak later and to raise the same issues.

My first point relates to city status for Wrexham. As Members will know, throughout Wales Wrexham is considered to be the premier industrial, commercial shopping and administrative centre of north Wales. The area's achievements over the past decade are worthy of the recognition and honour that city status would confer on every resident, business, organisation and group that has helped it to create its new positive future.

Besides being the largest town in north Wales, Wrexham is now truly the regional centre of the north. South Wales has two urban civic cities, Cardiff and Swansea, but there is no northern equivalent. City status for Wrexham would help to correct a long-overdue imbalance in Wales.

Economically, Wrexham's fortunes have undergone a transformation in recent years, by any measure. City status would constitute an acknowledgement of a sustained period of achievement in the town's regeneration. That achievement is due to the drive and purpose of its people, and to partnerships developed with private and public bodies. For example, on average one new company is established each week in the Wrexham area. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) should note that: although we heard some doom and gloom from him, there are good stories to tell, especially in areas such as Wrexham.

Chris Ruane: I am glad that my hon. Friend is seeking to correct the imbalance created by the Conservatives. Last year in my county of Denbighshire, 44 new companies were started in Ruthin and 24 in Rhyl, with the help of the council and other agencies. That is a marvellous example of the expansion of the small and medium-sized enterprise base in Wales.

Mr. Jones: I am pleased to hear such news of another centre in north Wales. It may not be quite as big and prosperous as Wrexham, but I know that with the help of its Member of Parliament it will improve in the near future.

Development opportunities in Wrexham's town centre are eagerly sought, which reflects the confidence and vitality of the town and the surrounding area. The Henley centre for forecasting described Wrexham as one of the top 20 areas in Britain with above-average potential for economic activity during the 1990s. It has more than fulfilled its expectations, and continues to move from strength to strength.

So far the campaign for city status has proved a great success, and we are delighted with the Wales-wide support that we have received for our bid. To date, 56 per cent. of Members in Wales—excluding those on the Government payroll—have supported the granting of city status in this jubilee year. To that can be added the support of all five Members of the European Parliament representing Wales, 75 per cent. of Welsh local authorities and 61 per cent. of Members of the National Assembly. Given the expressions of support from thousands of people in all walks of life—those working in television, sport, business and tourism, health professionals and religious leaders—we begin to see a huge momentum gathering in favour of a just reward for Wrexham and, indeed, north Wales.

City status would enable Wrexham to be seen as a location for quality and opportunity, not just locally and regionally but internationally. It would allow the town to compete in the global economy, and it would help the area to attract more new investment and to build on its strengthening economic base by bringing in high-quality jobs. The area would be enriched, to the general benefit of the people. I urge the Secretary of State, as he considers which Welsh town to recommend for city status in the coming weeks, to reflect not just on what such status would deliver for the people of Wrexham but, more important, on what it would deliver for Wales as a whole. It is time to redress the imbalance between north Wales and south Wales.

The second issue I want to raise concerning Wrexham is not unrelated. It involves the future of the North East Wales institute of higher education, and its ambition to achieve university status. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently met its principal, Professor Mike Scott, to discuss the prospects of that.

I endorse NEWI's ambition. Let me say at the outset that there remains an important role for the more traditional so-called supply-led universities, such as Cardiff and Bangor, in higher education in the wider national Welsh context. I believe, however, that there is also a real need for a new type of university in north Wales to meet the needs of local people, and I sincerely believe that NEWI can serve that purpose. It has the potential to work in partnership and alliance not just with the supply-led colleges in the university of Wales, but with its partners in the further education sector and in business, commerce, the arts and sport.

NEWI has a progressive and innovative vision that can be realised in its development as an independent entity with university status. Wrexham and north-east Wales need a new, high-quality university, and NEWI can fill that role with ease. I urge my right hon. Friend to think again about its ambition at the earliest opportunity.

Let me now deal with a matter that has concerned me for some time. It has come back into focus only recently, as a result of a campaign with which I have been involved in my constituency. My concern relates to the serious matter of balance in news coverage and current affairs programmes broadcast on the Welsh-language channel SpedwarC, or S4C. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be aware of those concerns, as I have copied to him recent correspondence that I have sent to the chair of S4C, Elan Closs Stephens.

I have genuine worries about the existence of a policy among S4C news and current affairs producers and editors effectively to exclude non-Welsh speaking MPs and Assembly members from coverage on their various programmes. Hon. Members may know of the campaign that I have fought to save Britain's oldest brand of lager, Wrexham Lager. It has received considerable coverage in recent weeks on independent networks and on BBC regional television and radio. As a natural consequence, the story also attracted much interest from producers and editors making news and current affairs programmes for S4C.

However, although my office received several calls from S4C production teams, my staff were asked only to provide background information for the story and to

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suggest only Welsh speakers for interview on camera about the story. I became concerned that there was a possibility that S4C was operating a policy of linguistic apartheid when reaching editorial decisions. I certainly hope that such decisions are not based on a politician's ability to speak fluent Welsh, but all the indications are that that, sadly, may be the case at S4C. What other hon. Friends have told me reinforces that view.

As a result of my fears, I recently made some very interesting inquiries of TG4, the Irish-language national television channel of the Republic of Ireland. TG4 mirrors the function and the role of S4C in the Republic by providing a daily Irish-language programme schedule.

I was amazed to discover that non-Irish speaking politicians are not excluded from any news programmes on the basis that they cannot speak Irish. Indeed, in such circumstances, TG4 simply subtitles any interview or contribution. The only criterion for the broadcast of a news item is newsworthiness.

As an interesting aside, thanks to the endeavours of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his previous job as Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, TG4 is now broadcast in Northern Ireland. My right hon. Friend's crucial and important part in securing peace through the Good Friday agreement now means that TG4 is broadcast for Irish speakers across the border in Northern Ireland. I am sure, therefore, that he is all too familiar with what I am describing.

Sadly, in Wales newsworthiness and balance do not seem to be taken into account by S4C producers and editors when they make editorial decisions. Language seems to be the overriding and determining factor in deciding the news agenda. That cannot be a healthy way to present news and factual programming, as it limits and restricts opinion. In any case, it does not reflect the Welsh nation as a whole.

S4C claims that it does as much as possible to help learners of the Welsh language. I know from my own experience of trying to learn Welsh and Spanish that the best way for television to help language learners is through the use of subtitles. In this case, subtitles should be both Welsh-English and English-Welsh.

It is sad that on this day—the eve of St. David's Day, and of my birthday—S4C is leaving itself wide open to accusations of imbalance in news reporting. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to raise this matter at the earliest opportunity with the chair of the channel, and to establish once and for all that S4C serves the entire Welsh nation, irrespective of linguistic competency. I have supported S4C in the past as a valuable asset in Welsh life. A change in news and current affairs policy such as I have described would reinforce my support.

In conclusion, I should briefly like to deal with the work in this House of the Welsh Affairs Committee, of which I have the privilege to be the Chairman. We recently examined the shameful decision of the Children's Society to withdraw from Wales, a decision that angered many people in Wales. The Committee was not impressed by the society's reasons for pulling out of Wales, and the subsequent report emphasised that the society's action must not be seen as a green light for other charities to follow suit.

The House should know that our inquiry exposed some major flaws in the decision-making process adopted by the Children's Society. The Committee concluded that the adoption of the recent recommended code of practice by the voluntary sector in Wales could prevent such mistakes in the future.

Currently, the Committee is looking at the important issue of objective 1 funding for Wales, which was mentioned earlier. We are also receiving evidence on broadband internet provision. The Committee will be happy to hear evidence from anyone on those issues, and on the question of the operation of the legislative process in Wales, and its potential, following devolution.

I assure the House that relations and co-operation between the Welsh Affairs Committee and the National Assembly are very constructive indeed. That is a testament to the success and the drive of the devolutionary policies of this Government. This House can be satisfied that self-government for Wales and the relationship between Westminster and Cardiff go from strength to strength. The message is clear—devolution is working for Wales.

5.9 pm

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, which falls as close as possible to St. David's day.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on achieving another birthday and surviving the terrible car accident in which he was involved, thus sparing us the unedifying spectacle of the competition to see who would succeed him as Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Committee.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) on his maiden speech, which was very good. I did not have the opportunity to get to know his predecessor, Sir Ray Powell, very well, because of the short time that I have been in the House, but I got to know the hon. Gentleman in the general election, in which he fought a vigorous campaign—fortunately, though, not vigorous enough to get the result that he wanted.

I will aspire to reach the high standard set for politicians by my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik). No doubt what I say will be reported back to him and judged accordingly.

I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) for publicising the Liberal Democrat "Focus" leaflets and the great effect that they have throughout the nation because of their positive content.

In this debate, we have talked about the economy, manufacturing, the service sector, tourism, agriculture and even shellfish gatherers, so we have had a fairly comprehensive tour. We have also considered how we are functioning as a society and how we are dealing with health, education and transport. The one aspect that we have missed out—although it was touched on by the hon. Member for Ogmore in his description of his constituency—is the environment.

The environment is one of our greatest assets and we must protect it at all costs. Much is written and spoken about sustainability, yet it is a little-understood concept and certainly not one that has captured the imagination of the general public. It is not used by planning authorities, for instance, to rank development proposals in order of acceptability, and developments are taking place in Wales under the cloak of sustainability, environmental targets and international obligations that are profoundly and demonstrably unsustainable.

Unfortunately, Wales has had a history of being robbed and raped of its assets and of having its environment degraded and impoverished. One of the first examples was the desecration and deforestation of the hills of south and mid-Wales to produce charcoal to feed the furnaces of the early iron foundries. Those hills have never recovered their diversity—biologically, they will never recover. However, the process led to the wide, open and challenging landscapes that are so valued by the people who live there and by the visitors who bring money into the local economy.

The second great exploitation in south Wales took place in the name of coal, to fuel the iron and steel industries and to be exported as well as being used domestically. The coal rush brought very modest returns for the people who live in the area, and great social deprivation. The huge returns went to the coal owners. Because there were no environmental controls, the mining utterly destroyed some of the south Wales valleys, which were a landscape every bit as beautiful as mid-Wales, and probably more diverse in its wildlife.

The hon. Member for Ogmore mentioned the reclamation work being done by the Welsh Development Agency. I commend that. It has made a great impression and there has been a real greening of the south Wales valleys, but the hand of man does not compare with that of nature: man-made landscapes and environments lack the fascination of the real thing, which is what attracts and will continue to attract visitors. There are lessons to be learned: let us not destroy the very jewel of the Welsh crown that sits so well with the other jewels of culture, language and community.

Recently, the uplands of Wales have become the target of developers who use the words "renewable" and "sustainable" to cloak and cover a unique landscape with industrial structures, such as wind farms. Friends visiting me say, "Don't ever take that landscape for granted. Fight for its survival." A sense of wilderness is very hard to find today in urbanised Britain, but finding it is enormously spiritually uplifting for those whose lives have become humdrum and stressful. Such experiences are more than recreational; they are re-creational and truly renewing. They re-create people's spirit.

We should not be misled: when landscapes are lost to industrialisation, they are lost for many generations and probably for ever. Reclamation has always taken a very long time. In an important debate in the other place, noble Lords, including the Lord Bishop of Hereford, drew attention to the Cefn Croes wind farm development and the Department of Trade and Industry's decision to allow it to proceed without public inquiry. I shall not dwell on that too much, except to say—

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I apologise for missing the earlier part of the debate, but I have just returned from Germany, where I was looking at renewable development. Given that the hon. Gentleman disapproves of wind farms, I hope he will explain his party's position on nuclear power. If we do not adopt one or the other, we may as well throw away any commitment to Kyoto.

Mr. Williams: I do not agree that the choice is between wind power or nuclear energy. The Liberal Democrat party and I favour offshore wind farms, rather than the establishment of wind farms in Wales's wild and special places.

As I said, the debate in the other place made mention of the Cefn Croes wind farm development, about which there is huge disquiet in the whole of Wales. Ceredigion's local planning authority approved the application in a meeting lasting less than half an hour, even though the officer's report, which ran to more than 100 pages, recommended refusing the application. That recommendation was based on, among other factors, the view of the Countryside Council for Wales that wind farms are inappropriate in that location. Here we enter a circle of confusion. The CCW thought that it was not empowered to request an inquiry, and the Assembly thought it could not request one if its adviser, the CCW, had not done so.

The application then went straight from Ceredigion county council to the desk of a Minister in the DTI, without touching any other organisation in Wales. That Minister then took his decision without visiting the site; he merely consulted what we in Wales call snaps, or, in more technical language, photomontages. I wonder whether the Wales Office was involved in that process, and whether the Minister or the Secretary of State could give a personal view on it.

My main concern is the Camddwr trust's proposal to build 165 turbines, 400 ft high, on the Ceredigion-Powys border. One third of them would be built in my constituency above Abergwesyn, on land that is of national park quality but has never been designated as such. That application must not be fast-tracked in any way, but scrutinised in detail. In any event, a public inquiry must be held, involving an entirely independent inspector who is well versed in the impact of such developments on dramatic landscapes.

I am particularly concerned by a press statement by the Minister for Industry and Energy about future planning applications. On announcing the Cefn Croes application, he said:

> "new rules which will relocate renewable energy projects . . . have been proposed under the non fossil fuel obligation but have failed to obtain planning permission".

We are not quite sure what that means, but it fills us with horror. Perhaps there is some fast-tracking system for so-called sustainable or non-fossil fuel obligation developments. Once again, Wales is being exploited by a large organisation that is making huge profits from non-fossil fuel obligation subsidies. We must put our environment before financial exploitation.

5.19 pm

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I am grateful that I caught your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, in this important debate on issues connected with Wales. I am pleased to have been in my place when my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) made his maiden speech. He reiterated the principles that guide this party, so it was a tremendous pleasure to listen to him today.

I am also pleased to be here on the day that the Leader of the House announced a timetable that will, I am sure, eventually lead to the end of hunting with hounds. That is an important issue in Wales and I have had more letters on that than on any other issue since becoming an MP.

[Julie Morgan]

The letters have come from all sections of the population, but especially from young people. Recently, I have had letters from people who cannot understand why, when democratically elected Members of Parliament have indicated their clear will to ban hunting on several occasions, it has not yet happened. A ban to end hunting might help to restore the faith in democracy that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) mentioned. Such policies will help to convince the public that we do what we say we are going to do. I hope that we will not see a fudge on the issue of hunting. If this House votes in favour of a ban and the other place votes against, the Parliament Act should be used.

I shall address most of my remarks to the subject of crime and the Home Office's policies in Wales on prisons and on combating domestic violence. I strongly support the Home Secretary's aim, which he stated to prison governors recently, to reduce the number of people in prison and increase community sentencing, including perhaps weekend prisons and other ways in which prisoners can maintain their contacts in the community while serving their sentences.

I have long taken an interest in the position of women in prison. Because of the lack of a women's prison in Wales, Welsh women have had to serve their sentences in English prisons, which causes huge problems for their families and children. United Kingdom figures show that half of the children of Welsh women in prison are taken into care. An analysis of the 169 Welsh women in prison on 30 November 2001 showed that the majority were there for non-violent offences. Many of the Welsh women who are in prison today should not be there.

I fully support the proposals by the Prison Reform Trust for a network of local facilities to help to rehabilitate offenders. Women are treated differently from men by the criminal justice system. Those facilities should be made available, because women from Wales, and their families, would benefit from them.

The general population of prisoners in Wales, like that in the rest of the UK, has risen rapidly. An answer to a written question that I received yesterday reveals that the prison population in the Welsh prisons—Cardiff, Swansea, Parc and Usk, including Prescoed—rose from 1,437 to 2,191 between 1997 and 2002. That is an increase of nearly 50 per cent. In reasons for prison sentences, the biggest rise has been in drug offences. Some 124 men were held for drug offences in 1997 compared with 280 in 2002—another huge increase. The next biggest rise was for burglary—from 237 to 332. I do not have a deeper analysis of the drug offences, but it is difficult to obtain help for drug addiction in prison. We all know that, despite the best efforts of the prison officers drugs are still widely available in prisons.

With a rapidly escalating prison population we must find alternatives to prison. I support the tagging schemes that allow early release and that have been almost universally successful. I look forward to more community sentencing. Those who are a danger to the public must be kept in prison, but many of those who are not a risk could serve their sentences more effectively in the community. It is also important to ask how successful prison is and how good it is at preventing reoffending. We all know that its record is poor. Reconviction rates are very high after a prison sentence, and I believe that the entire subject must be reviewed.

Another move by the Home Secretary that I strongly welcome is the ending of the policy of holding asylum seekers in jail. Very many asylum seekers have passed through Cardiff prison and I applaud the Home Secretary's decision, which means that there are now no asylum seekers there.

I previously visited asylum seekers in Cardiff prison, accompanied by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), and followed up the visit with a debate in Westminster Hall. Asylum seekers were unsuitably housed, on a top landing in an old, unmodernised section of the prison. That is no criticism of prison officers, who were placed in a very difficult situation and had to deal with it as best they could. For people who have committed no crime it was an entirely wrong policy, which I am pleased that the Home Secretary has ended so soon after entering his post. I was also encouraged by the report in the press this week that many of the old Victorian-style prisons will be replaced by more modern ones, which could affect us in Wales.

I shall now discuss violent crime against women in the home. In Welsh questions yesterday I raised the issue of future funding for the women's safety unit in Cardiff. The unit is one of several projects in Wales that are funded by the Home Office for a 12-month period as part of its crime reduction programme, and I was very pleased to hear that a Wales Office Minister would be visiting it soon. The unit, which was very recently launched in Cardiff, is a one-stop shop dealing with criminal justice, housing, finance and the emotional fall-out from domestic violence and rape, particularly in the 70 per cent. of rape cases in which the perpetrator is known to the victim.

The women's safety unit aims to provide advocacy for victims and their children and to reduce the risk of future harm. In the first 11 weeks of its operation, it has dealt with 140 women and 209 children. It is important that we do not forget the effects of domestic violence on children. There are some powerful and evocative images on posters, showing children cowering on the stairs or hiding behind doors when domestic violence is occurring in the home. We have not spoken much about children in today's debate, but obviously they should be at the heart of all our policies. Research has shown a strong link between domestic violence and child abuse, and children are absolutely key in all policies to do with domestic violence.

The women's safety unit has been able to change the structures of the criminal justice system in Cardiff so that cases can be quickly and appropriately dealt with. In Cardiff there is a named prosecutor from the Crown Prosecution Service. There is a domestic violence pre-trial review court staffed by a clerk who, along with all the Cardiff magistrates, has received training from the women's safety unit in how to deal with domestic abuse. It is absolutely essential that people who are dealing with that type of case receive the training to enable them to understand the implications. The time that it has taken for such cases to be heard has been halved in Cardiff, which means that there is less time for the victim to withdraw because of fear or intimidation.

The major problems to be tackled by the unit are the under-reporting of violence in the home and the fact that very many of those women who do report violence drop out before the case reaches court. In Cardiff in one week last October there were 52 call-outs to incidents of domestic violence. Those resulted in six arrests, and four people being charged. Thus, following 52 incidents, only four people were charged.

I applaud the Government for putting domestic violence high on their agenda. Projects such as those that we have in Cardiff pave the way for a complete change in attitude and approach to this very damaging situation. The Government have made a tremendous start on the projects that they have set up. There are several throughout Wales, but the funding for those projects is only for 12 months. I want to reiterate very strongly that it is impossible to tackle an issue of such major importance with 12-month funding. I ask the Minister again to use all the power he has to persuade the Home Secretary to increase the funding for these projects.

5.29 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I am glad that the hon. and new Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) is back in his place. As a fellow socialist parliamentarian and a fellow west Walian, may I add my words of warm congratulation on an excellent maiden speech? The hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) is not here, but he will know that the best intellectuals in the Labour movement have always come from west Wales. I am glad to see that that civilising missionary spirit is carried forth, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will endeavour to raise the consciousness of the Ogmore constituency Labour party for many years to come.

This is my maidenesque appearance in a Welsh day debate, which is an interesting if rather peculiar institution in some ways—a bit like this entire Parliament. The first Welsh affairs debate took place in 1944, and such debates became an annual event two years later, under a Labour Government. That was something of a sop at the time, although I do not wish to be in any way ungrateful for the opportunity that the debate gives us to discuss Wales affairs. Obviously, we are very grateful for every opportunity to raise issues of importance to Wales. The idea of having a Welsh day is slightly redolent of tokenism. Of course, every day needs to be a Welsh day, and we look forward to a time when we have a Welsh Parliament—obviously with family-friendly hours—when every day will indeed be a Welsh day.

One of Parliament's interesting conventions is that we are not allowed to see outside the Chamber, but it is fair to say that perhaps the media interest at United Kingdom level in this Welsh affairs debate may be rather less than we might have hoped.

Mr. Llwyd: It is limited.

Adam Price: Possibly, yes. In a sense, Welsh politics and affairs have been pushed to the periphery of interest by successive Governments. Hon. Members on both sides of the House would try to resist that kind of metropolitan centralism. *[Interruption.]* I shall gladly give way to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) if he has something of relevance or interest to say. I am only 60 seconds into my speech, and I shall try to get on to the matters of interest.

Of course, it is true to say that, during the past month, a Welsh story, broken by the Welsh media and by my party, has come to dominate the headlines throughout the United Kingdom. I certainly cannot remember the last time that a story made in Wales has come to dominate the news agenda in that way.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Does the hon. Gentleman think that the story dominated the headlines in Ogmore?

Adam Price: The hon. Gentleman is incisive as ever.

The story was originally published by the *Western Mail* four weeks ago today, and it has rightly been at the forefront of political debate in Wales. On that day, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales was involved in an interesting spat on the BBC. It was as poetic as ever, and I remember the phrase "maggots on the corpse". I am not sure what the corpse was—perhaps it was that of the Welsh Labour party, but I thought that that had a little bit of life left in it. I remember the prophetic words, "Adam, if you have any evidence of impropriety, then publish it." Four days later, we found the famous letter on the Romanian website, and I am sure that that will go down in history.

Clearly, there are two stories at the heart of that affair. The first is the set of circumstances surrounding the Government's support for the Sidex deal, and I shall concentrate on that. As the Secretary of State for Wales said, there will be an opportunity for further discussion, especially on the second issue—the cover-up. I do not want to try your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have counted nine fundamentally untrue statements or misleading statements that have been made by the Prime Minister and his official spokesperson as a result of those allegations. Clearly, my party is focused on the significance of that for the Welsh steel industry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must choose his words carefully. I am not quite sure what he said a moment ago, but he should not accuse any Member of deliberately misleading the House. If he did, he should withdraw that remark.

Adam Price: I withdraw it if you advise me to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Prime Minister's official spokesperson has made a slightly evasive and confused series of statements, but I shall not detain the House further. I am sure that there will be ample opportunity to discuss the matter on Tuesday night. The Secretary of State for Wales should not have to answer on the matter—he is an honest man whose commitment to support the steel industry is of long standing, and he was not consulted on the Sidex deal. In fact, as we know from the Minister for Europe, the only Minister who saw the letter was the Prime Minister. Surely, therefore, the Prime Minister should respond on behalf of the Government on Tuesday night. We look forward to that—at least, we live in hope. The message is, "Don't lose your idealism."

The Sidex deal was never in the national interest of Wales, the UK, or, indeed, the British—I have no problem with the word "British", as the Welsh and Cornish are the original Britons, are they not? The deal was never in the interests of the Welsh steel industry—Graham McKenzie commented to *Scotland on Sunday* that not only the plant in Romania but the plant in Kazakhstan owned by Mr. Mittal produce flat-rolled steel, which, of course, was produced in Llanwern and Ravenscraig. Therefore, Mittal's plants are competitors. Eastern European steel

[Adam Price]

imports doubled in 1999–2000, and low-cost competition from eastern European steel producers is one of the core problems facing the UK steel industry. It was therefore never in our interests to support the deal.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) pointed out that a deal was going to happen anyway. In a sense, that is true, and many things are happening in the world that will be detrimental to the prospects for Welsh companies in a range of sectors. However, should our Government actively support such developments? Technically, one could argue that the Usinor deal would have been less damaging to our steel industry because, as we have heard, the company employs more people in the UK than Mittal. At least its profits are retained in the European Union, which has indirect benefits, and the main focus of Usinor's steel production—it is formerly state-owned—is in western Europe. It would not therefore be in Usinor's interests to flood western European markets with low-cost steel imports, which is what Mr. Mittal intends to do with his plants in Kazakhstan and Romania.

We should never have supported Mr. Mittal's acquisition of Sidex: quite apart from the Labour party's insensitivity in accepting a donation from a prominent competitor, jobs in the Welsh steel industry will be endangered. Subsequently, we learned about Mr. Mittal's lobbying efforts in the United States. We await President Bush's decision—which he must make by Wednesday under the section 201 inquiry—and we may know it by the time of the debate on Tuesday.

Why was it not possible to seek an undertaking from Mr. Mittal that he would desist from his lobbying efforts in the United States as part of the price of UK support in Romania? As I understand it, no such undertaking was given or sought. It is incumbent on the Government, because of their support for Mr. Mittal both in the letter that clinched the deal and the loan, to use the full power of the British state to introduce a package of measures to support our beleaguered steel industry if President Bush imposes tariffs.

Although the package of measures for steel communities is welcome, in terms of additional central Government money it is less than Mr. Mittal received from the British taxpayer to fund his acquisitions in Romania and Kazakhstan, for which he got £6 million and £14 million respectively. That is depressing.

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman is depressing.

Adam Price: It is depressing for all of us. I would support many aspects of the Labour tradition in Wales. I have always said that I feel like a prodigal son of the Labour party, which I am sure will disown me. I distinguish between the best traditions of the Labour movement in Wales and the way in which the leadership of new Labour have dealt with that issue. I know that privately many Labour Members have sympathy for that sentiment.

The affair has corroded public confidence in politics and we are left with a sobering insight into new Labour and its priorities. Does the Prime Minister care more about his billionaire friends, as the draft letter referred to Mr. Mittal, than the families in the steel communities that have loyally supported the Labour party for more than 100 years? Coming from a mining constituency, I know enough of the failings of old Labour in Wales. I certainly would not whitewash the Labour party's past, but at least there was a moral compass. It did not have an unblemished record, but it was possible to shine up the failings of the Labour party locally against its principles. The problem is that no one is clear about new Labour's principles and it is condemned by its actions. Its inability to realise or to admit what it has done wrong—it committed a grievous injustice to steel communities in south Wales—defines the ideological vacuum at the heart of the new Labour project.

5.43 pm

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): I am pleased to contribute to this St. David's day debate, even though I have to turn my 13-page, 15-minute, well-researched, finely crafted and perfectly delivered speech into a five-minute ramble.

Mr. Ainger: Get on with it.

Chris Ruane: Indeed.

I will confine my comments to town centre renewal. All hon. Members will have empty shops in their constituencies. It is a national issue, but in particular it affects the poorer communities in Wales. First, however, I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) on his fantastic victory in the recent by-election. Well done—llongyfarchiadau.

I intend to draw on my constituency experience and on recent research by the Joseph Rowntree trust, an excellent organisation that has produced a research paper called "Local Shops for Local People". It researched 14 centres around the United Kingdom, including one in Ferndale in Wales, that have reinvigorated, renewed and regenerated their town centres. Lessons can be drawn from that. I urge the Minister to ask his civil servants to study that document. There is a copy available in the Library, which I have used.

I pay tribute to the Labour Government for what they have delivered in our communities and town centres. First, objective 1 funding will allow our local economies to regenerate so that our people are employed, have money in their pockets and can spend it in our town centres.

Secondly, there have been changes in heritage lottery funding since Labour's victory in 1997. Members may recall that, prior to that, £12 million of heritage lottery funding was spent on the Churchill diaries, and £5 million was spent on improving playing fields at Eton. Labour changed the rules so that such money is now used in areas where there is architectural merit and poverty. As a result, Denbigh town centre in my constituency is to benefit from £6 million of heritage lottery funding and Rhyl town centre, which is in Rhyl west, the poorest ward in Wales, is to receive £6 million. So, we have made big inroads into improving our town centres.

The main threat to our town centres, as everyone will realise, has come from out-of-town shopping centres. They are built on cheaper land and because of that benefit from a range of economic factors to the detriment of town centres. The main thrust of my speech is not to turn the clock back 25 years—I shop in those centres on a weekly basis, as I am sure do many hon. Members—but to create a level playing field to ensure that we have the means to regenerate town centres.

The Joseph Rowntree trust research said that we should be creating town centres and not shopping centres in our communities. There is a difference. The town centre should be part of the town and should include the voluntary and community sectors. I opened the Clwyd Coast credit union in my constituency two weeks ago. Because it is located in the centre of Rhyl, its 1,000 members go there weekly and spend money there. The benefit advice shops and citizens advice bureaux are also in Rhyl town centre, which increases the footfall. Not only that: together with the welfare rights unit, their advice brings an additional £4.5 million in benefits into Denbighshire each year. That money is spent in our communities. So it is vital that we create town centres and not shopping centres.

There are other ways in which local and national Government can help our town centres. They can locate employment services in town centres, as they have in Rhyl. Healthy living centres, doctors surgeries and libraries could all be located in town centres.

"Local Shops for Local People" also revealed that for success we need partnerships—not just the traditional partnership of shops and offices in a commercial centre. We are blessed in my community with such business associations in Denbigh, Prestatyn and Rhyl—the three principal towns in my constituency. We need wider partnership and to consider the best examples around the country. The Borough Market renovation, not three miles from this House, enlisted the support of the Churches, residents' associations, the voluntary sector, the community sector and local authorities. We should be aiming for such wide partnership.

Another key factor in reviving our town centres is a safe environment. The Labour Government need to be given credit for creating partnerships to tackle crime and disorder, which bring together the community, local authority and voluntary groups. A month ago in Rhyl, I jointly opened a project to ban the drinking of alcohol on our streets. It aims to convince street drinkers that the areas around the railway station and the piazza are not the places to do their drinking as it deters shoppers.

Labour should be given credit for the closed circuit television that we have introduced in towns and communities all over Wales and for other initiatives such as club safe in Rhyl, which aims to monitor antisocial behaviour in clubs—there are 10,000 clubbers every weekend—and pub watch. It is vital that we create safe communities in which people can shop.

We need to co-ordinate employment, training and education for the work force who will work in our shops. If we regenerate our communities, our local people must benefit. We should target the unemployed and economically inactive in our communities. We should do so carefully, taking a long-term approach to families suffering inter-generational unemployment who have lost confidence. We must reach out to those people, give them training and restore their confidence so that they can go back into the community to be employed in our shops.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to look into a key factor in many of the 14 regeneration projects around the country, which is the use of simple kiosks. They are low cost and low rent, so for a minimal outlay people can use them to set up their own business: if successful, they can go on to fill our shops; if they fail, no harm is done. Two national chains were first established in my home town of Rhyl—Iceland and Kwik Save. I believe that there are many more Albert Gubays out there in our communities—people who if they were given the opportunity could make great innovations in British retailing.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider three fiscal steps to help town centres, the first of which is to enable flexible rates to be set in depressed communities and town centres. That has been done for the post offices and shops in small rural communities, and I want it to be extended. Secondly, I want the Chancellor to consider re-rating out-of-town shopping centre car parks, and ring-fencing the money for use in revitalising the communities that such centres have done down over the years. Thirdly, last April, the Prime Minister made an announcement about business improvement districts, which would allow local communities to use part of their rates to improve their town centre. I believe that taken together those three fiscal policies would do a great deal to revive our town centres.

5.52 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I congratulate the Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs and wish him many happy returns of the day. I congratulate the new hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) on a first-class maiden speech.

Before speaking about violent crime in Wales, I wish to discuss the death of my daffodil. I put it on this morning and was complimented on it throughout the day, but during the speech of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), my daffodil died. I suspect that it may have been the slightly sanctimonious nature of his speech that did for my daffodil.

Lembit Öpik: The whole point of my remarks was that everyone, including the Liberal Democrats, needs to be more humble and more positive. I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the chance to make that clear.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful for that intervention, but I wonder what else about me will die next.

Statistics recently released by the Home Office have revealed an increase in violent crimes against the person across Wales. That type of crime now accounts for 17 per cent. of all recorded crime across the four police areas in Wales. My constituency borders Wales, so I know that the Welsh people are fed up of living with the threat of violent crime. They are being let down by a Government who must focus more energy and resources on reducing those figures. The good people of Wales cannot be allowed to live in constant fear of attack.

I am sorry to say that that fear is compounded by the continuing fall in the number of special constables in Wales. Since 1997, that eventful year, the number of serving specials has fallen from 1,140 to 811 in 2000—a fall of 41 per cent. More specials are needed in Wales for the fight against violent crime. While the Government claim that overall police numbers in Wales have gone up, they can no longer ignore the rapid decline of that important part of the force.

Recent Home Office-funded research made several recommendations on how to reduce the high wastage of special constables. Among the recommendations to

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[Mr. Wiggin]

prevent many specials leaving the force in Wales are plans such as local monitoring of wastage and improvements to management structures. Those recommendations are laudable, but they smack of new Labour's increased bureaucracy. The people of Wales need real policies to keep quality men and women in the force. Such policies would improve the pay and conditions of specials in Wales and complement the essential recruitment drive in that area. I am pleased that the Government have expressed commitment on that issue, but that must be backed by practical results for the distressed people of Wales.

Another major problem is the availability of treatment, or lack of it, for victims of crime in Wales. It is not comfortable to be confronted with a situation in which millions of pounds are spent rehabilitating offenders, yet the victims of crime are ignored. Statistics published by the Home Office itself reveal that only 3 per cent. of victims see the person who has targeted them charged and put through the courts. A further 1 per cent. receive some kind of monetary compensation for violent crime.

Those pathetic statistics mean that the Government are overlooking the needs of 96 per cent. of Welsh people who become victims of crime. The same report highlights the fact that insensitive treatment by some official bodies ends up making things far worse. The Government spend tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on rehabilitation schemes for people convicted of crime. Victim Support points out that only a tiny fraction of that sum goes towards support and help for those unfortunate enough to be victims of crime.

Research by Victim Support confirms that most victims of crime, violent or otherwise, receive little or no help from the state other than services provided by volunteer groups. The chief executive of Victim Support, Dame Helen Reeves, said that that negligible level of support is unacceptable. She said:

> "It is staggering to think that even though 14 million crimes are committed every year in England and Wales, most public services turn a blind eye to the specific needs of those affected."

About 23 per cent. of the population are affected. Dame Helen is referring to the lack of awareness in agencies such as the NHS and housing departments. Some great things are achieved with rehabilitation, but it is not just the criminal's future activities in society that deserve consideration. The lives of the victims of crime can be changed radically. Coming to terms with such upheaval can be difficult and traumatic, so it is as important from a sociological perspective to ensure that the victims can interact positively in future as it is to do so for the criminals themselves. Rehabilitation for the victim may include involvement with official bodies such as the NHS or housing departments, so it is essential that such organisations are equipped with the finances and the training to be helpful, rather than damaging, to the unfortunate victims of crime.

That principle is true anywhere, but it is particularly applicable in areas with unacceptably high levels of violent crime, such as Wales. Violent crime in Wales unfortunately permeates all aspects of life across the border. It is a sad fact that nearly every major hospital in Wales has its own police officer to protect medical staff from the threat of violence. The *Western Mail* carried out a survey which revealed that NHS trusts in Wales are:

> "so concerned about verbal and physical abuse by patients that they are either already funding the services of a police officer or have plans to employ one."

As the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff recorded 788 incidents of violent crime in a 10-month period, the new measure is hardly surprising. Statistics show that the employment of those police officers is proving to be effective. Indeed, Ysbyty Gwynedd, which had recorded 508 incidents of violent crime in a year, managed to reduce that figure by 35 per cent. following the employment of a police officer by the North West Wales NHS Trust. That sounds like an improvement, but surely such a move should never have been necessary. There is still an average of almost one violent incident per day at the hospital. When violent crime prevents doctors and nurses from doing their job, the situation is clearly out of hand. I recognise the good work that has been done to reduce crime in Wales, but the figures for violent crime are still distressing. Not enough attention is being paid to reducing these upsetting incidents.

In 1997, the number of crimes of violence against the person in Wales was 17,386. After almost five years of Labour government, that figure stands at 38,230, which represents an increase of 120 per cent. The total figure for violent crime in Wales in 1997 was 20,071. That figure has increased by more than 100 per cent. to 40,880 in the past five years. Why is Labour neglecting to rectify such an unacceptable element of Welsh society?

I know that the Government will point to an increase in police numbers in some areas of Wales. Some types of crime, I am happy to report, are being reduced, but violent crime—from preventing the incidents, right through to conviction and victim support—is not receiving the attention in Wales that it needs. Will the Government pledge today to start to right that wrong? Will they give some assurance of practical solutions to the present frightening situation, which is a reality for too many people in Wales?

6.1 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn): I am proud to speak in this Welsh affairs debate, on the eve of St. David's day. I hope in future to take part in the debate on the eve of a St. David's day public holiday. I was one of the Members who signed early-day motion 662, and I shall give my staff the day off tomorrow so that they can spend St. David's day with their families. We should start to recognise St. David's day.

I shall concentrate on the Welsh economy and the need for even economic development throughout Wales. I shall also discuss the practical arrangements between the National Assembly for Wales and Parliament. As a newly elected Member and one of the first batch of post-devolution Members from Wales, I believe that we have a responsibility to ensure that that settlement works for the people of Wales.

The Welsh economy has made good progress since 1997. It enjoys the fruits of the Chancellor's labour, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said. We have the lowest interest rates, low inflation, low mortgage rates and low unemployment. The Government's desire for a stable economy is shared by the Welsh business community that I meet weekly, against a background of boom and bust under the Conservatives.

Mr. Prisk: Boom and bust?

Albert Owen: More bust than boom, it must be said.

The Labour Government's policies, such as the minimum wage and the working families tax credit, along with the new deal, have helped the unemployed and the low-paid in my constituency. Youth unemployment has been cut drastically. That means that school leavers no longer move from the classroom to the dole queue, but receive real training and hope for the future.

In my constituency, some 2,000 people had an immediate rise in earnings when we introduced the minimum wage. Almost 50 per cent. experienced a doubling of their hourly rate to £3.60. Let us not forget that the Conservative Government opposed those measures, and Plaid Cymru sat on the fence and made no decision about them.

Prior to my election to the House, I ran an advice and training centre. I saw the impact of the minimum wage and working families tax credit on unwaged people and those on low wages. However, in an area of high long-term unemployment such as mine, those benefits do not have the same impact as in the rest of Wales. Yes, unemployment is down. On the claimant count in my constituency, it stands at 7.7 per cent., which is down 0.5 per cent. on the previous year. On the residents base count, which is available in the House of Commons Library, male unemployment stands at 8.7 per cent., which represents a decrease. I welcome any drop in unemployment, but at 7.7 per cent., it is too high. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s in my constituency unemployment remained twice the average in Wales. One statistic that is a legacy of the representation of my constituency by the Conservative party and Plaid Cymru in the past two decades is the evidence of depopulation in two successive censuses. Mine is the only county in Wales that has seen such a drop in its population. Most stark is the depopulation among young people: 18 to 36-year-olds are leaving in droves to find jobs and opportunities elsewhere in the United Kingdom. With them goes the Welsh language and the Welsh community spirit that they hold, and the communities that people like me want to support. It is economic decline that leads to loss of the language in constituencies such as mine. It is not incomers who are responsible, as some have suggested, but lack of economic opportunity.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I am listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Will he be specific on this point: when in the two decades to which he referred did he see decline in Anglesey? Exactly when during that time was Plaid Cymru in government here or in Cardiff, or even in control of the local authority in Anglesey?

Albert Owen: The answer is firmly to say that when Plaid Cymru was elected to represent us in 1987, the individual concerned promised a big difference from the situation with his Tory predecessor. There was no such difference, but only a continuation. That is my answer to the hon. Gentleman.

Let me turn to skills training. I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke in answer to a question that I asked in Welsh questions yesterday about the vocational qualifications that are coming in at GCSE level. It is important that people in my area have the opportunity at a young age to get vocational training so that they can enter the jobs market.

I want deliberately to be critical of the Welsh Development Agency. We have heard from previous speakers about the boom areas in north Wales, but unfortunately, such areas do not come as far west as Ynys Môn. If we are to achieve an inclusive Welsh society, we need even economic development and it must come across the Menai bridge to Anglesey to provide job opportunities.

I am conscious of the time and I know that other hon. Members wish to contribute, so I shall move straight to my conclusions. In 1997, people in Wales looked forward to a new, inclusive Wales. We were promised a bonfire of quangos and a more inclusive society. I am a pro-devolutionist and I will fight for devolution and to ensure that the devolution settlement works. However, if we are serious about devolution, we have to devolve economic opportunities throughout Wales.

I said that I was proud to speak in this debate. I am proud to do so as a Labour Member. I quote my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's predecessor, the first Secretary of State for Wales, who once said:

> "I am not merely a Labour man. I am more than a member of the Labour party—I am also a Welshman. As a Welshman, I want to see Wales, all of Wales, to have a share in the economic development of the United Kingdom, and not allow it to slip back into an economic and industrial backwater, as it did under the Tories. I want to see a confident, forward-looking strong Wales in a strong United Kingdom."

I believe that this Government, in partnership with the National Assembly for Wales, can deliver that.

6.8 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies)—or for Ogwr—who is sadly not in his place. I should say that I have had some problems with the pronunciation of my name since I have been in the House, so it is a great relief to see someone else with an exotic name taking his place in the Chamber. I use the word "exotic" because he is a Davies and I am a Williams.

Perhaps it is stating the obvious to say that it is very appropriate for us to debate the Welsh language on dydd Gwyl Dewi, St. David's day. It is especially so because this year marks the 40th anniversary of Saunders Lewis's seminal radio lecture, "Tynged yr Iaith"—"The Fate of the Language". It led directly to the establishment of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg—the Welsh Language Society, which has proved such a dynamic force in Wales in the past 40 years. It is loved by some people, loathed by many but rarely ignored.

The issue of the languages of Wales is wide, perhaps as wide-ranging as life, given that language permeates all aspects of human activity. It is not surprising that the Welsh language is close to the hearts of those of us who speak it, those who have learned it and others who do not speak it but support it. We are bound to have mixed feelings as we survey the state of the language today. We eagerly await the results of the census that was held last year. They will give some idea of the language's health.

[Hywel Williams]

We have some information, thanks to Professors Carter and Aitcheson at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth and the Mercator project there. For example, we know that approximately 500,000 people speak Welsh and that the age distribution of speakers is changing. In the past, the language was predominantly spoken by older people. That proportion is declining, but that of young people who speak Welsh is growing quickly. The language is getting younger, and that is a hopeful sign.

We also know that half the Welsh speakers live in the north and west of Wales—the so-called heartland areas—and that half live in the south and east, which are not generally regarded as Welsh-speaking strongholds. However, there are more Welsh speakers in Cardiff than in Llyn and Eifionydd in my constituency, and more in Swansea than in Dwyfor. Public services are fairly easily available through the medium of Welsh in constituencies such as mine, but they are not so easily found in other areas where there are larger Welsh-speaking populations.

The number of Welsh learners is increasing every year, thanks to the dedicated efforts of learners and their teachers throughout Wales. I pay tribute to the National Language Centre at Nant Gwrtheyrn in my constituency. It has done remarkable work for more than 20 years.

Welsh speakers in the heartland areas perceive that the language is under threat as the number of communities where it is the everyday means of communication diminishes. The danger to the language must be taken seriously. Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National party and supporters of the language in Wales profoundly regret the fact that the Housing (Wales) Bill, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) promoted recently, was talked out. It was a missed opportunity.

Out-migration poses a genuine threat, as does the relatively poor economic position of Welsh speakers when compared with that of English speakers in the north and the west. A former colleague, Dr. Delyth Morris of Bangor university, undertook research that shows a direct link between Welsh speaking and a lower position in the socio-economic order. Clearly, that should be tackled.

The Welsh language is the subject of consultation by the National Assembly. I am sure that all hon. Members look forward to its conclusions. We also look forward to sufficient resources being made available to carry out any recommendations. Resources are crucial. Any conclusions that the National Assembly reaches about further legislation will be especially interesting to hon. Members. I hope that if it recommends further legislation, a way will be cleared for it here.

The legislative history of the Welsh language is illuminating. The Act of Union of 1532 aimed to expunge

> "all sinister usages and customs",

that is, speaking Welsh. It was a matter of pride to me as a younger man to be notorious for such "sinister usages and customs".

The Act also states:

> "No person who uses the Welsh speech or language should have or enjoy any manner of office or fees in the realm of England or Wales or any of the King's dominions."

That led to centuries of keeping the language under the hatchet, the denial of basic human rights, and terrorising children merely for speaking their language.

Matters progressed with the Welsh Language Act 1967. I shall not detain the House with the details of the Act, except to say that it introduced the concept of equal validity—that is, that Welsh was as valid as English. The Act, however, contained the statement:

> "In the event of a discrepancy between an English and a Welsh text, the English shall prevail."

For example, "dau a dau yn bedwar"—which means "two and two is four" in Welsh—could be supplanted by "two and two is five" in English. That is clearly ludicrous.

The Welsh Language Act 1993 states that Welsh and English should be treated on a "basis of equality". The use of Welsh is, however, qualified, in that it should be

> "reasonably practicable and appropriate in the circumstances."

These issues need to be addressed, and I hope that the National Assembly will steer its recommendations in this direction, possibly with a view to legislation.

Some hon. Members might remember that the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales, when he was in this place, opposed the Welsh Language Act 1993. He said that it was a Tory Act, and that Labour would act differently in government. That was the last we heard of that promise, but we shall see what comes from the review by the National Assembly.

The 1993 Act introduced the concept of language schemes in the public sector, and public bodies throughout Wales now have plans for implementing the principles of the Act. Significantly, however, these language schemes were not extended to the private sector. It is perfectly possible and reasonable for the private sector to adopt language schemes. Indeed, the Welsh Language Board has informed me that five large, established enterprises have already done so. The emphasis on size here is crucial. Those organisations are able to absorb the costs involved, and I am sure all hon. Members will recognise that there is a cost element to ensuring that people have the basic right to use the language of their choice in communication not only with the Government but with commercial enterprises.

The problem is how to extend this best practice from the five large organisations to other commercial organisations. We see a specific role for the Welsh Language Board there, but it will need resources. Indeed, resources are the crucial element in creating the power to bring about change. The resources are the power. The three elements to language planning—I shall try to say them slowly—are legitimisation, institutionalisation and power. If we change the law, we legitimise the use of the Welsh language. If we extend the powers of the Welsh Language Board, we institutionalise it, and if we provide the resources, we provide the power for change.

6.18 pm

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): It is sometimes difficult to chart the progress of this Labour Government simply by speaking in vague generalities. So, in the short time available to me, I shall give some specific examples of how Labour is benefiting some of the poorest communities in Wales. I shall begin with the Aber valley, a small valley just north-west of Caerphilly. It contains two small communities: Abertridwr and Senghenydd, the village where the largest mining disaster of the last century occurred. This community has some of the most acute poverty, the poorest health and the lowest incomes anywhere in Wales.

It is significant, however, that today the community is coming together behind the National Assembly's Valleys First initiative. Resources are also coming into one of the great community institutions of Abertridwr, the YMCA. The YMCA has been massively expanded with a grant of £650,000, providing real opportunities for the community as a whole and for disadvantaged young people. The question is, where is that money coming from? Two thirds of it is from objective 1 funding. Objective 1 money is coming into south Wales and west Wales because of a deal that was struck by a Labour Government.

Only a few months ago, we heard a great deal about the lack of match funding and long delays. The reality is that we have match funding: a formula is in place that goes beyond Barnett to ensure additionality. Projects across west Wales and the valleys are materialising before our very eyes.

I mentioned the YMCA in Abertridwr, but if we extend our horizons slightly to the Caerphilly borough as a whole, we see resources going to Ystrad Mynach college to provide lifelong learning initiatives, a former colliery site in Penallta where Groundwork is taking a lead, a youth café in Bargoed with two youth workers and internet facilities, and a new business and technology centre in Tredomen where £160,000 has been provided. All those resources are meaningful and worth while.

In just one year, Caerphilly borough as a whole has received £7,485,381. That has come about not because of Plaid Cymru or the Conservatives, who argued for many years that it was not possible to get objective 1 funding. It came about because of the determination and advocacy of a Labour Government. Those practical results on the ground have come about because of Labour, and let us not forget that.

6.21 pm

Mr. Dai Havard (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): First, I should like to welcome my colleague and comrade, my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies). I, too, was in the rain, which is where my flu comes from, so I hope hon. Members will excuse me.

I want to talk about crime and disorder. Yesterday, I tried to raise the issue of antisocial behaviour orders, and the Tories tried to shout me down. I wanted to talk about the speed and frequency of their use from experience in my constituency. The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs visited my constituency recently to meet people in the community who are trying to deal with these issues. He saw the community police officers Kyle Manns and Cath Parker, who told him that they needed the tools to do the job, including help to speed up that process. That is why I want to raise this issue.

We have a strong local partnership to deal with these problems. We bring all the agencies together—the local authority, the youth justice team and the health boards—so we are able to examine the issues across the piece. One of the organisations involved is Safer Merthyr Tydfil, and we have an experience to relate from which others may learn. It helped to establish community warden schemes, and people have since moved from those agencies to Government Departments, from which has come the experience of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which is replicating those schemes in England.

In my constituency, this activity is carried out by the voluntary sector. I want to make a plea. The involvement of the voluntary sector is a good thing—it is not a local authority scheme—but to maintain its involvement, it needs sustained funding, and I would like that matter looked into.

The police community takes most of the action against crime and disorder, and we are experiencing the benefits of intelligence-led policing. Others across the United Kingdom should consider that approach, because it is bringing benefits. We are working in partnerships, so I do not recognise the description that was given earlier—of my community fighting itself. The trend in the United Kingdom as a whole has been for the sickness rate of police officers to go up—it is about 12 days a year—whereas in Merthyr it is coming down, to 6 or 7 days a year.

The extra resources are being used for intelligence-led policing initiatives and good management processes, and they are bearing fruit and bringing benefits. In five years, domestic burglaries in my community have been reduced by 60 per cent. There are initiatives on violent crime which we need, as we know that we have a problem, but there is a 90 per cent. detection rate in Merthyr, and that is the highest in the force. At Christmas, we ran a special scheme called "crystal clear" which reduced by 28 per cent. the amount of facial and other injuries from bottles and glasses in pubs and clubs, which all hon. Members will know about.

We are learning from our own experience and I think we have something to offer others, but we need extra help. Although so many good things are happening we still have massive problems, not least the problem of drugs. I am glad that one of my hon. Friends mentioned that earlier. We need not just enforcement and reduction measures, but better treatment facilities.

Although we require the co-operation of all Government agencies if we are to provide help, we realise that we are making the improvements we are making only because of sustained investment by the United Kingdom Chancellor of the Exchequer. Redistribution is taking place. That is something the Tories would never do, something the Liberals cannot do, and something that narrow nationalism would destroy.

6.25 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, and I too praise my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) for an excellent maiden speech.

As many Members will know, in the early 1980s Deeside experienced the greatest number of redundancies ever experienced in one day. Ten thousand people lost their jobs at Shotton steelworks, and many thousands of job losses followed as a knock-on effect. The community spirit went into free fall, crime rocketed, and the hopes of youngsters were shattered. Those events became a lasting testament to the Tory Government's industrial policy—and now the Tories have the nerve to talk of being the friends of the steel industry and its work force.

Since 1980 the community and policy-makers of north-east Wales have been striving for a strong and stable economy, looking to the future rather than the past. Massive strides in industrial development and expansion have been made since the steel closures. A major component in the reconstruction has been the creation of the Deeside industrial park, in which my predecessor Lord Jones played a vital role.

[Mark Tami]

Deeside lies on the English border, and acts as a motor for the entire economy of north Wales, Cheshire, the Wirral and Merseyside. Without the industrial park, the biggest of its kind in Europe, that would not be possible. Because we have focused on building for the future, tens of thousands of highly skilled jobs have been created in north Wales and the north-west of England. No barriers exist between the two regions, which rely on each other for growth and strength.

Yesterday's announcement by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions of improvements in the north Wales link to the north-west and the M56 is excellent news, both for Alyn and Deeside and for north-east Wales in general. The route constitutes an important link in the economic bond between the north-west and north Wales, and the improvements are crucial to economic growth in the region. The National Assembly for Wales has welcomed the plans, considering them vital to economic expansion.

Last Friday, however, a panel of Assembly Members decided to rule out the expansion of the Deeside industrial park. In my view, the reason given for refusing planning permission to double the size of the park was not justifiable. The Assembly's inspector claimed that the land on which the park would be expanded was of high quality, and that the area's farming industry would therefore be compromised. While I fully support our farmers in Wales, we should remember that the original park was built on that land. If such a decision had been made in the 1980s, we would not have the jobs that we have today.

I wanted to speak for longer, but I know others want to contribute.

6.28 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): In the three minutes available to me, I will say something about some of the problems experienced by Cardiff, as Wales's capital. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) has an important three-minute constitutional speech to make.

The press, early-day motions and speeches in the House often criticise Cardiff as a capital. It is frequently alleged that it sucks in resources—possibly because people in Cardiff did not vote for devolution, although the swing in the 1999 referendum was one of the largest in Wales. Cardiff, however, makes an important contribution to the economy. Members may not realise that, in 2000, 70,600 people came into Cardiff from the surrounding communities to work each day. The fact that those people went home and spent money in their communities represents a vital contribution to the south Wales economy. It is impossible to separate Cardiff's economy from that of the rest of south Wales; south Wales would be a much poorer place without that vibrant economy.

Cardiff still has problems, however. Levels of unemployment in my constituency are frequently among the highest in Wales. Month after month, communities such as Ely in my constituency are in the top four when it comes to deprivation—although I see that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) finds that amusing.

There are real housing problems in my area. Many newspaper column inches are devoted to the problems of rural housing in Wales, but those problems pale into insignificance when compared with the housing problems in Cardiff. House prices in my constituency are very high. Ironically, many of the most expensive houses are owned by people who have come to live in Cardiff from some of the communities mentioned by Opposition Members.

That is not a bad thing: it is good, as we in Cardiff encourage diversity of language, culture, and race. However, I shall give the House a few figures relating to housing in my constituency. For example, the average price for a terraced house in Cardiff is £83,000. In the Canton area of my constituency, the average price is £102,000.

Over the past 20 years, the local council has sold 9,000 properties under the right-to-buy legislation. Of those, only 900 were flats. At the current rate, the number of council properties remaining in Cardiff will fall in a couple of years to 13,600.

I shall have to skip many of the figures that I have prepared, but there is one statistic that I must share with the House. In Canton, there were 1,119 applicants last year for three-bedroom council housing. Three properties became available in that period.

I could say much more on the subject, but I shall do so on another occasion.

6.30 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak, and to my comrades for allowing me three minutes in which I may ruin my political career.

I intend to make what I hope is a constructive proposal with regard to the relationship between the National Assembly for Wales and Westminster. My premise is that Wales and the United Kingdom are inextricably linked. My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) has spoken already about the close links between north-east Wales and the north-west of England. It is clear that the future for north-east Wales, where there has been much prosperity, lies in working with the rest of the United Kingdom to take matters forward.

However, I am also a convinced devolutionist. I believe that we need to devolve as much power as possible to the different countries in the United Kingdom, and to the different regions. There are regions within Wales, and we need to think of devolution not as a nationalist matter but as a way of securing better government.

I believe that the way ahead is through the use of draft legislation. This Labour Government have successfully pioneered what most hon. Members agree is a good way of improving scrutiny. We need to consider more draft legislation, especially Bills relating to Wales that come to us prior to Second Reading. I think that all hon. Members would agree that those Bills need to be looked at more closely.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has already spoken about the National Assembly for Wales and Westminster looking at Bills in parallel. I do not see why there should be anything to prevent the National Assembly and hon. Members with Welsh constituencies from looking at draft legislation together in a Joint

Committee. In that way, the people involved could present suggestions and discuss matters in a positive manner, before a Bill reached Second Reading.

I believe that it would be important for the discussion taking place at that stage that no vote would be held in such a Joint Committee. Proposals put forward by the Wales Office and the Welsh Assembly Government should be considered in a Joint Committee consisting of members of the Assembly and Members of Parliament. The opportunity to meet members of the Welsh Assembly in that way would be very positive, for us and—more importantly—for the people whom we represent.

If we are going to make devolution work, we must start a dialogue for the benefit of the people whom we represent. I believe that the proposal that I am floating is a starting point for discussion. I am a new Member and I want to try to make the situation better, which I think can be done. I would like hon. Members of all parties to talk about the issue and try to improve matters.

6.35 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I am making a guest appearance at the Dispatch Box tonight—perhaps I could use the phrase "famous for 12 and a half minutes". It is a delight to be back at the Dispatch Box at a time when Wales is doing better. That is nothing to do with the Secretary of State or the Government, because I am not talking about the Welsh economy, the health service, tourism or agriculture—not even a video referee could hide the Government's lack of progress in those areas. Incidentally, were it not for the video referee and the enthusiasm of Scott Quinnell, Wales would be going to Saturday's game against Italy one up and on their way to the six nations championship.

The Secretary of State referred with some glee to the general election result, but I must remind him that there was a 6 per cent. fall in the Labour vote in Wales. In his own constituency, there was a 5.25 per cent. swing to the Conservatives. The Labour vote in Wales fell by 220,000, or a quarter of the people who voted Labour in 1997. I remind the Under-Secretary, too, that the Conservative party is still, in electoral terms, the second party in Wales, with 50 per cent. more votes than the next party on the list.

Much of what the Secretary of State said was fairly predictable. Much of what my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) had to say, by contrast, was very much to the point, especially what he said about the grotesque favouritism shown to Mr. Mittal's offshore activities at the expense of the Welsh steel industry.

The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths)—for the Secretary of State's benefit, there was a 4.05 per cent. swing to the Conservatives in that constituency—talked about the health service in Wales. I remind him of the Government's record: there are 4,000 people in Wales who have been waiting more than 18 months for treatment, and since 1997 there has been an 850 per cent. rise in the number waiting for their first appointment in an out-patients department.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) made an interesting, varied and sometimes wandering speech. He took the moral high ground, almost oblivious of the activities of the leader of his party in Wales—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Perhaps I should make myself clear: I mean the leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Welsh Assembly.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) made a worthy maiden speech, following his predecessor, Sir Ray Powell, although sometimes I felt that he may have pushed the limits of political controversy. He has succeeded an excellent Member of Parliament and I am sure that he, too, will serve the people of Ogmore well.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) made some predictable points. He made serious points on objective 1, which I will come to in a moment, and then made a predictable plea for a larger block grant.

Mr. Llwyd: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what the swing against the Conservatives was in my constituency?

Mr. Walter: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman has got the better of me, but I should point out that I am still waiting for the bottle of champagne that I should have been awarded in the Adoption and Children Bill Standing Committee for the best pronunciation of his constituency by an Opposition Member.

I was delighted to hear from the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) that we have yet another Gower boy—the hon. Member for Ogmore in the House. The hon. Member for Gower made an impassioned speech on the problems of the cockle industry in the Loughor estuary, and I am now better informed on diarrhetic shellfish poisoning than I was at the beginning of the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) gave a clear and concise view of the Welsh economy, and discussed growth in Wales during a period of considerable change under a Conservative Government. I was particularly impressed by his commitment to the small business sector; and in pointing to the divergence of the English and Welsh economies he highlighted the different policies on business rates.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), who is Chairman of the Select Committee, talked about the plight of Wrexham and the potential for city status, and about university status for the North East Wales institute. At one stage, I thought that he was going to ask for a new underground system and international airport for Wrexham. I was concerned about his point about bias on S4C. I am not sure that I have ever noticed bias. Certainly, I, an English-speaking MP, have been included on its programmes. I have always admired its tremendously helpful coverage outside Wales, particularly its Saturday evening club rugby programme, even if the subtitles are about two minutes behind the action.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) made a good speech on the interaction between the environment and industry, and strayed into the subject of wind farms and renewable energy. As always, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) spoke with passion on women's policy and prisons policy. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) made an old-fashioned nationalist—socialist, even—contribution, but he gave a very good trailer for next week's "Mittalgate" debate, which we await with interest.

The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) made a good speech on urban renewal. Uncharacteristically, he did not mention the Tories once, which was a refreshing and intelligent development. My hon. Friend

[Mr. Walter]

the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) told us of the fate of his daffodil, for which the Liberal Democrats were, I think, responsible. None the less, he gave a key speech on crime and the fears of ordinary people. His plea for better policing and use of the specials was very welcome.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) struggled to say something positive about employment in his constituency under a Labour Government. I am afraid that the speeches by the hon. Members for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams), for Caerphilly (Mr. David), for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard), for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) and for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) were somewhat curtailed by the numbers who wanted to speak.

Two factors have dominated the past year in Wales, one of which must be foot and mouth disease. Some 118 farms were devastated by confirmed outbreaks, but the impact was far wider, affecting the entire agricultural sector and the communities in which those farms are located. We all know about the number of goats, pigs, cattle and sheep that had to be slaughtered. That was bad enough, but the businesses that depend on those farms and on agriculture have suffered as a result of the disease, as has tourism throughout Wales. As we maintain calls for a ban on substandard imports into this country, there must also be a very real effort to ensure that we hold a public inquiry into the entire foot and mouth outbreak.

The second factor is the economy, which we discussed. Other hon. Members spoke about job losses and manufacturing, and many spoke about objective 1 money. It is right that we should continue to say, as I have said before, that no new United Kingdom Treasury money was committed to objective 1. There was new European money, but the other money had to come from existing budgets. Now we are witnessing a very slow development of objective 1. The notion that inertia has gained its own momentum takes on new meanings when it comes to the allocation of objective 1 money. After two years, business in Wales is exasperated and frustrated that less than 3 per cent. of the allocated funds has been spent.

By the next St. David's day debate the focus will be on the National Assembly elections, and the people of Wales will be able to pass judgment on a second term of Labour Government in London and the cosy Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition in Cardiff. It will be a judgment on the National Assembly building, a judgment on Corus and Mittal, a judgment on education in Wales, a judgment on foot and mouth, a judgment on crime and a judgment on the national health service in Wales. I will make no predictions—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"]—but I can tell the House that, as far as the people in Wales to whom I speak are concerned, time is running out for Labour in Wales.

6.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): May I at the outset give a temporary welcome to the stand-in on the Conservative Front Bench, the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter)?

The debate has demonstrated again the depth of experience and knowledge of Welsh Members and the importance that we collectively attach to this special day of debate. The first such debate was graced by the words of Nye Bevan and I know that all parties in the House will join me in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the new Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), who spoke so well today in the tradition of Nye Bevan, outlining the practical politics demonstrated by democratic socialism. His predecessor Sir Ray Powell will be missed, and I join all those who paid tribute to Ray today. He has a fitting successor in my hon. Friend, who in his maiden speech spoke movingly about his constituency and his people, for whom I have no doubt he will be a doughty champion in the coming years. He spoke of the real issues and concerns that affect real people.

This day of debate continues to be an important one for Welsh Members, as demonstrated by the fact that 18 Members have already taken part. Indeed, the Welsh contribution to the affairs of the House continues to grow in importance. Many Conservative Members predicted that devolution would leave Members from Wales with little to do, but the past three years have shown how wrong they are. Devolution has in fact increased the amount of Welsh business in the House. Most major public service Bills, such as those that we recently discussed concerning education and reform of the national health service, contain significant Wales-only clauses, and in the national health service (Wales) Bill, which the Secretary of State mentioned earlier, we shall be discussing a Wales-only Bill. The contribution to the House by Welsh Members remains strong and vibrant and will continue to be so in this, the Parliament of a united Britain.

I thank the spokesman for the main Opposition party, the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), for his kind and generous tribute to Ray Powell. As I said, I thank all colleagues for their comments to Ray. I am afraid that afterwards, the hon. Gentleman took the usual tack down hill to one of his rants. He gave us a catalogue of horrors from the national health service and spoke about the problems of waiting lists, but the fact is that more people are being treated by the health service in Wales. One of the things that we shall need to do if we are to tackle the problems of waiting lists and improve the health service in Wales is to put in resources and reform. When we put in the resources, Conservative Members said that we were being reckless. When we proposed the reforms, they voted against the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill. We remember what the Tory years involved in Wales—cuts in the number of doctors, nurses and hospital beds.

The hon. Gentleman went on to talk about the Welsh economy. Like so many Conservative Members, he talks down the Welsh economy. He and the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) talked about the problems that the manufacturing economy in Wales faces. The hon. Gentleman frequently uses cuttings from the *Western Mail*. I would not be without my cuttings from the *Western Mail* either. I have a copy of a report published in the business section of the *Western Mail*, which states:

> "The economic slowdown is showing distinct signs of thawing with manufacturers reporting their highest level of optimism over future profits for two years, according to research from Cardiff Chamber of Commerce.
>
> The chamber's latest quarterly economic survey shows that the marked downturns in domestic sales, exports and business confidence in previous quarters have reversed.
>
> Confidence amongst manufacturers in improving profitability over the next year has risen dramatically".

That is the true picture of the future economy in Wales.

I note that in this evening's *Evening Standard* the Governor of the Bank of England has said:

> "The economy has turned the corner and is starting to show clear signs of recovery."

It is important that we all recognise that we have had knocks and job losses in Wales, but it is also important that, rather than talking Wales down, we boost it. We have confidence in a new dynamic and energetic Wales—a Wales that has a rich heritage, a strong economy and a good future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) spoke very well—and authoritatively, of course—on health matters. He welcomed the fact that spending on the NHS in Wales is three or four times above the rate of inflation. He spoke with authority because, as the first Labour Minister in the Wales Office after the 1997, he started to stop the rot in the NHS in Wales that the Tories had left us. We owe him a debt of gratitude for that.

I thank the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) for his tribute to Ray Powell. The hon. Gentleman went on to give a most interesting exposé of the new politics. I do not know much about the Liberal Democrats' new politics, but I know about being the victim of Liberal Democrat tactics. I was the Labour candidate in the 1992 general election campaign, fighting in Richmond in west London, and the Liberal Democrats carried out market research into the fact that I am Welsh. They asked people whether they were troubled that the Labour candidate was from Wales or was Welsh. All their literature throughout that campaign referred to the fact that I am Welsh. That is why I am not sure what their new politics involves.

I will ensure that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) receives a full response to the questions that he has asked. Many of those issues were raised at the evidence sessions of the Welsh Affairs Committee, which I believe will publish its report on objective 1 in October. The key role that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State played in ensuring that additional funding has been provided, through Barnett-plus, to support our objective 1 initiatives must not be underestimated. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the case for recognising structural funds outside the Barnett formula was part of the last spending review. I further remind him that, on that occasion, the Government stood by Wales and provided the extra funding that we needed, despite speculation to the contrary.

At Question Time yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) raised an issue about the cockle fishery problems in Gower. I am aware of that problem. I will take on board the points that he has made and I shall certainly ensure that he is fully involved in any response on those issues that I receive from colleagues in other Departments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), who does a tremendous job as the Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, said how well the emergency services responded when he was involved in a near-fatal accident recently. That is the point. When push comes to shove, we have some first-class public services. They are some of the best in the world, and we should be proud of them.

My hon. Friend also made some points about Wrexham gaining city status. I welcome the interest that has certainly been shown in the competition throughout Wales for city status. My noble Friend the Lord Chancellor hopes to announce the names of the new cities in the United Kingdom in March. My hon. Friend also spoke about the North East Wales institute's hopes of becoming a university, and I wish those involved well in their efforts. I understand the points that my hon. Friend makes about S4C, and I have no doubt that they will be taken on board by S4C in due course. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) recalled our history of environmental impoverishment, which I understand, as I come from the mining valleys of south Wales. My valleys are green again, as are the valleys across Wales, but I share the hon. Gentleman's commitment to ensuring that this gift of nature which mankind has now had a hand in retrieving and improving is made secure. It is right to describe the Welsh environment as one of the jewels in the Welsh crown.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) spoke about issues related to hunting and welcomed the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House today. I share my hon. Friend's concerns about community sentencing and tagging, and I note her points. She has been a strong champion of women's rights, and I take on board her point about how we care for and handle women prisoners in Wales. She also spoke about domestic violence, which is a serious matter. I think that she was the only Member who raised the issue in relation to its effects on children. Too many incidents of domestic violence go unreported. Our clear message must be that domestic violence must be reported so that the services can respond and so that families are protected.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) contributed a series of smears and innuendos, to which he may want to return in the debate next week. I noted that he had not been speaking for more than five minutes before he had to start retracting some of his innuendoes, which is not untypical. I also note that he thought of himself as a prodigal son of the Labour party, and talked about socialism. Let me tell him this: when people from my party were fighting fascists in Spain, the founder of his party was declaring his admiration for Hitler and Mussolini.

Adam Price *rose—*

Mr. Touhig: My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) welcomed the success of objective 1 and the changes that we have made to the heritage lottery fund.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) talked about the rise in violent crime. In fact, there has been a fall in violent crime in England and Wales in the past five years. I remind him that in the last year of the Conservative Government there was a 9.2 per cent. increase in violent crime in Wales.

Contributions were also made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) and by my hon. Friends the Members for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), for Caerphilly (Mr. David), for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard), for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) and for Wrexham (Ian Lucas). I am sorry that I am not able to respond to all of their points.

In the year since we last met in this forum, the people of Wales delivered their verdict on Toryism and nationalism in the general election. What a verdict it was.

[Mr. Touhig]

The Tories were not required and very few nationalists were wanted. That will be the case in the Assembly elections, too. Why did the people of Wales reject Toryism and nationalism? Because neither have anything to offer our country. The Tory campaign had nothing to offer, and neither does the Tory Front Bench. The Tories tell us that our public services can never be improved, only privatised. They tell us that public services are destined for disaster and that the state can never help—it must only be rolled back. They scour the world for specious examples to back their case. We say that services can and will be improved, and we are not afraid to take the difficult decisions to make that happen. We have delivered the investment in public services that the Tories said was reckless, and we will deliver the reforms that the Tories say are impossible.

Nationalism remains a pale reflection of Toryism in Wales. The Tories and the nationalists both say that we cannot build a stronger Wales. The Tories blame public servants, while the nationalists—daffodil Tories—blame the English. They are welcome to each other. Wales does not want them, and neither do we. The brave new dawn of the nationalists that was predicted only months ago has turned into an endless nightmare. They have a weak and ineffective leader who is unable to take control or lead his party anywhere. Once again, we see the clear parallel between Toryism and nationalism. One party cannot decide whether to embrace or extinguish Thatcherism, while the other cannot decide whether to love or leave the language extremists. Both parties, though, are united by a narrow xenophobia—fear of the outsider.

Wales is growing in economic strength and confidence. It is doing so as part of the world's fourth strongest economy and the world's largest single market, but it is also proud of its traditions of solidarity and care. It was no accident that the national health service was founded by a Welshman—indeed, a man from my county of Monmouthshire. It was no accident that in June Wales returned a Labour Government with a clear mandate for investment in and reform of our public services.

We will be true to that mandate. We represent the true spirit of radicalism and reform in Wales. We will continue to turn Britain from the country that it became under the Tories into a country of which we can all be proud. My colleagues and I are determined that this Labour Government will deliver on our manifesto pledges, as we are doing now, throughout the country. We will ensure that the people of Wales and the people of Britain gain the services that they deserve and that our country needs. I have no doubt that Labour will succeed in the Assembly elections and go on to win a third general election.

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PETITIONS

Foot and Mouth

7 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I have the honour to present a petition of citizens of the United Kingdom amounting to 250,000 signatures supported officially by the Countryside Alliance, the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association, the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and, of course, a large number of citizens of the United Kingdom.

The petition declares

that the outbreak of foot and mouth disease has caused extensive damage, hardship and disruption to the farming and rural community, to the tourist industry and other businesses throughout the United Kingdom with consequent economic loss to those directly and indirectly affected and the economy of the United Kingdom.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons insist that Her Majesty's Government as a matter of urgent public importance, hold a fully independent public inquiry under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921 into the causes, progress and administration of the foot and mouth outbreak of 2000/01, the adequacy of measures taken to investigate and to remedy the outbreak and with terms of reference to make recommendations (a) for the prevention of any recurrence, (b) with respect to financial compensation and relief and the application of European Union rules relating thereto and (c) for the future of agricultural and related interests and those of the rural tourist business community and the environment.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

7.2 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), and my petition is along the same lines as his. The House will know that Cumbria was the county that was worst affected by the foot and mouth outbreak.

This petition to the House is the petition of farmers, hoteliers, families and residents of south Cumbria, and carries some 2,000 signatures. The petition declares that the signatories

believe a full independent public inquiry into the 2001 foot and mouth epidemic is needed on the grounds of establishing the effectiveness of the actions taken in combating the disease and to ensure that appropriate lessons to prevent future foot and mouth outbreaks are learned.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons encourage the Prime Minister to heed public opinion in south Cumbria and set up a full independent public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Firearms Crime (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

7.3 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I am glad to have the opportunity to raise the subject of gun crime, which troubles many Londoners, including a great many of my constituents. I have represented my constituency for 14 years. There is much to be proud of in Hackney. We have enormous creativity and culture, especially in arts and music. There are more artists per square mile in Hackney than in any other part of London. For generations, the area has been a staging post for economic migrants, and we are proud of that. Those migrants have gone on from Hackney to contribute to society as a whole.

Hackney has fairly good race relations, especially when one considers the diversity of its people. Hasidic Jews live side by side with people who have west African and Caribbean origins. Every language and nationality under the sun can be found in Hackney. When we compare our race relations with what happened in some northern towns over the summer, it is clear that we have much to be proud of because we have achieved genuine integration. Young people in Hackney mix and match each other's food, slang and dance music to astonishing effect.

But gun crime is casting a terrible shadow over my constituents. Hackney residents who have got used to the incompetence of the council, who glory in the multiculturalism, are genuinely frightened of gun crime. Gun crime in London, certainly until recently, has been largely confined to three hotspots: Lambeth and Southwark, Brent, especially the Harlesden area, and the Hackney and Tottenham area. One stretch of road in Clapton in my constituency is known as murder mile.

My constituents are frightened of waking up to find a corpse outside their house, as people have written to me to describe, or of being caught in gunfire. We have had cases of gunmen shooting at each other from speeding cars. One car came off the road, ploughed into a group of innocent people queueing for a bus, and people suffered serious injury thereby. We have had cases of disputes among young people at a party when a gunshot has gone through a wall, and a completely innocent person in another room who had nothing to do with the dispute has been shot.

We have had cases where bullets have gone through windows, missing a child sitting in a chair by inches. We have had cases of somebody getting into a dispute with a doorman at a club, going to get a machine gun and spraying a queue of innocent people who are waiting to go into the club. People pull guns in Hackney because of a dispute over a girl or merely to demonstrate how hard they are. Above all, my constituents are frightened of a phone call to say that their son, boyfriend, relative, neighbour, or even some young man whom they saw every day on the way to work has caught a bullet and is bleeding to death.

That has obviously been of some concern to me in recent years. I am working closely with Operation Trident in Hackney to increase community co-operation. One thing that people are genuinely terrified of is being a witness to a crime. I am working with Operation Trident to maximise co-operation in the widest community.

Operation Trident has a gallery of photographs of some of the criminals who have died in shootings. When one sees the pictures of those young men—younger than anyone in the House—lying on a pavement in a pool of blood, sometimes with their brains seeping out, one thinks not only that that has caused violence and mayhem for my constituents, but what a tragedy and a waste of life. These young men are dead even before the age that many young people leave university—and for what? That has made me focus on the issue as never before. What kind of community are we, what kind of people are we becoming, when young men hold their lives so cheaply that they will risk death? One can purchase a murder in Hackney for a very few thousand pounds.

In London, and possibly in other metropolitan areas such as Moss Side in Manchester, we face a different type of gun crime from that known in the past. Then, guns were the province of a specialised type of professional criminal, who took his gun to pursue a particular type of specialised crime and then, largely, took it home. It was interesting that those who tried to rob the millennium dome—it would have been one of the largest robberies in recent times—were not carrying guns. Professional criminals rarely carry guns because they know that being found with a gun at the scene of a crime automatically increases their sentence. Although the millennium dome robbers planned to take millions of pounds worth of diamonds, they went with nail guns and ammonia.

Walking the streets of Hackney and elsewhere in London, we have the young man who is steeped in a gun culture. He is routinely armed and will use his gun not just to pursue a specific criminal activity but in domestic disputes, to show how tough he is and because he has lost his temper with someone in a nightclub. The difference between professional criminals who are armed for a specific purpose and the kind of young man who is absorbed in a lawless, valueless gun culture, who walks the streets of Hackney, Battersea, Lambeth and Southwark, multiplies many times over the risk to innocent people, young people who are simply out enjoying themselves and people just walking the streets.

Let me say a word about "yardies"—a term much used in the media, but not one that I like. It is used to refer to a certain type of black gun criminal associated with the cocaine trade. I dislike the term because it is unhelpful and misleading about the nature of the problem. It suggests that all the people in question originate in Jamaica, but the police say that more than half the deaths are not of Jamaican criminals but of British-born blacks, many not even of Jamaican origin. My parents are from Jamaica and I am a proud Jamaican; I do not like a term that smears Jamaica.

The behaviour of these young men, the lawlessness, the gun culture, the criminality and the violence ultimately stem from wider problems of social exclusion that can be dealt with only in the very long term. Resources are needed for youth diversion and youth clubs. We must also examine educational failure and its links to social exclusion, especially of young black men. That is something that concerns me greatly.

Having got financial support from the Mayor of London, I am holding a conference on 16 March entitled "London Schools and the Black Child" which is to examine precisely the roots of educational failure of black children. When black children—children of African and Afro-Caribbean descent—enter the school system aged

[Ms Diane Abbott]

five, they do as well as white and Asian children. By age 11, their performance starts to drop off, and by age 16, their achievement—especially that of black boys—has collapsed. We have to get to the roots of that problem. I have no doubt that the road to a tragic end taken by many of the young men in Operation Trident's rogues' gallery of corpses lying in a pool of blood started with educational failure.

The House might be interested to know that we started by organising a conference for 500 people, but by this morning my staff had registered 1,400 people and had to close the conference to any more. People want to talk about the issue. At another time, I shall talk to Education Ministers about how the Government need to focus specifically on the way in which the school system is failing children of African and Afro-Caribbean descent. It is a complex issue—often, children newly arrived from Africa do better than second or third generation British black children—and I do not seek to oversimplify, but I believe that an underlying problem is educational failure in inner London and the collapse of the school career of many black children.

To return to the specific issue of gun crime, there are of course problems of social exclusion. I and people like me have to work with the community to make sure that the community is co-operating and that the public are aware of victim protection schemes, which Trident operates. Victim protection is needed: in a recent case, a young woman sought to give evidence against black gun criminals; she was shot at point-blank range and put in hospital; she left hospital against the advice of police and went to Jamaica for a funeral, where she was again shot at point-blank range by the same criminal network. She returned to this country and her brother was kidnapped, but with bravery that I do not believe I could show, this girl gave evidence in court and a number of people were put behind bars. None the less, people hear such stories.

The point about gun crime in Hackney that my constituents find so distressing is that in those communities it is no secret who is committing those crimes. All the gun criminals have girlfriends, or mothers, or friends they boast to, or families at home who wash their shirts. Who is committing the crimes is no secret even to the police. The problem is getting people to come to court and bear witness. That is why I am pleased to work with my local police, to liaise with the community and to improve the witness protection scheme so that we can get convictions.

None the less, there are things that the Government should be doing. I call on Ministers to support the Mayor of London's measures to achieve a year-on-year increase in the number of police, comparable to the number in New York city. Council tax payers in London are ready to pay more council tax for that purpose—money for the police is the one aspect of the current budget that has not been disputed by any member of the Greater London Assembly—but ultimately moneys from general taxation will be required.

I was interested to read that the Home Secretary apparently threatened the Metropolitan police with intervention, reminding them that he had powers to intervene in under-performing forces. While the whole of London supports the Home Secretary in his concern about under-performing police forces, I hope that in stepping in to intervene in the Metropolitan police, he would consult the Mayor and the Metropolitan Police Authority. The Government could help to strengthen the Metropolitan police's performance management regime and empower the commissioner to hire and fire his own management. The Metropolitan Police Authority is interested in introducing a system similar to the New York ConStat system so that crime could be closely monitored locally, with resources redirected quickly, but that would mean a much clearer chain of command for the Metropolitan police. Currently, there is the Mayor, the Metropolitan Police Authority, the Home Secretary and the boroughs; legislation may eventually be required because we need a much clearer line of command.

It is important that the Government encourage London boroughs to prioritise firearms offences in their crime and disorder reduction strategy. I am sorry that in many boroughs where gun crime is an issue, firearms offences are still not included in such strategies. My local police officers have raised with me the difficulty of confiscating money when they find it on known drug dealers. They showed me a photograph of a young man who was not working or claiming income support who was living in a flat in Docklands and paying £1,000 a week in rent. They took a photograph of him with plastic bags full of money—he had £55,000—but having found him in the flat with the money, they had to give it back to him. That does nothing to dent the morale of drug dealers. I understand that the Proceeds of Crime Bill will make confiscation easier, but I draw the problem to the Minister's attention.

Local officers have told me that it must be easier to extradite people charged with serious crimes abroad. People are walking the streets of London who have been charged with murder in Jamaica; for all kinds of technical reasons, it has proved impossible to extradite them. Ministers should look at that problem. Another issue raised with me both locally and by Scotland Yard officers in charge of Operation Trident is the penalty for the possession of firearms. Recently, policemen charged and prosecuted someone with two loaded firearms in his waistband in the middle of London. He did not have them to shoot rabbits or for self-protection; he did 18 months, and he will get out after doing half that.

The police believe strongly that we need to raise the minimum sentence for possession of a firearm. We are not talking about the professional criminal who takes a weapon out when committing a crime, then takes it home. We are talking about young men who swagger about all day long with firearms. If we increased the minimum sentence, that would help us to intervene in the culture where a gun is almost a style accessory and would deter people from holding guns for others. People with criminal records know that it is not a good idea to be found with a gun and get people without records to hold them. If people knew that they would do a minimum of five years if they were found with a gun, they would be deterred from holding guns for others.

The police are keen that the Government should look at legislation to ban imitation firearms. That may sound like trying to get the Government to ban water pistols, but the police argue that there are different categories of imitation firearms. No one could mistake children's plastic toys for firearms. Imitation firearms look genuine, but why should anyone want such a thing? The Brocock is an imitation firearm whose shaft can be bored through and converted into a gun. The police are anxious that the Government consider legislation to ban, not children's toys, but intentional imitations of firearms, especially those that can be converted into usable firearms.

There is also the question of drug mules. I do not accept for a minute the media's idea that every speck of drugs found in the British isles is imported in the stomachs and orifices of girls flying in on Air Jamaica planes. None the less, drug mules coming into the country from Jamaica is a tragedy. It is a tragedy for communities such as mine, where some of the drugs end up, it is a tragedy for Jamaica, because it taints its name and that of its airline and it is a tragedy for those girls.

Holloway prison is next door to my constituency and I have often visited it. The largest single group of foreign nationals is Jamaican—girls who have been caught as drug mules. As somebody of Jamaican origin and as chair of the British Caribbean group, I want to see something done about that trade, both in the interests of my constituents and in the interests of those women, who are often told that they will get off with a caution. Many of them—more than the number recorded—swallow the drugs and die. That trade could be choked off. After the debate, I shall seek a meeting with the Minister to discuss in more detail what middle-ranking police officers have told me can be done about the drug mule problem.

Gun crime always runs the risk of being sensationalised by a press looking for a story for the front page—something to make people shiver in their shoes. As somebody who lives in Hackney, represents the people of Hackney, has a young son, and knows very many women in Hackney and communities like it with adolescent and male relatives, I know what fear the topic of gun crime brings to the hearts of Londoners. The police, through Operation Trident, are moving towards a solution. Through education, I and others are trying to work on the wider social issues. However, there is more that the Government could do. In particular, I stress the issues of penalties for carrying a firearm and imitation firearms.

7.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on achieving the debate. It is clearly a matter of great importance to her constituents in Hackney, North and Stoke Newington, to people across London and, unfortunately, beyond as well: we are beginning to see similar problems in cities such as Bristol.

My hon. Friend has left me a little short of time. I shall try to reply to all the main points that she made, but if I do not manage to do so, I am sure that she will understand. I shall certainly write to her and I shall be happy to have the meeting that she suggested about how to deal with stuffers and swallowers coming in on Air Jamaica flights.

It is worth reminding ourselves of the extent of the use of firearms in London. Operation Trident alone last year dealt with 18 incidents involving 21 murders and 135 incidents of non-fatal shootings. Already this year there have been five murders and 26 other shootings. My hon. Friend is obviously familiar with the work of Operation Trident. I met Commander Brown, who heads the operation, at the beginning of the month, and we discussed how such crimes could be countered more effectively.

My hon. Friend graphically explained that the Metropolitan police cannot be expected to deal with the problems entirely on their own. In the case of Operation Trident, they are often dealing with young men who carry firearms as part of a macho gun culture, and who are willing to use them to settle disputes over drugs and in other situations which on the face of it seem minor—for example, when disrespect has been shown. We have for many years prided ourselves on the comparatively low level of crimes involving firearms, and we are determined to counter the upward trend.

The Met have our full support in their efforts. Last year Operation Trident resulted in 442 arrests, mainly relating to firearms and possession of drugs with intent to supply, and recovered 130 firearms and associated ammunition. As a result of his worries about the level of gun crime, the Commissioner recently seconded a further 30 officers to Operation Trident and a further 20 officers to work within the shootings team of the serious and organised crime group.

Underlying much of the use of firearms is the market for drugs and especially crack cocaine. Customs, the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad are working together to try to reduce the amount of cocaine that is reaching the UK. Part of that work involves reducing the flow of cocaine from Jamaica, and Customs has had recent successes in preventing passengers from smuggling cocaine through Heathrow and Gatwick airports. However, I share some of my hon. Friend's concerns and I intend to examine with CIDA—Concerted Inter-agency Drugs Action—whether we are giving appropriate weight to that form of smuggling.

I know that that is neither the only nor the main method of entry for cocaine into the country. None the less, it is controlled by, and far more closely associated with, the crack cocaine market. The gun culture is also associated with that market, and it would be a little more difficult for such criminality to link in with some of the other supplies of cocaine in the country than with the small supply that is being brought in from Jamaica. As my hon. Friend said, it is brought in using women who are often as much victims as those who find themselves on the receiving end of the consequences of the drug trade in our cities. I want to explore further with the appropriate authorities whether we have got our thinking exactly right in terms of the recognition of the proportionate damage done by this form of entry of cocaine into the country.

Much more needs to be done to prevent the couriers from travelling in the first place. We are considering measures that might be taken to achieve that, including discussions with the Jamaican authorities. We also need to consider how to prevent Jamaican criminals from travelling to the UK. There is police co-operation between our jurisdiction and the authorities in Jamaica.

I understand and accept my hon. Friend's concern about terminology. I heard also what she said about the fact that a great number of these people are British-born blacks rather than Jamaicans. However, I am being told by the Metropolitan police authority—I hope that her information is the same—that a considerable element has close relations with Jamaica and is constantly returning there, and that association is a real problem. As she said, it is not the sole problem—there are other, far deeper issues—but it is a considerable part of the problem that

[Mr. Bob Ainsworth]

we face. I am planning to meet the Jamaican Minister of National Security and Justice when he visits the United Kingdom early next month.

Of course, we must do everything we can to reduce the opportunity for criminals to obtain firearms in the first place. We already have some of the toughest gun controls in the world, but we are committed to improving them to maintain public safety if that is necessary, and we have been working with the police to ensure good security of legally held weapons to prevent them from being stolen. We are also considering the need to establish strict controls on the deactivation standards. We want the same standards to apply throughout Europe, and we have been working closely with the European Commission to that end. Anybody who is minded to misuse guns should be left in no doubt that there are heavy penalties for these offences, including life for the most serious ones.

My hon. Friend was suggesting not necessarily that the maximum penalty was a problem in that regard, but that we might need to consider whether we should introduce minimum penalties in respect of some of these issues. I shall consult colleagues in the Home Department about the points that she made, and I agree to come back to her having thought about the consequences and the potential for some action.

Reference is often made to guns flooding the country. However, I have consulted the police, Customs and Excise and NCIS, and there is no evidence of organised or large-scale smuggling, and there appears to be no single main source of firearms held by criminals. Those sources in recent years include theft from legitimate owners, smuggling individual weapons, conversion of deactivated and replica weapons, and trophies of war brought back by service personnel.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Brocock. I do not know whether she realises that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs talked to the company responsible for importing the weapons. It has agreed to stop that. We must examine the regulations that affect the ability to convert weapons. It is as illegal to carry imitation weapons as to carry real ones in the sort of circumstances that my hon. Friend described. We are actively considering whether we can do more.

My hon. Friend was right to say that if we are to be effective, we cannot leave the police to struggle with the problem on their own. I know that she has not done that, and that considerable effort has been made in Brent, where community safety partnerships have been at the heart of steering a targeted policing initiative to reduce violent and drug-related crime. It is important that people such as my hon. Friend and local people work with the police to give the community maximum confidence so that it can co-operate. However, I fully understand the issues that she raised such as intimidation and the problems that arise from it.

Operation Trident was created to establish links with the community, to work with it and to bring the police closer to it in tackling problems, and in considering whether appropriate protection is offered in all cases. There is clearly a problem with getting people to come forward to give the evidence, but that is essential if we are to take effective action.

My hon. Friend called for the ability to confiscate cash. The Proceeds of Crime Bill contains strong powers to give the police and Customs and Excise the same ability to confiscate cash that is found in-country as they currently have only at the border. We have been told for a long time that that is a problem—

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-seven minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 1 March 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

HAMMOND INQUIRY REVIEW

Resolved,

That there shall be laid before this House a Return of the Review of the Conclusions of the 2001 Review by Sir Anthony Hammond KCB of the circumstances surrounding an application for naturalisation by Mr. S. P. Hinduja in 1998.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Achievements of the National Lottery

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

9.33 am

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I welcome the opportunity to debate the achievements of the national lottery and to take account of the Select Committee report on the operation of the national lottery published in March last year.

The national lottery is all about dreams. Some are glamorous, such as the new car, the yacht or the exotic holiday, and some are personal, such as support for the family or the funding of a career change. Other dreams are essential for the health and vitality of the community, such as the new arts centre, the new pavilion or the restoration of a local landmark. Whether people are spending winnings or working out what the good causes can do for them, the lottery relies on firing the imagination of millions of people up and down the country and inspiring their ability to dream. It is vital that everyone involved in the lottery remembers that and does as much as possible to fan, not extinguish, that fire of enthusiasm.

Every week, six out of 10 of us spend at least £1 on a lottery ticket. Since its launch in 1994, the lottery has become part of our national life and a major force in improving the quality of life. It is fair to recognise the amount of cross-party credit that is due for its success. The key challenge is to maintain public confidence. Although the Government and the Opposition have taken different approaches to the national lottery, a strong body of consensus underpins it, and that consensus is cause for public confidence.

The lottery has surpassed all expectations. It has become one of the most successful lotteries in the world. More than £12 billion has been raised for good causes and more than 100,000 awards have been made. The success is evident in the wide-ranging and varied projects that it has funded from the national flagship projects such as Tate Modern and the Eden centre, to the funding of sports events for people with disabilities, to new dance studies and the refurbishment of football pitches.

In many ways, the lottery is succeeding in meeting the needs of our diverse lives and interests. Instead of hanging around on the streets after school, children can pursue worthwhile interests and activities in the after-school clubs that are funded by the lottery or take advantage of the new sports co-ordinators to develop their interest in sport. People of all ages can improve their health by visiting one of the lottery-funded healthy living centres. Anyone can enjoy the parks that have been restored with funding from the heritage lottery fund.

However, the landscape is changing as our lifestyles are changing. Things are now possible that would have once seemed out of reach. We can be proud of the lottery's success. Sales of games have totalled nearly £36 billion. It is worth considering why the lottery has been so successful. It caught the public's imagination early on with high-profile big cash winners. That caused the public to take the national lottery to their heart; they believed that they really could be winners. Our system is well regulated. It strikes a good balance between allowing fun games at the soft end of gambling while ensuring that young people and the vulnerable are protected. People from all parts of our society enjoy playing it. For those reasons, the lottery has become part of our national life. It is good fun for good causes.

We have an efficient operator in place, but we have no grounds for complacency. We need constantly to consider ways to improve and therefore strengthen our national lottery. The market is changing, as is the technology available to deliver the lottery, which is why this is the right time to review its structure and regulation to ensure that we continue to achieve the maximum return for good causes. I welcome the opportunity to set out some of the matters dealt with in the review and the reforms that we need to address.

When we came to power in 1997, the Government wanted to make the lottery responsive to the needs of the whole population, acting and responding to criticisms that lottery funding was too often for the articulate few rather than the silent many. Large, well-resourced organisations were adept and experienced at securing funding, but the fruits of the lottery were passing entire communities by in too many parts of the country. People feel strongly that lottery money is their money and that it should support the things that they think are important, and we agree with them. So we delivered reform by making the lottery more accessible and responsive to people's needs.

We introduced a new good cause and created a new distributor—the new opportunities fund—that in turn has funded new initiatives in the areas that concern people most: health, education and the environment. We also changed the distributors' powers and responsibilities so that they could become more strategic and pro-active and work together better, made the application system less bureaucratic and more user-friendly, and pushed more decisions closer to the grass roots. We encouraged distributors to ensure that all parts of the UK have access to funding. We also gave them scope for reducing social and economic deprivation, highlighting the need for much greater emphasis on people, activities and access.

Those changes have yielded important success in the way in which money is awarded. The number of small grants—under £5,000—to community groups has more than trebled since 1998. Some 41 per cent. of all grants have gone to the 50 most deprived local authorities. The percentage of revenue funding awards has increased from

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9 per cent. to 31 per cent., and more money is being invested in people and activities, rather than just buildings.

Lottery distributors have made significant advances in simplifying the application process, especially for smaller grants. They have launched a national telephone helpline to point callers to the right distributor for their project, and have undertaken to overhaul application forms. The awards for all programme, which involves a single distributor bringing together many other distributors, has been a tremendous success and has made lottery funding accessible to community groups throughout the country. UK-wide, it has awarded nearly £123 million to some 38,000 projects. The programme is also making money available for projects to celebrate the golden jubilee. We are encouraged by the enthusiastic take-up of that opportunity by extraordinary people throughout the country, who want to do extraordinary things for the jubilee.

Area-based schemes such as the community fund's Brass for Barnsley, which distributed £3 million to local voluntary and community organisations, have proved successful in distributing lottery money where it is needed most. I am sure that hon. Members can point to ways in which the national lottery has helped to regenerate and revitalise urban and rural areas in their own constituencies.

The Millennium Commission, which I chair, has injected more than £300 million into regeneration projects in places such as Belfast, Bristol, Coventry, London, Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): The Millennium Commission awarded some £46 million to help stimulate construction of the millennium stadium, in Cardiff. Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge on this St. David's day that the value of that award will be even more apparent when we beat Italy tomorrow and the renaissance in Welsh rugby begins?

Tessa Jowell: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's welcome intervention. The millennium stadium will give many causes for celebration, not least as an example of the investment of lottery money.

Many other large-scale city developments have acted as a catalyst for further regeneration, triggering investment by commercial companies and thereby creating an even greater impact. Indeed, the Millennium Commission's programme of lottery-funded projects has generated some 7,000 jobs. However, as I said, maintaining public confidence is crucial. The lottery has been a success in so many ways, but there are no grounds for complacency. Public confidence in the lottery's integrity is key to its continuing success. Against that background, we must face some crucial challenges if we are to maintain the critical bond of trust between the public and the lottery.

I want to run through the key headlines for the programme of reform that, as I announced, I intend to initiate. The high level of funds in the national lottery distribution fund is rightly a cause for public concern. People ask why good applications are rejected as money appears to languish unspent, and some accuse Government or distributors of seeking to capitalise on the interest raised.

I want to take a moment or two to debunk a few myths. While lottery money continues to flow to the good causes, balances will never stand at zero, and nor should they. Lottery income is by its nature uncertain and distributors are right to hold on to a certain level of funds to cope with the inevitable fluctuations. They have commitments to the causes that they fund and cannot overdraw, but money held in the distribution fund is largely committed to projects. Awards have already been made and distributors are waiting for applicants to draw down the available funds. In fact, total commitments by all distributors stand at £3.82 billion, which is £290 million more than is held in the NLDF account. In one sense, therefore, they have not underspent at all. In reality, they have overcommitted, and interest received from the balance goes straight to the good causes.

Having said all that, I do not consider it right for money to sit needlessly unspent while some parts of the country lose out on lottery funding. A balance must be struck between managing money prudently and putting it to good use now, when it is needed. Action can be taken to speed up the flow of lottery funds. The steps that I am discussing with distributors include setting deadlines by which applicants must draw down funds, providing funds to help them manage their projects and get them under way more quickly, and committing funds further ahead to prevent them from silting up.

No one expects lottery balances to reduce dramatically by tomorrow, but I made it clear in firm terms to the distributors whom I met that excessive prudence makes no sense. They agree, and they accept that reducing the balance is an important priority. They have made absolutely clear their responsibility for achieving that aim, and they expect balances to halve by March 2004. I shall hold them to account in that regard.

On licence renewal, although the new Camelot licence began only a few weeks ago, the time is right to review the lottery's licensing and regulatory framework. I aim to publish a consultation document before the House rises for the summer recess to ensure effective competition for the next licence.

On the size of projects, as I said, since Government reforms in the 1998 legislation, a change of emphasis has been made from capital to revenue projects. I welcome that, because as a result more money is getting out to communities for smaller, people-based projects. However, the people to whom I have spoken have made it clear that there is still value in both large capital projects and small, more community-based ones. Some of the more ambitious capital projects have provided communities with facilities that they could never have dreamed of before the lottery intervened.

The important thing is that those projects, large or small, are seen to deliver value for money and to offer improvements to people's lives. I have asked the distributors to evaluate carefully the results of the projects that they fund, so that the lessons learned can be applied to subsequent funding policy.

Lottery funding should not and will not substitute for Government spending. The point is not what the Government could fund, but what they will fund. I accept that there is a fine line to be trodden here, and it needs to be navigated in a way that maintains public trust and confidence. The Government have never been able, and indeed have never aspired, to fund everything from the

Exchequer. We fund cancer equipment, for example, but the demands are infinite, and so much more can be provided for local communities with the help of the voluntary sector, as has always been the case. Much more has been made possible by the introduction of lottery funding, and the lottery can do things that the Government cannot. I hope that we will begin to define those distinctions a bit more sharply in the review that I have announced.

The lottery is a fund for innovation, and lottery money should be available to take risks. We like to focus on the lottery's big successes, but nobody pretends that every last penny has been spent as wisely as it should have been. I hope that we can create a sense that lottery funding is venture capital for community enrichment. We have to accept that such a role means that distributors must be willing to take risks.

A further problem, which is often identified as an obstacle to the most effective operation of the lottery, is the overly bureaucratic distinction between the role of the different distributors, so a more joined-up lottery must be another objective. The lottery was designed to build on the experience of existing funders such as the Sports and Arts Councils, as well as creating the new ones, bringing us to the present total of 15 distributors, UK-wide. I am sure that there is value in such a diverse funding system, which builds on and develops particular areas of expertise, but there is also a need to ensure good co-ordination between distributors.

It is frustrating when people tell me that good projects have come to nothing because they have fallen between the remits of various distributors or they involve two or more distributors. It is vital that distributors work together more effectively when considering applications or providing advice to potential applicants. The awards for all programme, to which I referred to earlier, has been an encouraging example of such co-operation, but we need to be able to do more.

Another key challenge is to ensure local equity in the distribution of money. The lottery has always been open to all parts of the country and to all sections of society. The problem is that some areas, and some of the groups that live and work in them, are much more adept than others at identifying opportunities and applying for funding. Certainly, there seems to be a small-town problem, and we may well hear examples of that in the contributions of hon. Members this morning. There are areas that do not have an established infrastructure and funding network, and there is a risk that they will lose out on their fair share of lottery funding.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): My right hon. Friend is referring to broad categories of areas with specific problems. Will she comment, in particular, on the problems faced by former coalfield communities? I know that her Department has done a great deal of work on those problems, as have all the funding bodies, but significant problems still face those communities, which attract only about 60 per cent. of the average funding received by other constituencies.

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are making progress in redressing the imbalance in the lottery allocation to coalfield areas. The trend is in the right direction, but there is still progress to be made. I recognise that we will be judged by whether or not the allocations, in time, become equitable. As I made clear when I addressed the coalfield communities conference last year, we need to consider carefully the way in which we build the capacity in some of those communities to tackle the obstacles to making good applications and navigating through the necessary processes. The Government's commitment to addressing the problems to which my hon. Friend referred remains as firm as it has always been.

That is an example of our desire to change the lottery to a proactive, rather than a reactive, fund, seeking out applications where they are not forthcoming and helping applicants and local communities with what, in many cases, may seem to be daunting paperwork. There is an important role for Members of Parliament here, and I commend the efforts of many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House in fulfilling that role on behalf of their constituents. There is also a role for voluntary organisations and local authorities in ensuring a fairer distribution of lottery funding.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: My right hon. Friend mentioned the role of Members of Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) introduced a private Member's Bill in the last days of the last Parliament to amend the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 to allow the national lottery charities board to make endowments. Has that particular glitch in the legislation been ironed out, or is it one of the issues that will be addressed by the consultation paper that she mentioned?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend is right. We have signalled our support for the proposed change to extend, particularly to the community fund, the power to make endowments. That will require legislation at the appropriate time, and it is one of the changes that I propose to address in the consultation document.

Lottery distributors can begin to address the problem of inequity by building on the initiatives, a number of which are already under way, to target funds at those areas that have received less than the amount that they should rightly regard as their fair share. It is still a matter of huge concern for many, including Members of the House, that some deprived areas are chronically underfunded by the lottery. The time is right to develop a more targeted approach to reach those areas that are deprived—they are among the most deprived in the country—and receive less than their fair share of lottery money. Until that happens, areas at the bottom of the lottery league table will never be able to catch up with those that have the capacity and the experience to make bigger, more successful applications.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): My right hon. Friend knows that my constituency is in the bottom 10 in terms of getting lottery awards. I welcome her fair share initiative, but I have a problem with its targeting. She announced yesterday that fair share money is intended to be targeted, which is welcome, but I do not believe that it will benefit my constituency and lift it out of the bottom 10. The figures for my constituency bear no comparison with those for neighbouring constituencies, and to target the money on a borough area will do nothing to lift Doncaster, North out of the bottom 10. In fact, even if my right hon. Friend were to allocate £1 million today to

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Doncaster, North, it would merely move into the bottom 20. Will she explain how she will redress the obvious imbalance?

Tessa Jowell: It might reassure my hon. Friend to know that my constituency spans two of the most deprived areas in the country—Lambeth and Southwark—but will not benefit from the fair share programme that I announced in a parliamentary answer yesterday, nor will the similarly deprived Sheffield, Central constituency of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, who is to wind up the debate. My hon. Friend is a passionate advocate for his constituency and the rights of his constituents, many of whom live in deprived circumstances, to get their share of lottery income. If he is patient, I hope to address his points specifically.

In June last year, I announced our intention to introduce a new targeted initiative to inject millions of pounds of lottery funding into deprived areas that had not received their fair share. Yesterday, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown), I was pleased to detail the 51 local authority areas in England that the community fund and the new opportunities fund have decided will benefit from the initiative. Fair share will begin in April 2002, and during the next three years the community fund aims to commit about £80 million of its income to programmes that fall within the terms of eligibility for the initiative. The new opportunities fund will allocate a further £50 million so that it, too, can contribute. In England, the new opportunities fund will target £39 million of its already announced transforming communities initiative money on the English fair share areas. In addition to fair share, the community fund will shortly announce a £10 million fund to help rural areas that have been chronically underfunded by the lottery.

To respond to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), I recognise that although fair share will make an important contribution in those 51 areas, it is not a panacea for all the problems. Some areas will still need and deserve a more equitable share of lottery money. However, I am confident that fair share will make a tangible difference to the 51 deprived communities whose claim on lottery funding has not been realised fully.

Mr. Bryant: I am sorry to have to press again the issue of coalfield communities, but I often hear Ministers announce new money for rural areas, or for metropolitan areas, and coalfield communities often lose out because they are neither one nor the other. No one would have lived in the area had it not been for coal, and the result is straggling communities that feel rural—everyone in my constituency lives within 250 yd of some sort of farm—but do not attract rural money, and are not metropolitan either. They tend to fall between two stools.

Tessa Jowell: I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured to learn that of the 51 areas announced yesterday, 11 are in coalfield areas. That benefit is in addition to the initiative and continuing drive to improve coalfield communities' access to lottery funding that I mentioned earlier.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): There is a clear need to ensure that lottery funds are distributed equitably. Often, better-off areas are more articulate in making bids than deprived areas. However, one of the lottery's founding principles was that it should be separate from Government and the distributing bodies should take the decisions. Will the right hon. Lady assure the House that the step that she is taking does not compromise that principle, or create a mechanism of Government-engineered investment in certain communities?

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The legislation is clear. The Government set the legislative framework in the National Lottery Act 1998, which made changes to the operation of the lottery consistent with the Labour Government's priorities. It is for distributors, operating at arm's length from Government, to implement the legislation. I assure the House that there is no question of political interference or of fixing lottery funds distribution. That is a matter for the distributors consistent with the powers given to the Secretary of State in legislation that is debated by both Houses. That is what the relationship should be and what it will continue to be.

There is an urgent need now to get fair share money out to those whom the community fund and new opportunities fund will benefit. We all know how much communities can achieve when they are empowered to decide their own priorities and get on with things. We all want fair share to achieve that. In three years, I want all of our most deprived areas to be getting their fair share of lottery funding. To achieve that, the efforts of all the lottery distributors will be required. That is why I shall ask distributors other than the community fund and the new opportunities fund to look long and hard at those areas that have received less of their funding in the past. It is clear that different areas lose out in respect of different good causes. A flexible approach is needed on the part of distributors, and our approach should be the same: we should aim to tackle disadvantage and reduce the wide variation in the amount of lottery money per head received by each area.

I pay respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen) and to the work that he and other hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster, North and for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden)—he is not able to be here today—are doing to identify the obstacles to lottery funding in their constituencies. There is a group of hon. Members of different parties working in the interests of their local communities. I met them in January to discuss how to remove the obstacles surrounding other communities that have received less than their fair share of lottery funding. I shall meet them again after Easter to review progress and to identify practical steps that can be taken.

I hope that the House shares my judgment that the lottery has been a resounding success. It allows people throughout the country to dream. Its tickets are habitually bought by individuals and syndicates, and it grants a lifeline to the communities it reaches, whether as a £10 prize or as a £100 million grant. It has touched the lives of millions of British people, even though it is less than eight years old. Any eight-year-old is shaped and continues to be shaped by his experiences, and the lottery is no different. It needs to be given more freedom and, in 1998, it was. It now needs to begin to exploit that freedom. It needs to be nimbler and more responsive, and encouraged to develop new and better ways of achieving its goals. I am not prepared to stand and wait for that development to happen over many years because communities are impatient for change, as are the Government.

Fair share is an expression of the Government's determination to deliver more equity in distribution now, as well as insisting on longer-term improvements. Three-year plans are all very well, but they do not help people who are impatient and in need now. I want support for the imaginative and essential projects that local communities, for whatever reason, have struggled to fund. I want to start now.

I want distributors to use the powers that they were given in the 1998 legislation to help people to apply for funds. I want to ask people to apply for funds, and I want them to work together to make people believe that the system that pays those funds is simple and fair. The only mystery about the lottery should be which numbers come out of the machine. I want more delegation of cash resources and of decision making to the local level.

The lottery cannot make everyone a millionaire but, as Secretary of State, I can and will insist that while the games may work on the rules of random chance, the distribution of the cash raised for good causes in communities the length and breadth of the country does not.

10.11 am

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I am delighted to respond on behalf of the official Opposition to this welcome debate on the achievements of the national lottery. I personally welcome the Secretary of State on one of her rare appearances at the Dispatch Box, having missed an interesting debate on Ofcom on Second Reading and a debate on the earlier Select Committee report on the subject.

Today we celebrate the national lottery as one of the lasting achievements of the Major Government, as it was launched in November 1994. It has raised £12 billion for good causes, and £36 billion has been spent on tickets. We also welcome this first major debate on the lottery.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Camelot, whose lottery is consistently ranked among the top lotteries in the world in terms of efficiency and returns to good causes and Government. The lottery duty paid to the Government over this period has been £4.2 billion; retailer commission has reached £1.8 billion; and the total of prizes across games has reached more than £7.3 billion.

Like the Secretary of State, I congratulate the distributing bodies. The Arts Council and others; the community fund; Sport England and others; and the national lottery fund each distribute 16 per cent. of the total, while the Millennium Commission distributes 20 per cent.

During the second licence period, it is estimated that the national lottery will help to create and secure in the region of 121,600 jobs. The national lottery has made more than 97,000 awards, benefiting thousands of communities across the UK.

The overall size of a jackpot ticket is in the region of £2 million, and the overall average amount going to jackpot winners is £639,301. I would like to declare an interest, in that having purchased a lottery ticket on normal weeks, I do not seem to have become a jackpot winner. About 60 per cent. of the adult population plays the national lottery generally. The average spend per week is £3.32 and there are approximately 36,000 national lottery retailers throughout the UK.

As the Secretary of State has suggested, every constituency in the land has benefited, and Vale of York is no exception. The Leonard Cheshire foundation received £146,000 from the community fund; a playground at Newton-on-Ouse received £37,000; Topcliffe and Asenby village hall received £5,000; Topcliffe playing field received almost £5,000; Stillington village hall received almost £5,000; and Thirsk hockey club received just under £2,000 from Sport England.

Nationally, by September 2001 the Sports Council across the UK awarded nearly 17,000 grants, worth nearly £1.6 billion. It is important to recognise that the lottery fund contributed to the success of Great Britain's team at the 2000 Olympic games in Sydney, where Britain won 28 medals, finishing tenth in the overall medals table. At the Paralympic games, Britain won 131 medals, finishing second in the medals table. At the recent Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Britain had its best result since 1934, and I add our congratulations on their magnificent achievement, which was recognised on Monday.

Before we get carried away by the huge successes and achievements of the national lottery, let us pause to consider the fact that there are disappointments under the stewardship of this Secretary of State and this Government. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo)—who leads for the Opposition—said at Question Time on Monday, with reference to a written answer from the Minister for Sport on 13 February, that:

> "lottery-funded spending on sport had fallen by one third since 1997—a drop of more than £100 million a year".—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 427.]

If it is correct that more than £3 billion in unspent lottery funds is sitting unused—the Secretary of State alluded to this—the rejection of proposals such as that from the university of Hertfordshire to build an Olympic-sized swimming pool is, as my hon. Friend said on Monday, profoundly discouraging for budding sportsmen and sports fans, and undermines the chances of future Olympic success.

It has come to my notice that there is a category of young athlete, aged 16 to 18, who currently do not qualify for any training funds under the sports fund. I take this opportunity to make a special plea that they should qualify in future.

An earlier disappointment, to which the Secretary of State referred, was the setting up of the new opportunities fund. On 7 April 1998, the former Prime Minister and right hon. Member for Huntingdon, John Major, said in a debate on the National Lottery Bill:

> "A small part—or perhaps not so small; we do not yet know—of the New Opportunities Fund will use lottery money for what I envisaged would always be tax-based expenditure. I have no problem with some elements of the New Opportunities Fund, but expenditure on children's play, coaching in literacy and numeracy and science and technology—all of which are worthy areas for expenditure—should properly be tax borne. The lottery is substituting for what we all, including the Secretary of State, know should be tax-borne expenditure. That is a source of grievance to us and to the distributing bodies . . . Those areas of expenditure are not, not, not in the original sprit of the lottery."

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Lady refers to the record of the previous Prime Minister and to his comments that funding

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for certain activities now funded by the new opportunities fund should be tax borne. Why did the previous Government never take steps to fund such activities from tax?

Miss McIntosh: The right hon. Lady will recall that, particularly in relation to health, we had a year-on-year increase in spending.

Tessa Jowell: Rubbish.

Miss McIntosh: It is very well for the right hon. Lady to say that, but I stand by my Government's record. Subsequent to the eloquent intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), it is a source of concern to the Opposition not only that lottery funds are being diverted from the good causes for which they were originally intended, but that the Government appear to be intervening to set objectives for lottery distributors.

Also in the debate in 1998, John Major said:

"They"—

this Government—

> "infringe the principles that Labour demanded of the previous Government when the original Bill went through the House . . . The Government are raiding the lottery, raising the fear that they will do it again—and possibly again and again."

—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 189-90.]

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss McIntosh: Why not?

Mr. Steinberg: Is the hon. Lady saying that if we had a Conservative Government in 20 or 30 years' time, they would stop that sort of expenditure and not keep the new opportunities fund, which has given millions of pounds to constituencies throughout the country for many different schemes, which would never have been paid for by the taxpayer, neither under this Government or the previous one?

Miss McIntosh: I fear I would be ruled out of order if I set out the objectives of a future Conservative Government. When the time comes, we shall have plenty of opportunities to discuss our priorities.

The raiding of the lottery for causes that were always intended to be funded from general taxation is deeply regrettable. General tax spending is substituted by money raised through the generosity of ordinary people who purchase lottery tickets week in, week out, in the belief that they may win the jackpot—in the Secretary of State's words, their personal dream—safe in the knowledge that they are contributing to good causes. Their trust should not be abused.

That money is not public money—it is not taxpayers' money—and the two should not be confused. Even the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) who, regrettably, is not in the Chamber today, has been known to refer to lottery money in that way. Let us recognise and rejoice in the generosity of national lottery players, who raise funds for good causes which, historically, taxpayers' money has not reached.

I welcome the Secretary of State's refinement of the definition of the principle of additionality and her further commitment to it. The principle that lottery money should be additional to existing public expenditure is as relevant today as it was in 1994. Even now, good causes are under threat from another direction. The Budd review on the deregulation of betting shops and other gambling outlets could pose a threat to the national lottery and money raised for good causes. I am sure that the right hon. Lady will have received, as all Opposition Members have, many heartfelt representations from lottery distributors about that.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Pinner Wood school in my constituency has just received an £18,000 grant to run an after-school club. Is the hon. Lady's party committed to abolishing the new opportunities fund? Will she make a commitment today, or has she secured a commitment from her education and Treasury spokesmen, that her party would match from general taxation the money that would be lost by schools like Pinner Wood to fund after-school clubs, which were not being provided when this Government came to power?

Miss McIntosh: I repeat the commitment that we made when the lottery started and welcome the Government's devotion to a successful concept. I hope that when the Minister for Sport makes his winding-up speech, he will give a commitment to the principle of additionality and that there will be no further raids on the lottery coffers.

Chris Grayling: Does my hon. Friend recognise that in many parts of the country groups that are taking advantage of finance through the new opportunities fund traditionally received much greater support from the local authority? As she will know, local authorities this year are under increasing pressure because they are underfunded for things like teachers' pay. Discretionary spending for grants to the kind of schemes to which the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) referred cannot come through local authorities because of that underfunding.

Miss McIntosh: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point which shows how shire counties in particular have suffered in this year's spending round. I shall return to that subject later.

This week, the Government almost broke with their recently established tradition of burying, or causing to seep out, bad news on Fridays. An announcement on the English fair share areas could have been made during departmental questions on Monday, so we have to ask ourselves why the Secretary of State held it up until yesterday in a written answer to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson). My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk received that information via his fax machine at approximately 4.08 pm, and the Secretary of State elaborated further on the scheme today.

Tessa Jowell: With great respect, the hon. Lady must do better. She has been abandoned by the Opposition spokesman, who is away from the House, to handle this debate. As Secretary of State, I am here. The hon. Lady, having chosen a debate on the lottery in Government time to raise the issue, will have to give a better explanation of why answering a parliamentary question yesterday to clarify the position on fair shares can possibly be described as burying bad news. The 51 areas that will benefit from the scheme will regard it as a reason to celebrate this weekend.

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her assistance. In announcing the fair share agreement in her written answer and her opening remarks today, she referred to her announcement on 27 June 2001. I wish to spare her blushes, but one must ask why it has taken nine months for an announcement originally promised on 27 June to seep out in that elaborate form. Following the targeted lottery initiative announcement on 27 June, one is tempted to ask why the Secretary of State has waited so long to make yesterday's announcement. What reason for such a long delay can there possibly be?

Tessa Jowell: I must put the hon. Lady out of her agony. The announcement about the fair share areas was made in today's debate and a parliamentary answer was given yesterday, because the programme will start in April. The announcement is timely; it is properly timed for the start of the programme by the new opportunities fund and the community fund at the beginning of April.

Miss McIntosh: If an announcement had been made in January, the programme could have started in March. If an announcement had been made in September, it could have started in November. However we shall not debate the meaning of the word "timely" because that is not why Members are here.

The written answer to which I referred—it has been expanded on by the Secretary of State—refers to direct support in respect of 51 of our 100 most deprived areas. The community fund and the new opportunities fund have analysed areas that receive less than the average amount of funding from the community fund and from other lottery distributors collectively. Those areas are to receive direct support from fair share. I congratulate the community fund on targeting money on the most deprived areas in that way. The Secretary of State mentioned that £80 million of community fund money will be targeted. I gather that £10 million will subsequently make its way to rural areas, but it should be made clear whether that money is additional to the £80 million or part of it.

I also congratulate the community fund on following the Secretary of State's request that it simplify its procedure. It has pioneered the one-stop shop and even taken advantage of the popular radio programme "The Archers" to explain how the procedures will work. I urge her to go further and to encourage other distributors—especially those concerned with heritage and the arts—to make efforts to put similar money into the fair share initiative.

I add one note of caution. I recognise that the majority of the 100 most deprived areas are not rural—the list given in the written answer speaks for itself. I welcome the fact that the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) will benefit. None the less, Barking and Dagenham, Barnsley, Darlington, Doncaster, Kingston upon Hull, Peterborough and Portsmouth—the list goes on—could hardly be described as rural. I gather that the regional sparsity factor is one of the indices used to create the relevant criteria, so I make this plea: the fair share initiative, which appears from the written answer mostly to represent urban areas, for the reason given by the Secretary of State, should be matched by the Government with a similar rural initiative. I add to that plea a request that the Government examine exactly how the rural indices are arrived at and calculated.

The Secretary of State may not be aware that Thirsk is now among the 10 per cent. most deprived areas in the country, according to a recent newspaper report; yet Hambleton district would not be considered in the same way. The Government must address that conundrum. They have failed to do so today. I invite them to work with the Countryside Agency to identify and assist areas such as Thirsk, which have been especially badly hit by the foot and mouth crisis. Such areas need the benefit of such a rural scheme.

The Secretary of State did not seem to welcome my appearance at the Dispatch Box. She will have noted that I am the official Opposition spokesman for the lottery. I mentioned that I would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I am glad to see her recognise from a sedentary position that this is an important subject.

The Secretary of State referred at some length to underspend and the £3.82 billion that is committed. She said that in one sense, such money is not underspent but overspent, as it is committed. A very alarming report was published in *The Mail on Sunday* on 24 February, referring to a scandal of a £3.6 billion cash mountain that the lottery chiefs are sitting on and cannot give away. I am not entirely persuaded by her explanation. Is it true that there is such a mountain? If so, it is indeed a scandal, but if such reports are not true, the Government should not allow their press machine to go into overspin. If the article is correct, this will not be the first Secretary of State who has had to apologise this week for not being entirely straight with the House and the British public.

In that context, I should like to refer to the answer given by the Minister for Sport yesterday to a written question tabled by the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey). The answer contains two tables, one of which lists all the distributing bodies. Rather alarmingly, it gives the amount held in the lottery distribution fund in millions of pounds. The balance of outstanding commitments is also given. Perhaps the Minister will give some more sense to the table.

Tessa Jowell: I should like to be absolutely clear about what the hon. Lady is saying. Is she suggesting that any of the information that I have given to the House this morning is misleading or incorrect? Does she accept that I made a clear distinction in respect of the important difference between balances being committed and spent? The distributors are not allowed to overspend, but they can overcommit.

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful for that clarification. I was trying to say that that the Secretary of State has not made the position entirely clear and that even the written answer is misleading in many respects. I welcome the opportunity for elaboration on that point; perhaps it can be further clarified later in the debate.

We are also considering this morning the first report of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. The report, which was published in October 2001, is an

[Miss McIntosh]

excellent recognition of the national lottery's contribution to the life of the nation. I want to draw the House's attention to three points in relation to the report. First, conclusion (v) states:

> "We see no justification for the view that the Lottery is a tax, whether on the poor or anyone else. The purchase of a National Lottery ticket is a wholly voluntary decision, which players make to take part in the dream of winning a large amount of money."

I note that the Government welcome that conclusion. Secondly, conclusion (xxvi) states that the Committee was

> "disappointed that the Government saw fit to exclude the question of the National Lottery's regulation from the current Gaming Review Body."

It goes on to state:

> "This issue should therefore be considered by the review of the selection process announced by the Secretary of State."

I want to express my disappointment that no mention was made of that point in respect of the review and reforms on which the Secretary of State has announced that consultation will occur before the House rises for the summer. Finally, in conclusion (xxxvi) the Committee states that

> "the Government must allow the good causes to evolve and consider changes in the future."

The final conclusion states:

> "We expect the Government, in considering the good causes, to adhere to the principles under which the Lottery was established and ensure that it continues to enhance the quality of life."

I commend the report to the House. I also welcome the review, reforms and consultation announced by the Secretary of State. The Opposition hope to play a full part in the process.

I would welcome a clearer definition of additionality. I have mentioned the concept of underspend or overcommitment, and I believe that the great British public would benefit from greater clarification in that regard.

In conclusion, we seek an undertaking from the Secretary of State that she will restore the clear separation between lottery funds and taxpayers' money, and that the procedures through which the public apply to the lottery distributing bodies for funds will be streamlined to ensure that they are as user-friendly and efficient as possible. We want the Government to admit that they are responsible for a £100 million drop in lottery-funded spending on sport. I am sure that the whole House will unite in condemning that drop. I repeat my plea that all young athletes will qualify in respect of training, including the category of 16 to 18-year-olds, whom I gather do not currently qualify. Perhaps the Minister for Sport was not aware of that point.

We seek an assurance that the suspected £3 billion underspend will be confirmed as a firm spending commitment, that the national lottery will operate as the Conservative Government envisaged—free from Government interference and run for the benefit of good causes, big and small, across the country—and that there will be a proper balance in the distribution of funds by all the lottery bodies and distributing bodies between rural and urban areas, recognising the devastation suffered in rural communities as a result of the on going farming crisis.

10.40 am

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): We are always quick to criticise and complain, but we rarely offer congratulations. That is why I wanted to speak in the debate. I am sure that we all dream of being a winner in the national lottery, and I am equally sure that most people have some experience of the many excellent and worthwhile projects that have come to fruition as a direct result of the revenue generated by the national lottery and disbursed by the distributing bodies to support good causes such as sport, arts, charities and heritage.

It is too easy to sensationalise the more dubious awards that have been made by the distributing bodies. We all have our own views about how lottery money could be better spent, and on worthwhile projects which we think it should be used to assist. I admit that I have shared such views on many occasions—for example, about the huge amounts spent on projects that I regard as elitist.

We all have our own opinions about the amounts spent on the more questionable projects on which the media have focused, including the millennium dome. Although I understand the well-intentioned aims of the project, I admit that I joined many other people in pondering the many other laudable schemes that could have been assisted with the resources that were spent on the dome. However, I believe that the smaller, perhaps less sensational schemes have made a real difference to people's lives.

Very few hon. Members could honestly say that their community has not received some form of assistance from one of the good causes for a local project. Those range from relatively small schemes to the much bigger initiatives. The fundamental point—let us be quite clear about this—is that without the income generated by the national lottery, such schemes would not have been possible, and those who benefit from them would not be doing so.

Let us think about the projects funded for arts provision; valuable and important heritage schemes; the improvements and developments that have been made possible in sport; and the excellent charitable schemes that have been realised as a direct result of the national lottery. All hon. Members could cite several examples to demonstrate my point.

We all have our own ideas about what we will do when—or, perhaps more importantly, if—we win the lottery. When we pay our £1 or whatever, we all think of that with great relish. However, we probably do not think twice about the approximately 28 per cent. of the revenue generated from the sales that is handed over to the national lottery distribution fund, and how that money is being used. The lottery has made a real difference not just to the lucky winners who scooped the millions or the thousands, but to everyone who has benefited directly or indirectly from projects funded by the six distributing bodies.

Numerous community groups, sportsmen and women, and arts groups, not to mention charities, have been the recipients of financial assistance that has allowed excellent work and projects to be initiated, and in some cases to continue. New sports facilities have been built, equipment has been purchased and excellent development work has been undertaken. Many arts projects have been funded, and restoration schemes have ensured that local treasures have been safeguarded for the future.

Community associations and groups have been rewarded for their valuable efforts, ranging from schemes for toddlers and young children right through the spectrum to the more senior members of our society. Schemes are being funded from which everyone throughout the country can benefit. Yes, we can all criticise, but perhaps it is time that we all took stock and realised just how much revenue is being ploughed back into every city, town, village and community as a result of the weekly flutter that most of us have.

I wanted to speak in the debate to highlight some of the achievements that have made a difference in my constituency, City of Durham, which is obviously the place closest to my heart. I hope that after I have described some examples, the lottery funds do not dry up! We have done quite well in Durham up to now.

A first-class specialist gymnastics facility, which will provide a much-needed centre of excellence for the gymnasts in the area, has been made possible. I know that the facility will make a huge difference to gymnasts in Durham and the region. For years its development has been an aspiration. It is questionable whether that would have been fulfilled without the input of £320,000 of national lottery funding. The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) spoke about the Olympic games. Who knows, we might see a future gold medallist as a result of that gymnasium.

Another excellent facility that has been opened in my constituency is an indoor bowling facility, which was made possible as a result of £450,000 of lottery funding. The new building provides a centre for bowling development for all members of the community, young and old, and has led to a huge growth in bowling in the area. Both of these projects, incidentally, were also funded by grants from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, for which I am extremely grateful. That organisation still has an important role to play in the distribution of grants to local organisations. We should not forget that, while we are congratulating the national lottery.

In 2000, Durham Sport, based in City of Durham, became the first sports partnership to receive £100,000 of revenue funding from the sports lottery fund for its active sports programme. The programme will lead to more young people taking part in many kinds of sport, more coaches being trained to deliver sporting activity to young people, and more junior clubs being developed to retain young people in sport. All hon. Members are aware of the recent reports about increasing obesity in young people and concerns that the country is not producing sufficient high-class performers. The programme in Durham will address both those important issues with the support of the national lottery.

To tackle the needs of the more senior members of our society, Age Concern in County Durham has been the recipient of £208,000 of funding via the National Lottery Charities Board, as it was then, which has made possible the establishment of offices in various locations in the county. That has enabled the organisation to work more effectively at local level, mapping existing provision, identifying unmet needs and working towards the development of new services.

As a result of lottery funding, the Durham Light Infantry museum has been refurbished, remodelled and its exhibits redisplayed. The museum, managed by the county council's arts, libraries and museums service, is a major tourist draw in our historic city. The £1.5 million refit has attracted considerable critical acclaim. The museum, which is set in the parkland of Aykley Head, is now fit for the 21st century. The remodelled displays and associated activities programmes are focused on the family, especially younger people and school parties. The Durham Light Infantry Regiment may have been disbanded in 1968, but its history is indelibly linked with the identity of my constituents. The staff are therefore ensuring that future generations understand their spiritual inheritance.

Durham county council is a firm believer in the value of cultural services to the local community. It may be some years since the small village of Cassop-cum-Quarrington was mentioned in the House, but I can report that its local history society, with the support of the national lottery, has established a mobile visual display outlining the history and past events of the parish.

This comparatively modest initiative is contributing to a regionwide digitisation project managed by the county council, which is entitled "Tomorrow's History". It is creating a local heritage database covering every community in the north-eastern region, from Berwick to Guisborough and from Haltwhistle to Hartlepool. That would not be happening without the national lottery.

Community initiatives in the villages of Brandon, Shincliffe and Bowburn in my constituency have greatly benefited from the regional initiative. The same project has encouraged the Durham Dialect Association to survey communities spanning all age groups to illustrate the survival of the local vocabulary, pitmatic included. The expression "Whey aye, man" will, I hope, continue to be used for many years to come.

Age Concern has contributed to "Tomorrow's History" on intergenerational work for senior citizens. It is collaborating with school children on local history topics. Once again, that is because of the national lottery.

I shall mention work that is going on in other small villages throughout my constituency—for example, Bearpark, New Brancepeth and Ushaw Moor—as a consequence of new opportunities fund moneys that the arts, libraries and museums department is utilising to broaden community access to learning, working with local community associations.

Last summer, archaeology was actually brought to life in a small village called Coxhoe, with a "time detectives" local equivalent for youngsters as part of the learning strand of the new opportunities fund. This, and many other schemes, are countywide, but of immense benefit to my constituents. For example, the elements drama development programme is encouraging youth theatre, commissioning new work and stimulating the touring of professional plays in the rural areas of my constituency.

Last year, a new play, "Set in Stone" explored the harrowing account of a Durham first-world-war soldier who was shot at dawn for alleged cowardice. Thankfully, this man's name is now remembered in the rolls of honour, the evidence leading to his death being questionable to say the least. The national lottery has helped to right an 80-year-old wrong.

Last year, the arts, libraries and museums department established "The Forge", an arts in education development agency, again with the benefit of lottery funding, this time through the regional arts lottery programme. I cannot speak too highly of the work of this organisation in local

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schools, for example. It is providing the springboard for collaboration with the recently established Sunderland and Durham creative partnership that I hope will encourage more creative activity among schoolchildren in the area.

There are six libraries in my constituency and the county council's policy is clear: libraries are the hub of community activity. I shall quote from the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who said:

> "Libraries contribute to four of this Government's most important policy objectives. They underpin education, providing essential support for schoolchildren, students and lifelong learners; they enhance public access to the world's storehouse of knowledge and information; they promote social inclusion by helping to bridge the gap between those who can afford access to information and those who can't, and increasingly have a role to play in the modernisation and delivery of public services."

Lottery funding has enabled libraries in my area to play their full part in meeting those objectives. Investment from the new opportunities fund has enabled the provision of additional PCs, scanners and printers, the extension of an upgraded data transmission network and, most importantly, the training of all library staff to the European computer driving licence standard. All the libraries in County Durham have had free internet access since 1998. They are the base for lifelong learning programmes in association with local colleges. They provide mediated information and advice, and are the hub of community activity.

All in all, the national lottery has stimulated new ways of thinking, new collaborations and exciting new initiatives. I believe that the Durham pleasure gardens, which fell into disuse in the early years of the century, could well be restored, at least virtually, through a partnership between the archaeology section of the arts, libraries and museums service and its Northumberland counterparts, because they are jointly developing virtual models of archaeology sites in the north-east, again with the assistance of lottery money.

On something entirely different, only last weekend, a new bridge—the first new bridge for more than 40 years—was erected across the Wear in Durham. The Millennium Commission, Durham city council and Durham county council are funding that £460,000 bridge, which links Framwellgate Waterside with the Sands, as part of the city's millennium city project. The bridge would never have been possible without national lottery funding.

Of particular significance to the people of Durham, and to those who are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to visit such a magnificent city, is the Durham millennium city development. This wonderful and fantastic scheme has transformed the city centre. It will be a legacy to the efforts of all those involved in bringing it to fruition, and to the significant funding input from the national lottery via the Millennium Commission. There was a grant of more than £13 million from the commission, which has been matched by the local authority.

I hope that when Members visit Durham they will also visit that new development. It has regenerated an area of the city that was little more than a car park on a derelict site for more than 30 years. The development has acted as a catalyst for the redevelopment and improvement of the central part of Durham. I am sure that many Members have fond memories of Durham. Only yesterday, I was away with members of the Public Accounts Committee; two members of it were at Durham university. Many Members know Durham well, including the city. When they revisit, I hope that they will see what I am talking about.

The scheme includes the fantastic Gala theatre, the state of the art Clayport library, a new tourist information centre, a visitors' centre, access to information and advice for everyone, and space for community groups. The city council, in attracting investment for the development, has realised a dream for the people of Durham. That development has been a local Labour party manifesto item for as long as I can remember or for as long as I have been in politics, which is 30 years. Now the scheme has come to fruition.

The Gala theatre has been designed as multi-purpose building. It can house theatre shows but it converts to a dance hall, a conference centre or an exhibition hall, to name but a few uses. It is a venue for everyone for seven days a week, from early morning to well into the evening. At long last, it will give the people of Durham the opportunity to experience different forms of entertainment without having to travel out of the city, which they have had to do for many years.

On the opposite side of the Millennium square is the new Clayport library, which will offer a huge range of facilities. The lifelong learning centre will provide ideas and opportunities for learning or leisure, work or hobbies, stimulation or relaxation. It occupies three floors, with full access for the disabled to all levels. Here we can learn, brush up on our IT skills, browse for a book from the 18,000 volumes that are on loan and explore online the catalogue of the county's 800,000 stockholdings. Information can be sought from a mixture of traditional reference works or from the latest in electronic formats, and visitors will feel at home in one of the 60 study places. A community resource centre, incorporating office and meeting facilities for community and voluntary organisations, provides community services in one easy to access location.

I must declare an interest because I have recently moved my constituency office into the new building. The development has given a much-needed facelift to what was a rather drab part of the city, and the careful selection of facilities will ensure that the people of Durham can really benefit from what it has to offer for many years to come.

One of the potential knock-on effects includes an increase in revenue from visitor activities, as the facility will offer the many visitors to the city a number of further opportunities. I do not need to state that the additional permanent local jobs that have already been generated and will be generated by the scheme are very much welcomed.

Durham city council's endeavours to implement an extensive redevelopment programme, geared to the regeneration of the city centre, have been especially apparent in recent years, with a number of key projects being completed. The realisation of the Durham millennium city project was a significant part of that regeneration, which would never have taken place without the crucial funding offered by the national lottery. It was always a dream that would never be accomplished; now, thanks to the national lottery, it has been accomplished.

Just as Durham cathedral has been a magnificent landmark in the city, the millennium city development was a wonderful way to mark the beginning of the new millennium.

I have mentioned only a few examples of the many excellent schemes that have been made possible in Durham as a result of national lottery funding; I could have gone on to mention many more. I am personally aware of the huge difference that the national lottery has made to the facilities and services that are on offer to my constituents in a wide range of areas, including sport, recreation, arts, heritage projects, education and projects affecting the lives of entire communities. Virtually everyone in my constituency has benefited from the national lottery in some way. That is a significant achievement in anyone's terms. I hope that it will last for a long time to come and that we will continue to benefit from national lottery grants.

11.1 am

Nick Harvey (North Devon): Since its launch in 1994, the national lottery has been of great benefit to many people. The money that it has raised has allowed much regeneration in our communities, enhanced the lives of many people and improved all our constituencies. The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) paid a heartfelt tribute to what it has achieved in his constituency, which I visited for the first time a few weeks ago. I do not know how many of its treasures can be directly attributed to the national lottery, but if it is helping to keep the city as wonderful as it is, it is clearly doing good.

Such achievements should not be underestimated. Hon. Members have already mentioned the sums of money that have been raised. However, in many cases the value of the projects that have been funded by lottery proceeds cannot be calculated because of the lottery's success in unlocking other forms of finance, triggering many projects that would not otherwise have happened and which therefore go beyond what the lottery has directly funded or stimulated.

Although the national lottery is a relatively new creation, we must be aware that it is likely to have a limited lifespan. The experience of lotteries elsewhere around the world is that however successful they may seem to be for a considerable time, in the end they inevitably roll over and implode. No one can predict with any certainty how long they will last. Indeed, our own lottery has shown some diminution in ticket sales, and we cannot afford the luxury of believing that it will last for ever, continuing to generate the revenue figures that it has so far enjoyed.

We must ensure as best we can that we maximise ticket sales and thereby the investment that the distributing bodies are able to make; that the lottery operates in a manner that is fair, accountable to the punter and protects the vulnerable; that the distributors have extracted the best value for money from the funds that have been made available through ticket sales; that that money is administered in the best and most efficient manner; and that investment is maximised in every sense. In short, we must ensure that we make the most out of the lottery because, like all good things, it will eventually come to an end. Whatever money is raised, and however it is raised, it is most important that we spend it wisely.

The funds raised for good causes—28p in the pound for every ticket sold—are distributed between arts, sports, charities and heritage, and education, health and the environment. Historically, arts, sports, heritage and charitable causes have been low down on the Treasury's list of priorities.

When we look around, we can all see examples of what the lottery has achieved. Mention was made of the millennium stadium in Cardiff, which I visited on Sunday for the Worthington cup final. It is a fantastic stadium and it was wonderful to see a full house. The atmosphere that is created when a match is played with the roof closed is extraordinary. That would not have happened without lottery proceeds being made available, and the same can be said for much of what has been achieved in the arts, sport and heritage and for charitable causes.

The same cannot be argued in respect of health and education. Those are high up on the list of voters' priorities, and they expect the Government to fund services in those sectors appropriately and adequately. We have already talked about additionality. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) challenged the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on whether she would want finance to be withdrawn from after-school clubs. After-school clubs are clearly an adjunct to the education system, not one of the core parts that have traditionally, as the average member of the public would expect, been paid for by the taxpayer. If those are the sorts of new opportunities that the fund is creating, that is consistent with the original aims and objectives of the lottery.

However, when one starts to consider using the new opportunities fund to pay for hospital equipment, which the man in the street would expect the Government to fund from Exchequer revenues, one begins fundamentally to stray from the original purposes and objectives of the lottery. When the new opportunities fund was established, the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport said:

> "The principle is clear. Lottery money must not replace Exchequer spending".—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 166.]

The Secretary of State touched on that this morning when she said that lottery money should not and will not be a substitute for such spending. She acknowledged that there is a fine line to be navigated. There certainly is, and in some cases the new opportunities fund has ended up on the wrong side of it.

Chris Grayling: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that the new opportunities fund may become an excuse for the Government not to consider funding certain areas? One example is the hospice movement, where the voluntary sector has traditionally played an important role in appeals—such as that for the Shooting Stars hospice, which was so memorably not visited by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge). The Government should consider providing additional support in that area, but it is easy for them to use the new opportunities fund as a smokescreen for not doing so.

Nick Harvey: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point that echoes my worry about the current scope of the new opportunities fund. Welcome as the additional expenditure may be, it is not the right place for it to come

[Nick Harvey]

from. That is not only a matter of principle, but central to my point about all good things coming to an end, including lotteries and the funding stream that they bring with them.

The Government are using lottery money to fund their commitment to cancer care through the £150 million living with cancer programme, which the public may not want to think is contingent on lottery funding for its existence. The principle of additionality—that any funds created by the lottery should add to, not substitute for, services provided by the Government—was enshrined in the original legislation. At best that is being ignored, and at worst abused. That was the point that the hon. Gentleman was making.

Time and again, the Government pledge themselves to universal access to health—a comprehensive NHS that cares for all regardless of ability to pay—and, rightly, attack plans to make the less fortunate pay extra for their health care. The Government commit themselves to broadening the spectrum of education and to improving the infrastructure in our schools. Those are laudable objectives, but they should not be paid for by siphoning off funds that lottery players think are going to the original good causes. Such funds should not be pumped into the health service and education, which the public think are being financed by general taxation revenues. That is the most regressive form of taxation. Certainly it is not in the spirit in which the lottery was originally set up.

Of course those extra forms of funding are welcome, but in the long term they are not a right or sustainable method of funding. Are we to presume that the scanners, the new breast screening equipment and the cancer prevention projects funded by the new opportunities fund would not have gone ahead otherwise? If teaching our teachers and librarians to use the computers and the internet is funded in that way, would it never have happened without lottery funding? If so, although those may be among the biggest achievements of the national lottery, one would have to say that the lottery was propping up public services that the public would expect to be provided by Government.

What would happen if the lottery funding eventually dried up? Surely the cancer care would not be withdrawn from the NHS and the teachers withdrawn from the training programmes. The lottery funding is not a long-term answer to the long-standing funding problems from which both the health and the education system suffer.

The new opportunities fund was set up to focus particularly on the needs of the most disadvantaged—an aim reiterated both in its list of key objectives and throughout the mission statement for its projects. However, four of the 81 most deprived districts in the UK received no new opportunities fund money in 2001, and 33 of them received less than the national average. Of the 80 districts that received more than £10 per head, not even half appear on the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions list of the most deprived districts. Clearly there is a problem, and I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State acknowledge it this morning. I hope that the initiatives announced yesterday will begin to make serious progress in solving that problem.

Once the funds reach the distribution bodies, how should they be distributed? When I tabled questions, I received the answer that the prompt payment of grant by distributors to successful applicants was "desirable". In my opinion, it is more than desirable, it is essential. We all understand that when funds are committed they cannot necessarily be paid at once, because proper performance of what the bid entails has to be achieved to the satisfaction of the distributing bodies first.

We cannot be glib and pretend that there are simple solutions, and I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has entered a dialogue with each of the distributing bodies to try to address the serious problem that has built up. The reserve funds of the distributing bodies have continued to grow—by almost £150 million since December 2000—and now stand at almost £3.5 billion. That is more than a quarter of the £12 billion that the lottery has raised since it began; the equivalent of almost two years' net income has not yet been distributed. One understands some of the reasons why that has happened, but there is a clear need for action to sort it out. I hope that what the Secretary of State is now proposing will succeed.

The amount going to the distributors has been falling every month, and one can understand that that may cause a cash flow problem in the fulness of time. I do not believe that the present situation is the result of an attempt to manage a cash flow problem, but I hope that if the trend continues—we all hope that it will not—such a problem will not arise in the future. We all hope that Camelot's new plans will begin to reverse the trend.

In many cases, the lottery distributors do a fine job of distributing funds, and also provide excellent advice to project leaders, not only about how to make their bids but how the projects can be carried on.

Community sports clubs would benefit, and their financial affairs would be made much easier, if they were given the tax concessions for which they are now campaigning. I welcome the sounds that the Minister for Sport was making at Question Time on Monday, and if it is possible to persuade the Charity Commissioners to allow clubs to act as if they were charities, but in a less bureaucratic way than the rest of the charity movement has to endure, that would be welcome. If it could be pulled off, I suspect that many other charities would look on with envious eyes and wonder whether such an arrangement could be extended more widely.

When grants are provided by distributors, the promises that applicants make and the contracts that they sign must be upheld. Where they are not, we should have no hesitation in trying to recover moneys. I hope that in the case of Wembley, with the unfortunate saga that has dogged it in recent years, that will not ultimately prove necessary.

As the lottery pledged the money for Wembley so long ago, it is a great pity that more progress was not made, and it was not possible to find a solution to the Wembley conundrum in time for the World athletics championships to be held there in 2005. It will be a supreme irony if a stadium, which we are now told will be compatible with athletics, opens either for the cup final in May 2005 or the charity shield in August of that year—because that will be a month or so either side of the very athletics championships that we hoped would be conducted at Wembley. However, there is now a new plan on the stocks for Wembley; we must wish it success and hope that the athletics capability will come to fruition, and that in the fulness of time we shall see a major athletics tournament conducted there.

Very few of the projects would have gone ahead at all if it were not for the success of the lottery and its high sales. Camelot has done an exceptional job in operating an efficient lottery; ours is consistently ranked among the best and most successful lotteries in the world. Dwindling sales are a concern, but we must hope that the sales improvement programme that Camelot is now putting together will lead to a significant improvement.

The Secretary of State made a series of remarks about her plans for the future. For example, before the summer recess she will issue a licensing consultation document, and I look forward to seeing that and commenting on it. As she said, additionality is a fine line to navigate, and I hope that we shall debate further exactly where that line is to be drawn.

The recognition that local equity needs to be improved is welcome, and I hope that the plan announced yesterday will enjoy success. The Secretary of State has already been asked about amending the legislation to allow endowments, and she said that the Government would do so. It would be useful to have the facility to do that, but endowments are an expensive way of bringing a funding stream into a project, so I hope that using lottery funds in that way will not become widespread.

The Secretary of State said that she wanted to see devolution of decisions to the most local level possible. We all welcome that, but I cannot understand how, at the same time, the same Department is beginning to devolve decision making in sport, yet appears willing to smile on a movement in the opposite direction in the arts. I hope that in the end, the Government will not agree to that movement.

The national lottery has achieved a great deal. However, we cannot assume that funding streams can be sustained at the current level indefinitely, so when we decide how to use the money we must avoid the mistake of making any essential public services dependent on lottery proceeds.

There is a great deal to celebrate. I hope that in the coming months we will be able to consider the various suggestions that the Secretary of State has made today about how the lottery can be improved, that we will find ways to sustain and improve it, and that there will continue to be a lot to celebrate for many years to come.

11.19 am

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): It gives me great pleasure to take part in this debate. I want to draw on four different areas of my experience to make four different points on the lottery. First, from my experience as a constituency Member, I want to draw local lessons from the operation of the lottery in Selby, which might have a wider resonance. Secondly, as a keen punter, I want to consider the impact of the gambling review on the lottery. Thirdly, as chairman of the all-party BBC group, I want to consider television coverage of the lottery, which is becoming an issue again. Fourthly, drawing on my experience in the previous Parliament on the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs—incidentally, hon. Members may be interested to know that the average spend on the lottery, and on the football pools, in Northern Ireland is greater than anywhere else in the United Kingdom—I want to conclude with a few remarks on the lottery in Northern Ireland.

Before I do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that you will allow me one preliminary remark. Yesterday, I attended the memorial service commemorating one year after the tragedy at Great Heck. It was an extremely moving service in Selby abbey. Coming down on the train last night, I heard that there had been a similar accident at Nocton, south of Lincoln. I am sure that I speak on behalf of all hon. Members present in sending our deepest sympathy to the bereaved family and our best wishes to all those who were injured in that crash.

To return to the lottery and to the local lessons in Selby, it is interesting that, in my constituency, £5.6 million of lottery grants have been given out in recent years—a total of 156 awards. Forty of those awards have been made in the past 14 months. That is no accident. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport mentioned that in some smaller towns the councils and the voluntary sector have got their act together to try to provide advice to voluntary groups and sporting groups on making lottery applications.

When I first became a Member of Parliament, I was astonished that one of the first things my office was asked to do was to help out with a lottery application. I was therefore keen to support the efforts of Gill Cashmore of the Selby association of voluntary services and Steve Shaw-Wright of the town council to obtain professional advice. That has worked—the Selby association of voluntary services now has a full-time funding office. Indeed, just before Christmas the local evening paper contained the extremely welcome headline: "Midas Mike aims to make a million for good causes". "Midas" Mike Dunne said:

> "I have been trained to hit the ri[illegible] and tell the charity fund managers what they want to hear. The great thing from my point of view is that I am helping groups who have found applications quite daunting in the past. And the quality of life for people that benefit can be raised tenfold by even a small grant. I love this job, and over the next two years I want to become a millionaire fundraiser."

He has certainly made a difference in the Selby area.

The new opportunities fund has been mentioned not least by the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), who is a fellow North Yorkshire Member. I have looked carefully at new opportunities fund funding in my constituency, which has been almost exclusively concentrated on after-school clubs and holiday clubs in villages that would not have had a hope of having such facilities and opportunities previously. Hemingbrough—a very rural village—has recently been funded for 16 before-school and 24 holiday places for children aged between three and 11. The beekeepers club in Fulford in my constituency and Space Base in Riccall provide similar opportunities. That would never have happened before in a rural area like Selby. North Yorkshire county council has been allocated £3.5 million from the new opportunities fund to improve sports facilities in schools in the North Yorkshire area. A Conservative county council is therefore enthusiastically embracing the new opportunities fund, and Councillor Carl Les is heading up the initiative in North Yorkshire.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) talked about the hopes of the Welsh for Cardiff Arms Park and about a possible renaissance in Welsh rugby, and we have similar hopes for Yorkshire

[Mr. John Grogan]

cricket, which we have achieved. Headingley has a new lottery-funded development, and we are now the county champions. Headingley is not quite finished, but it is getting better every day and will be a fitting home for the county champions when it is finished. Local club cricket is very strong in Yorkshire, and no fewer than five cricket teams—Cawood, Tadcaster, Saxton, Bolton Percy and Appleton Roebuck—have benefited from lottery grants. In illustration of the fact that there are a wide range of sporting activities in Selby, a further seven sports—hockey, martial arts, football, swimming, bowls, tennis and horse riding—have also received grants.

The heritage fund can be flexible in funding big projects such as Selby abbey—which has received nearly £400,000—where the memorial service to which I referred took place yesterday. That funding is essential in ensuring that Selby abbey continues to be the centre of the town for future generations. The lesson is that it is often worth persisting with such applications. The abbey was knocked back the first time, took some advice, went back and was successful on its second application.

There have also been much smaller heritage fund successes in my constituency. For example, Smeatons magazine team, which produces a community magazine for the villages of Kirk Smeaton and Little Smeaton, received an award of just £670 to cover the cost of publishing, which was as important for the team as the big grant was for Selby abbey.

To draw a couple of wider lessons from our experience in Selby, one experiment that I tried only last week during our half-term break was to take a minibus of those representing not only lottery funders but the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and landfill tax funders to look at the areas of Selby where there are the biggest problems—areas such as Selby South, which is in the top 300 wards for child poverty, and Brotherton. We looked at projects that the lottery can partly fund, but that other funders would be interested in as well. That seemed to be a success and I hope that it will bear fruit in future.

I now want to consider the impact of the Budd review. Of the 167 recommendations of that review, the national lottery is worried about three—side-betting, the deregulation of charity lotteries and the liberalisation of bingo prizes. In terms of the future of the lottery, we must be cautious about side-betting. The only example of allowing betting on the lottery in bookmakers is in Ireland, which seemed to lead to a reduction of about 20 per cent. in lottery funds. As a regular attender in betting shops on Saturday mornings—after my surgery, obviously—to put on bets for the afternoon, I know that they have had a good deal from the Government in the past year in terms of the abolition of betting duty. We therefore need to be cautious. If we deregulate immediately the lottery rules regarding other charities, large charities might combine with big retailers, which might have a significant effect on the national lottery. We must certainly think about that carefully. I am less worried about liberalising bingo prizes—bingo took a big hit when the national lottery was first introduced but it has adapted and is largely a distinct market.

Television coverage is extremely important for the national lottery. Since 1994 when the lottery started, the BBC has had the contract for the lottery. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has always been critical of that, as the BBC made a payment for the national lottery at the time. The market was very competitive at that stage. I do not see anything wrong in that—rights to screen the lottery are comparable to rights to screen test matches or the Oscars. Now, however, the BBC's contract is coming to an end—I think that it has been extended until just after the jubilee celebrations, but there is no guarantee that it will continue.

The market has changed, and I understand that ITV, buoyed up by the success of "Pop Idol" and other Saturday night attractions, is not making a big bid for the lottery this time. It is essential for the lottery programme to remain on terrestrial television. Were it to go to satellite TV, its importance would be much diminished, so I would encourage the BBC, if it is successful, and the national lottery to reach a long-term agreement.

I note that Michael Grade, who has a Channel 4 background, is much involved with the lottery. Interestingly, cricket and the BBC have agreed under their new radio coverage contract to promote the game across BBC radio—for example, Radio 1 is trying to appeal to youth—and I hope that, under any new deal, the lottery considers involving more BBC stations in coverage. One of the lottery's problems is also faced by politicians—attracting young people's interest. The age profile of those who buy lottery tickets reveals a dip in the 20s, and I hope that any new TV and broadcasting deal considers that carefully.

The lottery is more popular in Northern Ireland in terms of participation than anywhere else in the United Kingdom, and it is worth noting that the UK lottery is characterised by many people spending a little, which is a good thing. It is ranked 34th in the world in terms of per capita spending and has a broad reach across the population.

I want to draw out the issue of the proposed national stadium for Northern Ireland, so it is appropriate that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport will reply to the debate. The sports lottery fund is distributed according to population, and Northern Ireland contains about 2.8 per cent. of the UK population. I shall not go into details, but proposals are being developed for a national stadium, which would have a cementing effect on the peace process. There is no non-sectarian stadium in Northern Ireland. Windsor Park is the home of football, but it is much associated with one section of the community.

A national stadium, not just for football but for rugby and Gaelic sports, would be a big advance. A former chairman of the Sports Council, Mr. Allen, commented:

> "If we had a stadium in a neutral venue and Northern Ireland were playing"

a big international match

> "then the minimum I expect would be around about 30,000. If we had a stadium venue, it would encourage people to go into a peaceable and enjoyable atmosphere to support a team whether they win or lose, and that would be very significant in peace and reconciliation terms."

The matter is now devolved, but the Administration and the Assembly are considering proposals on making a lottery bid to support their ideas for a national stadium. I ask Ministers to consider whether there is a way around the rules on per head sports funding so that the project can be advanced.

Speaking as a constituency MP in respect of the funding going to Selby, as a Yorkshire MP in respect of Headingley and as a Member of this place, I think that our 1998 changes have made a real difference on the ground. For example, the after-school club in the village of Heminbrough, rather than the Churchill papers, has received funding. That is welcome, and proof that priorities have changed over recent years.

11.34 am

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I add my words of welcome for the success of the national lottery, which has become nothing short of a national institution. It has created many jobs and provided money for myriad good causes. We should not forget all those individual lottery winners whose lives have been transformed by big money prizes.

There are six distributing funds, so there is enormous competition. I was surprised to see still listed among them the Millennium Commission. Will the Minister clarify its position and whether it has an intended lifespan?

Mr. Bryant: A millennium.

Angela Watkinson: I hope not. Does the commission have a relationship with the millennium dome, which has already received £628 million of lottery funding? Considerable maintenance costs are still involved in keeping it closed until it is disposed of. Will the Minister kindly tell the House whether the moneys devoted to maintaining the closed dome come from the Millennium Commission and thus from lottery funding?

If the money allocated to the commission were redistributed among the other distributing funds, that would have a significant effect on the money available for other good causes. The lottery money—28 per cent. of the proceeds—would go to only five funds and that which goes to the commission could be divided among them, representing, for example, a funding difference of almost 1 per cent. to Sport England.

The largest lottery grant received by my constituency of Upminster as part of the London borough of Havering was for a swimming pool, which was much needed to replace a facility that had gone beyond its natural life. A full-size competitive pool was required, however. The Secretary of State referred to the remit and style of advice given to lottery applicants. There was much discussion about the nature of a community facility, as eligibility rested on community facility status. I would have thought that a swimming pool was a community facility, but, on its own, it was not eligible for the grant. Other ancillary facilities had to be provided, and the result compromised the size of the pool.

A six-lane pool has been approved whereas an eight-lane competitive pool is necessary to establish a facility suitable for galas, which would have generated income. Such a pool would be suitable for the user groups, such as two well-established swimming clubs that use the pool continually, and a high-diving club. Many local schools also use it.

The new pool will have less water space than the existing one, which means that there will be insufficient room. Coach loads of schoolchildren need a certain amount of space so as to enter the water at the same time, but the new pool will be too small for that purpose. There will be no high-diving area, so the club will have to go elsewhere to practise, and the two swimming clubs that train at the pool say that the new one will be insufficient.

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Lady may know that the Culture, Media and Sport Committee recently produced a report on the sport of swimming which amplified many of those issues. It might be worth her while reading it, if she has not already done so. There are terrible problems with finding money for sport and, in particular, 50 m pools. London is ill served compared with, for example, Paris.

Angela Watkinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that information. I have not had the opportunity to read the report, but I shall do so.

The restrictive interpretation of the availability of and access to funds has resulted in a compromise solution in Upminster. The new pool is welcome, as are the ancillary facilities, but the full-size competitive pool would have been a triumph for Upminster.

I should also like to draw attention to the community fund. A chart showing the community fund allocation to London boroughs ranks the boroughs in order of the deprivation index. Although Havering comes quite low down on the list—it is 26th out of 33—it has within it an area of deprivation that is masked by other areas of my constituency that are relatively affluent. I seek some means of addressing that problem.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I wish to support the thrust of the hon. Lady's remarks, because I represent a constituency in a similar suburban area. One of the real challenges for suburbs is that they rarely qualify for the additional funding that is often available to inner cities and rural areas, yet they have pockets of deprivation where the poverty is just as acute as in inner-city or rural areas. I therefore urge my right hon. Friend the Minister, in a non-partisan spirit, to consider further how those pockets of poverty can be provided with additional support through the lottery programme.

Angela Watkinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful comments.

Mr. Bryant: One of the problems that I face in my constituency is that we are often lumped in with Rhondda Cynon Taff. The Rhondda has some of the poorest wards in Wales—12 of the 100 poorest—whereas Rhondda Cynon Taff has five of the wealthiest. The money seems to go to the wealthy wards, rather than the poorer ones.

Angela Watkinson: I should like to draw attention to some apparent anomalies on the community fund chart. Although seven London boroughs are even less deprived than Havering, if I may put it that way, they have all received more money per head from the community fund than the London borough of Havering. Indeed, Havering has received the lowest per capita amount of all London boroughs—£7 per head. All the seven boroughs below it have received considerably more, even discounting the City of London, which received £40 per head. Given its small resident population, the City of London is atypical, so I shall not include it. Even Sutton and Kingston upon Thames, the two least deprived London boroughs, have received £14 per head from the community fund, which is twice as much as Havering has received.

[Angela Watkinson]

I should be grateful if the Minister would clarify that point and assist me in seeking a fairer allocation of community fund provision for the London borough of Havering.

11.43 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): First, let me pay tribute to the general thrust of the remarks of the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson), as I said in an intervention. On a less positive note, I regard it as a discourtesy to the House that the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman could not even be bothered to be present for the two Front-Bench speeches, at the very least.

Miss McIntosh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thomas: I shall give way in a second. It would have been useful to have had the shadow spokesman present so that we could have sought some clarity about whether the Opposition intend to abolish the new opportunities fund. In her speech, the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) read great chunks of the speech of the former Prime Minister, John Major, in the 1998 lottery discussion about how the new opportunities fund was potentially a raid on the lottery. We could usefully have had some clarity from the Opposition on whether they intend to abolish it.

Miss McIntosh: I fear that the Secretary of State set a trend for the senior Opposition spokesman not being present. On Fridays, we are used to fielding those who are most responsible for the brief and, as I mentioned, that falls to me.

Mr. Thomas: The Secretary of State not only spoke in the debate, but stayed to listen to the hon. Lady. I hope that she will pass on the concern that the Opposition appear not to want proper scrutiny of their policies on this subject. However, I pay tribute to the former Prime Minister: the establishment of the national lottery was the only visionary measure to come out of the 1992–97 Parliament. It was significantly improved on by the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), in the National Lottery Act 1998. The lessons from the operation of that Act nevertheless suggest that some further reform and tweaking are necessary. I welcome the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that further consultation is due to occur.

I wish to highlight some local examples of lottery achievements and to outline the case for using the national lottery at a local level in a couple of other areas. I shall go on to suggest how the lottery's purpose to add value could usefully be deployed to deal with some strategic issues that London faces.

St. George's church, which is based in the Headstone parish of my constituency, is a significant focal point for part of the community of north Harrow. Friends of mine have been married in the church, which has one of the last surviving examples of an electromagnetic organ built by F. J. Rothwell, who also built the organ at St. George's chapel, Windsor. All hon. Members present will understand that music is crucial to many church communities; it is often a symbol of the vibrancy of such communities. The £16,000-plus grant awarded by the national lottery to St. George's church has allowed the electromagnetic organ to be restored, preserved and returned to full working order, to the delight of the church community.

Nearby in the same parish is Headstone manor, the last moated manor house in Middlesex and a designated ancient monument. It is perhaps most famous for the fact that Thomas à Becket stayed at the manor on his last ill-fated journey to Canterbury. In the borough of Harrow, Headstone manor is a focal point for heritage and cultural activities, as the Harrow museum and heritage centre is now located on the site. I am delighted to say that £1 million has been allocated by the national lottery to develop the buildings in the manor area, including the restoration of, and structural works to, the manor house and the neighbouring tithe barn. Work is due to start this summer.

The £1 million grant has already helped to provide some storage facilities, too, at the manor house. I mention that because the storage facilities house an excellent collection of works by Heath Robinson, the international artist and book illustrator who became particularly famous for his drawings of mad inventions. Sadly, there is nowhere to hang his paintings in Harrow, despite the fact that from 1912 to 1918 he was a resident of Pinner, part of my constituency. The William Heath Robinson trust, in partnership with the Pinner Association, a local residents' organisation, is campaigning and fundraising successfully to bring the now derelict West house back into use as a permanent home for the Heath Robinson collection. West house is also important to the community of Pinner because it has acted as a shrine to Pinner's dead from two world wars. The Pinner Association has already raised more than £50,000. Consultants have estimated that some £350,000 would be needed to fund a temporary art gallery to house exhibitions, and that more than £2 million would be necessary to complete the restoration of the house to act as a proper home to the Heath Robinson collection. Clearly, national lottery moneys would be a highly appropriate way to fund such works.

I want to touch on the benefits to sport from the national lottery, because as all hon. Members know it has been a crucial source of additional funding for sport. More than £1.5 billion has gone to sporting good causes. So far, more than 2,700 lottery-funded capital projects have been completed and opened specifically for sport. Wembley has been mentioned as a recipient of lottery money, and I look forward to the last links in the chain being completed soon and work at last beginning to restore and build a new national stadium at Wembley.

Perhaps most importantly the national lottery has funded the school sports co-ordinators programme, which in its short life already seems to have achieved a significant increase in the number of extra-curricular activities, and in the number of participants in sport. Sport England says that there has been a 29 per cent. increase in extra-curricular activities, and more than a 40 per cent. increase in the number of young people taking part in sport through that programme.

Sir John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor General, whose report on obesity served as a wake-up call for a variety of agencies and those of us who hold political office, suggested that if effective action is not taken, by 2005 one in five men and one in four women will be obese. That is clearly a huge concern.

The other issue that Sport England has recently highlighted is that, although programmes such as the school sport co-ordinators have begun to address the issue of participation in sport, there is nevertheless a concern that sports participation could continue to drop if further action is not taken.

As hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Vale of York, have said, the national lottery has also helped to support our elite athletes and the facilities that they use. I am looking forward to the Commonwealth games, which will take place in Manchester this summer. The lottery has been a crucial stimulus to the building of appropriate facilities for those games.

I have long believed that we should bid for the 2012 Olympic games to come to London. The national lottery would be a crucial source of funding for the building of the sports facilities to which my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) referred. There is a lack of 50 m sports pools in London compared with other cities, and that problem clearly needs to be addressed if an Olympic bid is to be successful.

The national lottery could provide further useful assistance to a number of sports projects in my constituency. There has long been a healthy rivalry in Harrow between the excellent Harrow Borough football club, which is currently in the Ryman premier division, and its near neighbours, the Wealdstone football club, which is located in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty). It has put together a major development proposal, which will work only if the national lottery provides the necessary funding through the new opportunities fund.

The development involves Wealdstone FC building a 3,000-seater stadium on a 44-acre site that was once playing fields. The scheme will bring into use 16 football pitches and two all-weather pitches, and make them available to the whole community of Harrow: the schools especially will benefit.

The club at Wealdstone has already secured £5.7 million of private funding, working with the Royal Bank of Scotland and a private health club. To complete the financial package, the club has applied for a further £800,000 for pitches and changing rooms to the grassroots development fund of the Football Foundation, and £250,000 for the stadium costs from the same source. All that is needed to complete the project and to make it a success is that a bid for £500,000 from the new opportunities fund to top up the finances for pitch landscaping and fencing be approved.

That £500,000 from the new opportunities fund would ensure that a project that is rooted in the community and has clear sporting benefits for the people of Harrow comes to fruition. That £500,000 out of a total cost of £7.45 million will ensure a true state-of-the-art sporting facility in the centre of suburban London. It would be a powerful message that the national lottery funding for sport is as much use to suburban areas, such as my London borough, as it is and has been to rural and inner-city areas. I hope that my right hon. Friend will do all that he can to assist in the success of this highly worthwhile project.

Sport England has suggested further changes that would help its work of extending access to sports funding, such as a relaxation of the rules on partnership funding to help to attract more private sector money alongside lottery proceeds. It has also suggested that it would be worthwhile considering the possibility of lottery distributors providing applicants with loans, as opposed to grants, in a limited number of cases. I would be interested to know from the Minister whether he intends to allow such innovations to be considered as part of the consultation on tweaking the rules.

One other area that has not received attention thus far in the debate is the excellent work of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, which was set up under the National Lottery Act 1998 and is chaired by Lord Puttnam. Some £200 million of lottery money has funded the first ever national endowment, and has been invested to provide an annual income of almost £10 million. Last year, some £4 million was spent on an invention and innovation programme that offered 43 inventors assistance to take their ideas to the market. There was also a £2.5 million education programme to fund innovative educational programmes for science, technology and the arts, and a £2 million fellowship programme last year offered 18 awards to exceptional individuals to challenge, rethink and explore new ideas in science and technology.

Given the congestion difficulties that many of our major cities face, a particularly interesting idea funded through a £75,000 award by NESTA's invention and innovation programme award is to develop a driverless taxi. The scheme has already attracted £18 million of funding from the National Assembly for Wales. That is on the back of a trial that took place back in January on a 1 km track around Cardiff bay. A successful experiment was carried out with three battery-powered driverless vehicles.

It looks as if that initial £75,000 NESTA award will, in about a year, produce the first routes in Cardiff on which up to four passengers with pre-purchased tickets can be taken to their destinations at one time. Transport along dedicated guideways will be powered by a series of magnets. The project has attracted interest from a number of other European countries. People from Italy, Holland and Sweden attended a conference in February to discuss the potential of the driverless taxi as a model for future transport systems. Sadly, no one from either the Mayor of London's office or Transport for London attended. London has particularly serious congestion problems, which generate huge frustration and huge delays and costs for business. My constituents and other Londoners are forced to suffer the effects of pollution, and other health problems.

The new opportunities fund and NESTA are working together to promote such projects as renewable energy schemes and technological innovations in an attempt to deal with environmental challenges. Over the next few years, perhaps they could consider funding a proper strategic assessment of the potential of, say, a London light rail network. There could be an overground network of tram routes connecting with existing transport hubs, and significantly increasing the capacity and attractiveness of public transport in our capital. The lottery was established to add value. Perhaps, in the

[Mr. Thomas]

absence of a Government-led study or any work by the Mayor or Transport for London, it could fund such an assessment.

Chris Grayling: I realise that the lottery and its funding apply to a broader range of areas than they used to, but surely the review suggested by the hon. Gentleman would not be the responsibility of Transport for London. Should it not feature in the Strategic Rail Authority's plans, or indeed those of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions? It would be a sad day when their jobs were abdicated in favour of lottery funding.

Mr. Thomas: Sadly, I do not control Transport for London and nor do the Government; otherwise the hon. Gentleman's suggestion would be entirely appropriate. Perhaps a business organisation or other pan-London body should seek lottery funding for this purpose.

There have been four new proposals for tram routes in London, involving a cross-river transit from Camden to Brixton, a west London transit from Uxbridge to Shepherd's Bush and other systems in Greenwich and east London. They are all significant schemes in their own right, but they do not interlink. Moreover, it will have cost between £250,000 and £750,000 just to establish a sensible route for each scheme. Again, we need a proper assessment.

NESTA has initiated important new thinking in technology and science, and, through its transforming communities programme, the new opportunities fund has done the same in regard to renewable energy that will not damage the environment. That is another instance in which the lottery could add strategic value, and help to solve some of the problems of the country and London in particular. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State suggested that the lottery should be seen as venture capital for community enrichment. An assessment of the potential for trams would be useful in that context as well.

The 1998 Act has made a huge difference to the running of the lottery, although the rules need some further tweaking. I hope that my right hon. Friend will look carefully at the bids from Wealdstone football club and, when it comes, from the Pinner Association to give a proper home to the excellent Heath Robinson collection, but I commend the work that the Government have already done, and look forward to the consultative document.

12.6 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): As a number of hon. Members have said, the national lottery has become one of the most influential developments in society over recent years. It has reached many communities and organisations, and many different parts of our daily lives. It has made a huge contribution.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) and others for paying tribute to the work of the former Prime Minister, John Major, and his Government in launching the lottery. There are often important differences across the Floor of the House, but Governments do not always get things wrong from the perspective of the Opposition. I think that members of all political parties can say that the lottery was a positive development that has continued to make a real difference to many people since its launch eight years ago.

I want to refer to some of the lottery's successful contributions, but I want in particular to discuss the new opportunities fund. Earlier, I spoke of the potential politicisation of parts of lottery funding. I also want to deal with an issue raised with me a number of times by a constituent—money relating to the Millennium Commission. I hope the Minister will give some clarification.

My constituency does not receive as much lottery money as many others. As I have no doubt that the transcript of this debate will be read by a number of people involved in the allocation of lottery money, I will take the opportunity to plug my constituency, and say that I hope that in the months and years ahead the shortfall that has existed for the past few years will be addressed.

In my part of mid-Surrey, the borough of Epsom and Ewell—which contains most of my constituents—has received 32 awards in recent years, Reigate and Banstead, which represents a small part of the constituency, has received 61, and Mole Valley has received 50. Let me compare that with what has happened in other areas not too far away. Guildford has received 122 awards, Mid-Sussex 85 and East Hampshire 124. There is clearly a gap which must be filled.

Of course the process of securing funds for a constituency depends partly on the local community's determination to deliver positive ideas that are worthy of lottery funding. I also acknowledge the role of the local MP in trying to encourage organisations to seek opportunities to bring money into the constituency.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) said that in his constituency it was easy for less well-off areas to be masked by better-off areas. The same applies to my constituency, which is certainly in one of the more prosperous parts of the United Kingdom. It contains affluent areas, but also pockets of deprivation. At least three estates have genuine social problems. Lottery funds could make an important contribution to tackling such problems. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is tremendously important that decisions on lottery funding are not made on the basis of blanket coverage across significant geographical areas but take into account specific local circumstances. That should be a caveat for the Government when they set out the rules on the allocation of funding to individual local authority areas. There is always a danger that individual circumstances within a locality are lost in headlines that relate to an overall local authority area or a broader geographic area. As the Government stipulate how funding is to be allocated on a geographical basis, they need to be watchful of that problem.

If the funding in my constituency has not been as high as it has in many others, the national lottery has made one important contribution to my constituents and, indeed, throughout the country. It has played an essential role in supporting small local retailers in some of the smaller arcades that have struggled to survive as shopping patterns have changed. There is no doubt that many small shopkeepers, such as newsagents and grocers, have found it difficult to keep their businesses going against a background of new shopping patterns and the unfair business rating system for small shops. Hon. Members will be aware that the rate for a small shop is calculated on the basis of a shop's frontage, much in the same way as the rateable levels for major supermarkets are determined. The system does not take into account the individual difficult circumstances that such businesses face.

The national lottery's role in delivering a secure flow of business to those retailers on a weekly basis is welcome. It is an essential part of the future of smaller arcades. For those of us who are committed to seeing them survive and flourish as neighbourhood resources, the issue is important. As the Minister looks forward to the development of the lottery, I hope that that aspect of the way in which the lottery is structured will remain sacrosanct and will not be threatened.

The most visible sign of the lottery in many communities is the high-profile facilities that it has created, such as the sporting facilities for the Commonwealth games, the Lowry centre, the Eden project and the millennium bridge in central London. It has contributed to sporting achievement, as reflected in the successful results that our national teams have enjoyed in, for example, recent Olympic games. However, as hon. Members rightly said, the smaller contributions can make the most difference within communities. The spread of village halls around the country engendered by the Millennium Commission in the run-up to the millennium was a welcome development. That has strengthened the sense of community in many towns and villages and is a fundamental part of the lottery as it develops. Improvements to local sports clubs are also welcome. Sport has a vital role to play in tackling social problems in areas of deprivation where there is a prevalence of anti-social behaviour. That will be a fundamental part of the lottery's role.

I am anxious about how the lottery is evolving. I am especially concerned about the new opportunities fund in its present form. Prior to the millennium, 20 per cent. of lottery funding was allocated to the Millennium Commission and 13 per cent. to the new opportunities fund. All Millennium Commission money is now distributed through the new opportunities fund. As I said in my remarks to the Secretary of State, two of the core founding principles of the national lottery were that decisions on individual grants should be taken at arm's length by the distribution bodies and that lottery grants should be additional to core Government spending. The Government seemed to acknowledge those in their White Paper on the lottery published in July 1997. The Government claimed that they

> "don't believe it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities".

That commitment has become questionable as the new opportunities fund has developed. There is evidence that the Government are starting to use the new opportunities fund to pay for what can only sensibly be described as pet projects that reinforce their core political strategy in matters such as health, education and the environment. It can be argued that many of those should be funded from core Government spending.

The Government are also becoming increasingly prescriptive about the way in which lottery money is distributed. An essence of the lottery is that the money is supposed to be devolved to the distributing bodies to allocate, but the Government are dictating strategies and priorities to bodies that are supposed to operate independently of Government. Lottery funding is starting to be allocated in a way that serves a political purpose. For example, at the Labour party conference in 2000, the Prime Minister announced the spending of £750 million on sports facilities in schools through the new opportunities fund. That money was not allocated until 12 months after the statement. In particular, I question whether it is right and proper for the Prime Minister to use the detailed allocation of funds through the national lottery to create a party political platform given that the lottery is supposed to be independent of Government. I see the hon. Member for Rhondda itching to get to his feet. I will happily give way if he wishes to intervene.

Mr. Bryant: I am contemplating it.

Chris Grayling: The Government's approach manifests itself in funding allocations to different projects through the new opportunities fund. Let me give some examples. Some £213.5 million has been allocated to projects to reduce the burden of coronary heart disease, stroke and cancer. It is admirable to spend money on such things, but are they not rightly and properly the domain of the Department of Health, not the national lottery? Some £198.5 million has been allocated to child care, especially in deprived areas. I have no problem with the objective, but does that not fall within the ambit of the Department for Work and Pensions? Some £159 million has been allocated for a programme of environmental renewal and community regeneration, promoting recycling and developing renewable energy sources. Again, those are admirable aspirations, but is that money not more appropriately distributed by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions or the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs?

The hon. Member for Harrow, West referred to after-school projects in his constituency. I said that some of the funding for those schemes would traditionally have come from local authorities. For example, in the London borough of Merton, where I am a serving councillor for a few more days, the future of a play scheme in one of the local schools that catered for children with special educational needs caused a controversy for a number of years. It had always been partly funded by the local authority, but the Labour-controlled council decided that it could no longer do that. That is a classic example of funding that would traditionally have come from local authorities, but that is no longer possible because authorities have less and less discretionary funding to spend on such schemes. I would not want funding that, traditionally, comes from the local authority to be replaced by national lottery funding to enable the play scheme to continue. That is the risk associated with funding such schemes through the national lottery, rather than through traditional mechanisms.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I re-emphasise the fact that the new opportunities fund has added value. There was a huge demand for after-school provision in my constituency before the National Lottery Act 1998 came into force. Aided and abetted by a lack of proper funding from the then Conservative Government, the Liberal Democrat-controlled council had been unable to provide any funding whatever for after-school clubs in my constituency. It is only since the creation of the new

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

opportunities fund that the need for after-school provision in my constituency has largely been met. The hon. Gentleman should ask his Front Bench whether the Conservatives would abolish that funding stream. Would they abolish the new opportunities fund?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman is extremely keen to discover future Conservative policy, but I am afraid that he must wait a little while, particularly because, as he knows, we are regrettably some distance away from the next general election. It is clear that his Government are initiating major changes, and both Opposition parties must respond to them when they arise. I hope, however, that we will not have to respond to increasing politicisation of the national lottery in the next three or four years, or to a new opportunities fund that increasingly becomes a replacement for spending through taxation and which deals with matters that should be funded by the Government. I urge the Minister to ensure that that does not happen. The national lottery is not a political creature but an important part of the fabric of this country; it should not become an adjunct of Government.

I began my remarks on the new opportunities fund by drawing the Minister's attention to the fact that Millennium Commission finance has been transferred entirely to the new opportunities fund. Even though the commission related specifically to the millennium, it is a matter of regret that there is no replacement for it. In her opening remarks, the Secretary of State rightly referred to the important role that the lottery has played in encouraging the development of major capital schemes, and the commission made a real contribution to developing areas of strategic national importance.

A raft of welcome schemes emerged throughout the country, and I worry that in the next few years there will be no successor body to assist—albeit not to the same extent as in the run-up to the millennium—schemes like the Eden project, London's millennium bridge and the new bridge referred to by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), who is no longer in his place. Such schemes made a difference to communities throughout the country, and the commission had an important part to play in that regard. Within the framework of lottery funding allocation, a successor body to the Millennium Commission should be created. It need not be on the same scale, but it should take a strategic view of the nation as a whole, in the manner of the commission.

I conclude by discussing Millennium Commission funding allocations in the run-up to 2000–01. My remarks are based on the experience of a constituent of mine, Mr. Gordon Winborne, who feels very let down by his experience of the commission and the allocation of funding. On his behalf, I seek further clarification from the Minister. In 1995, Mr. Winborne submitted to the Millennium Commission a scheme for a series of slipways. It was initially rejected, but the commission subsequently invited him to resubmit his application. It was eventually rejected, however, on the ground of a lack of funding for such schemes. Mr. Winborne accepted that decision, but then he observed the unhappy process of funding the millennium dome, of which we are all well aware.

As hon. Members will recall, through the Millennium Commission the House initially allocated £449 million to the New Millennium Experience Company and thus the dome. When the dome experienced financial problems in 2000, a further £179 million was allocated. The Government have always stated—in this House and in written responses—that that additional sum did not come from funds that would otherwise have been allocated to other good causes. However, Mr. Winborne believes that his project, and many others like it, were unable to receive funding because additional funds had to be allocated to the dome. He made the not illogical point that, if additional money had to be found in 2000 for the New Millennium Experience Company and the dome, it had to come from somewhere. It did not appear from thin air; nor did it come from the taxpayer. It must therefore have come from lottery funding that would otherwise have been allocated to other sources.

As one can imagine, my constituent was disappointed not to receive funding—as, I suspect, were many others who applied to the Millennium Commission for various worthy projects. It remains a matter of considerable frustration that so much extra money had to be invested in the dome. For the benefit of my constituent and others in his position, I ask the Minister to explain from what budget the additional funding for the dome was taken, so that he can be reassured about what happened. That would set to rest an issue that has irritated him, and others like him, for a number of years.

In conclusion, I urge the Minister not to politicise the national lottery. It has made a major contribution to this nation and continues to contribute to communities throughout the land. I support many hon. Members' aspirations for it to make a difference in communities of all sorts and all levels of prosperity—perhaps communities that have not seen fit to seek lottery funding in the past. However, the national lottery must not and cannot become an adjunct of Government spending, or an excuse for the Treasury to take a slice off spending that should come through Government Departments and use the national lottery as an alternative route for spending. That must not happen.

I commend all those who work in the national lottery—those who allocate funding, those who raise money, and those who operate the tills in shops in my constituency and elsewhere. It has been a great success and I hope that it continues to be so.

12.25 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Although many have waxed lyrical about the lottery today, my original feelings about it were mixed. Perhaps because I was exposed to too much Methodism in my youth, I have always been rather puritanical about gambling, and when the concept of the national lottery was introduced, I thought it was a classic instance of redistribution of wealth—taking mainly from the poor to make a few people rich, which is not the socialist way.

I remember hearing Prime Minister John Major saying that when he heard about the amount of money involved, it made his fingers itch. That was a poor start for the national lottery, not least because it put me in mind of Fagin's lines in Lionel Bart's splendid musical "Oliver!":

> "When I see someone rich, both my thumbs start to itch."

That was unfortunate because it created expectations, especially in many of the constituencies represented by Labour Members, that could never be met in the short term.

Other problems included the fact that initially a significant proportion of the money spent by the different agencies went to capital projects, and capital projects alone. At the time, I worried that we were creating a vast number of white elephants—that throughout the country there would be lots of wonderful buildings built over five or 10 years that had no decent revenue stream. They would either provide significant problems to local authorities that would have to provide funding assistance, or fall empty to lie fallow within a decade or less.

I am glad that, thanks to the Labour Government, changes have been made to the structure and to the way in which money is spent. A large proportion of the money is now spent on revenue streams, and I shall speak presently about certain issues that need to be resolved in that respect. Furthermore, the lottery has scored some great successes. I confess that my Calvinist and puritanical initial thoughts about gambling were inappropriate—perhaps Mr. Major had it right.

Not least among those successes is an element of socialist redistribution: £4.2 billion of lottery money has gone straight to the Treasury and therefore into more traditional forms of funding public services. There has been some redistribution to the Rhondda. We have had two—although only two—major cash prizes: one person got £182,824, which is more than any house in the Rhondda costs, and a syndicate got £249,105. We can only wish them luck.

Before focusing on specific considerations, I wish to make one general point, which is that when debating the national lottery it is important that we eschew narrow parochialism in any form. Several hon. Members have referred to specific constituency cases, and I, too, will do so, but we must take into account regional centres of excellence, especially in sports and the arts. It would not be right if we spent every penny or expected every penny to be spent purely on redistribution to every constituency. A fair distribution of money will also mean that regional centres will attract specific amounts of money.

Reference has been made to 50 m swimming pools. There is currently no 50 m pool in Wales, although we are building one at Swansea. If we are to see real success in the swimming and diving pool, we will have to make sure that we have more 50 m and high-diving pools. Otherwise, we will not win medals in the future.

There are hon. Members on both sides who are somewhat sceptical about the proposed millennium centre at Cardiff. Some would argue that the valleys in south Wales have not attracted the funding that they should have—especially for the arts—and that yet another building going to Cardiff is inappropriate. My feeling is that many of my constituents would be happy to go to Cardiff to a centre of excellence to see theatre, opera or dance. If that building were not to be built in Cardiff, it is unlikely that those people would have any opportunity to see the best in music, theatre, opera or dance. That is why I wholeheartedly support the millennium new centre that is being built there, while still wanting more money spent in my constituency. *[Laughter.]* Parochialism will triumph in the end.

I mentioned earlier the subject of coalfield communities. In many of the debates to which I have listened since becoming a Member of Parliament, people have stated that there are either rural communities or urban communities. In fact, many of the coalfield communities in this country fall into neither of those categories. They have some of the characteristics of rural communities, in that they are isolated and do not have particularly good transport links. Public transport is often deficient and many people live within 200 yards of a farm; that is certainly true in my constituency. However, they also suffer from all the problems of urban communities, in that they have relatively high levels of unemployment and sickness and poor multiple deprivation indices.

In respect of the lottery, that has produced some particular problems. The emphasis on major capital projects at the start of the lottery meant that many small communities—such as the Rhondda Fawr and the Rhondda Fach, with 15 small, separate communities—were unable to sustain or create a single such project. That means that we have not been able to attract funding.

Similarly, the time limit on revenue funding from the lottery has been difficult for poorer communities. The lottery funding bodies have said, quite legitimately, that it is unlikely that such communities will be able to sustain a large revenue project across several years and that there is a long-term doubt about whether such a project would be sustainable. That has caused problems in many coalfield communities.

Many people are uncertain about whether the lottery and the funding bodies are for areas such as their own. They hear about the Royal Opera house, the national theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and other big projects and ask what relevance they have to themselves. Some organisations feel that they are not the kind that should be making an application.

Many of the forms are still far too complex for some organisations to fill in. I know that all the organisations have made valiant efforts to simplify the processes, but many smaller organisations that do not have full-time staff still find it difficult to go through the processes.

The low limit of £5,000 on grants for the simplified version of the forms is a problem. This means that in many areas such as the coalfield communities organisations have decided to go for grants of £3,000 or £4,000 rather than larger amounts.

Those problems have already been highlighted by the Department in successive reports on coalfield communities. The end result is that, before reforms were introduced a couple of years ago, grants of only £54.62 per capita went to coalfield communities, compared with an average of £100.65 for communities across the UK—only 45 per cent. of the national average went to coalfield communities. The Government have changed some rules, which has led to significant change; now, £35.64 per capita is being given to coalfields, compared with £58.94 across the UK. That is 60 per cent. of the national average, but it is still significantly less than that average.

The position is even worse in certain areas of lottery funding. In the arts, for instance, coalfield communities, before Government reforms, attracted £5.95 per head, while the rest of the UK attracted £20.94. Since the reforms, the grant has been £1.87 in coalfield communities and £7.83 for the rest of the UK, which

[Mr. Chris Bryant]

represents a reverse in arts funding. Twenty-eight per cent. of the national average for arts funding used to be attracted to coalfield funds, but now the figure is only 24 per cent., which shows that there is a significant issue for the Government and lottery bodies to address. How can we get more arts projects to attract lottery funding in coalfield communities?

By contrast, we are doing rather better in sport. Before reform, £7.25 per capita was being given to coalfield communities, which was 47 per cent. of the national average of £15.47. After reform, there was significant improvement, and coalfields received £7.23 per capita, which was 65 per cent. of the national average of £11.04. No coalfield community would expect to get more than the national average; many are straggled-out isolated communities and would not even expect to get up to 95 per cent. of the average. However, we aspire at least to get three quarters or four fifths of the national average.

In the past, national figures have been gathered on all the coalfields in England, Scotland and Wales. My office has tried to do some research into the specific problems of south Wales coalfields. We have worked out that we still receive only 40 per cent. of the national average: we receive a total of £5.7 million, while the national average is £14.1 million. There is still a great deal of work to be done to ensure that the south Wales coalfields in particular attract the funding that they deserve.

It is not all negative; there have been some wonderful awards in the Rhondda. The Blaenllechau community regeneration project in one of the more remote and beautiful parts of the Rhondda recently received £149,000. Valleys Kids has done well, and has attracted several awards. Holy Trinity church in Tylorstown and other churches in the Rhondda have done well from the heritage fund. Indeed, I could not continue without mentioning all the bands in the Rhondda that have received money: the Treherbert silver band, the Parc and Dare band, the Rhondda big band, the Ynyshir welfare band and the Tylorstown band (valleys line). Our bands have done well, which is only appropriate because the best brass band in the country—*[Interruption.]* No, it is an objective fact, as three years in a row we have won all the awards that can be won. Successful bands include the Cory band, once known as the Ton temperance band, but whose full name is now the Buy As You View Cory band.

It is excellent that all those awards have been won in the Rhondda. However, some of the figures compiled by Camelot and other organisations on the Rhondda are inaccurate. They often think that everything that goes to Rhondda Cynon Taff, the local authority, goes to the Rhondda. According to Camelot, £531,000 was granted for an indoor bowls hall. I have toured up and down the Rhondda and I can neither find the hall nor see any prospect of its being built; I do not think that there is a piece of land flat enough to accommodate it. Perhaps it will be located somewhere else in RCT. Similarly, the £500,000 given last year to RCT for sport was spent elsewhere in the area. So the figures for the Rhondda and some other coalfield communities are masked by moneys that are going to other areas.

There is much still to do. In my constituency—let me be thoroughly parochial for a moment—we have a great theatre, the Parc and Dare, which is named after two collieries up in Treorchy. It is a splendid theatre with lovely front-of-house areas, but terrible backstage facilities. We have many amateur theatrical groups—I am seeing "Oliver!" in two weeks' time and the Cambrian male voice choir next Saturday evening—but the backstage facilities are so poor that it is very difficult for the theatre to stage decent productions that attract support from across the whole of the Rhondda.

It is my firm belief that there should be a decent theatre in each of the constituencies in the south Wales valleys and that we should build on what we have in the Parc and Dare. After all, Paul Robeson appeared there many years ago, and it would be a delight to have a decent theatre. To get such a theatre, we need to buy the chapel next door, so it can be converted into decent backstage facilities to ensure that actors, in rehearsals as well as performances, and audiences can have a decent theatrical experience.

Similarly, the Abergorki hall, which is located a little bit further up the road in Ynyswen and is a classic example of a miners' institute, has a very fine facade, while everything behind it is terrible. The people who run the hall have a significant revenue stream from a gym, aikido classes, an arts class and all sorts of different healthy living classes, as well as the Rhondda Civic Society. However, that revenue provides nowhere near enough to convert the building into a decent healthy living centre, and there is terrible difficulty in attracting the initial seedcorn funding to get the feasibility study done on rebuilding while retaining the facade and changing the back. In such areas, where many people are unaware of the processes that must be used to attract funding, it is vital that specific support is provided either by the local authority or the lottery funding bodies to ensure that they can be successful in significant long-term capital bids.

I should like to make one final parochial point about the Rhondda heritage park, which some hon. Members may have visited. It is a museum that is run by the local authority in the old Lewis Merthyr colliery, a fine example of the industrial heritage of mining communities in south Wales. Indeed, even Her Majesty will be visiting it as part of her jubilee tour in June. We look forward to that visit. However, the park currently has a problem. Just as the Government have rightly done in England, the National Assembly for Wales has made entrance to national museums free, but that creates a problem for local authority-run museums that cannot take advantage of the same funding stream. The Rhondda heritage park has 55,500 visitors every year, but it is currently having difficulties because people clearly find it much more attractive to go to Big Pit, which is only a few miles away and is free because it is a national museum, than to come to the heritage centre.

Interestingly, having looked through the figures for Rhondda, I notice that practically no money has yet come from the new opportunities fund. We have a problem in terms of ensuring that the new opportunities fund gets around to spending its money. As far as I can see, only £29,074 has been spent from the fund in the Rhondda. I suspect that that may be replicated in other constituencies in the south Wales coalfields. I hope that the fund will consider specifically what it is doing in former coalfields.

The Arts Council of Wales is doing a good job of not spending its money, as is shown by interesting figures which I have. I accept that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, there must be a cautionary element in how any of the bodies spend their money, as they are never sure quite how much they will receive from the lottery each month. None the less, the figures for last year show that in each month there was a significant gap between the sum that came into the Arts Council of Wales and the sum that went out. In other words, the council has been receiving far more than it has been spending.

The worst case was last October, when the Arts Council of Wales received £2.22 million and spent only £670,000. If that happened in just one month it could be overlooked, but as it has been happening systematically throughout the past year, we need to look into the matter to make sure that we are not being so frugal and troubled about how we give out money that the bodies that could be receiving the money and doing good things with it are not receiving it.

Reference has already been made to the £3.5 billion of reserve that has been accumulated. I welcome the earlier comments of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about trying to make sure that more of that money is spent and that we are not quite so precautionary, but we need to move further.

I have some suggestions which I hope my right hon. Friend the Minister will consider, if not today, then in due course. First, there is a specific need in the south Wales coalfields for a means of ensuring that every organisation that might possibly make a decent application has the tools to do so. I ask Ministers to consider encouraging the lottery funding bodies to provide a single lottery officer to work in the south Wales coalfields with all the bodies—arts, sport, community and heritage—to foster more applications. It is true that a higher percentage of the applications made in the south Wales coalfields is successful than elsewhere in the country, but there are still not enough applications. More should be fostered.

Secondly, I hope that we can encourage the Arts Council of Wales and other organisations to consider making revenue commitments for a longer period. Last year they finally agreed to make revenue commitments for three years, but in poorer communities such as mine we need to consider a five-year programme of funding support. Also, the limit of £5,000 for the simplified system—the fast-track process, as it were—should be increased to £10,000 or £15,000. That would make a significant difference in areas such as mine.

I welcome the announcement yesterday of the 51 areas of special need, but should we not also top-slice part of the money for the poorest areas in Wales?

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) made an excellent point about the importance of lottery outlets in retail premises in ensuring continuing support for local businesses. As I said earlier, I have 15 small communities in my constituency, which makes it difficult to know where to hold my surgeries. It is essential that people have a local shop. There are areas such as Stanleytown, where I live, and Blaenllechau, which are poorly served in that respect. Sometimes, in the smaller communities, the presence of a lottery outlet has made it possible for Spars, post offices and others to remain in business. I hope that Camelot will work hard to make sure that all those communities are well served in the future, and that there are sufficient outlets to maintain local communities.

Perhaps we should follow the example of the Prince's Trust more closely. In the fostering of a new entrepreneurial spirit, especially among young people from poor backgrounds in poor communities, the Prince's Trust has done remarkable work. There is a young man called Jamie Rowland who, I am sure, will not mind my mentioning the Bicycle Doctor shop that he set up in Porth. He has already won an award from the trust in Wales. It was not a large amount of money that made a significant difference to him—I think that [illegible]00 was the original grant, with a loan of £500 to set up [illegible] shop. The significant difference was the hands-on personal support and advice that he received from the trust. Is there a way of the lottery finding the means of providing that support for young people to foster an entrepreneurial spirit?

I have two final points, which are not parochial. The first is the state of theatre in the United Kingdom. One of the problems is that many theatres were built within a short period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many of them were built by Frank Matcham, and many of them are fine and beautiful buildings. They were designed for a particular form of theatre. There is a proscenium arch and a certain form of stage machinery. The theatres were built at a time when those who had money expected not to be sitting in the same area as those who worked for them as servants. There would be separate entrances to the balcony, up into the gods and around the corner. Such theatres would have a dress circle and stalls, as well as bars and so on.

Many of these theatres are wholly inappropriate now for a modern theatre-going audience. In many west end theatres and regional theatres throughout the country, there are cramped conditions for audiences, poor front-of-house facilities and seats that have needed re-upholstering for many years. Back stage, there are conditions in which no one should be expected to work. Actors are working in conditions that often come close to the edge in terms of health and safety.

Before more money is spent on theatres by the lottery and by the Arts Councils of England and Wales, perhaps an audit should be undertaken. Unique for tourists, especially American tourists, is our theatre. American tourists, who spend significantly more than most other tourists on the theatre, expect good theatres. It is not only the play itself that matters, but the entire theatrical experience. The Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport recently visited the Royal Shakespeare theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon. If there is an emblem that is at the heart of British tourism, it is Stratford. I think of it not as an English resource but a British resource.

The theatre is wholly inadequate both back stage and front of house. I know that English Heritage would like to preserve the building; indeed, it is listed. The staircase is even more listed, as it were, than the rest of the building. However, I believe that it should be rased as fast as possible. It is a hideous carbuncle. I know that we have become accustomed to it, rather like a rude aunt who comes every Christmas for lunch, but it is time that we got rid of it and built something appropriate—that is, a theatre that would be able to show the best of British acting talent and the best of Shakespeare and others of his era.

It would be an attraction for American tourists and for my constituents. When I suggested that it was only old fogies who went to Stratford, I received many letters from my constituents telling me that there were not old fogies and that they went to Stratford.

[Mr. Chris Bryant]

As a tiny footnote, it would be nice to see funding arrangements between the Arts Councils of England and Wales to allow the Royal Shakespeare Company to tour in Wales. Every child in Wales studies Shakespeare. It would be good to see the RSC perhaps performing in a reinvigorated Parc and Dare theatre in Treorchy.

We have the Budd report, which looks into gambling and how that affects the lottery. The Select Committee will be producing its own report on the Budd report. Many of us accept that we need to take a more liberal attitude towards gambling, notwithstanding some puritanical instincts that I might have. It is important that we ensure that in the process of liberalising some regulations on gambling, we do not remove the protection that the lottery has. Although it may seem that we shall allow more charities to run lotteries and therefore attract more money for their own organisations, the end result may be that we give less money, not more, to charities and good causes that need support.

12.55 pm

Miss McIntosh: With the leave of the House. I welcome the acknowledgement of the national lottery's achievements and its contribution to national life. It is a lasting legacy of John Major and his Government, as so many hon. Members have said.

The debate has been positive and wide ranging, and many excellent contributions have been made. The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) paid tribute to the work of libraries. I was brought up in the county of Durham, and I join in his congratulations to the city, the county and its gymnasts.

The hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) rightly spoke about the necessity of distinguishing the core spending on education, health and the environment, which should rightly come from the Treasury, not the new opportunities fund, which increasingly funds such projects.

It is always a pleasure to hear from the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) with whom I share a boundary in North Yorkshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) raised the genuine problem of funding school swimming pools, to which Sport England has drawn attention.

It is regrettable that the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) is not in his place. He made a welcome contribution in a wide-ranging speech. It was disappointing that the Secretary of State was not present to hear it because I am sure that she, like the rest of us, would have enjoyed it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on his sterling contribution. It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant); we were sparring partners on the Standing Committee that considered the Office of Communications Bill.

We should stand by the original purpose of the national lottery when it was set up in 1994. We should not substitute but recognise the principle of additionality. The lottery should fund projects and good causes in arts, sports, heritage and charities that are not funded by the Treasury. However, the new opportunities fund increasingly strays into funding health, education and the environment; that should not happen. I would welcome clarification of the difference between underspend and overcommitment. I was pleased that the Secretary of State said that it was good to reduce the time between commitment and payment to projects.

It is important, especially this year, when the Commonwealth games are coming to Manchester, to recognise Sport England's contribution to the City of Manchester stadium. Without the £92 million that it contributed, the stadium would probably not have been built, and perhaps the Commonwealth games would not be held in Manchester. I therefore share Sport England's anxiety about future funding. The pressures on its lottery fund continue to increase, while its annual lottery income has fallen. It stated that any further reduction in its income could have serious implications for English sport.

Many hon. Members have projects in their constituencies that have been turned down. Several village hall projects of essential benefit to a local, rural community have been rejected in my constituency. The emphasis should be on smaller, local projects that benefit communities rather than major national schemes. There should be a better balance between them.

Conservative Members want the lottery to be more responsive to local needs. The lottery application process remains a lottery: it is complex and burdensome and I welcome any Government efforts to simplify it. We believe that where projects primarily involve regeneration, but also involve sport and the arts, they should be covered by the national lottery guidelines.

The Secretary of State touched on two major areas: the new fair share arrangements and her programme for reform and consultation. Like the rest of the House, we welcome both, particularly the contribution that the fair share arrangements will make to the most deprived areas that have benefited least.

I pay tribute to the role of the distributing bodies, notably the community fund, in identifying the areas and pioneering new simplified procedures such as the one-stop lottery shop. All that will make the lottery more user-friendly for people applying for grants. I particularly welcome the fact that £10 million out of the £80 million committed by the community fund will go to help alleviate rural disadvantage.

In announcing her programme of reforms, the Secretary of State said that the Government would introduce deadlines, so that either projects would get under way more quickly or money would be committed further ahead. That is welcome. She also said that the Government would embark on a process for licence renewal.

This may be a good moment to remind the House that before the 1997 general election, Labour promised to select a not-for-profit operator. Curiously, the rules that were drawn up allowed the next operator to make a profit, and on 19 December 2000 Camelot was awarded the licence. Perhaps by consulting and starting the process earlier, as the Secretary of State has suggested, a less confusing procedure, with greater competition, will be in place for the next licence renewal.

We welcome the change in emphasis from capital payments to a focus on revenue funding. The Secretary of State said that distributors had to evaluate carefully the projects for which money would be given, and that a fine line had to be navigated. The Opposition would welcome a clearer commitment to the definition of additionality.

The House has benefited from and welcomes the role played by Members of Parliament in the process, as has been so colourfully displayed today.

When the Minister sums up the debate, there is one fact that he will not be able to escape. I shall not set him a quiz, such as he will remember from Radio 5 Live recently, but I shall ask him to have regard to a number of challenges that we face.

Ticket sales are falling. There is also a threat, as the hon. Member for Rhondda and my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell said, from the gambling review in the Budd report. Another factor has been discussed both at Question Time on Monday and in the press: overcommitment or underspend. I would welcome any clarification that the Government can give.

There is increasingly greater competition among the good causes to be funded, and I regret the drop of £100 million in sports funding. There is a possible oversight involving the provision of training facilities for the key group of young athletes between 16 and 18, and I urge the Minister to close the gap.

I would welcome any contribution that the Government can make to the recognition of pockets of rural deprivation, such as the one that I mentioned earlier, Thirsk. In the otherwise prosperous district of Hambleton, Thirsk and other areas have suffered dramatically from the ongoing farming crisis.

We wait with bated breath for the Minister's reply to the debate. We recognise that not only have the dome, the Wembley complex, Tate Modern, the Manchester stadium and the Manchester aquatic centre benefited from lottery funding, but literally thousands of small projects all over the country have received grants.

It is right to give people more say in how their money—the lottery money—is spent. The Government should aim to encourage lottery distributing bodies to support projects identified and run by local people, for local people. It was precisely for such projects that the lottery was created.

1.4 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): As the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) said, I hope that Members at least acknowledge that the Government put the subject on the Order Paper because we considered the debate important to informing our decisions as we move forward.

I acknowledge that the previous Administration and the previous Prime Minister had the vision to introduce the national lottery in the mid-1990s and I hope that we have been able to refine it to ensure that it achieves its objectives, but it is unfortunate that the shadow Secretary of State has not come to the House to show the importance that the official Opposition attach to what I think is an extremely important debate. Indeed, some remarks made by the hon. Member for Vale of York on their commitment rang a little hollow. The shadow Secretary of State is not here and he has relied on her to open and close the debate.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Where is the Secretary of State?

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Gentleman makes his comment from a sedentary position. Whether he saw the Secretary of State or not, she opened the debate and spent more than an hour in the Chamber. Although she has important business to deal with, I have no doubt that she will return, as we on the Government Benches think the lottery significant. The Opposition's remarks ring a little hollow and we would probably have had a more intelligent debate if they had the same vision as the previous Prime Minister.

Chris Grayling: We on the Conservative Benches perhaps pay less attention to hierarchy and more to specialism, which is why it is entirely appropriate for my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York to be here. There are not many of us in the Chamber, but is the Minister disappointed that there are more Opposition than Government Members present, despite the fact that the Government have more Members of this Parliament than we do?

Mr. Caborn: Yes, but my hon. Friends the Members for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) and for Selby (Mr. Grogan) have given their apologies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps we have dealt adequately with the matter. Will the Minister get on to the substance of his remarks?

Mr. Caborn: Very much so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have no doubt that the theme of the debate is that the Opposition's remarks were not as constructive as they ought to have been. Indeed, they reflect the legacy that the previous Administration left this nation. There is no doubt that the lottery is a national institution that most people think of as good. We all ought to acknowledge that and try to keep the ethos going.

May I make a general reply to points that were made by a number of Members? On sport, changes have been made to the allocation and national distribution of lottery funding. My parliamentary answer of 13 February shows that sport received £302 million in 1997 while the figure for 2002-03 is £202 million—a reduction of a third. However, in 1998, we revised the distributors and introduced the new opportunities fund and the community fund. Both are making major contributions to sport. In fact, over the next two to three years, the school sport initiative will receive £750 million. That is probably three times greater than the annual income that goes to Sport England.

Some £30 million from the new opportunities fund is going to the school sports co-ordinators and a further £25 million is going to space for sport and arts. The football museum will receive £9.3 million from the heritage lottery fund. We are also making a major contribution out of Exchequer expenditure to the school sports co-ordinators through Sport England.

[Mr. Caborn]

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) referred to the millennium stadium in Cardiff, which was given £46 million by the Millennium Commission. Hampden Park in Scotland was given £24.2 million. A total of £884 million has been given to sport as a result of the changes in distribution made in 1998, so the contribution to sport has not been reduced by a third, as the Opposition claim. On the contrary, it has increased.

Miss McIntosh: How would the right hon. Gentleman respond to Sport England's criticism that ticket sales are falling? The hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) said that in many countries the lottery got off to a cracking start but then imploded and had no sense of permanence. Sport England has said that it regrets any further cuts. Will the Minister respond to the lack of facilities for 16 to 18-year-olds, who are the next generation? We want them to do just as well as the winter Olympics athletes have done this year.

Mr. Caborn: I was going to deal later with falling ticket sales, but as the hon. Lady has raised the matter I shall deal with it now. It is unfortunate that a fall occurred as a result of the licensing round. Camelot has been experiencing difficulties for nearly two years. I shall not go into all the details of that, because they have been extremely well rehearsed, but there was a considerable decline in participation in the lottery and no fresh ideas were being developed. However, lottery ticket sales are now levelling out. The latest figures that I saw were for January, and they were beginning to increase.

I know that Camelot is putting a lot of effort into relaunching the lottery later this year, and I hope that we can now put the licensing round behind us. The new licensing review is all about learning from that. I hope that, with the help of Camelot and cross-party support, we can now support the lottery in a way that will encourage an increase in ticket sales. The past couple of years have been extremely difficult and the consequence has been a decline in participation, and a subsequent decline in income to good causes. That has now been stemmed and, although one swallow does not make a summer, the January figures have increased.

On investment in sport, I reiterate that more money is going into sport via the lottery, through the NOF, the community fund and Sport England. I understand Sport England's concern that the £750 million from the NOF should have gone through the offices of Sport England rather than through local education authorities. Nevertheless, that is the decision that was made. I know that the new chief executive of Sport England is working closely with the NOF and I hope that that working relationship will be strengthened and that sport will gain from that.

It would be wrong to see these matters in isolation, because a major investment is being made in sport, not only through the lottery but through the education structure—sports colleges, school sports co-ordinators, whom I mentioned earlier, and the links with primary schools. We are dealing with the group of young people whom the hon. Member for Vale of York rightly mentioned—the 16 to 18-year-olds, among whom there is a massive fall-off in participation in sport—not by providing a short-term fix, but by making the structures sustainable. We are doing that not just with lottery money but with general education money, encouraging local clubs to work with their local communities. It is important that we do not regard lottery money as standing in isolation from other sources of funding, whether for sports, the arts or anything else.

Earlier this week when I visited Canterbury I saw the very first sports hall that had been built with private finance initiative and sports lottery money. That is to be encouraged, because it serves the education structure and the community. A sports college has been funded directly out of taxation, which enhances the investment that has been made by Sport England.

I want to put on the record the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is again present. The development that she referred to in her persuasive and perceptive opening remarks showed that we want to move the lottery on from where it is now. We want to ensure that the review that she announced produces a sensible debate on how we can make the lottery more effective.

Hon. Members argue that the lottery has been politicised, but they should consider the dome, which was one of the great fixes of previous Administrations, and compare that with the question of coalfield communities raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda. The Deputy Prime Minister made no bones about it. He believes that we need to do something for coalfield communities, and to use lottery funds to do so. I do not think that the vast majority of British people have any objections to that. They believe that it is right to do that. Hon. Members may argue that that was a political decision, as was the direction from a Prime Minister that there was a weakness in our sport infrastructure so our new opportunities fund should direct £0.75 billion into sports facilities in our schools. I do not believe that many people in this country would disagree with that. Government's are elected to effect policy, and in the broad context of developing policy Governments have a right to tell distributors how we believe the policies that we have been elected on should be implemented.

Chris Grayling: The concern that I raised was that the announcement of the money for sport in schools was used as a policy announcement at a Labour party conference. My concern is that the more individual allocations of funds from the national lottery become used for specific party political policy announcements, the more they will become an adjunct of Government, and the national lottery's independence from Government will be compromised.

Mr. Caborn: I do not remember where the dome was announced, but I shall find out. The Wembley stadium project was also initiated by a previous Administration. I shall look back at some of the speeches made at Tory party conferences when it was in power. It would be wrong for the impression to be given that we are not investing in sport.

I made the point that the fair shares scheme is yet another refinement of the lottery to meet the needs of the nation. As my right hon. Friend said, it is not the last, and we shall continue to keep the lottery under review. That is important, because we want a sensible debate on how to take it forward.

On the national balances, the commitment by distributors totalled £3.82 billion at the end of December 2001. That was £290 million more than was in their balances, so if everyone drew down on those funds immediately, they would be left with a deficit of £290 million. The corresponding figures for the end of September 2001 were £3.6 billion and an over-commitment of £159 million, which shows that they were committing more funds, not fewer. If everyone drew down on those funds, they would be over-committed. As that commitment is over a period of time, we need to revisit the subject of how those balances are used. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that very clearly this morning, and has said the same to all the distributors. I shall meet each of them during the coming months to ensure that they do what has been suggested. We want the balances to be reduced by about 50 per cent., and we think that that can be done in the next couple of years. We are committed to a better use of resources, as are the funding bodies. We also think that some of the money could be distributed more effectively.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda spoke of simplifying application processes. That could indeed make the lottery more efficient, and distributors are currently simplifying the system of applications for smaller grants. The heritage lottery fund, for instance, introduced a simple application form for capital grants of less than £50,000, which came into force in April 2001. The community fund has launched a new grant programme relating to awards of between £500 and £60,000, based on the awards for all programme. There is a short, simple application form and a quick turnaround time. I have told the new opportunities fund that I want some fast-tracking in the distribution of the £750 million for school sport: I want things to start happening by the summer.

We shall continue to engage in constructive dialogue with distributors. We shall ensure that they are diligent and that public funds are protected, but we shall also ensure that there is not too much bureaucracy, and that the smaller organisations mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda move more quickly.

My hon. Friend also mentioned coalfields. I understand the problems. I am glad that my hon. Friend acknowledged—as has the coalfield communities campaign—that we have made significant progress since 1998, but structural weaknesses still exist. As my hon. Friend knows, at a conference late last year we discussed with the coalfield communities how the applications system could be made simpler and more effective. Some local authorities have received money to enable them to help organisations in coalfield areas to make their applications. We will keep the situation under constant review, and hope to see improvements. I was not aware of the figures relating to the arts that my hon. Friend mentioned, but the matter should be given more consideration.

I have expressed our concerns about the last licensing round. Camelot—to which, like others, I pay tribute for the efficient way in which it deals with the lottery—embarked on a new seven-year licence in January. I hope that our review will consider how that could have been handled more effectively. Certainly it could not have been handled any worse.

At the time of the Budd report in 1997, the lottery had already been subjected to one review, and people did not think it very logical for another to take place. Time will tell whether they were right or wrong, but I think our licensing review is important in the context of Budd. A number of the report's 176 recommendations could affect the lottery, and we must consider them carefully. As I think we have all agreed, the lottery is almost a national institution, and is recognised as such. We must think carefully before making changes that might affect that status. The Government are close to reaching a conclusion on the three-month review by Budd. I hope that soon we will be able to announce to the House our reflections on it and the many submissions that were made during the consultation period.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) mentioned a constituent who had problems with the allocation of money for the millennium dome. As I understand it, the additional £179 million did not come from lottery money but from the Millennium Commission. I think that the allegation was that it slowed down or detracted from the allocation of other lottery funds. As I do not want to mislead the House or the hon. Gentleman's constituent, I will get my officials to look into the matter and write to him to clear up the problem once and for all. I do not have the information that I need to make a definitive statement on it now.

The contribution by the hon. Member for Vale of York was not as constructive as I would have expected it to be. Perhaps it was written by central office, because all Friday speeches seem to be. She gave some interesting statistics. We may not believe that MORI polls are always right, but the poll in question was carried out on behalf of several organisations. It asked people to identify two or three of the most important recipients of lottery funding out of a list of 10. Some 69 per cent. of respondents identified health, 55 per cent. identified education and 26 per cent. identified the environment as causes on which lottery money should be spent. Obviously we would have to look at the survey in more depth to understand why people think that. However, it is interesting that people outside the House in the real world think that health, education and the environment can gain from lottery involvement.

Miss McIntosh: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the National Council for Voluntary Organisations conducted another survey that vindicates the Conservatives' view that lottery distribution bodies should operate free from Government interference and that the Treasury should pay for health, education and the environment? Only one in eight thought that they should be paid for by the new opportunities fund.

Mr. Caborn: We can bandy figures around because there is room for debate. All I am citing is the MORI poll—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) can laugh, but it does no justice to our discussion. The vast majority of hon. Members have made a constructive contribution.

The MORI poll, which was conducted on behalf of two major organisations, set out health, education and the environment as priorities. There has been a positive response to the money for coalfield communities, the new opportunities fund as it relates to schools and for school sports co-ordinators. I have seen projects throughout the

[Mr. Caborn]

country that have received investment as part of a major investment strategy by Sport England and know that they have been welcomed across the board. We could make party political capital out of that, but I do not think that it would do any good.

The argument about lottery money for Wembley stadium has been well rehearsed over the years. We hope that progress will be made on it. My right hon. Friend laid down clear criteria against which the decision will be made and we are awaiting the response of the Football Association.

I think that I have dealt with most of the points that were raised. The hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) asked about a swimming complex in her constituency. I do not have the relevant details, but I have asked my officials to look into the matter and I shall write to her when I have that information.

This has been an extremely interesting debate, which Labour Members have approached constructively. We believe that the fair shares announcement was necessary and is a move in the right direction. It is part of the process of modernising the lottery and ensuring that it delivers what people want it to deliver. That process is not set in tablets of stone, and it needs to move on from time to time. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has set out a programme of consultation that includes the potential for change, and through it we want to take people with us in partnership.

It is totally untrue to say that we have politicised the new opportunities fund or any other aspect of the lottery. The Opposition never say how they would deal with funding demands if they came to power in the next 20 or 30 years. They have already committed themselves to reducing public expenditure to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product, which, in reality, would entail a cut of £60 billion. However, they cannot tell us what they would do with the new opportunities fund. All that they do is whinge and carp and make grandiose statements about cutting £60 billion from public expenditure—should they ever be returned to power. Would they politicise the new opportunities fund? I leave the British people to make their judgment.

Angela Smith (Basildon): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Chest Disease

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

1.32 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): May I say what a pleasure it is to speak on a health issue for once?

The lack of treatment of respiratory diseases, which I shall also refer to as chest diseases, concerns me greatly. The British Thoracic Society ran a display in the Upper Lobby of the House—I hope that at least some hon. Members saw it—to try to highlight the issue of respiratory diseases. Such diseases kill one in four people in the UK and impose a huge burden on health and the economy. As heart disease cases have decreased, the burden of chest disease has actually increased. In 1999, 150,000 people died from respiratory diseases, 139,000 died from coronary heart disease, and 119,000 died from cancer, excluding lung cancer. In other words, respiratory diseases are the biggest cause of death in the United Kingdom.

Some 43 per cent. of those deaths are due to some form of pneumonia; 23 per cent. to cancer of the lung, nasal cavities, larynx or pleura; 20 per cent. to chronic obstructive lung diseases such as emphysema; and 16 per cent. to rarer diseases such as tuberculosis, cystic fibrosis, acute infection, pneumoconiosis and—believe it or not—choking. Having said that, TB is on the increase again, and choking is a quite common cause of death.

One in five deaths from cancer—one in five—are caused by lung cancer. It is not widely known among the general population that more women die of lung cancer than of breast cancer. Before I leave the subject of lung cancer—many of the issues that I am raising deserve a debate of their own—I understand that my noble Friend Lord Clement-Jones has got through the other place his Bill to ban tobacco advertising, which fell in the last Parliament. Will the Minister tell us what the situation is in respect of that Bill and when, after five years of Labour Government, we will see a ban on the advertising of tobacco, which greatly contributes to deaths from lung cancer?

Death rates from respiratory disease have fallen by a third since 1968, and over the same period deaths from coronary heart disease have fallen by 53 per cent. That is very welcome, but since 1984 the number of deaths from respiratory disease has stayed constant, while deaths from coronary heart disease have fallen by another third, which suggests that we are not doing enough to tackle respiratory disease. I am sorry to give the House even more statistics but it is important to get them on the record. Deaths from occupational lung diseases such as mesothelioma, the asbestos-related disease, have risen, with a 75 per cent. increase between 1988 and 1998. That is another disease that needs a debate all of its own because it is a huge issue.

I recently asked a parliamentary question to find out the cost to the health service of treating respiratory disease, and I received the response that the Department did not have precise details of the cost, but

"it estimated that respiratory disease accounted for approximately 6 per cent. of hospital expenditure, 13 per cent. of primary care expenditure and 12 per cent. of pharmaceutical expenditure."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 426W.]

The British Thoracic Society has given a figure of £2.576 billion of expenditure in 2000. I do not know what that figure represents as a proportion, but it sounds as if it is rather higher than the percentage given in the response to my parliamentary question. Perhaps the Minister can clarify that.

There are clear socio-economic factors affecting respiratory disease. Men between the ages of 20 and 64 in unskilled manual jobs are much more likely to die from obstructive respiratory disease such as emphysema or tuberculosis, and there are other marked class differentials. They are 40 times more likely than professional people to die from emphysema or chronic bronchitis and nine times more likely to die from tuberculosis. That has implications for our policy on housing and the alleviation of poverty. In the 1990s, 29,000 working years were lost due to respiratory disease in those doing unskilled and manual labour. I find it difficult to get my head around such statistics, but they sound very impressive.

I am also very worried by the rise in the number of cases of pulmonary tuberculosis. There was a 22 per cent. increase in the 1990s, which is horrendous when one considers that when I was a junior hospital doctor we thought the disease was dying out. It was also very disturbing to find out a couple of years ago that we had run out of vaccine. As the House probably knows, that became a saga because only one manufacturer made TB vaccine and it has taken some time to put the situation right. There are questions to be asked about that, including whether all those who should be vaccinated against TB have indeed received the vaccine. I am particularly concerned about 11 to 14-year-old schoolchildren, many of whom must have missed out when no vaccine was available.

World comparisons of respiratory disease rates reveal that the UK has twice as many cases as the European average. Only Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ireland have higher death rates from respiratory disease rates than the UK. That is according to the British Thoracic Society. I find those statistics very depressing.

Another debate could be had on asthma in children. I will not go into great detail, but I am sure that everyone either has someone with asthma in their family, or has a close friend or relative who has a child with asthma. It is a serious problem in this country today. It is thought to be because of traffic fume pollution, but whatever its cause, asthma is the biggest cause of childhood illness.

I could go on quoting statistics damning our neglect of respiratory disease. The extent of the burden of lung disease is largely unrecognised and we need a huge investment in services. The introduction of national service frameworks—NSFs—for other diseases and making health authorities and trusts target other diseases, such as cancer and coronary heart disease, might sound good, exciting and right, but the result is that trusts and health authorities tend to neglect less glamorous diseases that are not the subject of Government targets.

I object to the notion that we are targeting cancer—what does that mean? Cancer varies from a serious or catastrophic illness that kills within weeks or months, to a mild, easily treated illness. What do Ministers mean when they say that they are targeting cancer? Does it not mean that other diseases are excluded from the spotlight? I suspect that that has happened to respiratory diseases. Someone with boring old emphysema has little chance of being targeted by anyone, even in the absence of a ban on tobacco advertising.

My local hospital has 1.2 whole-time equivalent—I love that sort of statistic—and excellent consultant physicians to deal with respiratory disease, but the population served by that hospital numbers 330,000. According to the Royal College of Physicians, the British Thoracic Society and the British Medical Association, we should have one specialist per 80,000 people. My local area should have four consultant chest physicians, not 1.2, however excellent the 1.2 are. On 22 January, I tabled a parliamentary question asking the Secretary of State

> "what recent discussions he has had with the BMA or the British Thoracic Society concerning the number of respiratory specialists needed in the NHS."

The answer was:

> "We have not had any recent discussions"—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 766W.]

with either organisation about that subject. Apparently, it is not a big issue in the Department of Health.

My area also has insufficient respiratory nurse specialists to cope, especially in view of the large number of children with asthma; and for 15 per cent. of the year, because of holidays and study leave, we have no chest physicians practising in the area. The majority of patients with chest diseases are not seen by a specialist; they are dealt with by people who have other expertise. Waiting lists for respiratory function tests are increasing, and a significant proportion of lung cancer patients—one of the targeted diseases—are not seen within the two-week national target period because of the lack of consultant manpower. There is no specified acute lung unit or respiratory specialist cover for patients in the intensive care unit.

My constituents and those in other constituencies around our local hospital are extremely badly served in respect of respiratory disease. The only way to improve matters is to get more doctors and nurse specialists. I fully understand why we do not have enough specialists, but we cannot debate the subject without saying what a disgrace and a scandal it was that the previous Government allowed the number of doctors in training—and nurses as well—to fall to such an extent. I could introduce hon. Members to young people in my constituency who have the right A-levels to go to medical school but who could not get a place anywhere because so many medical school places had been cut. That was one of the great national scandals of the last 20 years.

Please will the Minister find us some chest physicians from somewhere, just as the Government are finding surgeons to do joint replacements? Perhaps other countries would oblige and send surgeons here and save our people from the biggest killer in the UK today, respiratory disease. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

1.45 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I commend the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on securing this Adjournment debate. I welcome the debate, and her obvious expertise. As she rightly says, it is always a pleasure to talk about health issues. The debate gives the Government an opportunity to state clearly our policy on the treatment of respiratory

[Jacqui Smith]

diseases by the NHS, to emphasise the importance we give to them and to share with the hon. Lady and others our prevention strategy and the steps that we are taking to improve services for patients with respiratory disease. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is meeting with the British Thoracic Society and the British Lung Foundation soon to discuss this important issue.

The range of respiratory diseases that people can suffer from is very wide, and it would be impossible for me to talk about what the Government are doing in respect of them all in such a short debate, although it is slightly longer than we had presumed. I will concentrate in the time available on a few of the major conditions such as lung cancer, asthma, pneumonia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. I shall also refer to tuberculosis, which the hon. Lady mentioned.

The hon. Lady suggested—I think wrongly—that the Government's concentration on specific clinical areas had led in some way to a downgrading of the importance of respiratory disease. It is important to spell out that existing programmes have supported action on chest disease. The existing programmes for action on coronary heart disease will lead to improvements in the treatment of respiratory disease, because one of the key risk factors for coronary heart disease is cigarette smoking. It is the key cause of fatal lung diseases, such as lung cancer and chronic bronchitis, and increases the risk of pneumonia. I will refer more to smoking later.

Furthermore, many respiratory conditions are more prevalent in older people. The work being undertaken on the implementation of the national service framework for older people—addressing ageism, the development of a single assessment process and improved access to specialist care in hospitals—will produce improvements in access, prevention, treatment and services for all older people.

The hon. Lady highlighted lung cancer, which is the second most common cancer in England. In April 2001, the Government launched phase 2 of the cancer services collaborative programme, which is already producing some good examples of demonstrable reductions in waiting times for lung cancer treatment. Clearly, we would expect to see significant further progress.

An additional £10 million has been made available each year from 1999 to develop lung cancer services and is being used to help improve access to those services, to enhance the quality of treatment and to bring down waiting times for treatment for lung cancer.

We have asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to prepare clinical guidelines on the diagnosis and treatment of lung cancer to supplement the existing service guidance published by the Department of Health in 1998. It is likely that those guidelines will be published in autumn 2003. NICE, in June 2001, published appraisals of the various new generation chemotherapy drugs for lung cancer. We estimate that up to 5,000 patients will benefit from having those drugs available.

The hon. Lady spoke about pneumonia. Many deaths, including deaths from pneumonia, can be prevented by influenza immunisation, which is why the chief medical officer launched the flu vaccination campaign. We are pleased that take-up improved again this year, with 68 per cent. of older people getting vaccinated, compared with 65 per cent. last year. If everyone aged 65 years or over was immunised against influenza, an estimated 5,000 additional lives could be saved. Ninety-five per cent. of all pneumonia deaths, about 25,000 in total, occur in people who are over 65. The incidence of pneumonia increases with age as the immune system becomes less effective and the risk of chronic disease increases. At least 1 per cent. of people aged 65 years and over develop pneumonia each year, and many of them require admission to hospital. Older people who are at a high risk of chest disease are therefore offered immunisation against pneumococcal infection.

Eighty per cent. of patients with community-acquired pneumonia are managed by general practitioners, but most of the NHS costs of pneumonia treatment, amounting to more than £400 million a year, are associated with hospital admission. Prompt treatment in the community could reduce NHS costs and patient morbidity by reducing both the need for hospital admission and the length of hospital stay. Government investment and action in increasing capacity for treatment and the extent to which community and primary care can deal with those diseases is therefore crucial.

Dr. Tonge: I appreciate what the Minister has said about pneumonia, particularly in elderly people. In fact, in the old days it used to be called the old man's friend; it is often a terminal event in many illnesses. However, I must take the Minister up on her claim that the Government have been concentrating on funding primary care trusts and bodies outside hospitals to keep elderly people out of hospital. I do not want to go into the problem of bed blocking and the loss of nursing home places in this debate, but the Department may not appreciate that there is simply not enough community care for elderly people or anybody else. There are just not the bodies, spaces, beds or homes, to care for those people.

Jacqui Smith: That is why our action supporting social services and our success in cutting delayed discharges are important. The development of intermediate care services, particularly services which can respond quickly to the needs of older people with respiratory diseases who remain in their homes, will lead to further progress in ensuring that we catch some of those infections earlier and prevent hospital admission. In that way, we can improve the way in which the whole system works and, most importantly, improve older people's experience of care. Many local authorities and health authorities are using the increased investment that the Government are making available for intermediate care for precisely that sort of rapid response and care in people's homes.

Dr. Tonge: I feel passionately about this. Having been in health service management and administration myself, I know that one can often think that things are happening on the ground when they are not. I assure the Minister that there is not much evidence to suggest that such improvements are happening there. As she is suggesting that intermediate care is progressing and that a lot of facilities are being opened up, will she and her

Department consider writing to me—I do not expect her to tell me now—giving examples of just where that is happening, so that I can go and see it?

Jacqui Smith: I would be very happy to do so. I have visited such places and I am willing to write to the hon. Lady about the progress that we are making in delivering on our pledges in relation to intermediate care.

The hon. Lady also referred to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. As she pointed out, such disease leads to approximately 20,000 deaths each year. It also causes about 90 per cent. of respiratory disability. Expert groups working internationally have developed clinical guidelines for the treatment of COPD, which is shared between general practitioners and hospital doctors. Increasingly, COPD is being managed like other chronic diseases, with skilled teams offering lifelong care and often pulmonary rehabilitation to improve very significantly the quality of life of people with the disease. We have also asked NICE to prepare clinical guidelines for the NHS in England and Wales on the prevention, diagnosis, management and treatment of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Development work is currently under way on those guidelines.

As the hon. Lady pointed out, and as I said earlier, smoking is the cause of many serious respiratory diseases. It is the major cause of lung cancer and COPD and almost doubles the risk of pneumonia. That is why our anti-smoking initiatives are so important. Reducing the burden of avoidable disease will be good for the patient, good for the NHS and good for the nation. I am pleased to say that the United Kingdom is now a world leader in smoking cessation.

In the four years to 2003, we have allocated £73 million to the NHS to provide a national NHS smoking cessation service. Excellent results are already being achieved. The results for the first full year of the service, from April 2000 to March 2001, showed that about 132,500 people had set a quit date, with some 64,600 people successfully having quit at the four-week follow-up stage. We have also made smoking cessation aids available on NHS prescription. Zyban was made available in June 2000 and nicotine replacement therapy was made available in April 2001. Substantial resources have been made available to the NHS for this purpose. In addition, almost all NRT products are now available on general retail sale.

Dr. Tonge: The Minister is being very generous in giving way; these opportunities are very useful. What progress is being made with young women and smoking, which is a matter of great concern?

Jacqui Smith: I was just coming to that bit of my speech, although I am certainly willing to add to my letter on intermediate care some more details about progress with young women and smoking. An important element of the overall tobacco strategy is the health education programme, to which some £55 million has been allocated in the period 1999–2000 to 2002–03. The programme involves a mass media advertising campaign that is designed to address the 25-to-45 age group and the development of separate approaches in relation to pregnant women.

We want not only to prevent young women from smoking by carrying out education at an early stage, but to recognise that it is often when women become pregnant that they recognise the importance of taking action on their smoking. There are separate approaches for ethnic minorities, and all these programmes are supported by free telephone helplines offering confidential advice and, where appropriate, referral to local services. I hope that the hon. Lady will agree that those are positive measures that will, in time, help to reduce the dreadful burden of death and disease caused by smoking.

The hon. Lady pointed out that the private Member's Bill on banning tobacco advertising has been discussed today on Third Reading in another place. The Bill has been supported by Ministers in the other place. The Government are committed to legislating on tobacco advertising during the current Parliament, but of course the fate of legislation that originates in the other House is not for me to decide. Progress will depend on the House authorities and the extent to which parliamentary time is available. It remains an objective of the Government to legislate on tobacco advertising and as I have demonstrated, we have taken significant action to reduce smoking because of its considerable contribution to ill health.

The hon. Lady mentioned asthma. Although asthma prevalence has increased in England, as in western Europe, asthma deaths are falling, almost certainly as a result of better management. I was a little disappointed with the hon. Lady. I know that she was calling for both increased investment and increased emphasis on respiratory diseases, but I do not support the view that she seemed to be advancing at various times that everything in the health service relating to chest diseases is poor or substandard.

Much excellent work is clearly being done in our health service on a wide range of chest diseases by extremely dedicated staff, which will be supported further by the extra investment and reform that the Government are putting in place. Asthma is one area in which better management has been important in reducing deaths.

We are aware that the treatment of asthma can be improved. Our report into the expert patient provided evidence that self-management in asthma could reduce the number of attacks and improve lung function. Professionals can also help people manage their asthma attacks through written plans on managing their asthma and regular reviews.

The hon. Lady raised the important subject of the work force. We recognise that treatment of respiratory disease is a high-priority specialised area. In 1997 there were 109 specialist registrars in respiratory medicine. That figure has increased year on year and by 2001 had reached 257, which represents a significant increase. In 1997 there were 104 specialist registrars in cardiothoracic surgery. By 2001 that figure had risen to 199, an increase approaching 100 per cent. Our projections show that from a September 2000 baseline of 198, numbers should increase to 223 by September 2004.

I agree with the hon. Lady that the previous Government left us a considerable challenge to increase work force numbers. We will continually review future work force needs as part of our national work force planning processes and take action to address any shortfalls. In the longer term, our current supply

[Jacqui Smith]

projections expect a further increase of around 70 trained specialists to be available to take up surgical consultant posts by 2009-10. That reflects the increase in the numbers of doctors in higher specialist training in surgery as a result of the NHS plan and action taken by the Government.

The hon. Lady highlighted the issue of tuberculosis. There is, regrettably, an international resurgence of the disease. We need to be aware of that and take appropriate action. We recently announced plans for a new national infection control and health protection agency to streamline the services involved in the prevention and control of infectious diseases. The new agency will provide an integrated approach to all aspects of health protection, as well as infectious disease control. That will have an impact on infectious chest diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza.

The hon. Lady is right in her assertion that poverty is an important contributory factor in many respiratory diseases. As with many areas of policy, the significant actions taken across government to tackle poverty—for example, significant extra investment in our housing stock, which I have seen in my constituency—will be important contributors.

I hope that the hon. Lady will accept, if not agree with me, that the Government take the treatment of chest disease extremely seriously. We are investing considerable sums into improving lung cancer services. Our expenditure on anti-smoking initiatives will have an impact on the diseases caused by smoking. We are supporting, through the Medical Research Council, research into a wide range of respiratory diseases. We are asking NICE to develop guidelines for lung cancer and COPD. We are taking steps to increase the number of consultants who are available to treat people with lung disease, and we have recently launched a new strategy for dealing with infectious diseases.

I am pleased that we have had the opportunity to address the issue, not least because it enables us to show that the Government take the matter extremely seriously. Along with other initiatives, increased investment in the health service, and reform, have delivered, and will continue to deliver, important results.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 12 February 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

9.30 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): When I applied for the debate, I wrote on the paper "antisocial behaviour" without the "orders". I do not know whether those in your office, Mr. Deputy Speaker, decided that it was too close to the bone for a member of the Opposition Whips Office to speak about antisocial behaviour, but they decided to qualify the title by adding "orders", which is probably what I should have done in the first place. I am grateful to those who ensured that my debate was in order.

Every day, constituents telephone us in a desperate state to tell us about the antisocial behaviour that they, their neighbours or friends are experiencing. Antisocial behaviour affects us all in many ways. The term "antisocial behaviour" covers a multitude of sins, from underage drinking to quite serious offences—not that underage drinking is not a serious offence: I shall show how serious it is later. We do not always come across typical antisocial behaviour.

I cite two different examples from West Drayton, a small area of my constituency. One is a more typical example, to which we are more used. There is a park in an area called "The Closes", which various residential areas surround. Youths who frequent that park have caused a lot of misery by committing a variety of offences, including driving cars on to the park and setting fire to them, sniffing lighter fuel, being abusive to people walking past and generally creating an unpleasant atmosphere for all concerned. Those offences are associated with problem families, which is an issue to which I shall return.

The other example concerns something that occurs only a mile and half away and is caused by a slightly older age group. Bikers have discovered a good piece of road on which to race—the Stockley bypass. They are not local, but come from far and wide. They are not from a deprived background, as they have expensive machines. The season is about to start as the evenings are getting longer and the weather is becoming more clement. Throughout the week, but especially at weekends, they make the neighbours' lives hell by racing and revving up their engines through the night. That has led to another problem. Local kids come out to watch and decide to do their own thing later, with cars that they have probably taken without the owners' consent. It has become such a spectator sport that a burger van attends. Although the police and the local authority have tried to deal with all these offences, they have not had as much success as local residents would like, and demand.

I mentioned that second example because, if we are not careful, we may fabricate a stereotype of antisocial behaviour being committed in certain areas. Deprivation certainly has an effect, but antisocial behaviour is also a result of problems in families, which is an important factor.

The male age group that is most likely to commit crime is 18 to 20, followed by 15 to 17 and 12 to 14. The statistics are slightly different for females. The female age group most likely to commit crime is 15 to 17, followed by 18 to 20 and 12 to 14. It is generally agreed that once a child has committed his first offence, the barrier against crime is breached, the behaviour seems to become more acceptable to the child, and he is more likely to slip into a pattern of reoffending. That is frightening. It is most disturbing for us to find children as young as eight, or even younger, committing minor offences. We all have a suspicion, based on our everyday experience, that if the offending is not dealt with appropriately it will simply continue. The cost of juvenile delinquency to society and our communities is huge. It is also having a severe effect on us financially.

As a result of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Government introduced antisocial behaviour orders on 1 April 1999, with good intentions. I have a range of statistics to hand, but I fight shy of presenting them, as we are probably well enough aware of them. The orders have been criticised as being too bureaucratic and complex. They require the police to hold case conferences and consultations, and to collect a huge body of evidence before applying for an order.

Although the antisocial behaviour orders were intended to be cheap, quick and easy to obtain, the reality has become the reverse. That is why so few orders have been issued. There is also the issue of cost. I have seen estimates of more than £100,000 for obtaining just one order. The orders appear to have been ineffective and not what the Government had hoped.

On 2 July 2001, my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) said:

> "Three years ago, when considering the proposals in Committee, I warned the Government that antisocial behaviour orders would be unworkable and over-bureaucratic. Ministers responded that more than 5,000 would probably be made every year."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 8.]

The truth is a long way off that number.

I have picked up several suggestions from residents and the police, and it is fair to point out that eviction orders are not always seen as the answer. In July 2000, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said that serving eviction orders against families for antisocial behaviour was failing to address the real issue and the underlying causes of problems such as mental illness, or drug or alcohol addiction. Many families that are evicted from council housing often end up in the private sector, perhaps only streets away. People who are suffering from that antisocial behaviour would say, "I don't care where they go as long as they are not round here," and I understand their sentiments, but we in Parliament must consider where those people can go and how we can rectify their behaviour. In my limited experience of four or five years in the House but also as a lifelong resident in that area, it seems to me that the problem is increasing. It gives rise to much worry and anger among the public.

In December 2001 a White Paper dealing with the issue was published, to which I am sure that the Minister will refer. I welcome some of its proposals.

[Mr. John Randall]

It acknowledged that take-up of the orders in many areas was limited because they were perceived as expensive, labour-intensive, slow, ineffective and litigious. The Home Office plans to streamline the procedures. The proposed interim order to enable immediate action to be taken prior to the full process would help. It would also help to have an order that travels with the person on whom it is served so that, if he moves, the order goes with him. There is certainly a case for extending the scope of the orders by allowing registered social landlords and the British Transport police to apply. Some people criticise the idea of social landlords' having that power but, because antisocial behaviour covers such a wide variety of crime, it is difficult to resolve in all cases.

As we would all agree, prevention is better than cure. There are two angles to the issue of prevention. The first is to try to sort out the causes of the problem in terms of the social issues—dysfunctional families, mental illnesses and so on—about which we have heard. However, I hear constantly about the other side: that many people would probably be deterred by a stronger police presence on the streets. I mean by that community police officers, perhaps still on bicycles—I do not know whether the police would back me on that, but there is a demand for it. Policing works well where police officers are local and know the area.

We await the results of the trial of acceptable behaviour contracts, which I mentioned earlier. If it is successful, I hope that it will be taken up. When I have been out and about with the police on patrol, looking at how to curb underage antisocial behaviour, I have been struck by the lack of respect shown by youngsters to the police and authority. I am deeply concerned about the proposal in the new Police Reform Bill about auxiliaries because if those young people have no respect for the police, they will have even less for auxiliaries. Believing that it will be effective merely to issue tickets, as it were, is living in cloud cuckoo land. However, we must tackle the issue and I will support anything that will be a genuine aid in doing so because it causes so much misery to so many people.

9.44 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I am most grateful for the opportunity to raise an issue that is important throughout my constituency. I know from the letters and telephone calls that I receive, from the people who come to my surgery and from my visits to residents associations that the issues of whether people feel safe in their communities and of what can be done to deal with crime and the fear of crime are virtually top of the list of issues that people want to raise. Surveys conducted by Stoke-on-Trent city council confirm those concerns. I wish to participate briefly in the debate to convey the fact that much is being done and that we are determined to tackle antisocial behaviour. We look to the Government for greater resources and more backing to ensure that, where there is resolute determination to deal with antisocial behaviour, the means exist to do so.

I wish to outline some of the problems that we have had with antisocial behaviour orders. We are fortunate in Stoke-on-Trent city council in having an antisocial behaviour officer who links closely with the community safety partnership and local housing departments across the city. Concerns about antisocial behaviour are fed quickly into the city council and action is taken. However, there is a feeling that antisocial behaviour orders are bureaucratic, too slow and take up resources. As the Government have said, now is the time to consider how they can be modified so that people can have confidence that the issues that they raise will be dealt with speedily.

In a case in my constituency involving a prostitute, it took one police officer and one police sergeant six weeks each to gather the information to take the case to court; 27 written statements were needed. As a result of those delays, the police officers gathering the evidence eventually had to go back to each of the 27 witnesses. The process is very time-consuming and bureaucratic. We must be aware of human rights, but we also need to streamline and fast-track the procedure. It is vital for those who complain about antisocial behaviour to have faith in the authorities to deliver. Such delays in getting results through the court can undermine people's faith in the authorities and their belief in civil society, at a time when we should be fostering that. I should be interested to hear what the Minister says in her winding-up speech about how we can modify the procedure.

A further example from my constituency involved a case that reached the courts. The courts awarded an antisocial behaviour order, which was then breached. When the case returned to the courts they did not, in the view of many people involved in gathering evidence in the first instance, take that breach seriously enough. I ask the Minister to consider the ways in which guidance given to courts is reviewed so that where a great deal of effort, time, trouble and raised expectations is involved in securing an antisocial behaviour order, the courts do not then destroy that order. The issue is important.

I also stress the importance of antisocial behaviour orders in the wider context. They are just one piece of the jigsaw of ways in which we tackle antisocial behaviour. Young people who stand around on street corners may not create problems but they may be perceived to do so by local people. Far more time and effort should be directed to providing youth and community services that are acceptable to young people in those areas, so that the wider community can nurture future generations in civil society, instead of believing that they are a problem. That will have huge implications for the Connexions services and for youth and adult education and community services and we must consider the money going to finance and fund those resources. In my constituency, established groups and organisations do not always want to make buildings and premises available for young people because they perceive them to be a problem; they do not understand that making facilities available will empower them to be the first citizens of the next generation.

People often do not know where to go to find a solution to antisocial behaviour. It is very easy for a "pass the parcel" syndrome to develop in which a complaint passes from housing officers, to youth workers, to the police and so on, round the houses and there is a sense that no one has the responsibility for dealing with the issue. That is why I welcome the Government's new initiative on neighbourhood renewal and the use of neighbourhood support funds to bring all the agencies together in a one-stop shop to deal in a concerted, resolute way with antisocial behaviour, however it is manifested.

The current spending round is high on everyone's agenda, and I urge the Minr to ensure that sufficient money will be available to do everything necessary to reduce crime and the fear of crime. When the Chancellor makes his announcement there should be no cuts that would further undermine the ability to deal with these issues.

Housing was mentioned briefly. Much antisocial behaviour, especially in my constituency, occurs when people move out of certain streets and drug addicts and prostitutes move in. That is an enormous problem for the remaining residents of those streets, which are being destroyed. People have to put up with noisy neighbours, with taxis and young people coming and going at all times of the day and night. People who suffer from that type of antisocial behaviour find it difficult to get up to go to work, especially if they work shifts, and it has a huge effect on their life.

The time has come for the Government to encourage Departments, including the Home Office, to work in conjunction to consider matters such as social registered landlords and housing benefit, and the way in which private landlords are able to rent out properties and allow antisocial behaviour to undermine the whole community. It is important to cut across different Departments, and encourage private landlords and socially responsible landlords to get together with the local police to see what can be done.

Mr. Randall: Does the hon. Lady accept that in my constituency it is not just private landlords who are involved? The local authority has a statutory requirement to house people. If those people then cause problems it takes a long time for them to be moved out.

Ms Walley: I recognise that problem; that is the dilemma and the challenge at the heart of the debate. It is a matter for council housing authorities, for private landlords and for social landlords, many of whom have taken over council housing stock, although fortunately not in my constituency. The most important thing would be to make it absolutely clear as a condition of a tenancy that failure to comply with the tenancy agreement would result in eviction. It is simply not fair that residents of certain streets and communities should have to tolerate antisocial behaviour.

However, people have rights to housing; therefore, we must implement measures firmly to ensure that people comply with housing and rental conditions and we must do what we can to ensure that people understand that some behaviour will not be tolerated, and prevent such behaviour in the first place. It is a vicious circle, but life is intolerable for those who live next door to the neighbours from hell.

We must go beyond considering landlords, whether of council or other housing, and look at the system of social security and housing benefit; the Government must send a firm message that we expect people to comply with basic tenancy agreements. It is a matter of redefining the problem and re-educating people, which is not easily done; there are no short-cut answers but there should be a process of education.

I want to flag up one final issue for the Minister to consider: I am pleased that there are two pilot areas for antisocial behaviour contracts in my constituency. When the extra resources of police and local organisations work with active residents associations in areas such as the Norton ward, where local councillors are doing a wonderful job, there is an excellent opportunity for all the authorities involved to link up and work in partnership. Any hint of antisocial behaviour may thus be prevented early on, to make it unnecessary to use complicated procedures to obtain antisocial behaviour orders.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about my concerns. I have received many letters begging the Government to consider these issues; I ask for speedier antisocial behaviour orders and for the Government to think about people's tenancy and housing rights when considering measures to tackle wrong behaviour as quickly as possible.

9.57 am

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I shall follow what my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) said and pick up a point that she raised about prostitution.

There has been a problem with prostitution in central Swindon for a long time, but in the past few years the antisocial behaviour associated with the problem has become noticeably worse. I pay tribute to the residents of the area, who have had to put up with so much; they have rightly spoken up for their community and brought pressure to bear on the council, the police and the courts to take further action. It is extremely unpleasant to find that local residents have been faced with threats from prostitutes and pimps, that used condoms are disposed of in their gardens and in back alleyways, and that telephones are ripped out when people report those complaints. The community is obviously keen for more action to be taken.

Local groups are working together to tackle the problem and I have met the police and the council together to discuss how to pursue the matter further. We are pleased that the Government have introduced antisocial behaviour orders, and now that kerb crawling has become an arrestable offence, the police have many more powers to tackle the problem. I appreciate that Ministers and the Home Secretary are committed to tackling the matter.

Ms Walley: Does my hon. Friend agree that magistrates who choose to give a fine of only £50 in a successful prosecution of kerb crawling do not do justice to the level of local concern about the issue? They could fine up to £1,000, as it is a level 3 offence.

Ms Drown: I agree with my hon. Friend. Such fines serve only to send the prostitutes back on the street to earn the money. More important, members of the community rightly respond with steam coming out of their ears, because they do so much to raise the issue but feel that they are being laughed at. We must find a different way of tackling the problem.

I wish to thank the police for their action. They have diverted resources to the area and kept them there to allay fears and tackle the problem. However, we have

[Ms Drown]

had particular problems in Swindon with the use of antisocial behaviour orders. A great deal of work was done to take some prostitutes to magistrates court using such orders; unfortunately, the cases failed. It would be difficult for us to determine the exact causes of the failure, but we in Swindon feel strongly that the cases would have been successful if they had gone to the county court. The magistrates decided that detailed cases against individual prostitutes had to be made and proven. The proof that the prostitutes had caused or were likely to cause antisocial behaviour was not strong enough.

We believe that the experience of county court judges tends to be different from that of magistrates; it is more relevant, and antisocial behaviour orders fit more appropriately into the areas that they cover. We would like the Government to consider and address the issue, because effective action must be taken. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North described the huge amount of work that goes into producing antisocial behaviour orders, particularly against prostitutes. We must ensure that such work gets results for the community.

A system could be set up whereby the cases went to the county court but magistrates continued to deal with cases in which antisocial behaviour orders were broken. In that way, we could bring some balance to the system. If the Government do not transfer such cases to the county court, we must seriously consider the training of magistrates, to ensure that they acquire relevant experience and are able to make antisocial behaviour orders effective.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The hon. Lady advanced the idea that part of the process could be transferred to the county court. Has she considered the delays in the civil court process, as a result of which she might simply introduce an extra complication that would not help her constituents or those of other hon. Members?

Ms Drown: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I was about to address delays, which lead to extra frustration. As legislators, we must always be aware of the bubble of feeling in the community and the danger that people will take the law into their own hands. We must ensure that the courts can take action quickly enough. The Government are considering the creation of a fast-track system for antisocial behaviour orders. That must happen. We need a system whereby interim orders take effect to stop offending behaviour before the full court case comes up. I urge the Government to support that.

The results of a recent survey in the area were frightening. There was a huge response: most of the women had been propositioned, and most of the men and women felt threatened by activities in the area. It is not only individuals' social life that is affected, but businesses, people who work from home, and child minders, who have to deal with people at the door. Such levels of antisocial behaviour are not acceptable.

Ministers are aware of the problem, and I hope that the powers to deal with it can be strengthened, particularly by taking cases to judges in the county courts. Antisocial behaviour associated with prostitution in the neighbourhood is a real concern. It stops people going about their daily lives in peace, and it stops businesses working as effectively as they might. I urge the Government to take further action to support the community, the police, the council and the courts so that, together, we may effectively tackle a problem that has existed for too long.

10.5 am

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing the debate and thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me an opportunity to speak. Without a doubt, antisocial behaviour is increasing, if not at an exponential rate, to such an extent that it threatens virtually every home at some time during the year, so this is an important debate for each of us.

I have been closely involved with the police, the social services and the local authority in my community in reviewing the way in which antisocial behaviour and, particularly, antisocial behaviour orders are handled. In Stockton, three ASBOs are in place and seven are waiting for a court hearing. There is a clear and determined approach by a multi-agency group to establish effective measures for correcting the behaviour of many of our youngsters on the street.

Before I discuss suggestions for dealing with the problems and ways to secure improvements to the way in which ASBOs are handled, it is important that I mention the general belief within the police service and the local authority that this is an innovative approach. It has serious teething problems, but it is a multi-agency approach that is of value because parents are involved in a crucial and central way in achieving contracts of behaviour that should effectively control young people's behaviour. As I said, there is a sense that the scheme is innovative.

I acknowledge that there are difficulties; collecting evidence is certainly one of them. Serious caution inevitably influences the way in which people take evidence. They want to be sure that the evidence is in order and correct, and that when it is presented it will not be challenged. Thus there is a concern—a sweat—about collecting appropriate evidence. I will deal further with that shortly.

However, there is a belief that ASBOs will give people in the community an opportunity, for the first time, to give private evidence. They provide anonymity for those who previously would back off and say, "No, I won't come forward. I don't wish to make a statement about the youngsters, because they will throw bricks at my windows or intimidate me in other ways." People are now starting to see the positive side of ASBOs. A benefit is that they are no longer afraid of giving evidence to the court; a policeman can show the magistrates a signed statement from individuals in the community of the evidence that they wish to be included.

ASBOs clearly define when young people are out of control. I stress that we are often talking about a small percentage of a large group of people who get incensed when we generalise about them. I therefore resist the temptation to generalise, but that small group of people are inevitably the victims of peer pressure. Many of them find themselves acting up "having a bit of fun."

However, that bit of fun is at someone else's expense. Too many letters and visits to constituents have shown us what that bit of fun has achieved.

During the run up to 5 November, I heard of many episodes of youngsters throwing explosive fireworks into people's homes, or putting them on window-sills or through letter-boxes. In their terms, they were having a bit of fun. That was not a bit of fun but a nightmare for the people who live in those homes. The elderly reacted by blocking up their letter-boxes, turning off their lights, drawing their curtains and hoping that no one would think that they were at home. I do not underestimate for a minute what that behaviour is all about and how destructive it is. However, a child of eight or 10 does not have a sophisticated or well-rounded ability to make effective judgments about what their actions mean. Peer pressure has an inordinate influence on them. Through ASBOs, police officers or social services can become involved with such a family and talk to those youngsters, and may achieve an understanding of what is going on. That could be an effective early warning system; I hope that it will be.

If I say anything positive about ASBOs this morning, it is not because that is my direct experience. Frankly, it cannot be. However, the multi-agency group regards the behaviour contract of ASBOs as an effective system in which the behaviour that was being perpetuated is scrutinised by parents, social services and the police and is treated clinically and carefully. The contract may involve a curfew or preventing that young person from going to various parts of the locality. Whatever its form, the multi-agency group sees it as an effective mechanism for stopping offending behaviour and persuading youngsters that there is no end in sight other than an ASBO or, at an appropriate age, a custodial sentence. The police have told me that an ASBO is a frightening experience and has a salutary effect. An ASBO, in all its various stages, is one of the most effective measures when, and if, it can be brought together in an appropriate way. It is valuable for us all to see.

Most of us find it astounding when parents say that they did not know what their child was getting up to or where they were. I had such a serious control over my own family—before I entered this place as a Member of Parliament, at least—that I always knew where they were and what they were doing. I had a sure understanding.

Mr. Randall: I acknowledge that there are many single-parent families, but in several cases the trouble started after the death of one of the parents. It is almost as if the remaining parent cannot cope with the children, and they need help at that early stage.

Ms Taylor: I agree with that important point. It is not just death that brings on the problem, but divorce, or the choice to be a single parent. The strain is monumental. I am part of a marriage partnership that is stable and supportive, but even in that situation it is difficult and can be problematic. Increasingly often, the police are becoming the other parent. The social services are providing the type of support that a parent would give. Perhaps we should not be relying on that, but if they are giving parents the support that is required and that stops antisocial behaviour, it is valuable.

We all know of far too many examples of antisocial behaviour. Although it is still early days and there are serious teething problems, it is worth while to persist with solutions. What is the alternative if it is not an ASBO or a behaviour contract? We want to make the orders part of a legalistic structure and we want others to see the efficacy of such action. What else would we put in their place that would give us the same support? From my experience of working in a remand home and a detention centre, I know that they are not places in which the behaviour of youths can be rebuilt. They are often places to which children are sent who have gone off the rails for a short time, but once in a detention centre, it is extraordinarily difficult to get them back into society because they have learned too much about being off the rails. The sheer impossibility of their returning to social behaviour becomes a fact.

There must be serious requirements within the mechanism of ASBOs and behaviour contracts if they are to become the valued instruments that I should like to see. Will the Minister reassure us that the way in which evidence is collected will be examined? The matter must be approached cautiously. The method by which evidence is collected is seriously bureaucratic and takes a long time, which inhibits the speedy reaction that we had hoped would be achieved from ASBOs. I want effective guidance to be given to the police force, social services and social housing bodies to persuade them to provide evidence more speedily.

I reiterate that gaining court time is seriously undermined. People are waiting for months before they can present their case to the magistrate. That situation must be examined if we are to have an appropriate rapid reaction. A crucial adjunct to that is what happens when a breach of order has taken place and the ASBO returns to the magistrates court to be re-examined. The order is often considered by different magistrates, who do not have a full understanding of the original case. Those proceedings inevitably result in a supervision order, at which the police just throw up their hands. They feel distraught because, after they have put so much work and time into the case, the magistrates merely grant a supervision order. The Minister has two options: either she must require the magistrates who considered the first case to consider the breach of order, or she must allow a comprehensive, detailed report of the first case to be given to the second set of magistrates, so that they have a full understanding of why the order was made in the first place.

We are witnessing more proactive local authority involvement in some of our communities. Community strategy plans and neighbourhood renewal plans have been set up. Is the Minister persuaded that councils should involve ASBOs in those plans? If we are to use renewal and strategy plans, whereby communities will have a future, those will be achieved only in a stable and safe environment in which ASBOs are included.

I do not think that good practice is being networked throughout the country. Such action is long overdue. We need people to know why West Mercia police manages to get ASBOs put in place in a month. How does it manage to do so when my police force takes much longer? Good practice gives people courage; it gives them the support and knowledge that they require to use ASBOs more effectively.

[Ms Taylor]

Will the Minister consider an offshoot? Parts of Stockton have an on-street warden scheme. It is a support to the police services. The wardens walk about. They are well known. They are uniformed and are recognised as a valuable source of security support to the neighbourhood. I accept that the White Paper suggested extending the involvement of different groups such as providers of social housing to ASBOs, but has the inclusion of warden schemes been considered?

Antisocial behaviour inevitably requires a seriously challenging, robust approach to be taken by us all. Our mailbags are full of letters. The chief constable of Cleveland has walked with me around my patch and has seen the intimidating behaviour and the threats posed by youngsters. It is a colossal problem. We are seeking resolutions. A more flexibly handled ASBO, with the appropriate finances, that includes others in a multi-agency approach will give a more speedy delivery. Will the Minister consider such a valuable add-on, which will reduce young people's antisocial behaviour, certainly in my constituency?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. *It is appropriate to offer an admonishment to the Chamber. It is common practice in a 90-minute debate for the two Opposition Front-Bench spokespeople and the Minister to start their winding-up speeches 30 minutes before the debate is to conclude and that the timing is equitably disposed of in three 10-minute speeches. As we have a little more time than that before 11 o'clock, I appeal to the three hon. Members who wish to speak to bear in mind such practice.*

10.22 am

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing the debate. I agree that it is most timely. As a new Member of Parliament, I have to concur with more experienced hon. Members that antisocial behaviour is the main issue that faces us. That is despite the fact that I represent a constituency in the south, which, according to some stereotypes, does not have a high deprivation factor. It straddles urban and rural areas. In fact, one third of it is rural. There are just as many antisocial behaviour problems in the villages as there are in the built-up areas. The diversity in antisocial behaviour is striking; that is important to bear in mind when considering how to deal with it.

I preface my comments by saying that I am absolutely determined to tackle antisocial behaviour. I sympathise greatly with elderly people and others who are frightened and suffer enormous stress because of what is happening around them. We must get to grips with the problem. It is diverse and it is difficult to assess its severity; what one person might describe as outrageous behaviour, another might regard as high spirits. Perceptions vary among areas. Those huge variations in perception, locality and manifestation highlight the importance of the Government's initiative for crime and disorder strategies and partnerships, which are important because of their local focus.

Today's focus is on antisocial behaviour orders nationally. I agree with the principle of antisocial behaviour orders, but I find it difficult to make sweeping statements about them that apply to the entire country. Are they a measure of last resort? How early should they be introduced? Parliamentary questions sometimes seem to contain a presumption that an increased use of ASBOs is good. Is that true statistically? Last year, the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs cited Wrexham, where only one order had been made, but the real success was the 1,500 incidents that had been resolved through partnership working, before the red card was used. The threat of the sanction was probably an effective deterrent. In a moment I shall discuss Islington and acceptable behaviour contracts—another example where good practice is taking place and few orders are being made. Equally, an increase in ASBOs may mean simply that there is more antisocial behaviour, not that we are tackling it more effectively. I urge caution in taking an approach that results in a record number of such orders.

I am aware from my local experience of the bureaucracy and expense involved and of the fact that we need a weapon in our armoury. I welcome examination of how such orders are implemented. An excellent suggestion was to examine good practice and whether orders might be secured more quickly under existing provision.

The Liberal Democrats would like to examine the proposals carefully, using evidence on the effectiveness of ASBOs. I hope that the Minister will enlighten us on the full study that I believe was due to be published. I am slightly worried about our extending something if no robust evaluation is available. Perhaps there is such an evaluation. If so, I should be pleased to hear about it.

I do not know the breakdown of the number of ASBOs as regards those that applied to young people and those that applied to adults. Different circumstances have been described today, and I am worried that a single instrument is not the best approach. I would welcome a review, which the Liberal Democrats would consider extremely carefully.

We are impressed with acceptable behaviour contracts, which are flexible, cheaper than ASBOs and can be used earlier. The practice in Islington seems to have been excellent and is now spreading, including, indeed, to the authority in my constituency. Both the council and the police find them helpful because, if nothing else, they help gather the evidence for ASBOs, and thus have an interim use, if not a final one. I like the fact that the approach is incremental and that the contracts make children and families take responsibility. A strong link has been made with housing. Fear of losing a house has, I believe, made the contracts work and has made parents wake up. Young people should take responsibility for and ownership of their actions. The use of such contracts has been extended.

The approach is not so much like the armoury that I mentioned earlier; I view it as a toolkit. We have several tools, all of which need to be used in the right sequence. Hon. Members have discussed the importance of community and individual initiatives. I confess that I have bombarded my local police with issues relating to antisocial behaviour to such an extent that they have looked around the country, which is good.

I had passed to me details of a junior referral scheme that operates in Lancashire. We now have the Poole Operation Guardian. The scheme has incremental stages, which involve, first, going out and talking to young people; secondly, taking their name and address; thirdly, sending parents a letter, and so on. That incremental approach is important, but it needs to be resourced.

Auditing, trailing and monitoring antisocial behaviour are equally important.

Mr. Randall: I am very interested in what the hon. Lady is saying. Does she agree that one problem seems to be lack of knowledge on the part of the various agencies involved about what avenues are available to them? Guidelines on increments, especially in the case of, for example, housing associations, whose staff are not trained to deal with such problems, would be useful.

Mrs. Brooke: That is absolutely right. We are dealing with multi-agency shared practice. Many of the jigsaw pieces are available. I congratulate the Government on those pieces, but they are not all clicking in to make an entire picture.

We must not limit our discussions to antisocial behaviour orders, which are a single instrument. I accept that that instrument may have to be used, but we must take more positive action, too. Although ASBOs tackle behaviour, we should consider lower levels of intervention before we reach that stage.

I agree that we need neighbourhood renewal. Along with all positive measures, I am interested in neighbourhood warden schemes, a trial of which is being introduced in my constituency. The package involves school, integrated pastoral care, exclusion policies, family support and community facilities. The range is enormous. I hate to say it, but the approach ultimately relates to resources, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) said. One of our police superintendents told us what a difference small sums would make in implementing a crime and disorder strategy, such as £250 handed to a local group that raises money itself for its own purposes. People do not feel that they have those small sums. Will the Minister consider that point?

I recently spoke to representatives of the youth offending team, and some brilliant work has been initiated in providing parenting courses, of which there are many in my constituency. The Youth Justice Board has provided additional funds for a pilot scheme involving the introduction of parenting schemes at the point of changing schools—age 11 in that area. Such early intervention makes a lot of sense. Strains on local councils have resulted in their cutting back the amount that they put into parenting courses, so instead of additionality we have had replacement. I am sure that there are many such stories. That is a big issue, which needs to be resourced. We must consider all such issues and bring them together.

I mentioned making the jigsaw whole. I am excited about the principles behind Connexions, but much more needs to be done to pull the scheme together. Some of the schemes cover different age bands, and I am worried that there may be gaps. The age band for Connexions is, I believe, 13 to 19, and for YOT, 10 to 18. We need to pull that together.

As we have seen, an awful lot can be done for the community and families. However, we must not forget the individual, and sadly the issue is one of resources. We hear much about attention deficit disorder. That may be a small part of the cause of antisocial behaviour by individuals, but we need resources to follow through the research.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge mentioned mental illness. There is a tremendous shortage of resources to help deal with mental illness in young people. The Liberal Democrats believe that all the issues that I have mentioned are important. We see the matter as a whole toolkit and would like to emphasise that exciting and important initiatives should be resourced properly. I would like my toolkit to follow a positive intervention model, not one of blaming and enforcement. I am realistic and accept that we need this measure, but we must proceed with caution and get it right.

10.15 am

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I have had the opportunity to speak about antisocial behaviour orders on several occasions. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing this debate, which has been similar to many others in that it has contained interesting contributions based on personal constituency experience and the individual ideas of both Back and Front Benchers—as was the case with the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats on home affairs.

Today's debate is different in one way. The Government's most severe critic from their own Back Benches, the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), is absent—no doubt he has other duties. In every other debate on the subject, he made it clear that the Government had got the scheme wrong and that it was far too complex.

We said—more in sorrow than in anger—from the first moment that the Government announced the scheme that it would be a bureaucratic nightmare. It is not that we do not share the Government's ambition to deal with antisocial behaviour, as we agree with all those who have spoken that it is the scourge of our law-abiding constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge spoke of the problems in parts of his constituency such as West Drayton and we are all aware of similar areas that have difficulties with such behaviour.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge rightly referred to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) who is, like me, an Opposition spokesman for home affairs. In a previous debate, he pointed out some of the things that had gone wrong. However, it has taken a long time—a comment from not only Government Back Benchers but hon. Members of all parties—for the Government to concede that all the warnings that we issued at the start have turned out to be right.

I do not blame the Minister. The hon. Lady brings to her responsibilities professional expertise that she gained prior to entering Parliament. I know that she takes her responsibilities seriously from my experience of dealing with the case of one of my constituents, with which she assisted me and other hon. Members recently.

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

She inherited both a problem and an opportunity. The problem is that her predecessors in office got it spectacularly wrong by creating a bureaucratic nightmare. Everyone who has spoken has mentioned the problems that the police and local authorities face and I will touch on some of the most appalling experiences that senior police officers and local authority officers have recently found in my constituency.

The opportunity is that the Minister has joined the Home Office at a time when the penny has finally dropped that the Government can get rid of a lot of the bureaucracy. I hope that this time they will get it right. I wish I had confidence that they would cut through all of the nonsense, but I fear that we shall see tinkering rather than genuine action. I am sure that the Minister will tell us that she has every confidence that the Government will get it right. As always, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

I want to talk briefly about what is happening at the sharp end, as other hon. Members have done. I have huge respect for the views held on a range of subjects by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley). She spoke powerfully about the difficulties in her constituency, as did the hon. Members for South Swindon (Ms Drown) and for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor).

In my constituency, I have obtained detailed briefing from two people that I know extremely well—Mick Day, the chief inspector of North West Surrey police and Barry Catchpole, the chief executive of Surrey Heath borough council, one of the two councils in my constituency. In all our regular meetings, they have told me about their frustration at efforts to deal with antisocial behaviour. When I heard that this issue had been selected for debate, I asked them to give me detailed briefing on a recent case about which, only 10 days ago, I was receiving calls from national media and having discussions with other police officers.

Chief Inspector Day says:

"I refer to your request for an opinion from the police perspective on the ASBO process.

Recent experience at Surrey Heath in relation to two young men aged 15 & 16 years was a frustrating encounter with the ASBO process. In brief the two young men were committing acts of nuisance and terrorising their local community as well as causing problems in Camberley Town Centre as part of a larger group. Normal policing methods and the justice system had not been effective so a multi agency group decided in February 2001"—

the Minister and hon. Members should note the date—

"to gather evidence for an ASBO application. It took two months to collate the evidence and the complaint was laid in April 2001. The case was listed for hearing in August 2001",

which was already six months later. It was then

"adjourned on two occasions at the request of the"

defendants. The case was

"finally heard in late January 2002",

which is effectively a year later—I know exactly when it was because I started fielding calls from the media a week last Friday, the day after the case was heard.

Chief Inspector Day says:

"It was therefore almost a full 12 months to get this application through the judicial process. There are a number of points I would wish to make on this... The collation of evidence was an extremely bureaucratic process involving applications to other agencies for little return... Once the complaint had been laid the length of time to hearing was unbelievably long and frustrated the desire to provide relief to the local community who were the victims of these young men... It is worthy of note that in the interim one of the young men received a custodial sentence, perhaps this could have been avoided had the ASBO process been slicker and more effective... Partner agencies are reluctant to support the process because of the bureaucracy and time involved."

Who can blame them?

"What is needed is a process which is responsive to address anti social behaviour quickly and effectively. ASBO in the current climate do not provide that response and the public feel that agencies are not being responsive to local problems...In summary the whole process is a frustrating bureaucratic nightmare."

Those strong words are used by one of the most effective senior police officers that it has been my pleasure to work with and I have been working with senior police officers all my professional life—I qualified as a barrister in the late 1970s and I have been a Member of Parliament for nearly 10 years. I have worked with police officers in all parts of the country. I have been a shadow Minister with responsibility for home affairs for nearly three years.

Chief Inspector Day is not someone whose words can be dismissed. He does not use them lightly. He is respected throughout north-west Surrey, not only in my constituency, as an old-style traditional police officer who is nevertheless receptive to new ideas and thinking. He was born and brought up in my constituency and is a real, seat-of-the-pants police officer, respected in all the jobs that he has done from ordinary police constable to chief inspector. I have regular meetings with him and know that his strong words should be taken seriously.

The chief executive of my local authority states that there is a

"disproportionate need for huge resources from many different public bodies over several months during which time the offender is still disruptive.

Ordinary members of the community often decline to provide evidence as their identity cannot be kept confidential and they are fearful of reprisals. Such fears are well-founded given the nature of the people against whom the Orders are sought.

As always the offenders are very informed as to the processes and abuse this knowledge to the detriment of the community."

That sentence is relevant to the correct comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge about lack of respect for police officers.

The chief executive continues:

"At Surrey Heath Borough Council our first case was due for hearing in September but was deferred for two months as one of the "defendants" had been arrested the day before the hearing. During the two month delay the offenders continued to terrorise their communities and no quicker option was available. Later hearings were deferred as the offender was in Feltham Young Offenders Institute."

The chief executive also refers to the cost of the process:

"This hardly matches the aim of a quick simple system and is very costly to the taxpayer. This is seen as excessive by the communities against whom the anti-social behaviour is aimed."

The chief executive also draws attention to how long the process took and expresses concern that the court did not allow the names of the defendants to be publicised, One is always concerned about publicity with regard to juveniles, but that issue should be debated and I ask the Minister to comment on it.

Representatives of the media applied for reporting restrictions to be lifted. Although the police inspector who dealt with the case supported the application, it was not granted. I am not challenging the principle that the courts should decide such matters but, as the Government are reconsidering these provisions, the publicity issue should be addressed.

Finally, on the important issue of the involvement, or lack of it, of parents, which my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge also raised, the chief executive of my local authority, Barry Catchpole, states:

> "Throughout the 4 day hearing neither parents attended court in support of their children, and the court did not act on that position."

He also rightly comments that

> "parental responsibilities are paramount in making this process effective and where not voluntary the court should be looking to issue Parenting Orders to assist in keeping young people to the ASBO conditions.
>
> Local courts are not comfortable with the process, make life unnecessarily difficult for the agencies to even get to court and then the judges are reluctant to make Orders and are overtly critical of the agencies."

That is the case even in the extreme circumstances that we are discussing.

I wish the Minister to respond to what happened in the example that I have described. I state, more in sorrow than in anger, that we warned the Government when they set up this process that that would happen and it has. The system is not working properly and we want the Government to ensure that their replacement for it is a huge improvement.

10.47 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) for securing the debate, and to all hon. Members who have spoken for their constructive contributions. They have described their experiences, and it is clear that they have been motivated to speak by a desire to make the system work, because they recognise that antisocial behaviour orders are an important part of what the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) referred to as a toolkit of measures. I was going to describe it as a package of measures, but toolkit is a good word, because it conveys what we have tried to achieve, which is to offer a menu of options to tackle antisocial behaviour, of which antisocial behaviour orders are one.

There are many types of antisocial behaviour, such as graffiti, intimidation, verbal abuse and prostitution. As hon. Friends have mentioned, there is also antisocial behaviour that is related to drug abuse. All hon. Members deal with such behaviour in their constituencies, so they are aware that it reduces people's quality of life and creates fear and intimidation. The Home Office is heavily engaged in the battle against serious crime, but I assure hon. Members that the Government are equally committed to tackling antisocial behaviour and the problems that it causes for communities.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced antisocial behaviour orders, as well as child curfews and a range of other changes, to the youth justice system. It also established the crime and disorder partnerships, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole for mentioning that initiative because, although it is important that the Government should provide the tools that enable such partnerships to tackle the problems in their areas, it is also important that the partnerships should be allowed to identify the issues to be prioritised in their areas, and to apply the measures to tackle them in the most effective way.

Partnerships must focus on antisocial behaviour. They are now required to audit that as well as crime, and to develop a strategy to deal with it. It is important that partnerships focus on antisocial behaviour not only because of the quality of life issues to which I and many hon. Members have referred, but because such behaviour is a potential risk factor with regard to crime. Recent research confirms that there is frequently a link between antisocial behaviour in childhood and more serious criminal offending at an older age.

The antisocial behaviour order is a civil order made by a court. It is designed to address persistent antisocial behaviour. Individual incidents of such behaviour might not reach the required threshold of seriousness, but they will if they are taken together over a period. Such persistent behaviour has a corrosive effect on victims and communities. However, although antisocial behaviour orders are civil proceedings that require a civil standard to be met with regard to proof and rules of evidence, breach of an antisocial behaviour order is a criminal offence that must, therefore, be proved to that standard of evidence.

Between April 1999 and September 2001, 466 antisocial behaviour orders were granted. However, as several hon. Members have mentioned, we should not address the issue as if it were simply a numbers game. Although we want antisocial behaviour orders to be used—and to be used more often where they are applicable—the fact that they are available, and that they have been used, has had a deterrent effect. Important points have been raised about the use of measures such as acceptable behaviour contracts to prevent young people—and some adults—from reaching the threshold where they could be given an antisocial behaviour order.

Of those 466 orders, 84 per cent. were given to men, 74 per cent. to people under the age of 21, and 58 per cent. to juveniles. About 36 per cent. of antisocial behaviour orders have been breached, and 46 per cent. of breaches have resulted in custodial sentences. Only 4 per cent of applications have been refused, and the fact that so few refusals of applications reach court is of relevance to the case that was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown).

[Beverley Hughes]

I am aware of the breach case that was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), because the leader of her local council raised it with me.

I turn to cost. Although the hon. Member for Uxbridge mentioned a figure, these are early days, and I do not wish to be held to any of the sums that I will mention. The results of the review that we have been undertaking suggest that the typical cost of an antisocial behaviour order is £4,800. That includes the cost of the internal solicitor's time, legal work and so on. If breaches and appeals are involved, the average cost of an order is about £5,350. Those figures are based on the experience of authorities.

Agencies that have used antisocial behaviour orders—and some agencies have really got to grips with them—report to us that they are very cost-effective. That is particularly the case when one considers the cost of not dealing with antisocial behaviour.

Ms Walley: What about the costs of having to go out and buy in professional witness statements, where people are afraid and do not want to make statements? It is costly to purchase such professional statements. Will the Minister comment on that?

Beverley Hughes: I take my hon. Friend's point. Several of the costs that I cited would be incurred in such cases, although, clearly, not in all of them. The question of witnesses is an important ingredient in ensuring that we make greater use of ASBOs.

Several hon. Members referred to legislative changes that the Home Secretary announced recently. Those include extending the power of those who may apply for ASBOs to the British Transport police and registered social landlords, which are important developments. The British Transport police want to be able to deal with ticket touting and similar problems more effectively.

Interim ASBOs will help to overcome some of the problems of delay that were mentioned, especially for witnesses. If an interim ASBO is awarded quickly, that will give protection to witnesses.

County courts will be empowered to make an ASBO when dealing with cases such as evictions or injunctions in which the reason for the application was antisocial behaviour. The court will be able to link the eviction or injunction to the simultaneous award of an ASBO, rather than having to apply again for an ASBO.

We want to encourage the use of travelling ASBOs that will cover a wider area so that a person who moves will continue to be covered by the order.

Ms Drown: I am pleased to hear that the Government are considering using the county court when there is a link between benefit and eviction. Will the Government consider using the county court for cases such as prostitution? I do not know whether such cases experience a higher failure rate than other types of ASBO, but if that is the case, will the Government examine that route?

Beverley Hughes: That is outside the scope that the Secretary of State has announced so far. However, I shall take my hon. Friend's comments back to the Department and feed them into the review process.

Hon. Members mentioned the review. We want to see whether we can help bodies to overcome problems by examining the experience of local authorities and police services. I hope that we will produce the review very soon. Issues that should be addressed include guidance and the dissemination of good practice, which were mentioned by hon. Members. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) gave a detailed account of a case that he said was at the sharp end of what is happening. However, I tell him that there are other versions of what is occurring at the sharp end, and there are examples of excellent practice in which agencies—especially the local authorities and the police—have put in resources and worked together.

Manchester established a nuisance strategy group to allow the maximum use of ASBOs. It demonstrated that several factors contributed to the success of ASBOs. The publicising of ASBOs was important. Media coverage and leaflets produced by the local authority helped local people to understand an ASBO. Such communication helps to enforce the order because the community understands the behaviour that constitutes a breach.

The support of witnesses is also important to the success of ASBOs—a point that was touched on several times. Successful partnership working is a further important factor, as is cost-effectiveness, which the authority achieves by ensuring that front-line officers play a central role, rather than always bringing in outside assistance. That ensures that a knowledge base and the ability to work efficiently are bred inside the local authority.

I accept that many areas have found the process bureaucratic, but I do not think that that was inevitable. Agencies that use good practice and cut through bureaucracy have taken a more realistic view of the evidence that is required. Agencies that work quickly together to make a case have shown that bureaucracy need not occur. None the less, the Government want to ensure that when lessons have been learned in one area, they can be learned elsewhere. Hon. Members asked about delay at the court stage, and made suggestions. I will take those points to the Department.

We are planning to help local partnerships to use ASBOs more effectively. Acceptable behaviour contracts, which were mentioned by several hon. Members, are a further important part of the toolkit, and they have been implemented successfully in Islington.

I thank hon. Members for their contributions, which I shall feed into the review. We are determined to make ASBOs work, and to help agencies with responsibilities for ASBOs to cut through the problems that were identified today and allow them to use the orders more effectively—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We move on to the next topic for consideration this morning.

Poverty (London)

11 am

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I am grateful to have the opportunity to discuss issues around the welfare-to-work programme and the Government's agenda for tackling poverty, with particular reference to London.

Before I discuss London, I shall set the debate in context. I support and admire the Government's approach in the past five years to tackling poverty and unemployment. They set themselves the ambitious target of halving child poverty within a decade and abolishing it within a generation, which, as independent organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group have recognised, is unprecedented. The group said, slightly tongue in cheek, that it had been given a stick with which to beat the Government. The strategy is risky but completely right.

The Government correctly identified that poverty is rooted in several factors, rather than being dependent only on a household's individual financial income. They have adopted a bundle of indicators to establish the efficacy of the measures to tackle poverty. That is the context in which investment in public services has been proposed, in addition to area-based regeneration schemes such as sure start, the new deal for communities and the neighbourhood renewal fund. The Government have also introduced the Tax Credits Bill, on which I shall comment in more detail later. They have given extra help to families who are on benefit through a significant increase in the children's element of income support. Additionally, the child tax credit, which is in the next wave of tax credits, will be introduced next year.

Such measures have had a dramatic impact on poverty throughout the country. Independent experts have confirmed that 1.2 million children have been lifted out of poverty. The communities on which the area-based initiatives have impacted have warmly welcomed them.

London, however, has not benefited as much as it should have from the national strategy. Over recent years, London has enjoyed significant economic success; it has been a booming city, an exciting place in which to live. Both employment and earnings growth has been very strong, and people who have done well in London have experienced some very happy years. The events of 11 September caused a dip in economic confidence but we seem to be bouncing back from that.

However, alongside the success story is a story of poverty, deprivation and unemployment. Progress has been made but not to the extent of other regions. London continues to have the highest percentage of children in poverty in England. Forty-three per cent. of children are in households with incomes below half the national average. The decline in the number of children in poverty has been smaller than in other regions.

After housing costs are taken into account, a much higher proportion of London's population is in the lowest income band: income below £150 a week. Twenty-nine per cent. of Londoners live in households in that band; 24 per cent. of people are in that band in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Of course, London has a disproportionate percentage of its population in the higher income bands, and that is part of the problem when examining the distribution of resources. The polarisation of incomes in London is part of the problem of economic inequality. During the debate in the House on Friday, I described the problem as the tyranny of the average, because it leads to a misleading indicator of the state of London's population.

Median average income—that is, the point in income below which half the population fall—is only 1.5 per cent. above the national average. Not including housing, prices are 5.7 per cent. above average, so the evidence suggests that average living standards are lower in London than in the rest of the United Kingdom. I am grateful for that new analysis of the figures, which was produced for the Department for Work and Pensions by the Greater London Authority and the Mayor's Office.

London has a higher proportion of children in workless households than any other region: in some 26 per cent. of households in London there is no adult in employment. Inner London has double the national average of children from lone-parent families, who, as we know, are at the greatest risk of poverty. Since the early 1990s, unemployment in London has consistently been above the British average. Our unemployment rate is the second highest regionally, and is especially severe among black and ethnic minority communities, half of which live in London. The unemployment rate for white Londoners is close to the national average, but the rate for black and ethnic minority Londoners is almost three times the national average.

Some 40 per cent. of the 25 Parliamentary constituencies with the highest unemployment rates in the UK are in London. London's rates of job entry through the new deal are below the national average. Take-up of the working families tax credit, the foundation stone of the Government's welfare-to-work strategy, is lower in London than poverty indicators suggest that it should be. Some 10.2 per cent. of families receive the working families tax credit in London compared with 16.3 per cent. nationally. The disparity is even starker among lone parents: those in London are half as likely to receive the tax credit as those elsewhere in the country. I am grateful to the Association of London Government, the GLA, the Mayor's Office and the House of Commons Library for those statistics.

There is no doubt that we have a serious problem with poverty, deprivation and joblessness in London. I have two purposes in securing the debate, apart from that of putting those facts on the record. The first is to highlight that Londoners need more help to tackle poverty effectively through the employment path and other strategies. The second—I believe that other hon. Members will talk on the subject—is to highlight the fact that aspects of the welfare system are penalising Londoners and must be removed if we are to reduce poverty.

Why is it that, alongside London's vacancies, economic strength and success, there is such a serious problem of poverty and joblessness? Why, with our underlying economic strength, does the take-up of the welfare-to-work programme appear to be less effective in London? I do not fully understand why that is so, although I have some theories. It is time for the Government to carry out serious research to establish the reasons. I ask the Minister to give an assurance on that subject. Whenever we have discussed those issues—

[Ms Karen Buck]

for example, when considering the Tax Credits Bill—I have been told that the problem is rooted in take-up, and that there is an awareness issue about measures such as the children's tax credit and the working families tax credit.

I do not doubt that take-up is part of the problem. Constituencies such as mine have a high level of social mobility and high population turnover. For many people in houses of multiple occupation, getting the post is a nightmare. Readership of local newspapers is low compared to that in other regions. The multiplicity of media outlets may be exciting but it means that it is difficult to get a message through to people. Also, 130 languages are spoken, so it is especially difficult to reach minority communities, which are among the poorest.

Take-up is undoubtedly an issue, but it is not the only one. The poorer populations of London face structural problems, which means that however much money we pump into take-up campaigns, we will not completely reverse the disparity in the take-up of working families tax credit and in levels of unemployment. It is my assumption that the problem is rooted in joblessness. If we are to cut child and adult poverty—pensioner poverty falls largely under a different category that I am not talking about today—we must get to the heart of the problem of joblessness in London.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I support the hon. Lady's request to the Government for a special review and study of the issue. Who would she like to be involved, not just from the Government but from the many other players in London, in order to ensure that the study is effective and is undertaken urgently?

Ms Buck: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is right. Communities have different experiences, and an understanding of the barriers to take-up and participation must be rooted in community experiences. A multiplicity of organisations, including local councils, the London development agency and women's and child care organisations, have an important role to play and should be part of the process. We should listen to them to find out what they regard as problems.

Joblessness in London is at the heart of the problem. It is the reason why Londoners cannot break free from poverty and use the working families tax credit as a stepping stone out of poverty. The welfare-to-work strategy, in all its forms, is not working as well in London as it is elsewhere. That is not a criticism of the programme or its policies, which I back 100 per cent. It is an argument for a more focused look at why the strategy is not as effective in London.

Let us take the example of the new deal. Figures provided by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion show that the job-entry rate through the new deal in London is below the national average, with central London districts such as mine and, I am sad to say, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) performing particularly badly. That is partly because London handles a high proportion of unemployed people with multiple disadvantages, including those who have experienced homelessness, the prison system, mental health or drug problems and those with literacy or language problems. The Government could do more to address that important issue.

The agencies of delivery, particularly the Employment Service, have a disproportionate difficulty in recruiting and retaining the staff necessary to guide those with multiple disadvantages through support programmes and into work. If the new deal and Jobcentre Plus are to deliver to Londoners and contribute to cutting poverty through work, extra resources will be needed to pay personal advisers better in order to retain them longer.

I regularly go to my local Employment Service and sit in on interviews. I am saddened by the fact that good people do not stay. They move in order to earn more, and I do not blame them; they are not paid terribly well. We need to keep people of especially high quality in London, so that we can use their skills to develop properly tailored packages for the people who need them, especially lone parents.

We need to overcome the barrier of child care. The proportion of lone parents in the capital is much higher than in the rest of the country. I am grateful to the Library for its excellent research on the subject. Lone parents are much less likely to have family support networks that provide informal child care. Only 18 per cent. of pre-school children in inner London are looked after by grandparents compared with 34 per cent. across the country. The need for child care is greater, particularly for lone parents, yet the provision of affordable child care is significantly lower.

Although there have been improvements in recent years—the national child care strategy is a welcome development—the Daycare Trust said last Friday that the imbalance between quality child care places and need was particularly severe, with a place for fewer than one child in seven. Last summer, the Daycare Trust carried out an analysis of day care costs and found a shortfall between the cost of child care in London and the subsidy from the working families tax credit: it is £40 a week for a nursery place and £33 a week for a child minder, which is £6 or £7 more than in the rest of the country. We must accept that the cost of providing nurseries in London is far greater, especially in respect of capital costs and recruitment and retention of child care staff. Unfortunately, the flat-rate child care component in the working families tax credit, which will be carried through in the new tax credits legislation, will not be enough to allow parents, particularly lone parents who want to enter the workplace, to access child care.

Some evidence—it is mostly anecdotal but it is supported by the Daycare Trust—shows that the child care component of the working families tax credit is leading to some perverse incentives in London and elsewhere, whereby the costs of child care are ratcheted up to the level of the working families tax credit supplement. In my constituency some people in need have lost places as an unintended and perverse consequence of working families tax credit. Welcome as the child care component is there is no substitute for a dramatic extension of child care places, which will have to be funded by capital. Otherwise, there will be child care inflation and we will never catch up with it. Access to child care places remains inadequate and needs further development.

Housing costs have been endlessly debated in this Chamber and elsewhere by others and by me. London is engulfed in a housing crisis with three times the level of overcrowding than in any other part of the country. A significant increase in the number of families in temporary accommodation is another factor relevant to the poverty and welfare-to-work debate. Families in severe housing need are in poverty. For 60,000 households, the cost of private rented and temporary accommodation makes working impossible. Rents are about £300 a week. It is virtually impossible for people to find work that will pay while they face that housing difficulty. While we continue to try to unlock the housing crisis through supply, it is essential to provide special new deal-type provision for families in temporary accommodation, who are expected, through no fault of their own, to pay prohibitive rents and are unlikely to take up work opportunities.

Mr. Edward Davey: Does the hon. Lady agree that the ceilings on housing benefit, which restrict the rents that attract it, need to be raised?

Ms Buck: I am coming to that matter, which I feel passionately about.

Families in London on income support mortgage interest relief generally face higher mortgage costs than those in the rest of the country, so they face a higher risk of getting into debt if they get a job. The Government have extended the linking rule to mortgage interest relief, which is a positive step. I doubt whether the Minister can answer immediately, but I would like to know whether the extension of the linking rule has helped low-income homeowners to move into work. We must do more to help such people to return to work.

Considerable evidence suggests that good area-based partnerships between local authorities, the private sector, the Employment Service and community organisations have been effective in underpinning welfare-to-work strategies. Employment zones in London have been particularly successful, but there are too few of them. The level of deprivation and poverty in London strongly justifies a further extension of area-based initiatives, including employment zones. It is unfortunate that the Government's index of deprivation—a formula for distributing resources for area-based regeneration initiatives—has recently disadvantaged London. The Association of London Government calculated that under the old formula, we would have been £140 million better off. My hon. Friends and I will continue to press the Government to redress the inadequacies of the index of multiple deprivation.

I am aware that other colleagues want to speak, but I want to finish by emphasising two policy issues that hurt Londoners disproportionately, rather than focusing on the failure to make full use of the welfare-to-work programme. First, council tax benefit restrictions are impacting on households in high-value areas. People did not move there through choice, so they are suffering an unfair penalty. I hope that the Minister will deal with that in more detail later.

Secondly, housing benefit restrictions in London are particularly difficult for families on low incomes. They have to find £15, £20 or £25 a week out of their own pockets to sustain a tenancy on which a housing benefit restriction has been placed, as has been demonstrated by research in Brent. Housing benefit restrictions are also fuelling the flow into temporary accommodation and homelessness. It is false economics to impose housing benefit restrictions to prevent people in high-value accommodation from being funded by the public purse. Some such provision needs to be made—we cannot afford to subsidise people in penthouses in Marble Arch—but the principle has gone too far, particularly as the supply of private rented accommodation for families on low income has halved in the past five years, causing hardship and fuelling the housing crisis. It is time for action on both those fronts to relieve poverty.

I love London, its buzz and its dynamism. It has been an exciting place to live recently. Population growth and an exciting young multi-ethnic population have driven its success, but we cannot continue to tolerate the scale and intensity of poverty and deprivation in London. It causes hardship, and there is a danger that it will act as a drag on economic success. Getting more people into work is the best means of tackling poverty. There must be targeting of welfare-to-work strategies to ensure that they deliver in the capital.

11.21 am

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am grateful to be called to speak in this short debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing it and on her magnificent speech, which deserves a wider audience. She spoke up magnificently for London.

I shall add a few statistics of my own to the range that the hon. Lady provided, but I shall keep my contribution short because of her comprehensive speech. She is right about the existence of great areas of deprivation in our capital city, which may be concealed by overall statistics. Every London borough has poverty and deprivation. Even wards in my borough include deprived areas sitting cheek by jowl with prosperous areas in the leafy suburbs. An integrated approach is necessary to tackle poverty in London and, indeed, throughout the country.

The hon. Lady properly focused on poverty and people but I am convinced that the problem is accentuated if the environment in which people reside is in a disgraceful condition. I do not exaggerate but parts of our inner cities are an environmental disgrace to any nation that calls itself civilised.

Let me begin with the prosperous borough of Kensington and Chelsea, a royal borough. I understand that two of its wards are among the 10 per cent. most deprived in England and they are next to seven wards that are among the least deprived. That underlines how poverty can be found around the corner from prosperous areas.

I want to draw attention to data collected recently by the King's Fund, which created a sick list by finding out where the most unhealthy areas of the country were and by putting together the first ever league of the nation's 120 health authorities. In that league, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority is 111th and

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

East London and the City health authority is 118th, which means that two of the 10 sickest health authorities can be found in our capital city.

I am always interested to receive correspondence from our Mayor, Ken Livingstone. He sends me a lot, as I expect he does to every Member of Parliament who represents London. Like the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North, he drew attention to the Department for Work and Pensions survey. It is from 1998 and there may be new figures, but these are the most recent that I have. The context is that in any list of regions and household disposable income, London comes top, just ahead of the south-east and the east. The survey shows that, once account is taken of housing costs and household composition, average incomes in London are no higher than those in the rest of the United Kingdom, and incomes at the lower end of the distribution are significantly lower. One frightening statistic that it behoves us all to address is that in our capital city, 5.1 per cent. of the white population is unemployed but no less than 13.5 per cent. of the minority ethnic group population is unemployed.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that black and Asian young unemployed people are less likely to register at an unemployment agency and that those figures underestimate the level of disparity between white and black unemployment in London?

Sir Sydney Chapman: The hon. Lady makes a valid point. I would not presume to say categorically that she is right but I suspect that she is.

Mr. Cook—*[Interruption.]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do apologise. I took advice and was told to call you by name but that must have changed. My final point is that we must all tackle poverty in a comprehensive and integrated way. That is not a criticism but there is a possible weakness in the Government's strategy for tackling poverty. Much greater interdepartmental co-operation is necessary. I understand that the Government have to divide governance into different Departments but I am slightly concerned that in tackling poverty, interdepartmental co-ordination is not as good as it should be.

11.28 am

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this important debate to highlight the problems of poverty, deprivation and social exclusion in London. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing the debate. Her record in promoting the cause of our capital city and its residents is second to none in the current Parliament and one of which she can be rightly proud.

My hon. Friend has already referred to the issue that I want to raise. It is relatively small in terms of the number of people that it affects, although that does not mean that it is not important. The issue is the effect that the council tax benefit restriction scheme has on many of my constituents.

Highly regressive, mean-spirited and vindictive legislation was introduced in 1998 by, I regret to say, a Labour Government. Anyone who is entitled to council tax benefit has his or her benefit capped at band E. The Government made a welcome concession: anyone in receipt of full council tax benefit when the measure was introduced was given transitional relief. Many of us heralded that protection, and we were assured that the measure's effects would be carefully monitored and open to constant review.

The consultation paper that proposed the introduction of the measure assumed that claimants who owned their properties could release some capital value and make up the difference between council tax benefit and their liability above band E. That assumption begs the question why long-term residents in high capital value areas should be forced against their will to move from home, away from families and friends, while residents in other parts of the country are not so penalised. Research carried out by, among others, the Association of London Government has demonstrated beyond question that the majority of those caught by the measure live in London and rent their accommodation.

The practical effect is that many families on means-tested benefits are forced to suffer because of the geographical location of their accommodation. Current council tax rates in my borough are £1,128 for band E, £1,333 for band F, £1,538 for band G and £1,846 for band H. That means that families living in band F properties in Hammersmith and Fulham who are not protected by transitional relief—those who were not in receipt of full council tax benefit as of 1 April 1998—need to find from their already meagre benefits an extra £205 a year or £4 a week. For a band G household, the costs are £410 a year or nearly £8 a week, and for a family living in a band H property—there are quite a few—the costs are £718 a year or a staggering £14 a week.

That inevitably places families who are already trapped by poverty into a spiral of even greater financial difficulties. In practice, they must choose whether to heat their home, pay their rent or eat and clothe themselves and their families adequately. When I first raised the matter in 1998, we were able to prove beyond doubt that the measure disproportionately affected households in London.

For my local authority, strict criteria govern the allocation of social housing. Applicants on the housing register are entitled to only one reasonable offer of accommodation, and those that refuse that offer are deemed to be intentionally homeless. Nearly all the new affordable housing developments in my borough will be caught by the legislation.

Lord Falconer, the Minister for Housing and Planning, recently visited a relatively new housing development created by Shepherds Bush housing association in my constituency. Every one of the two-bedroom houses in that development is banded at band F, and larger accommodation at band G. Applicants who may have waited many years for their offer of permanent accommodation are faced with the choice of turning down their only chance of a new home or meeting an extra tax burden that applicants living outside London would almost certainly not face. Similar developments in Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle or almost any other major town and city in this country would not be so adversely affected. The measure is also a major deterrent to anyone who has received transitional relief from 1 April 1998 and wants to return to work.

It is contrary to the Government's aim of combating social exclusion and promoting welfare for work, and cannot be justified.

From 2 July 2001, arrangements were put in place for local authorities to provide additional assistance to anyone whose housing and council tax benefit is restricted, if they are satisfied that the person in need requires such financial assistance with their housing costs. According to answers to recent parliamentary questions, the Government seem to believe that the new discretion means that they no longer need to monitor the effects of the council tax benefit restriction scheme, which they promised to do when it was introduced in 1998.

That assumption is entirely specious. First, the majority of the financial discretion awarded to local authorities from July to April in this financial year would have to come from already hard-pressed local authority budgets, which are in no position to take on extra burdens. Secondly, only £15 million of the £37.5 million is Government funded. Thirdly, the new hardship fund is entirely at local authorities' discretion, and it does not represent a fair or strategic approach to dealing with poverty. My local authority is considering using it, although—I do not know what my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North thinks—her two local authorities are unlikely to use it.

The saving to the Treasury as a consequence of the measure is £7 million a year, which is a pathetically small amount of money in terms of the misery that it causes to people who are already struggling in difficult financial circumstances. It adds a further layer of complication to an already complicated system that is beyond the comprehension of many claimants and constituents. It is a Tory measure written by a Tory Government, and it should be consigned to the dustbin by this Labour Government without further delay.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I alert hon. Members to the fact that it is common practice during a 90-minute debate to give the two Opposition spokespeople and the Minister 30 minutes to conclude the debate. The 30 minutes is distributed equitably: in three blocks of 10 minutes. Three hon. Members are currently seeking to catch my eye, and little time is left. I therefore appeal to hon. Members to bear that practice in mind when making their speeches.

11.36 am

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I too congratulate the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing the debate. I have the privilege of serving with her on the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, and I know that she takes a serious interest in these matters.

I shall begin by saluting the Government's commitment to tackling poverty and disadvantage both in London and elsewhere; their intention is admirable. Significant factors that affect our society mean that those are difficult matters to change in a short time. We know from Department for Work and Pensions figures that between 1994 and 1999 there has not been consistent change in the number of children living in poverty. We also know that the number of working-age people in poverty in London and elsewhere has remained broadly constant. One reason why that has happened is because the world of work has changed. The opportunity to earn significant sums of money in the capital is available to some sectors of the population but not to all. The advent of two-earner households has also had a significant impact on income distribution.

I shall be brief because I know that time is short. The hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North discussed the decline in the supply of private rented accommodation, which is worrying. Private rented accommodation often provides the flexibility that people need in different stages of their lives as they progress in their careers and need to move around, and the Government must take its decline seriously. I urge them to consider schemes by which they can increase the supply of private rented accommodation. Whether that can be done through tax breaks to encourage more private landlords to rent part or all of their houses is for them to consider, but they must consider the issue given the decline in social housing provided by the local authority sector.

As the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North rightly said, it is important that we take an integrated approach to poverty in London. There is an important role, about which we have a heard a great deal this morning, for the Government, there is an extremely important role for local authorities, and there are important roles for community organisations and personal initiatives. She and I visited a deprived area of south-east Amsterdam last week. I was struck by the way in which different community organisations, churches and faith groups were working with local authorities and regeneration project managers. I commend the integrated approach because it provides a personal, one-to-one element that perhaps only community organisations and churches can provide. Such an approach can change lives by turning problems around.

The hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North mentioned ethnicity, which is an important subject given that 130 languages are spoken in London. Like her, I am concerned that the regional call centres advocated by the Department for Work and Pensions to deal with London residents' problems will be situated outside London. We must ensure that their staff have the languages required. I am unsure how we will get speakers of the many languages in London to work in regional call centres outside London. Perhaps the Minister will enlighten us on that.

The roots of poverty in London, as elsewhere, often start to grow in the early years of a child's life, during which they may have been neglected or abused. The shadow Home Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), recently made a speech in which he discussed a conveyor belt that goes through a sequence of events that often ends in hardened criminality. Shockingly, more than 25 per cent. of children are currently living in single-parent families. As a nation we pay £15 billion a year picking up the costs of family break-up. I suggest that we do more in the capital, and elsewhere, to support families in their early years, which would include both measures such as the working families tax credit and practical help.

[Andrew Selous]

Organisations such as Homestart offer practical advice and help to families on a weekly basis. A couple of hours a week of help that is a phone call away cannot be provided by the state or local authority , but I know from my constituency that such help can change the lives of stressed families with young children. We must see what we can do to help families to stay together because we have the highest level of divorce in Europe, and it is higher in London than in other parts of the country. Anything that we can do to help families stay together is important.

We have discussed getting unemployed people back into work. Work is key because it is the major escalator to get people out of poverty. Having been to the Netherlands with me last week, the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North will, like me, have been struck by the massive range of organisations that helps unemployed people to get back into work. The Netherlands is a laboratory. Help is delivered on a local basis. Many organisations work alongside the state sector, and I commend that approach to the Government.

11.43 am

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing the debate, and join the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) in sincerely congratulating her on a remarkable speech. She produced statistical evidence that shows that poverty in London is severe. It is unnecessary for the rest of us to go through those numbers again.

I endorse the two points that were made by my hon. Friend on the take-up of the working families tax credit. I must place on the record that my constituency is not exclusively inhabited by millionaires. It contains two of the most deprived wards in the United Kingdom, and my borough contains many similar wards. As the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet said, pockets of severe deprivation sometimes exist within individual wards. Poverty lives cheek by jowl with wealth. There is a gap in people's understanding of the working families tax credit, how they can apply for it and the benefits that it can bring.

I turn to joblessness. Much of the available work in London is perceived to be seasonal, temporary or part time, so people are reluctant to move from what they regard as a secure benefits system, not least because of the rents that they must pay. They believe that a job will not give them a permanent income and could lose them housing benefit. I admit that my evidence for that is anecdotal but I have heard it several times. The Government should consider that matter.

We heard of the worries that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet has about the poverty of the environment, and I strongly agree with him. The particular issue that I would like to discuss is the poverty of aspiration. It is linked to the statistics on unemployment, particularly those relating to ethnic minority groups. However, it is not found exclusively among those groups. In many parts of my constituency, the aspiration not only of young people but of their parents is almost nil. Their experience of life, and the facilities that have been offered to them—or, at least, the facilities that they believe that they can access—have been limited for so long that we need to create a targeted programme to begin to break down the barrier of aspiration. To reinforce the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North, if we do not tackle poverty in London, it will act as a brake on the whole city. That could have far more desperate consequences than a loss of economic vibrancy; it could lead to severe social breakdown.

There needs to be a co-ordinated programme, and I strongly agree with those who have said that the excellent programmes that the Government have set up are not sufficiently interlinked. Only last week, a sure start programme was launched in one of my wards, Gospel Oak. Crèche and nursery facilities are offered there, and mothers were asked what they wanted to know. Representatives from social services, health, education and from those who tackle crime were present.

Such initiatives are intrinsic to developing a sense of aspiration. We want the best for all our children, the best opportunities for all young people and we want those who have been unemployed to have the opportunity to return to employment to make the best use of their particular and individual abilities. However, there are still too many difficulties for people in patching into Government schemes, which have been set up under a range of titles.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) spoke of Holland as a laboratory, and mentioned the coming together of many organisations to tackle issues. It is extremely difficult for organisations that are in most desperate need of money, including that outside the Government's direct remit—say, lottery funding or the millennium fund—to begin to rekindle a sense of social aspiration. It should be made easier and simpler for organisations from a variety of areas to work together to patch into such funding sources.

Although we have made giant strides in creating a linked-up approach for all Government Departments, there is still too much separation between Departments in tackling these issues. It would not be difficult to link them, and it is essential to do so if we are to tackle poverty of aspiration; it is certainly important if we are to tackle the poverty of the environment. There are situations in my constituency, and, I imagine, in that of every hon. Member in the Chamber, that would not be tolerated in the environment of this building. If we would not accept something, we should expect no one in London to.

The Government will undoubtedly have to look again at the funding that they afford to local authorities in London. A peaceful environment, not besmirched by graffiti and faeces, and in which underpasses are not used as outdoor lavatories, will require funding. Those are not frills or mere externals. Far too many people in the capital have a sense that they are surrounded by an appalling environment because they are worth nothing. That is a root cause for the poverty of aspiration.

I too support the Government for tackling poverty in innovative ways but a great deal more must be done. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will pass on our wish for a greater link-up between Departments, which could bring a successful outcome in London.

11.50 am

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I too congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing this debate.

On the monitors that are scattered about the House of Commons, the debate is entitled, "Poverty (London)". However, that notion would seem tautologous to many hon. Members. Fourteen years after becoming a Member of Parliament, colleagues from other parts of the country are still under the illusion that London has all the jobs and prosperity, and could not know of the poverty of other regions. If this debate places on record that London has as much absolute poverty as anywhere else, and more than some areas, it will have been worth while.

I am not as lost in admiration for the Government's anti-poverty strategies as some of my colleagues. That may be because I am from the more disreputable end of the London Labour party. Hon. Members have spoken about rich areas being next to poor ones in their constituencies; in Hackney, we have poor areas next to poor areas. We have been the recipients of every variety of anti-poverty scheme and regeneration programme: neighbourhood renewal, sure start, the new deal, the new deal for communities—an alphabet soup of initiatives. In my office, I have files in which I put the Government press release each time a new allocation of money for a new initiative in Hackney is announced.

I agree that each initiative is wonderful, both in its aims and how it is fashioned. However, we have reached a point where it is time to assess this blizzard of initiatives. In Hackney, I have found that those who obtain funding for such initiatives are often those who are good at obtaining funding, rather than good at delivering programmes on the ground.

When I get a press release about a new initiative that has been given money by the Government, I make a point of going to see what is being done. When the staff in my office phone those involved to say, "Diane Abbott wants to see what you are doing with your new deal for communities money," there is a great deal of nervousness at the other end. When I visit, I may find a brand new computer, a new office and consultants who have been taken on using Government money but there is often a paucity of clients.

Without wanting to take anything away from the voluntary sector or from those running the schemes, there is a paucity of human capital for schemes in areas such as Hackney. We need fewer schemes, more co-ordination between them and more attention to be paid to the basic infrastructure that will deliver clients. In Hackney, we have witnessed the almost total collapse of our youth service. We can spend as much money as we like on schemes to deal with issues relating to young people, education and social exclusion, but if there is no youth service to deliver the clientele, such heavily funded schemes will deal with relatively small groups of young people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North spoke at length about tax credits. As the Member of Parliament for the constituency with the highest number of single parents in the country, I want to emphasise what she said about the working families tax credit and its low take-up in London. The Government are justly proud of that tax credit's effect nationally but, as an inner-London MP, I have found that it has not had the impact on my constituents that I would have liked it to have. I draw attention to my hon. Friend's comment that the take-up rate for single parents in London is half that for single parents nationally.

During the general election, I had cause to contemplate the disparity between what the Government correctly said about the new schemes and the experience of my poorest constituents. There was a mismatch between the bulging files of press releases announcing new Government initiatives in my office and people's perception of what was being delivered. The failure of the tax credit scheme to engage fully with poverty in London accounts for that mismatch.

I would like to raise the impact of asylum seekers, economic migrants and illegal immigrants on the London economy and poverty. Economic migrants have helped to make London a great world city. I use the term advisedly; it is regarded as a dirty word in political debate. My parents were economic migrants. Generations of Irish, Jewish and West Indian economic migrants helped to make London the city that it is. Sadly, the number of asylum seekers has increased because of the closing of avenues to legitimate economic migration. The Government are now examining that.

London boroughs are partially compensated for the services that they have to provide for asylum seekers. However, Hackney, Lambeth, Southwark and other London boroughs with a large number of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants are not properly compensated for the effects on delivery of service and on poverty. In the medium and long term, those people have a great deal to contribute to London's economy.

My son goes to school just across the border between Hackney and Islington. He is in year five, in a class of about 30. Only a dozen children in that class were there when he started reception. The turnover is such in many inner-London schools that teachers are teaching a different class by the end of the year. Boroughs and education authorities are not compensated for the strain that that causes the education department. Asylum seekers cannot be considered separately in the fight against poverty in London.

The Government pursued a policy of social inclusion for the population as a whole during their first term, but they pursued a policy of social exclusion for asylum seekers through the vouchers scheme. I am glad that they have abolished that.

There is a link between poverty and education and between poverty and crime. The long-term answer to poverty in London lies partly in raising educational achievement. If one examines educational achievement in London, a disturbing pattern emerges. Every year, certain ethnic minority groups fail to raise their achievement. Many ethnic minority groups in London are narrowing the gap between themselves and white Londoners. Some groups do better than white Londoners, but Afro-Caribbean children figure at the bottom of the league table every year, particularly

[Ms Diane Abbott]

boys. That is not a new problem; there have been Government reports about Afro-Caribbean educational underachievement since the 1980s.

Andrew Selous: Does the hon. Lady agree that more male role models, particularly in primary schools, would be useful for young boys if there is no such role model in their family?

Ms Abbott: I agree. I do not want to expand on that point because the debate is about poverty reduction. Whenever a picture of a failing school is shown on television or in a newspaper, it will feature a group of black or multi-ethnic children. Strategies for raising educational achievement have not focused sufficiently on black underachievement, particularly that of black boys. I urge the Minister to tell her colleagues that educational achievement in the inner cities cannot be raised without focusing on the underachievement of black boys.

J. K. Galbraith, the American economist, referred to private affluence and public squalor. Nowhere is that paradigm more obvious than in London. Where private affluence and public squalor exist, so does crime. Poverty is not an excuse for crime but some estates in London—a terrible nexus of poverty, deprivation and low aspiration—are a breeding ground for crime. If we want to avoid a proliferation of street crime and an increase in gun-related crime on the streets of London, we must deal with the issues that have been raised this morning.

12 noon

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) deserves our thanks for the way in which she has raised the subject. I thought it was one of the most well researched and thoughtful speeches that I have heard in the House. I hope that she will send it to some members of the Cabinet, who should read it. A study of the special issues concerning London is important if the Government want to achieve their targets of halving child poverty by 2010, and abolishing it by 2019.

If the Government are to meet their targets they cannot simply adopt the policies used in the rest of the country. They must urgently get a grip on the special problems in London. That would deal with one of the problems identified by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). People do not believe that poverty is a problem in London, unless they are London MPs or have a focus on London issues. The perception outside London—even in London sometimes—is that it is not a poor city. The success of London masks its major failure. We must hammer away repeatedly at that false perception.

In the first year of the previous Parliament, the Deputy Prime Minister said that Kingston was a leafy borough. That did not go down well in the Cambridge estate in Norbiton, which is one of the poorest wards in the whole of outer London. We have pockets of severe deprivation, even in the royal borough of Kingston. I am sure that that is the case in many other London boroughs.

When I pointed out to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that 43 per cent. of children live in households below the official poverty line—one of the most startling figures on London poverty—the *Daily Mail* published a sketch that lampooned me. Quentin Letts asked:

> "Is it just another of those political 'facts' that go unqueried?"

Of course, when I wrote to the *Daily Mail* to put the record straight, it did not publish my rejoinder. That sketch shows that many people, in the media and elsewhere, have a false perception of London. Even though the figures are official and well researched, many do not believe them.

The hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North was right to call for the debate because London is different. The Government have an impressive anti-poverty strategy. I do not agree with every tax and benefit change, but the major thrust of the policy is right. Employment measures such as the sure start programme and many other anti-poverty measures are welcome and deserve praise. However, they are not quite up to the task in London. The hon. Lady gave a clear analysis of the problems with the working families tax credit, which is in many ways the flagship of the Government's strategy to tackle poverty. It fails to deal with poverty in the capital, which is so much greater than elsewhere.

The hon. Lady suggested the direction that the Government should take. She rightly talked about employment; several hon. Members touched on the high levels of unemployment in our black and Asian communities in London. That point has come up time and again in my discussions with Ministers and their advisers about the failure of the new deal to have an impact on high unemployment areas throughout the country, not just in London. The new deal has yet to grasp that problem. Studies and pilots are being undertaken to examine the complexity of the problem but they have not produced a solution.

Some of the points made by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington should be taken into account but we need to go further than that in dealing with the issue. When I visited the Employment Service in Kingston during the early stages of the new deal, I was shocked by its lack of drive to get the right people for the right jobs, particularly at the gateway stage. The staff, who had been re-trained to prepare for the scheme, did not have the skills to deal with or knowledge about the problems of some of the people coming to them. They were good people and I do not criticise them but I question whether they were right for the job. As the hon. Lady said, we must tackle unemployment among those groups in the capital. We must ensure that we have the people with the right qualities for the job. If that means paying people more, let us pay more.

As the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North said, the Government claim that awareness is a vital issue in terms of tax credits. She gave ground to the Government by saying that it is difficult to run take-up campaigns because so many languages are spoken in the capital. However, the issue goes much wider than that. It is about not just awareness but the structure of the tax credit, as the Government like to call the benefit. The Government should look seriously not just at working families tax credits but at other benefits such as regional premiums. That would be a major change in Government policy on social security and I would not advocate embarking on such a change without serious research.

The cost of living in London is higher than elsewhere, yet we have national rates of benefits. We have argued in Parliament for higher housing allowances and a specific London allowance for key public sector workers in London. That is surely relevant to people who are struggling, whether on in-work or out-of-work benefits. If the Government believe that benefit increases across the board is too wide a river to cross, I suggest that they consider the analysis by the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North of the costs of child care and consider trials on regional premiums and child care tax credits, which would target some of the capital's problems. The hon. Lady was right to identify the need to look at supply as well as demand.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) made a powerful speech on the problems of the current council tax benefit system and I support all that he said. Many of the examples that he gave also occur in my constituency but my constituents are particularly hit by the shortfall in housing benefits. In advice session after advice session, I see constituents who would like to go into the private rental sector—indeed, I have met private sector landlords who would like to have them as tenants—but who cannot meet the difference between the housing benefit and the actual rent. Their income is not sufficient. It is totally unrealistic to expect them to be able to pay such rents. If we do not overcome that problem, the private sector will not play its part. It is madness to prevent the private rental sector from making a major contribution to the problem. The reform called for by the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North has come of age.

The sure start scheme is welcome but is targeted on very small areas. Some of its lessons need to be spread more widely, no more so than in London where some of the problems at which the sure start scheme is aimed exist in spades.

12.10 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) has rightly won praise from hon. Members of all parties for introducing this fascinating debate and for the range and authority of the statistics that she adduced in a powerful speech. I am pleased to add to that praise. In a previous debate on work and pensions, she cogently talked about the poor take-up of working families tax credit, a point on which she elaborated today. That is an example of the puzzling nature of this subject, which has come out so well in the debate.

If Ministers do nothing else, I hope that they will take seriously our plea for a cool and proper look at what is happening in London and where that differs from other parts of the country. I hope that they will continue to pursue their research into the effectiveness of the various policies. For all the good will that hon. Members of all parties expressed, there was an undertone that some of the policies are not working as well as they might. That applies to other parts of the country, as well as to London.

The debate has been a wonderful way of exploding cynicism about this place. The contributions have been positive, but not always uncritical, including those made by Government Members such as the hon. Members for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman), for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), and for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). My hon. Friends the Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) also made constructive and generous contributions. We should also remember those hon. Members who silently sat in the Chamber, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field). The debate deserves wider study.

The growing debate about poverty, which has been well exemplified today, has thrown up several general comments. The subject is still inadequately discussed, for which there is a political and structural reason. In the battle for votes, people tend to concentrate on socioeconomic classes B and C, as those are seen as the core battleground. Insufficient attention is given to people in classes D and E. That may be because they do not vote as often. In London in particular, there is a high level of social and physical mobility and those people are often not around to vote. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington mentioned the change in pupil rolls. The change in electoral rolls is equally kaleidoscopic in London.

I hope that hon. Members will accept that the subject of poverty should not be the prerogative of any one party. I am proud to represent the party of Wilberforce, Shaftesbury and Disraeli. The Conservative voice has a part to play in the discussion, and we should have such discussions more often.

Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have acknowledged that the problem is multi-faceted, so it is logical that the policies to tackle it must be multiple and must work together. Several hon. Members have expressed unease that there are so many initiatives that they may trip each other up without achieving much. Ministers have a difficult balance to strike between evaluating their flagship and subsidiary policies, the policies of other Departments, local authorities and the voluntary sector, and ensuring that the orchestra is properly tuned and conducted.

Colleagues have touched on some further outstanding issues. Poverty is a relational as well as a purely functional matter. What has come across strongly in our debate—hon. Members who spend time living or working in London as well as those representing constituencies outside London may not be aware of it—is the sharp differences in economic and social status. Such differences co-exist side by side—not just in north and south Kensington or the City and Tower Hamlets, but often in individual wards. Some signs of prosperity trickling down into other communities can be seen, but we must ensure that the poorer communities become more self-standing and self-sufficient economically. An effective community voice is also important. Poor communities will not be colonised by areas of affluence.

On the wider economic front, several hon. Members have already referred to the hugely changing economic profile of the capital, particularly following the decline of manufacturing industry. Great joblessness co-existing with a huge shortage of labour is a classic mismatch in the labour market; it is a paradox. As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate said, access to education and skills is a problem. Hon. Members will

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know that I have a longstanding interest in adult literacy. Low self-esteem and lack of basic skills are a huge blight on the prospects of individuals.

The cost of housing was rightly mentioned. It is a major worry for many people struggling to work in key service sector jobs. One subject not mentioned so far is transport across the metropolis—the daily worry about access to work. We read today that the Government's latest proposals for partnership on the tube are likely to lead to few tangible results for several years. These are not just economic factors: they interact with the environment and can actively inhibit regeneration.

Disabled people and pensioners form part of my responsibilities as a Front Bencher. Although not the centre of today's debate, they are relevant. The tube is notoriously unfriendly to disabled people and dial-a-ride schemes often stop at sectoral or borough boundaries. Crime blights everyone. The disadvantaged and socially excluded are probably as blighted, if not more so, than others—for example, when hard-earned family transport goes up in smoke. Young families and older people can feel trapped in poor surroundings with a diminished quality of life and little chance to join the economic world.

All those factors feed into problems with the benefit system. It is partly a problem of take-up, which requires further research. Older people's take-up of the minimum income guarantee has been disappointing. Preserving incentives is another problem when the Government find themselves on the treadmill of ever greater means-testing, which inevitably leads to ever higher and unsustainable marginal withdrawal rates for benefit.

The moral of our debate is that we are at the start of the process of discovery. No easy solutions exist off the shelf. Before the debate, many people were probably indisposed to say that London had a problem. We do not want to over-emphasise it or suggest that everything is wrong in the capital. As the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North said, many positive aspects of London life should be celebrated. Diversity and vibrancy are part of the equation and we should not view them as problems. We should not, however, sweep away the problems that exist. If we do nothing else, we should all use this debate and its aftermath to reflect seriously on the practical measures that we can take to help. We must remember that the needs must be met and the motivation must come from both inside and outside. We must all feel uneasy about a situation in which those needs co-exist so closely with the signs of success and affluence that are all around us.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): This has been a superb debate. I join in the chorus of praise for my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) for initiating it. It is a shame that it has been restricted to an hour and a half, as we could have talked for much longer.

I should make it clear that as someone who lived in London many moons ago, I am not one of those deluded people who think that there is no poverty in London. I have seen it, as has anyone who has lived in London, and it is a simple mistake to think that the bright lights and high incomes extend to every member of the population. They certainly do not, and the Government realise that. London Members will have often come across that mistaken attitude, and they are right to keep saying that poverty affects people who live in London as greatly as anywhere else in the country. They are right also to expect us to address poverty in London as we address it in other parts of the country.

The extent of the poverty that existed in Britain when we came to office in 1997 was one of our biggest challenges. The problem was exacerbated by the policies of the previous Government. During their time in office child poverty doubled and unemployment trebled. Poverty must be a priority. The last Conservative Government did too little to alleviate it. There were problems for pensioners, with widening gaps between the richest and poorest pensioners, unemployment hit 3 million and child poverty was particularly worrying.

Mr. Boswell: Will the Minister give way?

Maria Eagle: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have so many points to respond to and so few minutes to do that. I am perfectly happy to discuss the matter with him on another occasion.

We believe in equality and opportunity for all, so we could not be satisfied with that appalling situation and would not allow it to continue. We have set out to tackle it and are determined to continue to do so. As many hon. Members said, it is a complex and multi-dimensional problem. We must tackle causes, not just symptoms. Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have acknowledged the ambition of our aim, which is to halve child poverty in 10 years and eradicate it in 20. We have taken steps to combat joblessness, which is the main cause of poverty among those of working age, and begun to deal with pensioner poverty. Many hon. Members acknowledged in part the success and good progress that we have made so far. It is important to recognise that we are moving in the right direction, and this is where the value of such a debate is shown. Hon. Members have pointed out issues that it is important for the Government to take into account as we develop policies to bear down on poverty.

I want to deal with some of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North and by others. It will be impossible for me to deal with them all in the time that I have left. If I do not get around to responding to specific points raised by hon. Members, I will of course write to them.

My hon. Friend made a point about the take-up of working families tax credit, which has been echoed by others in the Chamber. People have been puzzled about the disparity between the take-up in London and the take-up elsewhere. Hon. Members asked whether I could promise that serious research would be undertaken into that. Our policies are evaluated rigorously. They are evidence based. We take seriously our commitment to ensure that we make policy on the basis of what works, rather than what we think might work.

We are looking at take-up and the position of various stakeholders in London. We are carrying out a wide-ranging evaluation programme. Last week, my officials met officials from the Greater London Authority to discuss the problem and they will continue their dialogue with stakeholders throughout London. Such work will continue so that we can learn from the results. We want to know the basis of the problem and how to tackle the important matter of take-up.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North referred to aspects of the welfare system that penalise Londoners and that need to be removed. She said that the problem occurred because of joblessness and mentioned some statistics that showed job-entry rates to be below the average. She asked whether problems of recruitment and retention compromised our ability to deliver. We are committed to building on the success of the new deal. Offices in the Benefits Agency and in job centres concentrate on London's recruitment and retention difficulties, but there is no evidence that that compromises our ability to deliver the programmes. That is not the problem but one of the biggest issues is to assist the many people in London who face multiple deprivation.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) have referred to issues in respect of their constituents. Helping the hardest-to-help groups is more difficult. We are developing policies, particularly the new deal, to tackle the many difficulties faced by groups that are harder to help because they suffer multiple deprivation, whether they are disabled people or people from ethnic minorities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington said, not all ethnic minorities suffer such problems. Therefore, we cannot say that the problem is one of discrimination or of ethnic minorities finding it harder to access the jobs market. It is not that simple.

We are continuing to develop our programmes and to target those who are hardest to help. However, the programmes are difficult to design and to evaluate. That is why, for example, the new deal for disabled people and the initiatives to help ethnic minorities and partners are behind the new deals for young people and for the long-term unemployed, which are successful. We know what works. We apply that and see the results. It is more difficult with harder-to-help groups, but to tackle the issue successfully and to get people back into work—the main way out of poverty—we must ensure that we get the more defined programmes right. Clearly, that will have an impact in London.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North said that, in London, there is a much higher number of lone parents and less informal child care. She referred to perverse incentives and said that child care credit perhaps led to increases in fees that soak up the extra money that is available. We have no substantive evidence that the child care credit is forcing up the price of child care, although all of us have come across anecdotal evidence of that.

We need to keep a close eye on what is happening. We are examining the costs of formal child care. The working families tax credit limits are not set in stone. We continue to listen to representations in that respect. Indeed, we responded to representations in the previous Budget by raising the limit. We want people to keep talking to us about the matter, although I am not sure about the point made by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) about regional premiums, which would be a nightmare from an administrative point of view. Of course, we must continue to listen to what works.

I am afraid that I am about to run out of time, and I have not managed to get through half the points that were made by hon. Members. I shall write to hon. Members whose points I have not addressed and no doubt we will continue the discussion in the Tea Room.

Policing (Mid-Surrey)

12.30 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I thank the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs for attending the debate, in which I proposed to draw his attention to funding for police in Surrey, the increasingly overstretched nature of the local force and the growing worries of many of my constituents.

I shall start with a positive point. Surrey has the good fortune of being an area that enjoys one of the lowest levels of recorded crime per head of population in Britain. My constituency of Epsom and Ewell is a low-crime area in a low-crime county, as I am sure that the Minister will tell me. However, it is easy to look at headlines and spot an area that is not a problem and put it at the bottom of the priority list when considering next year's budget and resourcing. That is happening to Surrey and I ask the Minister to think more carefully about Surrey's future police resourcing. That attention is needed not only because of the internal issues within Surrey that I will describe, but the international practicalities of having the two largest airports in the United Kingdom on our doorstep. If there is a major incident at Heathrow or Gatwick, Surrey police inevitably form a major part of the response. The Minister's decisions on funding in Surrey have a direct impact on the ability of the emergency services to deal with major events quickly and effectively, should the unthinkable happen.

Surrey is at the bottom of the pile when it comes to funding. In a recent written answer, the Minister kindly provided me with details of the grant per capita provided by the Government to forces throughout the country. Surrey's per capita grant in the current financial year is £77.04. The force area that receives the next lowest amount is Dorset, which receives £85.83. By comparison, Northumbria receives almost twice as much—over £140 per head—despite lower living costs for officers in that area. Surrey has one of the few forces in the country in which the number of officers is falling.

The relative support that the Home Office provides to Surrey has worsened considerably in recent years. Since 1997-98, Essex police have received a 20 per cent. increase in grant funding, Thames Valley police a 22 per cent. increase, and Hampshire police a 23 per cent. increase. Surrey has had a 1 per cent. cut in grant funding.

This year, the Government have announced a small increase of 2.3 per cent. for Surrey in the coming financial year. However, there has been a 4.9 per cent. increase in Surrey's cost base, which was largely made up of an extra 3 per cent. for police pay and additional costs for police pensions. All that means that the funding squeeze on police in Surrey has become tighter.

What are the consequences on the county of the funding squeeze? To start with, they are structural. From January, the force has had to streamline its operations from seven divisional headquarters to four. That means that fewer senior officers have operational roles. An example from my constituency is that Epsom always had its own local superintendent, but it no longer does. Our local police must now report to the divisional headquarters of a superintendent in Staines, which is a considerable distance from the town. However, the previous report by the inspectorate cited that one of the Surrey force's few weaknesses—the report was otherwise glowing, which does great credit to senior officers and those on the ground—was that local knowledge in control centres was rated as "poor" by operational staff. A financial process that creates a tighter structure with fewer operational centres can only make that worse.

In my constituency, Epsom police station's custody suite will now be open for only part of the week, rather than the entire week, to save money. Officers will have to transfer prisoners to Reigate, which is perhaps 10 miles away. That development is especially worrying in view of the changed nature of Epsom town centre, which is one of those centres on the fringes of London that are increasingly becoming dominated by pubs, clubs and restaurants. Unruly behaviour on Friday and Saturday nights is becoming worse and there are signs of violence that would have been unthinkable not so long ago. Only a few weeks ago, there was a serious stabbing outside a club in the town. Considering such developments, my guess is that in the years ahead Epsom town centre will become more rather than less difficult to police.

The Surrey police are scaling down their responsiveness to 999 calls, as they very publicly announced a few weeks ago. From now on, only calls that meet clear criteria will receive a response. For example, police will refuse to attend burglar alarms in the absence of clear signs of activity on a property. In fact, the problem is much worse than that. Already the pressures on front-line officers in dealing with 999 calls are manifesting themselves. Several of my constituents contacted me to express anxiety about how difficult it is to receive a 999 response to all but the most significant incidents. In one case a few weeks ago, a gentleman in my constituency had his car vandalised by a gang of local youths. He knew who they were. He contacted the police and asked for an officer to come round immediately, but he did not receive a response for a couple of days. That is an operational issue for Surrey police, but it reflects the day-to-day pressures on officers, which manifest themselves in the first signs of a service that is poorer than my constituents would choose to receive.

Officers' pay is an issue not only for the police in Surrey but throughout the south-east. Officers in Surrey are paid perhaps £6,000 a year less than their counterparts just over the border in London, who have the advantage of London weighting. There are signs that Surrey is losing officers to the Met, which is aggressively expanding its rolls. Such officers go because they can earn a bit more money for travelling not very far. The Minister needs to be mindful of that trend in the next few months, as there is a danger that force levels outside London will suffer as a result of the drive to recruit in the Met.

The crime figures for Surrey do not sufficiently reflect the increase in antisocial behaviour in the county and the social upheaval that it creates. We already know about the impact of such behaviour in inner-city areas. We must not allow it to take hold in suburban and country areas as well.

Against that background, I cannot praise Surrey officers on the ground highly enough for the commitment that they bring to the job and for their work in keeping crime figures down. They do an excellent job. However, in dealing with the growing menace of antisocial behaviour, there simply are not enough of them to provide adequate protection for my constituents and people throughout mid-Surrey.

I shall describe some of the incidents that take place every week in my constituency and with which the police simply do not have the numbers to cope. One case involved a woman who ran a small upholstery business in a building adjoining Banstead station. Her premises were probably originally the offices for an old coal yard—a detached building in the middle of the station forecourt. She has been there for nearly 30 years, but she is now leaving, having been terrified by a group of teenagers who, day after day, week after week, would vandalise her building and harass her in her place of work, banging on the side of the building and smashing windows while she cowered inside. Inevitably, before the police could come, they had melted away into the surrounding area. When one night they forced their way into her building, through strong iron bars, smashed up the inside and wrecked her business, she decided that enough was enough. She is on her way. None of that ever showed up in the crime figures. It might have showed up as a one-off, but the figures did not reflect the harassment that that woman faced week after week.

A second case involves a gang that has systematically vandalised Ashtead station in the past year. They hung around on a Saturday night, covered the walls with graffiti, jumped on trains, wrecked carriages and stopped off to commit acts of vandalism at various stations along the way. My local beat constable has done sterling work in trying to tackle the problem.

All credit to Surrey police. On a couple of occasions they have mounted operations to remove the ringleaders, but that has not solved the problem of that gang and others from all over the county going up and down the railway line on a Friday and Saturday night causing damage near the stations. The resources do not exist in Surrey to mount a systematic campaign to deal with the problem. The reality is that one or two local officers are confronted by a gang of 30 young people, who basically say, "Up yours!" Those officers cannot deal on an operational basis with such problems.

Very little of what the gang does will show up in official crime figures, but the fear that it causes is real. The bulk of our law-abiding teenagers, who live in one of the safest areas in Britain, as the Minister would tell us, are afraid to walk around Ashtead after 6 pm because of the gang. Gang members cause damage and harass commuters and young people in the area.

A similar problem occurred in Stoneleigh broadway, where another gang has harassed shopkeepers and committed acts of vandalism for months. In the past couple of weeks, the gang's activities have stepped up a gear and it committed an unpleasant assault on a local shopkeeper—an example of antisocial behaviour turning into criminality. Other incidents in my constituency involve shopkeepers on Tattenham corner and some of the smaller parades.

There are now widespread reports that the gang culture that has grown up in suburban areas is beginning to attract youngsters from the cities and other parts of the south-east who are looking for a Friday night session of vandalism and violence. That is especially true of the areas along the railway line in my area—as it is for others, I suspect. It is easy to jump on a train, cause trouble and get away quickly.

To some degree, the problem is showing through in crime figures. If the Minister studies the incidence of recorded crime in Surrey, he will see that criminal damage rates are now much higher than in other counties, especially in rural areas. The same is true of drug offences and, more worryingly, violent crime. For example, in Surrey there are three times as many acts of violence against the person as in Warwickshire. Therein lies the rub for the Minister. Surrey is a low-crime area that lies alongside the high-crime area of London. I understand that it has not been a priority for the Home Office. However, if the financial squeeze on Surrey police makes it impossible for them to deal with the rising problem of antisocial behaviour, we risk the tougher battle fought in the inner cities being brought out to the suburbs and a broader area of society, which cannot be desirable.

I have two requests for the Minister. First, although I do not expect him to get out his cheque book for long-term funding here and now, when his Department reviews future funding requirements for forces, will he reconsider Surrey's case and ask whether we merit such a low settlement in comparison with other counties? My second request concerns antisocial behaviour and vandalism on the railways. I have already discussed with the chief constable the possibility of mounting a systematic campaign this spring and summer to try to stamp it out once and for all. Inevitably, on a tight budget the chief constable does not easily have the resources to do that. Does the Home Office have discretionary funds? Can Surrey police, together with British Transport police and the railway companies seek the resources to mount such a campaign from the Home Office?

In the past couple of generations, we have seen a steady erosion of standards of behaviour throughout too much of our society. Too often, it has led to criminal activity. Crime rates today are much higher than when our parents were children. In Surrey and similar parts of the country, the trend is not the massive social problem that we face in many of our inner cities, but we cannot afford to ignore it. I do not want to return in five or 10 years to try to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted.

Police in Surrey need sufficient resources to stamp on the unwelcome trend in antisocial behaviour. I fear that they are far too thinly stretched at present because the overall crime figures give a veneer that all is well. Surrey police deserve the credit that they get for their work from the police inspectorate and the public, but the pressure on resources is already making the service that they offer a little ragged around the edges. The Minister can help to change that, and I urge him to do so.

12.45 pm

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing this debate on policing in mid-Surrey. It gives us a good opportunity to air local concerns and allows me to outline what the Government and the police are doing to reduce crime further and make Surrey a safer place in which to live.

[Mr. John Denham]

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not mind if I chide him a little. He spoke about declining standards of respect and behaviour in society. He is a member of the Conservative party, which told us not so long ago that there was no such thing as society. If we had not gone through such a long period of dismantling the things that make our society cohesive, we might not face some of the problems that we do. Let us not forget that, according to the British crime survey, which is generally regarded as the most authoritative measure of crime—a better measure than reported crime—in the year up to April 2001 the chance of being the victim of crime in England and Wales was at its lowest since the survey began in 1981.

I do not dismiss the seriousness of the incidents that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, nor do I deny that there are significant problems still to be faced and overcome. However, the surveys do not reflect his description of everything falling apart around our ears. I shall consider some of his arguments before I cover financial and staffing issues.

It is true that Surrey has relatively little crime and has experienced falls in crime. Even recorded crime fell by just under 1 per cent. in the 12 months to last March, and it has fallen by more than 10 per cent. since 1995. Both those statistics exclude the effects of the boundary changes. The detection rate for crime in Surrey for the past year was 28 per cent., compared with 25 per cent. in the south-east region, which suggests that the police are doing a good job.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about antisocial behaviour. Of course it is important to have more police on the beat to respond to crimes and I shall talk about the Government's reform program in that regard. Most antisocial behaviour and vandalism of the sort that he describes requires—and the police deserve—a partnership between the police and local authorities and other agencies. His local authority should have an antisocial behaviour co-ordinator, who should work with the police to ensure that full use is made of the antisocial behaviour orders, curfews and legislation that the Government have introduced to tackle the problems.

The Police Reform Bill will both simplify and extend the scope of antisocial behaviour orders to make them more flexible. One of the changes will enable the British Transport police to seek antisocial behaviour orders. That will be of significant use against those who are behaving on trains or at stations in the way that the hon. Gentleman describes. I hope that he will welcome those moves.

The hon. Gentleman asked about resources. There is no central pool of funds for antisocial behaviour work, but just as we have had a crime reduction program this year, next year we will have a safer communities initiative, which will fund priority crime reduction activities in local areas. For some of the problems that he describes, money from the communities against drugs initiative can be used, which crime reduction partnerships and local authorities will have received. That can be used to fund policing activities or deal with the consequences of drug misuse, or for closed circuit television. A range of funds that did not previously exist is being made available to communities to help to tackle those problems.

Let us consider the wider issues. We recently debated next year's police settlement in the House. There was a 6.1 per cent. overall increase in provision for police spending through Government grants in England and Wales, which builds on a 10.1 per cent. increase in the current financial year. That is good news. Surrey police were allocated a Government grant of £82.9 million—an increase of 2.4 per cent. on the current financial year. On one of the more discretionary matters, I decided to continue to pay the costs incurred by the Metropolitan police boundary changes in April 2000 for another year. Therefore, Surrey police will receive an additional £800,000 to meet those costs in 2002-03.

Aside from discretionary decisions of that sort, the distribution of grant is intended to reflect the relative needs of forces. The formula is weighted so that forces that serve larger populations receive more money. It also takes into account the socio-demographic nature of the population. Surrey is fortunate because it has experienced a large decrease in young male unemployment, which is a significant indicator in the formula that establishes the likelihood of crime taking place. It has also had a lower than average increase in resident and daytime population. That is reflected in the grant distribution for the current year.

The 2.4 per cent. increase in grant is not the only additional money that Surrey will receive this year. It will receive a further £3.3 million from the crime fighting fund to meet the costs of recruiting extra police officers, as well as the costs of those it recruited last year. It will also receive £11,000 from the rural policing fund and it is expected to benefit from additional funding to help meet the cost of the Airwave communications system.

It is for police authorities to set the final budget and they must determine the precepts. Government grant is just one indicator of police performance. The Audit Commission's figures on spend per capita for 1997-98 to 1999-2000 show that Surrey police spent more than the other forces in the south-east, although I accept the hon. Gentleman's figures with regard to grant per capita under the police grant.

The hon. Gentleman raised several questions about the police funding formula. Although it has many strengths and the policing community retains a high degree of confidence in it, we are working on updating it in line with the needs of policing for the next five years. I also want to ensure that the formula supports the reform and modernisation processes upon which we have embarked.

A working group has been established to examine the formula. Its members include representatives from the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Association of Police Authorities and other interested bodies. The group is considering a range of options to update the police funding formula, particularly with regard to the police activity data that underlie the formula and the additional costs that might arise from policing especially sparsely or densely populated areas.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the proximity of Gatwick and Heathrow airports. I cannot give any guarantees about the outcome, until the exercise has been completed. However, as such questions are raised every year throughout the country in consultations about the police grant, I hope that we will be able to answer them and show people that at least we have examined them, even if we have decided that they should not influence the formula.

Chris Grayling: Will the Minister also ask the people who are engaged in that work to examine the potential impact of cross-border movements? Some young people board a train and travel a few stops down the line to Surrey to commit antisocial acts because policing is tougher in the Metropolitan police area. Such cross-border flows of trouble could become a problem.

Mr. Denham: I am unsure whether it would prove possible for a formula to reflect such movements without it becoming incredibly complex. The Metropolitan police might point to criminal activity that is committed by people who come into the city from places such as Surrey. However, the type of one-way traffic activity that the hon. Gentleman mentioned might be addressed, if there was an evidence base to show that it was taking place. Some formulas are so complex that nobody understands how they operate. The new formula must avoid that pitfall if it is to command respect.

On police numbers, the public rightly feel reassured by the sight of police officers on our streets—it helps to reduce the fear of crime. The police reform process that we embarked on is designed to achieve record numbers of police officers in England and Wales by this spring and 130,000 officers by spring next year, and to make better use of their time. Our own research shows that just under 50 per cent. of a typical police constable's time is spent in the police station rather than out on patrol, for a variety of reasons.

On a recent visit to the police headquarters in Surrey, I was interested to see the new call centre that had been established with the specific intention of enabling officers to report directly the details of crimes, such as burglaries, that they had dealt with. They no longer have to travel back to a police station to enter the details before setting out on the next visit. I was impressed by that change when I visited the force with the chief constable. It is just one example of the ways in which new investment can free up officer time and, in part, it is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about response times for particular types of incident. The public can also use the call centre. As public confidence in that way of contacting the police grows, police time will be freed up.

In general, investment in information technology, reduced bureaucracy, better liaison with the courts and more effective use of civilian staff—the chief constable of Surrey is keen on that—will all help to deliver more police officers in the community, not just wandering the streets but devoting their energy to getting underneath and behind the underlying problems that the hon. Gentleman described and solving them. That is the wish of the public and the Government.

The overall number of police officers in Surrey on 30 September 2001 was 2,018. That is just under 400 more officers than in March 1997, although about half of the increase resulted from boundary changes with the Metropolitan police on 1 April 2000—none the less, it is a significant increase. I referred to the support that the chief constable gives to civilian staff. Their numbers have increased since March 1997 by 230 to 957 in September 2001. Many of the extra civilian support staff are used to free police officers from paperwork and from jobs that can be as effectively undertaken by civilians.

Surrey recognised that it would be affected by the boundary changes around London in April 2000. It had Met secondees, but recognised the need to recruit early. The force recruited strongly in 1999-2000 and in 2000-01 and expects to be at its target strength of 2,043 by 31 March 2002, which reflects a slight decline over the past 12 months. The force and chief constable deliberately decided to get ahead of the game and recruit extra officers so that they were not overly affected by the return of the secondees; I certainly would not criticise that judgment.

Under the crime fighting fund, Surrey police were allocated an additional 134 recruits over and above their previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003. In the first year, the force appointed 240 recruits, including 94 funded by the CFF. Last year, in addition to the force's allocation of 46 CFF recruits for 2000-01, the Government allowed it to recruit this year's allocation of 48. Similarly, we have allowed the force to recruit several CFF officers this year who should have been recruited next year. The Government have given significant support to the recruitment of extra police officers in Surrey. Overall, we expect the Surrey force to recruit more than 200 new recruits in the current financial year and, through the CFF, it will be able to recruit another 32 officers next year, over and above any planned recruitment of its own.

The hon. Gentleman talked about pay. I do not have time to set out details of the extra allowances, but as he knows a significant number of officers in Surrey received for the first time an extra payment of £2,000. Surrey also benefited from help with low-cost housing.

We are aware of concern about recruitment and retention issues; we are working with Surrey and other forces to get to grips with the matter and to find the best way of tackling it.

Specialist Surgery (North-West Kent)

1 pm

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): Last month, the Government announced an expansion in day surgery in the national health service, a welcome decision given the lengthy waiting times for most elective operations.

In 2000-01, according to the Audit Commission, the average wait for day-case patients needing cataract operations was 163 days, for hernia operations 84 days and for varicose vein operations, 154 days. Furthermore, critics of the NHS often do not recognise that the demand for operations continues to increase. The United Kingdom has an ageing population, which is reflected in the increasing amount of resources that the NHS must set aside each year for treating and managing chronic conditions and performing elective surgery.

More operations than ever before are being performed; for example, in 1994 there were 145,000 cataract operations, in 1999 there were 200,000 and about 250,000 are expected to be performed next year. However, unless we are prepared to carry out a far-reaching overhaul of the way in which surgery is carried, demand will continue greatly to outstrip supply.

A report by consultants from Moorfields eye hospital, published in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology* in the year 2000, warned of the escalating problem of visual impairment in the UK. The report concluded that by the beginning of this year the number of people with impaired vision needing some form of surgical intervention would reach 2.5 million and many of them would die before they had the operation. That is especially regrettable given the reduction in the quality of life caused by impaired vision, especially in elderly people.

Unfortunately, the UK is not the only country facing this problem; hundreds of thousands of patients in France and Germany are in a similar position, and even their much-vaunted health systems leave thousands of patients untreated each year. Indeed, no health system, however generously resourced or efficient it is, will ever eliminate the problem of unmet need. A constituent who came to see me recently mentioned the German system, which we hear is well resourced and has no waiting list, yet her sister had waited eight months for a hip replacement in the private sector. It is not only a problem in the UK; other countries have similar problems.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the way that elective surgery is managed in this country can and should be improved, as the Government have said. Too many patients wait too long for treatment. For example, last year a quarter of patients in north-west Kent waiting for an ophthalmology appointment had to wait in excess of six months to be seen. Several patients, having eventually been given a date for cataract surgery, had their operations cancelled at the last moment because their bed or theatre space was needed for an emergency.

For an elderly and often vulnerable patient, such a scenario is stressful and confusing. It is also extremely frustrating for the patient's family, who have to prepare their mother or father once again to face an operation, having already had to deal with the problems caused by their impaired vision, perhaps for many months.

Patients and their families ask why they should have to wait so long for what is in most cases a routine and relatively straightforward procedure. They also ask why there are such glaring local variations in the way that elective surgery is managed. Why do some trusts have measures to ensure that day surgery cases and planned operations are not cancelled for emergency cases and others not?

Plans by Darent Valley hospital in my constituency to begin 24-hour surgery, with six beds specifically ring-fenced for patients requiring routine operations such as hernias, varicose veins and urological procedures, are an example of innovative thinking, which needs to be more widely replicated in the NHS. The new service, which is being supported by a dedicated nursing team, is being funded for 12 months by the winter emergency services team, and will allow 30 extra patients each week to receive treatment. Darent Valley hospital is the first hospital in Kent to provide a dedicated, stand-alone unit for intermediate and elective surgery. That is welcome and essential. I have been in touch with the hospital over the past few months, and I have recent figures about its latest situation.

The Minister will know that Darent Valley hospital was zero-rated and has faced significant problems. However, I am pleased to tell those in the Chamber that there have already been noticeable improvements. The number of patients waiting more than 26 weeks for an out-patient appointment has reduced from 501 to 117 in the past four months. The total number of patients waiting for more than 13 weeks for an out-patient appointment dropped dramatically from 2,160 in March 2001 to 654. That is a huge and welcome improvement in waiting times for out-patient appointments.

The worst problem faced by the hospital is the waiting list for in-patient procedures. The total number of patients waiting for an in-patient appointment is still 3,500 and has not dropped significantly over the past year, despite the trust's best efforts. The hospital has successfully reduced the wait for an out-patient appointment, but there are still huge backlogs on in-patient appointments, which is causing it great difficulties.

The new unit will allow the hospital to fast-track elective surgery cases and to ensure that all patients are seen within the year. Some 5 per cent. of patients have to wait more than 12 months. The new unit will also ensure that more patients are treated within the Government's target period of six months, which the hospital is finding challenging. The scheme is welcome and will significantly improve the situation. The drawback of the scheme is that it is only a temporary measure. The trust does not yet have funding to keep the unit open beyond next year, and has no resources permanently to operate its theatres around the clock. Although the winter and emergency services team funding is valuable, it underlines this country's ad hoc and inconsistent approach to elective surgery.

Occasional batches of funding for individual trusts are not the answer. Every trust in the country must look closely at the way in which it conducts elective and intermediate surgery, and must work hard to identify new ways of ensuring that patients do not wait as long, and get a better overall quality of service. Just as important, the Department of Health and the

NHS Modernisation Agency must ensure that trusts are given the necessary resources and support. After all, what bothers patients who are waiting for elective operations is that under the current system they are made to feel like third-class patients. The quality of care that they get may be good, but naturally they feel aggrieved because it is made clear to them that their condition is of low priority, and that their treatment will be fitted in as and when circumstances permit. Their condition may not be life threatening, but it precludes them from enjoying quality of life, so why should they always be sent to the back of the queue?

There is no question of blame, and I am not attacking anyone. My point is simply that patients who are on routine waiting lists are often made to feel that their case must wait for the more urgent ones. They ask, quite reasonably, why that must always be so. This is why dedicated, stand-alone elective surgery units are a way forward. They ensure that patients awaiting elective operations enjoy the same access to health care as any other NHS patient does.

Dedicated units have operated effectively in the United States of America for many years. According to one US surgeon writing in the *British Medical Journal*, they have become such a fixture of the US health care system that in some cases they are threatening the viability of neighbouring general hospital units. One surgeon said that the dedicated unit was remarkably efficient. Its four theatres and fluoroscopy room performed 250 surgical and 200 interventional pain management procedures each month without operating at weekends or evenings, and without running at maximum capacity. The range of its care included orthopaedics, such as joint arthroscopy, cruciate ligament, shoulder reconstructions and extensive arm surgery. It also included general surgery, such as "lumps and bumps" and hernia repair, cosmetic surgery and invasive pain management. A neighbouring facility catered for common ear, nose and throat conditions and for ophthalmologic surgery.

Of course, specialist fast-track units are not suited to the needs of every patient. Patients with multiple health problems who need treatment from a range of services and specialisms will still need to be treated under the current system. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that for most patients, dedicated fast-track units are a viable option. Specialist units can operate throughout the week, at weekends as well as nights, provided they have proper support and are well integrated with other hospital facilities so that all the relevant services can be accessed easily and quickly at all times. They would cut swathes through our waiting lists in a short time.

The Royal College of Surgeons is backing the idea. The ex-president of the college—Sir Barry Jackson—said that the idea of ring-fencing elective beds and adopting more flexible working patterns should be embraced by the profession and promoted, providing there is an adequate number of surgeons and support staff to make it possible.

The British Medical Association also said that the concept of dedicated fast-track units was a welcome contribution to the debate about reducing time spent by patients waiting for elective surgery. I am therefore pleased that the Government announced last year their intention to build 26 fast-track units by 2006 as part of their latest hospital building programme. Will 26 units be enough to make a difference, given the rapidly increasing demand for elective surgery? There is a good case to be made for a dedicated unit of that sort to be built in north-west Kent, which is a fast-growing area where there is already a high demand for elective procedures. What will we do while we wait for the programme of elective units to come on stream, supposedly in 2006?

Plans by Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust to ring-fence beds for elective surgery and to explore the viability of 24-hour surgery is one way of ensuring that patients awaiting elective procedures are seen more quickly. Another possible approach would be to employ surgical teams from abroad on short-term NHS contracts. I know that it is extremely controversial but only last week I received a letter from a German health association that said it could provide the NHS with a complete surgical team able to carry out a wide range of elective and intermediate procedures. Clearly there would be all sorts of issues but they would be working in NHS hospitals, with NHS staff and NHS equipment, on NHS patients. It is worthy of consideration. Currently there are not enough surgeons and nurses to cut through the backlog of waiting lists as fast as we would like. It might be a way of reducing some of the problems.

As many of our operating theatres are not capable of operating round the clock because of manpower and resource restrictions, it would seem sensible to examine such ideas as a means of clearing our surgical backlog at regular intervals. After all, most patients would much prefer to be treated in an NHS hospital, which is close to home and a familiar environment, than to have to fly abroad for treatment. While I am pleased to see real and tangible efforts being made to cut elective surgery waiting lists, we can and need to go further. With the demand for elective procedures likely only to increase in the next few years, we have to ensure now that we have the right sort of surgical regime in place so that the NHS has the capacity to deal with the problems effectively.

I have worked in the NHS for a long time. I believe that I am the only MP who currently carries on any medical practice. I therefore have a lot of experience with the way that patients deal with the NHS and the way that they handle their care. Patients, generally speaking, do not complain about the care once they receive it. People who have heart attacks or get pneumonia go to hospital and are treated very quickly and generally are extremely appreciative. Patients complain not about emergency care, but about the length of time that they have to wait for non-emergency care. That is the biggest problem that the NHS faces.

There are currently three problems. One is increasing demand. We call it a problem but I am not sure that it is. People are living longer and the population is ageing. It has been shown that men in particular will spend the last 15 years of their life with a chronic or disabling illness. That is a long time. Many of those chronic and disabling illnesses are amenable to surgical intervention. If we could reduce the number of people waiting, we could improve the quality of life for millions of people by operating on them when they need it. I see it not as a problem, but as an opportunity. People are living longer: they are coming forward with more illnesses and they have more treatable conditions. It is up to us to ensure that they get that treatment.

[Dr. Howard Stoate]

The second problem that the NHS faces is its inability to predict accurately how long people must wait. They are told that they will have to wait six or nine months for their operation but cannot be given an accurate figure. The hospital cannot predict how many operations it will carry out in a given week because it cannot predict how many emergencies it might have to deal with that would eat into that list.

The third problem is the low priority given to routine cases. Hospitals have to make emergencies their priority, but the corollary is that people who are not emergencies see themselves as a nuisance and insufficiently ill to merit the treatment that they want. That is unnecessary and unhelpful. Operations are postponed for very good reasons but it causes huge disruption for families. The Government should look at the overall picture of the disruption not only to the family, but to the staff and the patient and the overall costs. Someone needing a hip replacement will be virtually incapacitated. If they had a hip replacement they could become productive members of society. If we examined the overall cost to society of a patient on a waiting list, we might discover some interesting figures.

In conclusion, we have to change the culture and move towards an NHS that is seen to view people as a high priority, seen to provide the right treatment and seen to predict when an operation should take place. If we can produce a culture in which people no longer view themselves as a nuisance, but as part of a system to provide treatment in response to their needs in a timely fashion, everyone will be more satisfied. I urge the Minister to reflect carefully on the plans that I outlined and assess whether any mileage can be gained in progressing them further. I look forward to hearing her response.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) on securing this debate and on his thoughtful speech about the direction of reform for the NHS. Much is happening, but more progress remains to be made. My hon. Friend clearly speaks with great authority and commitment. He is right that this subject does not always secure the most attention from the public or the media, yet it is a vital issue for many thousands of people every day.

Last year, more than 6.5 million elective operations in NUS trusts took place in England and nearly half were day case operations. As my hon. Friend said, these operations matter immensely to people's quality of life and the effective delivery of elective surgery is crucial to delivering the in-patient waiting time target set out in the NHS plan and rightly so. We all want top quality emergency care when we need it, but we also want to know that routine treatment for quality of life and our ability to carry on living our lives to the full is delivered as speedily as possible.

My hon. Friend is right to raise issues about the separation of elective and emergency care as part of the modernisation of services. Equally important is the role of the Modernisation Agency in improving the delivery of care at trust level and spreading good practice throughout the NHS. The success of the national booked admissions programme is also important. By 2005, it will allow GPs to book hospital appointments at times convenient to the patient. It is not just about better management of elective surgery and patient treatment throughout the NHS, but about addressing the frustration of patients who do not know when their appointment for needed surgery will take place. Shaping the services around the needs of patients as well as more efficient care is necessary.

In north-west Kent, some measures are already under way to increase the optimum use of bed capacity and ease the pressures placed on elective surgery by emergency care. The new Darent Valley hospital, opened by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in December 2000, was linked closely to the development and implementation of new models of care around a "closer to home" strategy, which supports additional capacity in the non-acute setting.

In the past year, the trust and primary care trust rolled out initiatives to support these new ways of working with an increasing emphasis on that strategy. For example, the stroke rehabilitation team reduced the length of stay of rehabilitative patients from an average of 21 days to an average of seven. The intermediate care team worked to prevent the need for hospital admission by working directly with the medical assessment unit and accident and emergency departments. Additional intermediate care capacity was freed up at the Livingstone hospital and the orthopaedic bridging team in the acute trust allowed the team to treat around 10 per cent. of total orthopaedic admissions, thus reducing the average length of stay of patients in the acute setting. Of course more remains to be done, but it is important to recognise progress.

My hon. Friend spoke about elective centres, but I want to speak about the national position on diagnostic and treatment centres before I deal with his points about north-west Kent. Diagnostic and treatment centres are a new, more appropriate way of delivering elective care. They can carry out a wide range of elective work and, by moving elective patients out of acute centres and into dedicated units, they free valuable emergency and critical care beds. They are separate units, not disrupted by other parts of the hospital, so patients can be treated quickly and efficiently and in an appropriate environment. Often, the centres are on the hospital site and so appropriate treatment in emergency or critical care units is available. However, as my hon. Friend said, there are a variety of DTCs in other countries and we need to learn from their experience, too.

A diagnostic and treatment centre is defined as a dedicated unit providing safe, high-volume, elective diagnostic and treatment services, with its work separated and protected from emergency pressures. DTCs are capable of delivering a wide range of services. How they develop in an individual hospital trust will be influenced by a variety of factors, including the potential impact and reliance on other hospital services. Careful consideration must be given to those factors in each individual instance, but there are some core elements that we expect all DTCs to provide.

First, elective or scheduled care must be separated from emergency care, with both diagnosis and treatment usually provided. Secondly, the centres must focus on effective work processes for maximum efficiency to make possible the speedy treatment of as many patients as possible. Care must be co-ordinated among medical and surgical specialities, and across all disciplines. Fourthly, they must provide a service focused around the patient, with prompt and convenient access and reliable booked appointments. As my hon. Friend made clear, patients' concerns and experiences must be addressed when considering the routine surgery that they need.

The booked admissions programme is a crucial part of the DTCs. It should mean the abolition of waiting lists for hospital appointments and admissions. Patients should receive a choice of convenient times within a guaranteed maximum waiting time. If the current trend in the growth of GP referrals continues, it will halve the maximum waiting time for a routine appointment, with the average waiting time for out-patient appointments also falling in line with the targets in the NHS plan.

The DTCs and the booked admissions programme will have a major impact on elective surgery throughout the NHS. The DTCs also have an important part to play in achieving the targets in the NHS plan. As my hon. Friend said, we have already announced a series of diagnostic and treatment centres. A target of 20 was set out in the NHS plan, with eight fully operational and treating 200,000 patients a year by 2004. The plan states:

> "We will develop a new generation of Diagnostic and Treatment Centres to increase the number of elective operations that can be treated in a single day or with a short stay."

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced plans for 26 DTCs in February 2001. That announcement put us well on course to exceed the target that I mentioned a moment ago. Work is progressing to ensure that those deliver, through tight project management and, where necessary, intense and early process redesign. They will work with the NHS Modernisation Agency as part of its programme.

My hon. Friend asked us to go further and I agree that we need to do so. The Government are considering ways to extend the DTC programme to areas including the south-east and, if possible, bring it forward. We have an ambitious programme for centres throughout London and the south-east and we will consider any suitable proposals to benefit even more patients.

We are already working with the London and south-east regional offices to identify additional diagnostic and treatment centre sites. We aim to have at least four schemes up and running in London and the south-east by the end of this year. We will encourage all proposals if they offer an appropriate response to local needs and quality and value for money. We will look to the new strategic health authorities to oversee the strategy and development of diagnostic and treatment centre proposals. They will work with local project teams to establish when the proposals should move forward.

We are also developing a process for further proposals to receive approval. We shall consider future proposals, including those from the new Kent and Medway health authority, which will no doubt need to take a strategic view of the delivery of services for Kent and Medway as a whole. At the launch of the diagnostic and treatment centre programme on 6 February this year, further expressions of interest were sought from trusts that wish to participate in the second wave of diagnostic and treatment centre expansion. We expect more interest and we shall look to the Modernisation Agency to support applications.

It is only appropriate, of course, that the first decision about where DTC sites are located should come from the future strategic health authorities. Obviously, the Kent and Medway health authority will need to explore with all the acute trusts and the nine PCTs the current capacity constraints within the area. Strategic decisions will need to be taken about the future delivery of services, but I understand that a provision of a diagnostic and treatment centre to serve the population of Kent and Medway to increase elective capacity is one of the options that is being considered.

Discussions will need to take place on an area-wide basis to determine the most appropriate site and the most appropriate way forward. If developed, a diagnostic and treatment centre could relieve pressure on not only the Darent Valley hospital, but other providers. My hon. Friend asked what should happen while the development of diagnostic and treatment centres takes place. He mentioned the present work in his local hospital. He is right that, due to constraints on capacity as a result of an increase in emergency admissions and delayed discharges, the trust has reduced the number of cancelled operations by protecting six beds for intermediate dependency elective surgery. Those beds are being used for patients on the in-patient waiting list, whose operations require them to stay overnight.

Non-recurrent funding from WEST—the winter and emergency services team—will maintain that service for 10 months from the end of February this year and will allow 30 patients a week to access surgery. That amounts to 1,380 a year from a current waiting list of 3,500 patients. By targeting the patients with the greatest clinical need whose operations make them most suitable for such care, it will enable the trust to make considerable progress.

The trust is negotiating with the PCT to ensure that funding is provided on a recurrent basis for the remainder of the year and beyond. Clearly, it is for the local economy to decide how best its local targets should be met and the best way in which to provide the service. My hon. Friend is also right that we shall need to look at other innovative ways of improving elective surgery and reducing waiting times in the meantime, such as introducing the booked admissions programme and recruiting staff from different places, including abroad.

We are only too aware of the pressures on the NHS system. Perhaps too often, the media focuses on the accident and emergency programmes and emergency care. We have taken steps to deal with those pressures and to improve emergency care by making more money available and introducing reforms to improve the patient experience, whenever we can. We need also to keep high in our minds the work that is being done to improve the support for those who need routine treatment. We must look to how we use new methods of working and how to make the best use of modern, more sophisticated technology. That is clearly about expanding capacity and investing the additional resources, where needed, and also most crucially about reforming the way in which we provide services and ensuring that the additional resources are put to best

[Yvette Cooper]

use. We must use that work to make the greatest possible impact on people's lives and, especially, patients' lives.

I hope that my hon. Friend will feel that considerable progress is being made in diagnostic and treatment centres throughout the country and that there is the potential for a big difference for his constituents and those who use the specialist elective surgical services throughout north-west Kent.

Regional Development Agencies

1.30 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I am grateful for securing the debate to allow me to talk about regional development agencies, and especially the South West of England development agency.

There is no doubt that regional development agencies have burst on the scene. However, I want to know why they are here and what they hope to achieve. If I were asked what the South West RDA stood for, I would say a "really dreadful agency that removes democracy absolutely", which is "RDA" twice.

Why must we have a regional development agency in the south-west of that size? It includes Gloucester, Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall. If one turned the RDA on its head from Gloucester and stuck it upwards, it would stretch to the Scottish borders, which gives some idea of the amount of land that is covered.

The RDA's brief is to help with economic development, efficiencies, employment, development and sustained development. It has not hit any of those criteria since its inception. It is meant to work for the benefit of people in the south-west, not for the benefit of a few.

Why do we have a quango that has been formed to be subservient to an un-elected regional assembly? I do not understand why the assembly has the say over the RDA. During a similar debate on 12 December, my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) asked about the Government's plans for the regional assemblies, what they would be used for and when they would be made legitimate. Our problem is that the RDA goes to the regional assembly every time that a decision must be made and the assembly okays it. What legitimacy does that have in the south-west? Absolutely none.

Let us examine the figures that show the growth of the RDA. In 1999, its budget was £44 million, in 2000, it was £63 million and, in 2001, £84 million. Up to 20 per cent. of its assets can be transferred to any one project and I shall return to that subject because of last year's foot and mouth crisis.

I am intrigued by the RDA's annual accounts. It spent nearly £10 million on administration out of a budget of £84 million. The accounts show that it spent £41 million safeguarding 602 jobs and creating a further 1,000. That money has been spent badly on behalf of the people in the south-west to create a sustained infrastructure.

Let us consider examples of where the money goes. The constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) contains the Morlands site in Glastonbury, which the RDA has bought. What is the RDA doing about that? It has not approached my right hon. Friend to tell him what it will do to the site. Why will the RDA not say what will happen to it?

In my constituency, a bypass is not being built for Ashcott and Walton because of Somerset county council's inability to get it together. The RDA did nothing to help. Nobody disputes that the bypass is a necessity. If the RDA exists to help and to create sustained development, why was it silent even after my colleagues and I made repeated pleas?

I discovered that the RDA spent £123,000 on advertising last year. When I asked why, I received no answer. Perhaps I can help to answer that question. The latest advertisement in stations in the south-west is a nice picture of the Clifton suspension bridge with giraffes on it. We do not have many giraffes in Somerset—or anywhere else in England that I am aware. Why spend money on promoting south-west tourism with a photograph of the Clifton suspension bridge in Bristol featuring giraffes? The serious side is that the advertisement is promoting the zoo in Bristol, but it does not look good for the south-west. Why can we not have an integrated policy, rather than a fragmented idea of unitary authorities? I suspect that the RDAs were originally designed to look after the unitary authorities.

Moving down the M5, our arterial motorway, it is evident that the RDA's main development, as it itself admits, is in Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, and, because of objective 1 funding, Cornwall. Most revealingly, the areas in between have been forgotten. The coastal and market town initiative would put money into such places—Minehead, in my constituency, is an example—although they do not know what they are supposed to do with it. I asked whether we might have some for Watchet, which features in the deprivation index and needs the money, as it has high unemployment, but we were told that that was not possible. I have tried twice to set up a meeting with an RDA representative, but I have been let down both times.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Given that welcome initiative, would my hon. Friend say, on reflection, that the RDA could have been more proactive in coming to terms with some of the severe deprivation caused as a result of foot and mouth, or does he consider that it has done everything possible?

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: My hon. Friend and I both represent rural constituencies, in his case East Devon, where foot and mouth has been devastating, and I agree. The RDA put aside £14 million to deal with the foot and mouth crisis. The crisis has cost the country more than £10 billion, but our RDA has provided only £14 million to help us.

My constituency covers part of Exmoor. The other part is covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook). If people want to find out what it is like to feel the cold chill of foot and mouth, they should go to see the businesses on Exmoor. My hon. Friend the Member for East Devon is absolutely right—the package was too little, too late and, unfortunately, put together in a difficult way.

Let us consider the company itself. I believe that changes have been made and I am sure that the Minister will bring me up to date. Why does the board contain only three business people, one of whom—the managing director of Clarks shoes—has just resigned? The rest are all from county councils or they are union representatives. There is nothing wrong with them, but what experience have they of business? Surely the RDA is a business-orientated organisation designed to introduce infrastructure and business. If we do not have that, we do not have a viable organisation.

The most damning aspect is the role of Sir Michael Lickiss, chairman of the RDA. He is an accountant. What experience has he of business? The buck stops there and nothing has given me any comfort that the RDA is working. I call on the Minister to make Sir Michael resign and have a business man take over. As long as Sir Michael is there, no real progress will be made. It is not that he has done a bad job; he has done the job that, as an accountant, he was trained to do. Why can we not have the head of Clarks, or the head of Cellophane from my constituency, for instance? Why must we have an accountant? Sir Michael should realise the limitations he faces, say, "I've done my bit, thank you very much", and ride off into the sunset. The longer he is there, the less that will happen. We are now witnessing the proof of the pudding.

The Government should examine RDAs carefully. If they want credibility for a structure that I believe to be entirely wrong, because of its size and because they broke something that was working perfectly well, and if they want legitimacy for the RDAs, they will have to convince a sceptical south-west—a huge area—to accept that the RDA works. On the evidence of the report and the board and all the other information that I have given, I do not see how the organisation can be sustained. The longer it goes on as it is, the more it will damage the south-west. Give us the chance to show that the south-west does not need the RDA. It needs the proper funding that councils and other organisations had before.

Mr. Swire *rose—*

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order. I have not been given notice, but if the Minister does not mind—

The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson) indicated assent.

1.40 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Thank you, Mr. Cummings. I am sorry if I was a little quick off the mark.

I agree with much of what my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) said. I fear that his comments about RDAs are historical, as I believe that they are shortly to be replaced; they certainly would be if the Conservatives were back in power. RDAs do not represent a homogenous geographical area, particularly not in the south-west, as my hon. Friend said.

The costs worry me. They have been increasing dramatically, while our councils have been starved of central Government funding. The results are all too clear, particularly in Devon. Interestingly enough, when I put a written question to the Minister for Employment and the Regions a few months ago as to how many people in my part of the world had asked or made written inquiries about wanting to have a regional assembly, the answer was none. I suggest that that is probably the answer that most of my hon. Friends would get if they asked the same question.

[Mr. Hugo Swire]

RDAs duplicate a lot of work that is already done by the Government office for the south west and the county council. They are shortly to be replaced, not by reinvigorating the existing tiers of local government, as we would do and as my hon. Friend has suggested, but by another body of unelected officials at the regional assemblies. I fear that the structure of regional government will be altered beyond recognition, as that is the last project that the Deputy Prime Minister wishes to see through. I understand that he has already been forced to redraft the White Paper that is due on regional government to make it clear that a tier of regional government will have to go to make way for the regional assemblies. We all know that that will be at shire county or county council level.

I was at a meeting of the Confederation of British Industry in Plymouth the other day and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), made his feelings about county councils clear. He said that they wasted money and were an unnecessary level of local government. We disagree fundamentally; we think that they are a good level of local government and they should be beefed up. We do not believe that the RDA should accrue power, or that the son of RDA, the regional assembly, should come in its wake.

There is confusion and it would be helpful if the Minister would clarify the position as the White Paper has not come out yet. The other day, when I was investigating improvements to the roads in my constituency, I was told that the south-west area's multi-modal report was coming out and was going first to the regional assembly. Why is it going to the regional assembly? Does the assembly have the authority to investigate such a report? We need clarification.

I hope that the Government are not moving too quickly to replace RDAs with regional assemblies. I hope that the replacement is nothing to do with the fact that the Tories won 17 counties while Labour emerged with only seven at the last county council elections. We in the south-west believe that we have particular needs, and I am sure that other areas could argue that equally well. In the light of foot and mouth disease, we need clear help and we want money to go to the end user. We do not want it diverted to quasi-autonomous national government organisations. Will the Minister clarify his plans?

1.44 pm

The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) for the opportunity to talk about regional development agencies. They are a key element of our economic strategy and, when single-pot funding arrangements are introduced in April, they will increasingly have the flexibility to decide on their own priorities. With regard to that, they will be guided by the regional economic strategies that they are developing, and by a close understanding of the needs of stakeholders in their regions. They will work best where stakeholders engage fully with them and ensure that their views and perspectives are clearly expressed. I also thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in letting my office have notice of some of the contents of his speech.

There is a genuine difference of opinion between the Government and the official Opposition on RDAs. The comments of the hon. Members for Bridgwater and for East Devon (Mr. Swire) have made that clear. The Conservative party is opposed to the RDAs. It was opposed to them in 1997, when they were part of our general election manifesto, and it was opposed to them in 2001, when we said that we would build on the foundation that the RDAs have provided by continuing to decentralise.

Conservative Members continually get confused about the difference between devolution and decentralisation. The hon. Member for East Devon asked me to clarify what will happen when the RDAs are replaced. The RDAs are not going to be replaced. A White Paper will be published shortly that will describe detailed proposals for English regional devolution, but it will not suggest that the RDAs should be replaced. However, I will not refer to its contents at length, because they do not address the issue under discussion.

The Conservative party does not have much experience of Scotland and Wales. In 1997 it truly became a one-nation party: none of its Members of Parliament represented Scottish or Welsh constituencies; they represented constituencies in only one nation—England.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: We have one Member of Parliament who represents a Scottish constituency.

Alan Johnson: I was referring to the 1997 election. The 2001 election resulted in a 100 per cent. increase in the number of Conservative Members of Parliament from Scotland; there is now one, instead of none.

The decentralisation programme is founded upon an analysis of what happened in Scotland and Wales. Scottish Enterprise and the Welsh Development Agency have been around for a long while, and they still play an integral part in promoting economic development in those countries, despite devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. The principle of one nation and one Principality has been upheld in those countries, and that will also be the case in England. None of the White Paper's proposals will involve the replacement of the RDAs. We are talking about regional assemblies—or the subject of democratic accountability, which featured in the contribution of the hon. Member for Bridgwater.

It is worth reflecting on why we established the RDAs. In 1996, Bruce Millan, the former European Commissioner, examined the successes and failures of regional policy. He found a piecemeal and fragmented picture. There was much useful activity in all the regions, including the south-west, but different elements were unconnected to each other, and individual regions lacked ownership of their various activities. Disparities between regions had widened, and no region's performance was as good as it could have been.

A White Paper entitled "Building Partnerships for Prosperity" was published in December 1997. It built on the Millan report by clarifying the roles and functions of the RDAs. It also separated out the RDA for London—which would form part of the structure beneath the newly elected Mayor and Assembly—from the RDAs in the eight remaining English regions. The RDAs outside London were given legal status by the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, and became fully operational in April 1999. In the ensuing period, the RDAs have, by necessity, merely been the channel through which funding streams that were previously set in place have been distributed. Over 90 per cent. of their funding comes from land and properties and the single regeneration budget. Therefore, in those early years, the RDAs' roles were to establish their economic strategy and to work with the stakeholders, and, as the CBI report before Christmas recognised, when we move to the single pot in April, the RDAs will have the flexibility that they need.

We have followed a consistent policy in relation to the RDAs. They are intended to be powerful bodies, which understand and have real roots in their regions. With regional partners, they have drawn up regional economic strategies which will guide their activities. Their close engagement with local partners means that they are able to direct resources to the real priorities in their regions. If hon. Members believe that an RDA has not identified those needs correctly—which was the gist of much of what Opposition Members said—they need to engage with them closely as they revise and refine their strategies.

Irrespective of the position of the Conservative party, which may or may not change, it is important that all MPs engage fully with the RDAs. They have an important role to play. It is worth reflecting for a moment on the impressive successes that the South West RDA has already achieved. Regeneration plans that the RDA is supporting will protect over 400 jobs at the Lister Petter site in Dursley and enable that long-established company to continue operating. Investment of £15 million in the Eden project, which funded much of the infrastructural work to kick the project off, is already seeing excellent returns. Recent research shows that Eden generated £111 million extra spending in the south-west in its first eight months of operation. The RDA has also invested £1.5 million in the combined universities in Cornwall project, and has committed a further £10.5 million. That crucial project for Cornwall will owe much to the RDA's support.

I was interested to hear the concerns of the hon. Member for Bridgwater that RDAs concentrate excessively on urban areas at the expense of the countryside. I have heard that criticism in reverse: that urban areas get a raw deal. I assure both tendencies that we expect RDAs to address difficulties in both town and country. We have set them urban targets to reduce social exclusion in the most deprived wards in towns and cities, and rural targets to regenerate market towns, and come up with their own targets for action in identified rural priority areas in the light of last year's rural White Paper. We have asked them to address both aspects in their corporate plans.

The hon. Gentleman expressed the view that the South West RDA should have done more in response to the foot and mouth crisis. I know how difficult conditions have been in the south-west. However, the South West RDA has done a great deal to help firms suffering as a result of foot and mouth. The RDA was instrumental in setting up the regional taskforce formed after the crisis broke. Through the business recovery fund, the RDA has committed £14 million to assist business recovery in the region. Phase 1 of the fund involved the allocation of business support of up to £15,000 for affected businesses. In all, 1,200 businesses in the south-west region received grant support totalling more than £8.5 million, of which more than £5.5 million has been claimed already.

We made further business recovery funds available in November and a further £3 million was allocated to the south-west. Following discussions involving partners in the region, it was decided that the funds should support the regional priority sectors most affected by the outbreak, and most closely associated with rural areas. On 28 January, the RDA announced that more than £2.3 million of funding would be earmarked to support sub-regional and regional initiatives in the food and drink, and leisure and tourism priority sectors. Initiatives that are being supported include an extension of the successful tourism promotion run by the RDA and South West Trains last summer to run until late spring, and the setting up of a dedicated south-west food and drink promotional organisation.

One would always want to do more in such circumstances. I hope that the real achievements will satisfy the hon. Gentleman that the South West RDA is taking the need to support the rural economy seriously and is acting effectively to do so. In that context, I think that the hon. Gentleman's call for Sir Michael Lickiss to resign is unfair and unwarranted. Accountancy is a noble profession, and I would not condemn someone because he happens to be an accountant.

Without having the statistics, I believe that RDAs are business led and, as far as I know, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that there is no more than one trade unionist on every RDA board. The latest refreshment of those boards has emphasised and underlined the need for them to be business led, which means that a majority of people on the RDA boards should be business men or business women, but it is obviously important for other stakeholders also to be represented. I agree with him that in the main business people should sit on RDA boards. Sir Michael Lickiss has done an excellent job with his board and staff in launching the RDAs and establishing their priorities, and a call for his resignation is unwarranted.

I understand that the South West RDA has actively supported economic development projects in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. It has contributed £2 million towards the £5 million cost of the Watchet marina development to which he referred. Minehead is part of the coastal and market towns initiative, and the RDA is working up plans with the local community to assist in regeneration. In Bridgwater town, the RDA contributed £3.4 million to a successful multi-stranded single regeneration budget project at Sydenham, and will be supporting another project in Hamp ward. It is also involved in discussions regarding the possible relocation

[Alan Johnson]

of the cattle market in Taunton to a motorway junction location, which would benefit the town and the farming community. The RDA has also given outline agreement to help fund the Foyer project aimed at homeless young people. Significant funding has been provided to Bridgwater college for its heavy goods vehicle school.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the Moorlands site in Glastonbury, and he asked what the RDA is doing. The RDA purchased the site in March last year, health and safety work has been carried out to make it safe and secure and a steering group has been formed with 14 interested organisations to monitor and advise the consultants who have been engaged. I am advised that a public consultation on the use of the site will be undertaken shortly.

Those are all examples of valuable activities carried out by the RDA, and they are the kind of activities that RDAs throughout England are carrying out for the benefit of the communities that they serve. The hon. Gentleman was concerned that the regional assembly has too much influence over the South West RDA. There will be a legitimate argument about that when the White Paper is published, because the question of democratic accountability is fundamental to that debate. We have strongly encouraged assemblies to take a leading role in scrutinising RDA activities, and I congratulate the South West regional assembly on its initiative in setting up "select committees" to inquire into the RDA's corporate plan. Assemblies can play a key role in scrutinising the plans and work of the RDA in their region. Although they are not directly elected, they contain a significant majority of local authority members, who are, of course, elected, with the rest of the membership made up from social and economic partners in the region.

The fundamental aim of the RDAs is socially inclusive sustainable wealth creation. That is the role with which nothing should interfere. We set their targets centrally because they are using taxpayers' money, and it is clear that even under the single-pot regime central Government should set output targets and ensure that taxpayers' money is well spent. It is, however, a matter for the RDAs in each region to work with their strategic partners to develop their own strategies.

RDAs are increasingly effective, and are supported by the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress and most people who are interested in balanced and effective regional development in England. Their role is increasingly well understood by regional stakeholders who have inputted effectively in the regional economic strategies that guide their activities.

I would be the last person to say that there are no problems. RDAs are less than three years old and, as I explained, they have been working in difficult circumstances in this early period. Abolishing them would mean that the work that they have done, which has led to an impressive strategic focus, would be lost. I hope that even Opposition Members who are sceptical about the matter will come to appreciate the benefits of regional decentralisation as we move into the brave new world of the single-pot regime later this year.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 13 February 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Gambling Review Report

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

9.30 am

Mrs. Janet Dean (Burton): I am delighted to have secured a debate on the subject of the gambling review report. This is the second one-and-a-half-hour debate on the issue, which shows the strength of feeling that people have on some of the recommendations made in the Budd report. Unfortunately, I was not able to be present for the previous Westminster Hall debate on 6 November 2001, but I have read *Hansard* and was pleased to see that it was a good, frank debate. I hope that today's debate will be of equal value.

Hansard records that hon. Members representing seaside resorts expressed understandably strong views in the previous debate about recommendations that could adversely affect their constituencies. I assure the House that there are also real concerns in constituencies such as mine, which are as far away from the sea as one can get. In my constituency, the town of Burton upon Trent is famous for its breweries. Indeed, it can justly be called the capital of brewing. Unsurprisingly, a number of industries have grown up around the production of beer. Perhaps the best known by-product is Marmite. It is said that people either love it or hate it, but I shall make no comment. It is produced in Burton, and I am pleased to say that the company is celebrating its centenary this year.

Another development from the town's brewing heritage has been the gaming machine industry. More than 500 people are employed in Burton in three businesses that service that industry. Leisure Link and Rank Leisure Machine Services supply, operate and distribute the machines, and Vivid Gaming designs gaming and amusement machine equipment. Obviously, anything that might adversely affect the industry is of direct concern to many of my constituents.

It is important to recognise the many positive proposals made in the Budd report. Many of its recommendations are sensible. It endeavours to modernise and to be libertarian yet, at the same time, it tries to crack down on illegalities. Since our previous debate, recommendation 72 has been implemented, which I welcome. It has increased the stake to 50p and the maximum prize to £25 on all cash machines. I visited two of the companies in my constituency in the new year, and they were pleased about that change.

We need to protect the vulnerable in society by ensuring, as far as possible, that problem gambling is limited, and that when it occurs, effective treatment is provided for people. I believe that the need for a voluntarily funded gambling trust is supported by all parts of the industry. However, one of the main concerns that has been expressed about the gambling review body's recommendations relates to ambient gambling. That misconceived concept particularly affects the gaming machine industry.

If the recommendations are carried through, every sector of the industry—pubs, clubs, the seaside and licensed gaming centres—will see a decline in demand and in the need for machines. That will affect manufacturers and suppliers of the product. The presumption is that ambient gambling, which the report describes as

> "gambling opportunities that are available in locations which are not dedicated to gambling"

is more dangerous than gambling in premises where it is a primary function, such as in casinos or bingo halls. However, the report states:

> "As with the Rothschild Commission, more than two decades ago, we were struck by how little is known about either normal or problem gambling. We had very little in the way of hard evidence to guide our discussions."

To help remedy that problem, the report recommends that

> "research be carried out to understand the nature of normal, responsible, gambling behaviour and to understand the development of, and risk factors for, problem gambling".

In the report, there is also a presumption that gaming machines should be restricted in pubs because they are secondary to the consumption of alcohol, and yet the review body recommends that alcohol be permitted on the gaming floors of casinos.

I welcome the proposals for casinos and bingo halls. However, it is important to recognise that British manufacturers will not benefit from the potential introduction of thousands of casino slot machines with unlimited stakes and prizes. The expertise and technology for those machines lies with manufacturers in the United States that will export casino slot machines to the United Kingdom.

Bingo halls provide a valuable form of entertainment and a comfortable leisure activity for many people, especially women who want to go out and meet friends. For most people, visiting a casino is not an everyday activity. Indeed, those who are frequent visitors to such gaming establishments might be viewed as problem gamblers. It would be interesting to study whether most problem gamblers are found in casinos, where the primary function is gambling, or the local pub, where ambient gambling may take place.

In the debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on 6 November, he and other hon. Members spoke eloquently about the impact of the recommendations on seaside arcades. The subject was well aired then and no doubt will be returned to today.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. She refers to seaside resorts and obviously will develop that point. The recommendations could be devastating for the traditional seaside resort as we know it. She has not yet mentioned rugby, football and other sporting and social clubs. The profitability of many rugby clubs in my constituency is based simply on one or two gaming machines.

Mrs. Dean: The hon. Gentleman is right, and I shall come to members' clubs in a moment. I do not underestimate the impact of the proposals on seaside resorts or clubs. Those who represent seaside resorts may comment further today. Although I have enjoyed the odd hour or two in such arcades on a wet afternoon, I shall leave that aspect of the report to those who represent our sunny shores.

Strong representations have been made about members' clubs and the proposals to remove jackpot machines. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has been lobbied close to home on the issue, and I am sure that he recognises the strength of the argument that many clubs would not survive if they could no longer rely on the income from the machines. In the previous debate, reference was made to the recommendations of the gambling review body to limit the number of all cash gaming machines allowed in public houses.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Does my hon. Friend agree that we all see problems caused by gambling and alcohol in our constituencies, but that those problems do not seem to be the driving force behind the review? Is her postbag like mine, in that owners of pubs and clubs write to point out the extra leisure facilities and community support that they provide? Given that, does she agree that we need to hear from the Minister about Government recognition of the importance of that sector and the need for stability in it?

Mrs. Dean: Yes, I hope that we shall hear that today, as I am concerned about the pub sector. I represent the capital of brewing, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand that I want our pubs to remain viable so that they can sell the golden nectar—the beer—that so many of my constituents produce.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Can my hon. Friend recollect whether she has had representations from the Scottish clubs on this matter?

Mrs. Dean: No, I cannot. Understandably, however, I have had many representations from constituents who work in the gaming machine industry. I want to speak out not only for those who are directly employed in the industry but for those who work in local businesses and who manage pub estates.

The argument for restricting pubs to up to two all-cash machines is not valid. I would go so far as to say that it is total nonsense to suggest that no account should be taken of the size of the pub. It is absurd to limit a 5,000 sq ft multi-bar pub to just two machines, while allowing a 400 sq ft pub with a single bar exactly the same entitlement.

Currently, local magistrates can approve up to five machines. The British Amusement Catering Trades Association—the trade organisation of the gaming machine industry—believes that it would be sensible to consider legislation to allow up to four all-cash machines as of right. That would reduce bureaucracy and free up valuable local authority time. Cases in which more machines were desired could, in exceptional circumstances, be considered individually.

The gambling review says that pubs have an average of 1.28 machines, so it appears that the report's recommendation is generous. It is, however, important to recognise that not all pubs have, or want, gaming machines, while others have five or more. All pubs are different, and 80 per cent. are independent small businesses. They are often the only source of entertainment in their local community, which they can also provide with other services.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I welcome the thrust of the hon. Lady's remarks. She makes a good point about the economic and social contribution made by pubs, and the same is true of arcades in coastal resorts. She may be aware of the Government's initiatives to revive such resorts, but it is not good joined-up government to threaten the future of traditional family arcades at the same time. Closing those arcades in the way outlined in the report will deal a devastating blow to the coastal resorts and seaside centres that, in another context, the Government say that they are trying to help.

Mrs. Dean: I agree. In our last debate on this subject, a good case was made as regards the needs of the seaside. I would hate to see the demise of seaside arcades, which are a part of our history that, like Marmite, goes back 100 years. We must try to save them. I also agree about the need to regenerate our seaside resorts, and it would be wrong to put obstacles in the way of regeneration.

Our pubs and clubs provide pool and snooker tables, thereby making other leisure activities available to local people, but those activities may be lost if the number of gaming machines is reduced.

It may be said that the report does not propose to ban gaming machines from pubs. It is, however, important to remember that the gambling review body said that, if starting from scratch, it would

"recommend banning all-cash machines from pubs."

By saying that it would be "disproportionate and harsh" to follow through on that now, however, it leaves the door wide open to a ban in future.

Another reason that is offered for restricting the number of all-cash machines in pubs is their accessibility to children and young people. Most people would assume that there was already a restriction on those under 18 years of age; indeed, according to a recent MORI opinion survey, 92 per cent. of machine players in pubs believe that there is a legal age limit for playing. It is a credit to the industry that, in the absence of such a law, it operates a voluntary code restricting use of the machines to the over-18s. There is widespread support inside and outside the industry for legislation to prevent under-18s from playing fruit machines in pubs.

There should be no problem in enforcing such a measure, any more than in enforcing the current restrictions on the sale of alcohol to under-18s. Indeed, the report accepts that, when it states that

"by themselves, all-cash machines in limited numbers are an ancillary activity for pubs and we do not think that it is necessary to insist that a separate licence should be obtained for them. The checks that already exist in relation to the granting of liquor licences are adequate for this purpose."

The dispute therefore centres around the number of all-cash machines that should be allowed. Policing the use of machines to prevent young people from using them illegally would be no more onerous if up to four machines were permitted, as suggested by the industry, than it would if only two were allowed, as has been proposed.

Fruit machines are an accepted part of a pub's traditional leisure offering, enjoyed by millions of players. They enjoy a casual gamble while having a pint of beer or other beverage. Why should they be prevented from enjoying what for most people is harmless fun? I support the liberalisation of casinos, but I do not believe that people who want an occasional flutter on an all-cash machine should have to travel to a casino.

According to MORI, three out of four people surveyed are in favour of fruit machines in pubs. I hope that the Government will reject the recommendations that I have pointed out in the gambling review body report, as they will adversely affect pubs as well as clubs. Pubs are a vital part of the community, where people meet for a drink, food, entertainment and company. Many rural pubs are already at risk. We must not compound that situation. I look for any reassurance that my right hon. Friend the Minister can give to my constituents employed in the gaming machine, brewing and pub industries, and to the many hon. Members present who are concerned about this issue.

9.47 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I congratulate the hon. Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on securing this debate on a subject that is important to many hon. Members and their constituents. I know that many hon. Members want to take part this morning, so I shall be brief.

The hon. Lady has already referred to the potential effects on pubs that implementation of the Budd report would have. That point must be true for every constituency in the country. She has referred to the clubs. Most constituencies have Royal British Legion clubs, constitutional clubs and similar venues, which depend for their survival on the proceeds from gaming machines. That ground has been well covered and will no doubt be covered again this morning, so I mean no disrespect to the people engaged in those concerns when I say that I shall concentrate my remarks on my constituents and the British seaside.

To put the issue in context, Thanet hosts several companies that manufacture or sell amusement-with-prizes machines and gaming machines. They employ significant numbers of people and export to the far east. Those sales have been valuable to this country. They employ significant numbers of my constituents and those of the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), who instigated an earlier debate on the subject. Those are real people in real jobs which are under threat. One of the oldest companies in the country, which has been one of the instigators and developers of much of the machinery that we are discussing, is at this moment fighting for survival. Whether Cromptons will survive, we do not know. Various rumours about its future are circulating.

I do not pretend that Cromptons' problems are entirely due to the Budd report. That is clearly not the case. Any company facing industrial problems must consider several contributory factors. However, the Budd report has destabilised what was a highly successful British industry, exporting British technology around the world. It is an absolute tragedy that that success story is now being placed in jeopardy as a result of a reaction to a threat that no longer exists.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I thank the hon. Gentleman, whose constituency adjoins my own, for giving way. I agree with him that the report is not the sole reason for Cromptons' problems, but does he agree that it makes it more difficult for it to find a solution to those problems?

Mr. Gale: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The entire industry, not just Cromptons, is now operating in an atmosphere of uncertainty. What investor is likely to come forward in such an atmosphere, until we know the decision on the report's recommendations? I must say to the Minister, on behalf of the hon. Gentleman, his constituents and my own, that the sooner the matter is resolved satisfactorily, the better.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the worst aspects of the report is that, as the hon. Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) mentioned, the research would be carried out over five years, causing uncertainty for constituencies such as mine, which provide the seaside machines? Firms will not invest during that period, and that will affect jobs in the constituency of the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale.)

Mr. Gale: The hon. Gentleman is right. That is why I said to the Minister that the matter must be resolved quickly. We cannot wait for five years—the companies will not be there in five years. It is a moot point whether some of them will be there in five months, so the matter must be resolved quickly. I know that the Minister has heard these arguments before, and that he is not unsympathetic to many of our points. I hope that he will be able to send a clear signal that will stabilise and reassure the market, which is seriously under threat.

What does that threat stem from? I do not suppose that there is a Member present who is not conversant with the ill effects of gambling on young people and the potential for harm. However, the idea that amusement arcades, particularly in their seaside manifestation, are still dens of truants and rent boys and young gamblers stealing to feed a penny-in-the-slot machine habit is nonsense. I am not saying that it was not a problem at one time, but I speak for the arcades in my own constituency along the Margate seafront and in Herne Bay, in saying that it is no longer a problem.

As the Member of Parliament representing the people who run those arcades and those who use them, I am satisfied that in the main—there may be the odd error—they are well run and well managed. They do not provide the sort of haunt and haven that Professor Budd and his colleagues seem desirous of attacking. On the contrary, they are an integral part of British seaside life. It is an acknowledged fact that the sunshine in Margate is not always quite as hot or frequent—

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Surely not.

Mr. Gale: Not always—there is the occasional cloud in the August sky. There is, from time to time, even a drop of rain. On those occasions, entire families seek solace in the amusement arcades.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I rise to speak up for my constituency, because in my experience the holidaymakers flock to our amusement arcades in the hot weather because of their good air-conditioning.

Mr. Gale: I do not want to labour the point. It has been well made.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Go on.

Mr. Gale: Do not excite me. Other hon. Members want to speak.

For much of the British seaside, the amusement arcades are a significant proportion of the all-weather facilities. It is a sad fact that there is a lack of investment in the kind of facilities that meet the needs of our climate.

If one removed the seaside arcade from the equation, it is not an exaggeration to say that one would go a long way towards killing what is left of the British seaside. We have suffered our hotels and guesthouses being taken over, first by dole-on-sea claimants and then by asylum seekers. We have seen the bucket and spade holidays go to the sunshine of the Mediterranean. Yet people are still running good reputable businesses—guest houses, pubs and fish and chip shops. People are still selling kiss-me-quick hats, candy floss and seaside rock from seaside bazaars. One cannot remove one bit of that equation without damaging the rest. Another element of uncertainty has been injected into the fate of seaside resorts, as well as into that of machine manufacturers.

Under human rights law, a sentence must be proportionate. Professor Budd has overreacted to a perceived but non-existent threat; the reaction is not proportionate, and the sentence that he proposes would not solve a problem but be a death sentence for the British seaside.

9.55 am

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): It is a pleasure to follow my parliamentary neighbour. There are few subjects on which he and I agree; in fact, I can think only of three off hand, and this subject is one of them.

I had a good stab at this subject on 6 November, when I was lucky enough to secure an Adjournment debate on it, so I shall be brief and let others contribute. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on winning further time to debate this important subject, which is, economically, a matter of life and death to many of my constituents who work in the industry.

Thanet is the world centre of the penny fall machine industry. Two leading companies in the world are based in Thanet, and they use their United Kingdom business as the bedrock of their business, because the revenue from it pays for their research and development work, which they apply to their machines to sell abroad. Without that United Kingdom business, there will be no exports abroad, the legs will be cut from under those businesses, and they will certainly collapse.

Since 6 November, I have had the pleasure of speaking at trade shows and conferences organised by the industry; I have met members of the industry in various forums and have debated the issue in various journals. Throughout that time, I have not heard anyone come up with an argument in support of the Budd recommendations. The only people whom I can find who think that the Budd recommendations about gaming machines and seaside amusement arcades have some merit are those who were involved with the Budd report themselves. No one else has any time for the recommendations, sees any merit in them or can provide evidence to support them; no one can understand what evidence Budd himself had to support them. Perhaps, however, we might find some clues in articles that Alan Budd has written and contributed to since he published his report.

Before I tell my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport about those articles, let me tell him something that Alan Budd was heard to say on a visit to an amusement arcade in London. He stood in front of a fruit machine and said to the owner of the establishment, "I've never played on one of these before—how does it work?" And yet, in articles in the press, he has claimed to be an incipient gambler who used to get lost in seaside arcades as a child and, therefore, understands the problem of gambling from the inside. Only one of those two things can be true: he either knows the problems from the inside or he has never played on one of those machines before. Which is the real Alan Budd who wrote the report?

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): The one who worked for Thatcher.

Dr. Ladyman: I will not go down that route.

Alan Budd has said:

> "When I enter a casino I almost fall over from the flood of adrenaline. It is only by immense self-control that I have not gambled away the house and everything in it."

If he had admitted to this problem earlier, does anyone seriously think that the Government would have put him at the head of a commission on gambling?

Bob Spink (Castle Point): If limits were placed on the machines that could be put in pubs, clubs and arcades at seaside resorts such as those in my constituency on Canvey Island—across the Thames from the hon. Gentleman's—and on the prizes that they could offer, people would be driven towards casinos, where problem gambling can take hold. That would also result in the destruction of those pubs, clubs and arcades. They are the heart of our community, part of the fabric of our society. We should cherish them, not destroy them.

Dr. Ladyman: The hon. Gentleman is right. Nobody in their right mind can believe that the machines that we are discussing, located in seaside arcades, are part of a regime of hard gambling that creates a gambling problem in adult life. If people develop such a problem, it is not because they have spent a wet afternoon in Ramsgate, Broadstairs or Margate playing on a penny fall machine for tuppence a time. The use of such machines should not be treated as hard gambling, yet the Budd report recommends that penny fall machines, roulette machines and "Wheel'em ins"—harmless penny amusement machines—should be treated as coin-in, coin-out machines and their use restricted to people over the age of 18. Who, over the age of 18, wants to play on those machines? [HON MEMBERS: "Alan Budd."] Except that Sir Alan probably does not know how they work.

If that was not enough to convince the Minister that he should drop the recommendations, let me give some facts and figures from the Henley report that might convince either him or the Chancellor. The Henley centre believes that, in the short term, implementing the recommendations will result in the family amusement industry losing £20 million per year in revenue and 1,500 full time jobs. If the five-year ban goes ahead, there will be £117 million of revenue losses and 5,000 full-time jobs will be lost, while the Treasury will lose £14 million per year in licence duty, £51 million per year in VAT and £29 million per year in national insurance and PAYE. That is a loss to the Treasury alone of £94 million.

There will not only be a loss to the seaside amusement industry. You would immediately rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I suggested that the Budd report would cost the national lottery's good causes hundreds of millions of pounds, but it will. There are some sensible recommendations in the report, as my hon. Friend the Member for Burton has said. Equally, there are some barmy ones. Overall, the Budd report could cost the Exchequer as much as £500 million and 15,000 jobs across the country. Surely we cannot countenance that. I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister, in making his report, to consider those matters carefully. If he comes up with the right recommendation, I can promise him from now on the premium space and the best deckchair on the beach whenever he comes to the seaside. Whatever he does, please will he make his recommendations as quickly as possible, because the uncertainty is already costing jobs and revenue to a vital industry and is adding to the problems of the British seaside.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. As hon. Members will see, there is a demand on time. We have some 30 minutes left because, traditionally, the final 30 minutes of a 90-minute debate are reserved for the Front-Bench spokesmen. Please, will all hon. Members whom I try to fit in be clear, concise and pertinent in their remarks, out of consideration for their colleagues?

10.3 am

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I congratulate the hon. Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on having secured the debate. As its MP, I have an interest in the continuing success of Skegness as a traditional family resort. The town has not just relied on its heritage and excellent reputation, but has seen considerable investment, primarily from private individuals who run family businesses for the benefit of other families who come to Skegness to enjoy its facilities. It must be clearly understood that that investment has enabled Skegness to remain at the forefront of the United Kingdom tourist industry. I hope that hon. Members agree that there is a place in a responsible society for controlled gaming, but we must find a regulatory framework that allows companies to prosper and create employment and allows those who come to Skegness and other tourist destinations to find pleasure and enjoyment.

The Budd report does not strike the appropriate balance. It is an odd report in that it is contradictory and creates a paradox. It argues that the gambling industry should be liberalised while at the same time proposing to reduce competitiveness by adding unnecessary tiers of restrictions and regulations that will force many seaside arcades out of business. The British Amusement Catering Trades Association is right in saying that amusement arcades are one of the significant attractions of UK tourist resorts, second only to funfairs. They create family entertainment, enabling the family to stay together by providing entertainment for those of all ages, from children in playgroups to adults on gaming machines with large jackpot prizes, in restricted areas. The money from such machines produces the investment that allows the owners of arcades to provide a broader range of services, such as play areas for younger children.

The implementation of the Budd report would change all that. It would drive many adults who enjoy gaming machines away from regulated family arcades into bingo halls, betting offices and other buildings that have gambling licences where children would not be welcome or allowed. There is no evidence to support the suggestion that trivial gambling causes harm, whether it is on low-stake, low-pay-out machines, push machines, cranes or Derby races. Indeed, a recent survey detailed the issues affecting the lives of people under 18 that worried them most. Gambling came 12th. Only 0.6 per cent. of those asked felt that gambling was a significant concern. It might not be a surprise to find that drugs and alcohol were high on the list. Indeed, text messaging and eating junk food came higher up the list than gambling.

If children were banned from arcades, the traditional British family resort would be almost at an end. Where would the family go in Skegness on the rare occasions when the sun is not shining? Such a ban would also have a dramatic impact on the tangential businesses that support amusement arcades, such as electricians and plumbers. It would have serious implications for those employed directly in the amusement arcade business in both full-time and seasonal work. Those employed are often the least skilled and least well educated of our work force and deserve help from hon. Members of all parties. Those workers will be the hardest and first hit by the proposals contained in the Budd report. Many students subsidise their higher education by taking part-time jobs, especially in the summer months, in amusement arcades in Skegness. If the Budd report were implemented, many of those students might not be able to afford higher education and a bar might be created that would prevent those from the poorest backgrounds from having access to higher education.

Any resort must invest to move forward. A lack of investment means that a resort or a business stands still. The length of time that the consultation process is taking is creating a great deal of uncertainty, and the proposals to allow local authorities retrospectively to close arcades or impose a blanket ban on gaming in any particular area will not allow businesses to invest. Businesses need stability and certainty. I ask the Minister to confirm that that recommendation will not be implemented, or at least to say when he will announce

[Mr. Mark Simmonds]

the results of the consultation process. Otherwise, the disinvestment that will occur will further damage the already greatly challenged UK tourism market.

I will not repeat the arguments about the loss of revenue to the Exchequer, which have been made eloquently. I shall address recommendation 70, which seeks to reduce the potential jackpots in gaming machines in private clubs from £250 to £25. Many clubs survive solely on the profit generated by those machines.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one organisation most affected by that proposal is the Royal British Legion? Its clubs are hardly dens of iniquity and under-age gambling, and the average age of its members is over 40. They raise tens of thousands of pounds for their local communities every year, but many may be forced to close if recommendation 70 comes into force.

Mr. Simmonds: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, and agree with his point. Not only those of the Royal British Legion, but many other community clubs exist as meeting places. They often provide cheaper beer than is available in commercial pubs, which allows the retired generation in particular to get together. They are often the core of a rural community and provide money for charities. In one village in my constituency, Kirton, the profits from a jackpot machine in a private club support the only children's playground in the village. Sometimes money is used for educating members of clubs.

I would like to make further points, but I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. It was right to hold a gaming review, but it is wrong further to penalise the UK seaside resorts. It is right further to liberalise the UK gaming industry, but it is wrong to destroy family entertainment centres. I understand that the Minister's Department has been swamped by responses to the consultation process. I hope that he will recognise and react to the very strong feeling that has been expressed, and adhere to the points made.

10.11 am

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on securing this debate. Hers is an inland constituency, which, like all constituencies, will suffer if many aspects of the Budd report are implemented. However, I think that constituencies with seaside resorts will suffer the most. I notice that many Members of Parliament for such constituencies have taken part in today's debate.

Seaside resorts have suffered tremendously during the past 25 years. Other regions of the UK that have suffered, such as the steel, mining and agricultural communities, have had their heroic struggles well chronicled in books, films and newspaper articles. However, the struggle of seaside communities has not been chronicled, although it is an equally noble struggle. Perhaps that is because we are literally on the periphery of the country and do not have a union or united voice to represent us.

Local arcade operators in my constituency have informed me that the Budd report's recommendations would be the death knell of seaside towns such as Rhyl and Prestatyn. We have heard the statistics: 14,000 jobs will go and £550 million of Treasury income will be lost. Tim Batstone of HB Leisure, a very successful arcade operator in my constituency, estimates that he will lay off 130 workers in the short term and 300 in the long term. That will mainly be in the ward of Rhyl West, the most poverty-stricken of the 850 council wards in Wales.

The effect on my community will be devastating. There will be a human cost, in terms of job losses, and also an environmental cost. On the west parade in my home town of Rhyl, half the old Victorian buildings are now derelict. The other half are currently arcades, brightly lit and well maintained and presented. They, too, will soon fall into dereliction if the Budd report is implemented in full. The knock-on effect on the local economy could be considerable, with a loss in rates and a drastic reduction in the number of visitors to Rhyl.

The part of the Budd report that most concerns the arcade operators and me is its proposal to ban children from arcades, even with parental supervision, which smacks of Big Brother, and "we know best". There is a move by Alan Budd to stop the cheap tuppenny games. Sir Alan Budd believes that such games have a corrupting influence on young people. He recommends a five-year study, which we welcome, but he is prejudging its results and implementing his changes from the outset.

Research needs to take place, and we would all welcome it. Existing research from the British gambling prevalence study 2000 shows that, on the whole, British people are a nation of responsible gamblers. Perhaps that is so because, at an early age, we have spent our tuppences with parental support in a controlled environment, and have developed a responsible attitude to gambling.

My main concern is the effect on seaside towns, but a further worry is the effect on military clubs such as the Royal British Legion, Royal Air Forces Association and Royal Naval Association clubs, on political clubs—perhaps we should declare an interest—such as Conservative, Labour and constitutional clubs, and on social clubs. Many clubs in the poorest areas, especially in my constituency, will fold unless they can make money from gaming machines.

We have heard many opinions expressed. Aspects of Sir Alan Budd's report have united all political parties in one voice. That is unique in Parliament. However, although many aspects of the report are good and sensible, many of its proposals, particularly those that pertain to seaside resorts and registered members' clubs, should be extinguished at the earliest date. Uncertainty is undermining registered members' clubs and seaside resorts, which have suffered so terribly in the past. Those resorts need help, not a kick in the teeth, which is what Sir Alan Budd is offering. I ask the Minister to listen to pleas from all quarters and end the uncertainty as soon as possible.

10.17 am

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I will be brief. I wish to reinforce the comments made by other hon. Members.

I declare an interest as an officer of the all-party group on non-profit-making members' clubs. I recognise, as I am sure do all hon. Members, that the gaming machine industry and non-profit-making clubs are irrevocably interlinked. The fortunes of the private clubs have a great effect on the fortunes of the gaming machine industry—clubs are a major customer of the industry. As the Minister knows, well over 20,000 private non-profit-making clubs in this country will be savagely affected should recommendation 70 come into play.

The Royal British Legion will be one of the biggest sufferers. The term "non-profit-making clubs" means that profits from machines go back to help members and local communities and provide comfort for those less well off or less well supported in the community. There are more than 20 non-profit-making clubs of all types and of different memberships in my constituency. They will be severely affected should recommendation 70 be introduced.

The Minister will remember that I asked him a parliamentary question in October about the number of representations that he had received from clubs and their members. He admitted that more than 1,500 clubs or members had written to him expressing concern about the effects of recommendation 70. He also knows that the organisations that represent such clubs nationally are desperately worried about the future of working men's clubs, social clubs, military clubs, the Royal British Legion, and, of course, political clubs. My local Conservative club in Eastleigh has written to me. It is desperately concerned that it will be forced to close if high-payment gaming machines are removed. I know that the Minister is a fair man. Given the average age of Conservative party members these days, he would hate to take away the old codgers' last bit of enjoyment.

The Minister has been gracious enough to listen to the views of the all-party group on non-profit-making members' clubs and the association that represents the clubs. He knows the issues well and I would like him to confirm that private, non-profit making clubs are an essential part of our community and social fabric. He has the chance to tell us that they will be exempted from a regulation that would destroy the very nature of an essential part of our society.

10.20 am

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on securing this important debate. It is also a pleasure to follow a fellow chartered civil engineer, the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). We both know the importance of foundations and structures. In this debate, it is important to recognise the linkages between each facet of the industry.

I want to concentrate on the importance of the seaside, but I will not rehearse the weather forecasts that we have heard from such delightful places as Skegness, Margate, South Thanet, Great Yarmouth—

Chris Ruane: And Rhyl.

Lawrie Quinn: And Rhyl. The best place, and the place where the seaside industry was founded, is Scarborough. On behalf of my community, I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for the tremendous work he did in laying key foundations to help the regeneration of the seaside while he was at the Department of Trade and Industry and the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. That important work led to my community being established as an objective 2 area.

An engineer's view of what confronts us would be simple. The Government are taking a long time to determine their response to the Budd report and, therefore, we face a blight on the industry at every level. I reiterate my previous invitations to the Minister to come to the front at Scarborough and do what Sir Alan Budd was not prepared to do: meet the many families who run businesses there. They cannot invest in their businesses because they are unsure of their direction.

The Budd report offers opportunities as well as challenges for the seaside community. The direction of the regeneration for which the Minister was responsible in seaside communities such as Scarborough and Whitby links to the possibilities for developing a casino-like culture in places such as Scarborough. I have a vision, which many of my constituents share, of turning Scarborough perhaps not into the Las Vegas of the north, but into something like the Monte Carlo of the north. I notice that my parliamentary neighbour, the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), knows exactly what I mean. The beauty of the area is very similar to that of Monte Carlo. He represents the good people of Filey, so he will know that a casino in Scarborough, as well as suitable hotel development, could bring about the Minister's vision.

My simple message to the Minister from the many people who work in the seaside community in Scarborough is that he would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater by taking up the proposals on seaside gambling in the Budd report. The North sea is very grey and cold even at the best times of the year. Prosperity could be increased for many people in my community and I am here to try to bring that about. If it does not happen, my community will be blighted and things will be bleak.

At the earliest opportunity—today would be great—will the Minister please say that he is prepared to put to one side the proposals relating to the seaside community and gambling, which is the only way to go until we have some effective research? We must end the blight and bring about prosperity for the seaside, especially for my constituents in Scarborough and Whitby.

10.25 am

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I shall be brief and try not to reiterate the excellent points that have been made both by hon. Members who represent seaside communities and by those whose constituencies are inland. I congratulate the hon. Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on securing the debate.

I should like to place on record my congratulations to the industry, which has completely changed its image in the past 20 years. Restricting access and improving policing have enhanced the quality of the environment in amusement arcades. I cannot remember the last time that I read in my local newspaper of a problem in an amusement arcade, whereas 20 years ago there were regular reports of incidents. The industry should be congratulated on getting its act together to provide true family entertainment and amusement.

[Mr. Adrian Sanders]

One issue that has not been raised is that of piers. We talk a lot in this place about reforming peers, but I am talking about piers. Piers are run with amusements, and we want to retain the great British pier. Most of us who represent seaside resorts have a pier in our constituencies, and some constituencies contain two or more of them. I hope that the Minister will take it on board that piers are an integral part of the seaside and the traditional British holiday, and that they are threatened by the legislation. I know that he is no stranger to seaside resorts because he has visited my constituency in the past, and he is always welcome to come again. He would not need to bring an umbrella because my constituency is in the English riviera.

As others have said, if some of the recommendations in the report were accepted they would cost jobs. They would not kill the holiday industry in British seaside resorts because we have many other attractions, but we must offer a package, of which amusement arcades are a part. Amusement arcades are an integral part of the British seaside holiday experience, and we do not want to see them go.

10.27 am

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on securing today's debate. I shall speak briefly.

I want to impress on the Minister the effects that the five-year review is having on my constituency. Pavilion plc, one of the arcade owners in my area, intended to invest an extra £3 million in Pier avenue, but it has put that on hold because it cannot wait for five years. No one will give it investment and support because there is no certainty that there will be arcades in the area after five years. I stress the importance of the five-year review, and I, too, should like my right hon. Friend to make a statement as soon as possible on whether it is going ahead.

I remember hon. Members' campaigns for seaside resorts, and it was only in 2000 that we called on the Chancellor to help seaside resorts in his Budget. I shall read an extract from the Budget report 2002, in which we received a good response from him on the concerns raised about seaside resorts and arcades. The report says:

> "The removal of the £645 annual licence charge on small-prize 'amusement with prizes' machines (AWPs), costing 10 pence per play or less, will provide a boost to seaside arcades, and will help to support the Government's 'Tomorrow's Tourism' initiative, aimed at reviving traditional seaside resorts."

The Chancellor is giving and Budd is taking away. We cannot afford some of the report's recommendations.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) mentioned an article. I wish to draw Members' attention to an article in *Coinslot International*, which is a publication for the traders who operate the arcades and machines. It says that Sir Alan Budd's problem is alleged to have stemmed from boyhood, specifically time spent in amusement arcades during holiday visits to the seaside. It says:

> "The experience has clearly imprinted on Budd a protective attitude towards fruit machines, of which he is quoted: 'Machines are the most addictive form of gambling. The best way to trap someone is with machines. They are designed to be addictive.'"

The banning of non-monetary prizes could be taken to an extreme. I am sure that we can all remember going into a shop and paying for a lucky dip, and how disappointed we were that we did not get what we wanted from it. One might take the ban even further. How many Members, when they were younger, paid to see Father Christmas, sat on his knee, asked for all sorts of things and did not get what they wanted at the end?

Is Budd saying that we should not play because we may get a prize at the end that we do not want, or because it may trap people in gambling? That is ridiculous. It is an idea that should be put to bed straight away so that we can safeguard the future of arcades. It is ridiculous to think that every time a young child spends a penny or two and gets a prize he will be trapped into a gambling habit.

For years, arcades in my constituency have regulated themselves. They do not allow under-18s into certain areas, and they have people on the doors who ensure that children do not go into arcades during school term and question them if they try to. Such regulation is already in place; the Budd report goes too far. We should ensure that our seaside resorts are maintained, and we should accept that arcades are part of their proud history.

10.32 am

Nick Harvey (North Devon): The Government were right to conduct a review of the industry's regulations. It is an important industry, contributing some £42 billion a year to the UK economy and retaining a relatively modest £7 billion. Some of the proposals in the Budd report will find favour with the industry, punters and society generally. However, some parts of it contribute to an incoherent, contradictory and potentially damaging whole.

A main impetus for the review was that the Treasury was licking its lips about the prospects of regulating and taxing internet gambling. I have no objection to the Government doing that, but, as the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) said, there is a potential downside in terms of Government revenues. The perceived benefit to the Treasury could easily be wiped out if we were to accept the package as a whole.

Hon. Members have already made the point that the incidence of problem gambling in the UK is not very high, certainly in comparison with other countries. There is something rather perverse about the report. It attacks and undermines some traditional British forms of gambling, which we know do not create serious problems with social gambling. At the same time, it seeks to espouse and permit the growth of huge Las Vegas-style casinos. We know that America and Australia, where that is a far more typical part of gambling, have a far greater problem with dependent gambling. In Australia, for example, 2.5 per cent. of people have problems with gambling, and gambling addicts are estimated to cost the Australian community more than 5.5 billion Australian dollars a year.

The situation is extraordinary. Our industry does not give us problem gambling, and we may undermine all its essential and traditional characteristics. However, the same report proposes to allow the type of gambling that has contributed to problems in America and Australia.

Dr. Ladyman: The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned France, where a gaming machine regime has been instituted similar to that proposed by Budd. In France, the problem with gambling is people who are shot by gangsters for not buying their gaming machines from the right set of criminals.

Nick Harvey: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and it is another that the Minister will have to consider when he decides how to respond to the proposals.

When we debated the subject in this Chamber in November, most of the speeches were about the impact that the proposals would have on social clubs, a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) referred to this morning. Such clubs were quick off the mark with their lobbying, and it is clear that they made an impression on hon. Members from all parties. The Minister has acute political antennae, so he will have picked up on that. Were I a betting man, I would wager a small sum on his not accepting the burden of that recommendation.

Today, hon. Members from all parties have expressed loud and clear their belief that damage would be caused to seaside resorts if the Budd recommendations went through. Almost all those resorts are economically fragile. I know that myself, as north Devon has several seaside resorts that are in serious trouble. Amusement arcades are an integral part of the package of seaside resorts, so I urge the Government to think long and hard before going down the suggested route.

Similarly, the recommendations on pubs could be extremely damaging. It seems self-contradictory to offer local authorities, which are to be the licensing authorities, the prospect of draconian blanket bans on all forms of gambling yet not allow them to exercise common sense on how many machines should be allowed in different pubs. Pubs can come in different sizes, so a one-size-fits-all solution to the number of machines allowed in them does not seem logical.

If the Government decide to accept the Budd recommendations about allowing large-scale use of machines in casinos, they must be aware of what will happen. Most of the bingo clubs will turn into casinos overnight. The image that the public have of casinos—with smooth Roger Moore-type figures in black bow ties playing the roulette tables—will bear no resemblance to what will follow. I do not say that I am morally or implacably opposed to allowing larger-scale machine gaming halls—that is exactly what they will be—but I urge the Government not to allow them to operate in an uncontrolled way. They should leave in place certain brakes and controls to prevent them from getting out of hand.

Hon. Members from all over the country and all points on the political spectrum have spoken. Clearly, they have many serious worries and reservations. I am glad that the Government have taken the time to absorb the burden of the lobbying that has taken place and the representations that have been made. If they introduce a White Paper or Green Paper on the subject in the next few months, I hope that they will treat the Budd report in an à-la-carte fashion. They should pick the good bits from it and ignore the bad, because if they took it as a whole, the result would be complete disaster.

10.38 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I congratulate the hon. Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on securing the debate, and on providing a further opportunity for the House to consider the implications of the Budd review for the future of the gaming machine industry and the importance of the income generated from gaming machines to several organisations. She set out clearly her constituency interest, as 500 local jobs depend on the gaming machine industry, and advanced a logical, coherent and powerful argument against a number of the Budd recommendations, which have caused such dismay and uncertainty throughout the industry.

The hon. Lady's thoughts were echoed by all the other speakers in the debate: my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), the hon. Members for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) and for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane), my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds), and the hon. Members for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn), for Harwich (Mr. Henderson), and for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). Indeed, the hon. Member for Eastleigh gave the best example of how desperate people have become when he told us of the Conservative club that felt it necessary to write to a Liberal Democrat Member. One could not wish for greater evidence.

No one doubts that a review of gambling legislation was overdue. The regulation of casinos, internet gambling, the future of betting shops and the permitted mix of alcohol and gambling in various locations were all issues that needed to be addressed, and they needed to be considered against the background of a growth in leisure time and more relaxed attitudes generally. The Budd report, however, found difficulties in areas where no one had seen much of problem beforehand.

Sir Alan's thinking was so out of line with the industry view, and I shall quote again from the *Coinslot* interview. This comment says even more than those quoted by other hon. Members. He says of BACTA members,

> "This will destroy us, they complain."

He continued:

> "What they don't understand is that the alternative proposal is not to leave things as they are but to abolish it completely."

There we have it: we should abolish seaside arcades and jackpot machines in clubs and public houses. Many in the industry realise the scale of the threat. There is strong reason to doubt whether the existing regime for the availability and regulation of gaming machines was a matter of concern when the Budd report was commissioned. I do not recall it being so. If there was a problem, it was that the existing framework was too restrictive.

I was constantly lobbied as a member of the Home Affairs Committee, with my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet, and when I had the gambling brief as Home Affairs spokesman when the Home Office had that responsibility. I was often told that the number of

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machines allowed in betting shops and bingo halls was too restrictive, and that the 100 local authorities that had banned all cash machines in a number of locations were being to restrictive.

There can be no doubt that the industry is deeply shocked by the Budd recommendations on clubs and seaside amusement arcades. We understand that the Minister will need time to respond in detail. I sympathise with him; it is a huge report with many recommendations. However, it is equally clear that the Budd report has generated huge uncertainty within the industry. Although it is not the only cause of decline in machine sales—I understand that sales of jackpot machines fell by about 27 per cent. between 1990 and 2000—it seems to have caused a major acceleration. In the quarter ending 30 June 2001, 1,509 machines were sold, but that number fell to only 1,235 in the quarter ending 31 December 2001. That is a further decline of 18 per cent. Yet, as many hon. Members said, the industry is one in which we have long led the world in ingenuity.

Some jackpot machines are too complex for some of the older members of clubs, which may be another reason for the decline in income in some clubs. That all impinges on the fact that if they lose that income altogether, they will be in real difficulty. I have considered the matter in considerable detail, and I would argue that the case has not been made for the Budd recommendations on jackpot machines or on how they might affect the seaside. Many hon. Members have said loud and clear that no one outside the review body has a good word to say for the recommendations, and I praise the views of the hon. Member for South Thanet.

At the BACTA conference in November, I made clear the Conservative view that we should leave alone the current regime of jackpot machines in clubs. Similarly, we believe that proposals to restrict machines in pubs to two are hard to fathom. Imposing such restrictions at the seaside is illogical given that there has been no research on their effect on tourism or on whether there is a problem with under-age gambling. It undermines the credibility of the recommendations. In our view, the solution—which Budd proposes—is a prohibition on under-18s playing jackpot or all-cash machines, regardless of their location. There must be a presumption that the proprietor will enforce that prohibition.

I concede that it is perhaps easy for the Opposition to take that view, but the strength of argument suggests that it is time to end the uncertainty. Every speaker has said loud and clear that businesses and jobs are at stake. I attend 90-minute debates in Westminster Hall with the Minister for Sport or his colleague the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting once a fortnight, but attendance has never been as good as it is now. That shows how concerned Members are about their constituency interests.

The general philosophy behind the Budd recommendations appears to be that ambient gambling should be discouraged and that gambling should be increasingly concentrated in premises that are dedicated to that purpose. It is, however, time to move the debate on and to ask whether that approach will create an industry and a gambling environment with which society feels more comfortable. Increasingly, I do not believe that it will, and I am becoming less and less convinced that the wholesale deregulation that Budd advocates is necessary.

Many in the industry who would benefit in the short term from Budd's proposed deregulation of casinos and amusement centres worry that we may see a massive expansion of casinos or so-called outlets—the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) stole my best line. Such outlets do not reflect the James Bond image of spending a luxury night out at a casino with—we can thank Budd for this recommendation, and there is nothing wrong with it—a glass of champagne in hand. Instead, we shall see wall-to-wall gaming machines in sheds that could be described only as gambling warehouses. It is a sad irony, however, that the machines in those premises will not benefit our manufacturers, because they will most likely be imported from the United States of America.

I want to give the Minister ample time to respond, so I shall conclude by advocating a cautious step-by-step approach to implementing those parts of the Budd report—I have alluded to some of them—that the Government support and for which there would be genuine all-party support. At the same time, when deciding the appropriate response to Budd's thinking on the gaming machine environment, the Government must keep in mind the old saying that if it ain't broke, don't fix it—I apologise that that is one of the most commonly used lousy cliches in our debates, but I could not think of a better one.

The debate has been a good opportunity to make it clear that the industry is convinced that the Budd report would wreak havoc on a range of legitimate businesses, and the Minister now has a good opportunity to respond.

10.48 am

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Mr. Cook, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on initiating this very good debate, which, as she said, is our second debate on the Budd report. Both debates have homed in clearly on the significance of the review and of the gaming machine industry. I acknowledge that there is concern, which has also been reflected in the number of hon. Members from across the House who signed the early-day motion.

If I may, Mr. Cook, I shall—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is the second time the Minister has referred to me as Mr. Cook, although other hon. Members have done so, too. I would be failing in my duty if I did not call attention to the fact that the House—in its wisdom or otherwise—has decided that the four senior members of the Chairmen's Panel should be referred to as Deputy Speakers in this Chamber. As a senior member of the panel, I should point that out.

Mr. Caborn: Please accept my humble apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry if I have offended the House, or indeed the Chair.

In considering the reason for commissioning the Budd report, we need to look back to the mid-1960s when the last relevant legislation was put on the statute book. I remind hon. Members of the reason for that measure; it was driven, to a great extent, by criminality and the laundering of money through various gambling outlets, particularly casinos. The Budd report has originated from a different perspective—the acknowledgement of the fact that information is now passed around electronically. If we are to continue as a major centre of the gambling industry globally we shall need primary legislation. The law requires the person who places a bet to be in the place where the bet is made, so electronic gambling is illegal. The stimulus for the Budd report was to a large extent the internet and the electronic movement of information.

I want to make it clear to the House that we do not intend to damage an industry which, as has already been mentioned, has something like a £42 billion stake, and contributes marginally less than £2 billion to the Exchequer. The number of people employed in the industry, and the location of that employment, which tends to be seaside resorts, are important considerations for the Government.

If anything, we want modernisation along with deregulation to move gambling into mainstream leisure. In view of the restrictions under the Gaming Act 1968, which were introduced for the reasons I explained, we now believe that that is the right approach. There has been significant change. It is interesting that there has not been much opposition to gambling in this debate. A decade ago, the atmosphere would probably have been quite different. It is significant that about 70 per cent. of the population now gamble through the lottery.

That cultural change has led to the acceptance of gambling as part of leisure and there is now an opportunity to move gambling into mainstream leisure. There are several reasons to do so, including employment and inward investment. Also, I have been struck, as someone who was not an expert on gambling—people would probably say that I am still not; they might compare me to Alan Budd—by the integrity of the gambling industry in the United Kingdom. That is important when we consider global gambling and wonder where internet gambling will find its base in the future. We must take such issues into consideration in evaluating the Budd report.

Governments are criticised for consulting and for not consulting. On the present important issue, we wanted the Budd report and three months of consultation; about 3,000 representations have been made and the matter is being considered. I gave the House an assurance that we would respond by the end of March or the beginning of April. We are on course according to our timetable and will do that, assuming that my colleagues in other Departments do not raise other major issues. We have tried to bring certainty to the consultations in setting out a clear timetable. I am hopeful that we shall be able to adhere to it.

It is important to eliminate uncertainty. I have come to this House from industry, where uncertainty is an expensive commodity. Several hon. Members have pointed out the effect of uncertainty on the gambling machine industry. I give an assurance that we have kept to the timetable and will deliver on it.

Several hon. Members have raised the issue of the protection of children and vulnerable people with regard to gaming machines. One must acknowledge that in the UK, the incidence of abuse in gaming is very low indeed relative to other countries. Again, the integrity of the industry shines through—but it is right for Budd to raise the question of ambient gambling and vulnerability.

The industry has responded in an effective and responsible way to the Budd proposals on setting up a voluntary trust to consider how organisations such as GamCare can be funded and to conduct research. Just under £1 million has been raised by the industry on a voluntary basis, and that is to be welcomed. I met several people yesterday about the trust and I hope that it will develop.

It has also been interesting to find that it is an aspect of British culture that we allow our children to play slot machines. Almost every other country in the world forbids that. However, we have all been brought up with it and we acknowledge it. For the past 20 years I have spent my summer holidays in the UK. If I were to approach the report in the objective manner in which some Members have described the weather in our seaside resorts this morning, I would probably produce a rather perverse analysis of it. Nevertheless, Members or Parliament, particularly those who represent seaside constituencies, must promote their areas as strongly as possible.

We must give serious consideration to the five-year timetable that has been laid down for the further review of the industry. We have received strong representations on that. To return to my earlier point, I do not believe that such timetables should be left hanging over industry because they build in uncertainty. We must take on board the comments that have been made and factor them in clearly, trying wherever possible to remove those uncertainties.

The review resulted in a number of recommendations, the arguments around which have been well rehearsed here today. We have heard what the industry has to say and listened to Members' representations, and we will factor those into our final decision. We do not want to damage any of the resorts; we want to build them up. We want them to move gambling into mainstream leisure, and that will be our approach as we evaluate the Budd recommendations and Members' comments.

On jackpot machines and the proposal to reduce the maximum jackpot from £250 to £25, I can only repeat what I have said on previous occasions. I am president of a trades and labour club in Sheffield. I walked into the club at 9.30 one Sunday evening and found four secretaries of local working men's clubs. One of my colleagues said, "They've come to see you, Richard." They did not quite resort to the vernacular, but they made their position very clear indeed. I thanked them, and they did not buy me a drink. They spoke very forcefully, and we are taking that into consideration.

I have made a statement in the House to the effect that we are also factoring in the fact that many clubs play a major role in the social infrastructure of their communities. That has been forcefully expressed. I met the all-party group on non-profit-making clubs, and we will factor in all those considerations.

The overall industry response has been quite positive. We were right to take up the Budd report. Budd has done a good job in bringing several areas into the 21st century, which was necessary. The industry's response

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was quite predictable. It wants to see some recommendations implemented, but rejects others. Overall, the report gives us a firm foundation on which to build.

I understand the points made by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) about casinos, and I take them seriously. We must be careful as we proceed with the legislation. We want to deregulate, and to allow the industry to grow, but we do not want it to lose its integrity. We have seen how some countries have deregulated too fast, and it is difficult to pull back when that has happened.

We need to allow the creativity of the industry to flourish in a framework in which change can be managed. In respect of casinos, we must ensure that we do not deregulate at a pace that cannot be managed properly and would damage the industry.

I have heard what hon. Members have said. The debate has been a good one, and I take on board all the points that have been made. The main point is that we shall try to meet the timetable that I gave at the beginning, and I hope that that will remove the uncertainty from the future.

Elder Abuse

11 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this subject, which seems almost taboo in this country, both because it is hard to get any reliable statistics to measure the extent of the abuse and because many remain in denial about the existence of such abuse. However, the evidence that does exist suggests that elder abuse happens on a scale that requires a significant shift in Government thinking and a change in professional practice.

Let us start by defining our terms. Action on Elder Abuse, an organisation that campaigns on the issue, defines elder abuse as

> "a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person."

The charity goes on to define five main types of abuse. They are:

> "Physical: for example, hitting, slapping, burning, pushing, restraining or giving too much medication or the wrong medication . . . Psychological: for example, shouting, swearing, frightening, blaming, ignoring or humiliating a person . . . Financial: for example, the illegal or unauthorised use of a person's property, money, pension book or other valuables . . . Sexual: for example, forcing a person to take part in any sexual activity without his or her consent—this can occur in any relationship . . . Neglect: for example, where a person is deprived of food, heat, clothing or comfort or essential medication."

Given those definitions, how widespread is elder abuse? Action on Elder Abuse offers evidence in its report entitled "Listening is not enough", which states that in the first two years of its national freephone service, more than one in four of the calls were about abuse in care homes. That figure should be set in context: just one in 20 older people live in care homes, and that pattern has continued beyond the first two years of the service. Research has also found that abuse increases with age.

Will the Minister tell us whether the Department has any plans to commission a national study of the level of elder abuse so that we can get a clear fix on the scale of the problem, not only in formal care settings but in the community at large? Such research is long overdue; research in the United States of America, commissioned by the US Congress, confirmed that the reported level of abuse in that country was merely the tip of the iceberg. I suspect that the findings would prove the same in this country, too.

I want to raise four concerns, of which I have given the Minister notice. The first relates to the resources available to the National Care Standards Commission to do its job properly. In 1983 there were eight nursing homes per inspector; in 1999 there were 20 homes per inspector.

The second issue is the low number of trained staff and the limited target set for raising the level of training. Currently, only two in 10 care staff have recognised qualifications. The Government have set the target that by 2005, half of care home staff should have NVQ2.

Thirdly, there is no offence of neglect of a vulnerable adult, and there is no legal means of dealing with informed consent when people no longer have the mental capacity to make decisions for themselves. Fourthly, standards of medication for older people are inadequate.

The resources available to the National Care Standards Commission are the subject of the first of my concerns. The *British Medical Journal* published a paper last year on the quality of care in the private sector and in national health service facilities for people with dementia. Using a system of evaluation based on dementia care mapping, researchers from the Institute for Ageing and Health came to the conclusion that the quality of care needed radical improvement or much improvement in all homes, and that

"no home showed even a fair standard of care."

Research revealed that in a six-hour daytime period, 60 per cent. of the time was spent asleep, socially withdrawn or not actively engaged in any form of basic or constructive activity. Only 50 minutes was spent talking or communicating in other ways with staff or residents, and less than than 12 minutes was spent actively engaged in everyday constructive activities. This is not about room sizes or the width of doorways; it is about the quality of the life experience of the residents in those care homes. As the researchers emphasised, inspection teams do not use direct observation, so how can they fully evaluate the care environment of older people?

In 1983 there were 28,000 nursing home beds. That increased sevenfold to 196,000 by 1999. In the same period, the number of inspectors increased from 100 to 300. The human resources available to carry out the meaningful inspection of care homes, and residential and nursing homes, is a serious cause for concern. I hope that the Minister can spell out in detail today some of the issues that I have raised in written parliamentary questions to which I have not yet received an answer, including details about the establishment of the National Care Standards Commission and the ratios that the Government hope to achieve for all care settings.

That is not the only concern. On 29 January the Minister wrote to the chair of the National Care Standards Commission, Anne Parker, with guidance on the implementation of regulations and national minimum standards. What message was the Minister trying to send? Certainly, the message received by groups such as the Coalition for Quality in Care was that the Minister condoned low standards, particularly in the physical environment, for an unacceptably long period. What message does that send to care home owners who already comply with or exceed the national minimum standards? What message does it send to care home residents? As the Institute for Ageing and Health demonstrated in its *British Medical Journal* paper, it is not good enough to limit the scope of the commission's work to the prevention of "dangerous and unsafe practice." As if to underline that point, Counsel and Care, another charity, published a report last month entitled "Showing Restraint", which makes depressing reading.

All restraints, used inappropriately, are an affront to the dignity of older people. They create barriers between the residents and the staff taking care of them. They undermine residents' confidence and autonomy. They emphasise the power of staff and the powerlessness of residents. They promote incontinence and dependency. In some cases they increase the risk of injury and death. Examples of restraint include removing a person's walking aid, setting a heavy table in front of a resident's chair to stop them getting up, and tightly tucking in blankets, which can immobilise a resident as effectively as straps.

A care home becomes abusive to its residents when the convenience of the staff is a greater priority than the dignity and well-being of the people in their care. Neither I nor Counsel and Care claim that elder abuse happens in every care home or care setting. There are many dedicated home owners and care home staff who do a challenging job, often in difficult circumstances, but that should not be an excuse for not turning the spotlight on this issue.

Far too prevalent is the insidious abuse experienced by residents because of poor standards and low expectations of the sort recorded by the Institute for Ageing and Health in its BMJ paper. I wrote to the institute to test whether it was confident about its findings and believed that they were representative of a wider problem. It confirmed that that was its strong view, but said that there was a need for further research to underpin the evidence produced by the original research.

Just as care home residents can become institutionalised, so too can the staff, accepting poor standards and tolerating bad practice. Will the Minister give a clear guarantee that the National Care Standards Commission has the necessary human resources to get to grips with the issues surrounding the quality of life in care homes and other care settings and to undertake even an abbreviated form of the recorded observation used by the Institute for Ageing and Health? If the commission is to focus on preventing dangerous and unsafe practice, how will the poor standards and low expectations reported by the BMJ be tackled?

That brings me to my second concern—the training of care staff and the status of elderly care. As long ago as 1997, the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting said that it was concerned about the increasing number of cases that it saw involving abuse of older people. In the year 1999-2000, more than one in four cases of misconduct by nurses involved nurses in nursing homes. Action on Elder Abuse also found that as many as three out of four alleged abusers were care workers or nurses.

Those figures, set against the findings of a study by the university of Paisley, which examined the attitudes of nurses and health care professionals to nursing the elderly, paint a disturbing picture. That research found that the care of the elderly is given the lowest status among care professionals. Elderly care is seen by many of those surveyed by Paisley university as a place to put staff who cannot do anything else. That is not my view; those are not my words. That was the result of the research.

Poor quality is frequently, but not always, associated with low fee levels which lead, in turn, to reduced staff levels, higher staff turnover and poorly trained staff. Low levels of training and high staff turnover are a serious cause for concern. In a recent debate on the state

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of the care system, I referred to a statement by the Association for Residential Care. It said—and this time I shall complete the quote:

> "With some supermarkets offering £8 per hour to stock shelves overnight it is hard to attract staff to a complex and often stressful job for much less money. In some parts of the country the only people applying for vacancies are those that Mcdonald's and Tesco have already rejected and, if employed, they come with high numeracy and literacy training needs, quite apart from any induction training and value based training needs."

Numeracy and literacy training needs are an issue for many care home providers. There are many thousands of dedicated people working in the sector, and their work is often overlooked and undervalued. Good staff really make a difference to the lives of the people they care for. Nevertheless, the economics of care are such that the pool of people willing to work in the care home sector is small and lacking in basic skills.

Inspections rely on good record keeping, so the skills gap must be closed, to ensure that the records can be relied on to give a true picture. Most hands-on care is provided by care assistants with limited or no formal training. It is disturbing to know that research in the United States has shown a strong and clear link between the level of abuse in a care home and the level of training. As Counsel and Care points out, the attitude of staff to residents can hugely affect the degree of freedom and choice that the residents enjoy. Standard 28 of the national minimum standards published last year for care homes sets the target of a minimum of 50 per cent. of members of care staff trained to NVQ2 level or equivalent, to be achieved by 2005. Can the Minister give us a categorical assurance that there will be no relaxation of that target, and that enforcement action will follow swiftly if it is not met? There can be no sliding on that standard.

My third area of concern is the legal protection of older people in care. The law continues to deny legal rights to people who are judged by others to lack the mental capacity to make decisions for themselves; they are not only denied proper legal status as autonomous individuals, but many areas of law simply ignore their existence. For example, under the Mental Health Act 1983, it is assumed that people who make no attempt to discharge themselves from hospital have consented to informal detention as patients. Who has authority? How is capacity defined? How can people with mental impairments, such as dementia, be enabled to participate in decisions affecting their lives?

The current "all or nothing" approach whereby authority is passed to those claiming power of attorney, or professionals giving health care and legal advice, will no longer do. Common law recognises that third parties must act in someone's best interests, but incapacitated people's best interests are about more than managing money or rationing services to meet their care needs. We must ensure that they have a decent quality of life, that they can express their needs and emotions, and that they are treated with respect as autonomous individuals.

The Government have shied away from reform in this area, despite promises of legislation year after year. The rights to life, privacy and family life under the Human Rights Act must be given real form; the legislation that has been lying around for too long in the Lord Chancellor's Department needs to be brought forward. In particular, it is time to introduce a new statutory offence to cover abuse of vulnerable adults. Why is there no such offence on the statute books?

My final area of concern is the inappropriate use of medication in care homes. Last December I published a report entitled "Keep taking the medicine?", which examined the evidence for over-medication and inappropriate medication of older people in care homes. The report drew on parliamentary answers and on an extensive review of both domestic and international research evidence. It concluded that antipsychotic medication was being used inappropriately to "chemically manage" some residents in care homes. The report called for action and set out seven recommendations, including more frequent reviews of medication in care homes, better documentation of prescribing, tougher requirements for the proportion of trained staff, and a change in the law governing informed consent.

Since its publication, the report has sparked considerable interest, and has resulted in a wide range of care professionals contacting me to express support for its findings and recommendations. When it was published I sent a copy to the Secretary of State for Health, and I look forward to receiving a letter setting out the Government's response.

The over-medication of elderly people is a form of abuse that can result in death, and denies them their dignity. The consequences of over-medication have been studied extensively and have been well reported. Despite that evidence, poor practice has persisted in the United Kingdom, and the prescription of antipsychotic medicine has continued to rise. Over the past 20 years concern has grown about the inappropriate use of antipsychotic medication in the care of the elderly, and drugs that were developed for one purpose have been switched to other purposes.

Although antipsychotic medication has beneficial effects in some cases, a succession of studies both in this country and abroad have demonstrated that the level of prescription greatly exceeds the number of elderly people exhibiting conditions that are treatable by such drugs. Research suggests that about 10 per cent. of residents in care homes have psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations and paranoid ideas, but about 30 per cent. of residents in care homes are regularly prescribed antipsychotic medication. If that pattern were repeated in England alone, more than 35,000 residents in nursing homes, and possibly as many as 53,500 elderly people in residential homes, would be kept in a state of sedation for no medical reason.

Elderly people with dementia are particularly at risk, and having to manage challenging behaviour without trained staff is no excuse for relying on chemical solutions. International evidence suggests that annual reviews of prescription for elderly people, as proposed in the national service framework, would be inadequate, and that harm can be done to people in far less than a year. Successive studies have consistently called for change. The chemical management of elderly people is an unacceptable scandal, because it denies them their dignity and their quality of life.

I hope that the Minister can tell us more about what the Government are going to do, not least about increasing the frequency of medication reviews. Will she undertake an awareness campaign targeted at care staff and GPs to ensure that over-medication is recognised and stamped out?

Elder abuse casts a sinister shadow over the care system and beyond. Elder abuse is more of a taboo than child abuse, and our attitude to it seems to be years behind our achievements in tackling child abuse. The national service framework for elderly people and the national minimum standards published last year are steps in the right direction, but more steps need to be taken. Without extra resources and law reform, elder abuse will remain hidden, and its victims will be dead and buried.

11.17 am

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on obtaining today's debate, and on his energetic, creative and intelligent campaigning; the House owes him a debt of gratitude.

The first thing that strikes one about this morning's debate is that it has attracted only one Back Bencher, although Front Benchers are present. The previous debate, which was about gambling, attracted at least 20 times as many Back Benchers, which illustrates the point of raising this issue. The ninth commandment of the Back Bencher's 10 commandments says, "Neglect the rich, the obsessed and the articulate, and seek out the silent voices." There are no voices quieter than those of people who are in residential homes for the elderly. Many of them have no relatives, or only relatives who are indifferent to their welfare. They are often broken and defensive and feel themselves to be weak, and their voices are rarely heard. The empty green leather Benches that surround us this morning are eloquent testimony to that.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, this campaign is enormously important. Sadly, it is not a new campaign, and although I wish him well in his plea, we have to look at the failures of the past decade. A number of early-day motions have been tabled in this Session of Parliament, the first of which was early-day motion 66, headed "Elder Abuse". There was also an early-day motion in 2000, and others in 1999, 1998, 1997, 1996, 1995 and 1994. I shall read out one of them to illustrate the fact that the position has hardly changed.

Early-day motion 1565, dated 1998, said:

> "That this House is shocked by the evidence from the Alzheimers Disease Society and Age Concern on the dangers of the over-medication of the elderly; is alarmed by reports that up to one in five admissions to hospital of the elderly are caused by the misuse of medicines and by investigations in England and Scotland that found 54 per cent. and 88 per cent."—

the 54 per cent. was in Manchester and the 88 per cent. was in Glasgow—

> "of prescriptions of powerful neuroleptic drugs"

to elderly residents in homes were not needed, so were "wrongly prescribed". The early-day motion calls for an improvement in care services, and

> "calls on the Government to replicate the reviews nationally"—

that is, the reviews in Manchester.

There have been other parliamentary efforts, too. The Residential Care Homes and Nursing Homes (Medical Records) Bill 2000 sought to change the situation, and Adjournment debates in 1996, 1998 and 2000 made the same points—and those are not the whole story, but all the results of the activity of one MP. Others, too, have been pursuing the matter.

Whenever the issue is raised in Parliament, whenever I mention it in a question or in debate, hon. Members from both sides come up to me and say that what I have described also happened to their elderly mother-in-law, or to their father, or someone else in their family. The stories are very similar. The old people concerned went into homes, reluctantly, because they were physically frail but very alive and sharp mentally, but within a short time, they were turned into zombies. People in that condition are easy to manage. Many of us conclude that prescriptions of neuroleptic drugs are given not because of medical conditions but because it is much easier to run a home full of passive supine people who will take orders easily, than a home full of argumentative elderly people. The results for the elderly people are catastrophic.

Several studies have been carried out. One in Glasgow, which I have already mentioned, said that 88 per cent. of drugs were wrongly prescribed. As has been pointed out, that largely involves antipsychotic drugs, which are meant for people who are deeply psychotic. They are being used for an entirely different purpose—as a chemical cosh to induce lethargy in elderly people. Every study carried out by any independent body here, elsewhere in Europe or in the United States has found evidence of vast overuse of such drugs. Reactions from Governments of all colours have been discouraging and inappropriate.

The study carried out by Professor Alistair Burns, Sarah Kathryn Lloyd Craig and Lee Furniss in Manchester is probably the most celebrated. On my way to the debate this morning, I passed the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who gave Professor Burns an award for that study when he was a Health Minister. It was a greatly encouraging study, and one assumed that the world would change after it. Professor Burns took into homes an independent group of doctors and pharmacists, who were not attached to the homes in any way, but, coming from outside, looked critically at the prescriptions being given out. Many of them were historic—people were getting prescriptions for illnesses that they had had 40 years earlier. Some of those were wholly inappropriate and clashed with other prescriptions.

The result of the study was to alter prescriptions, and greatly to reduce the number of prescriptions issued and medicines taken. The elderly people started to take milder medicines, often in lower doses. As a result, not only were their lives improved, but they made connections with members of staff and other residents. They were healthier and lived longer. Perhaps best of all—in the view of some people—there was a financial saving as well. That would have been irrelevant, because the aim was not to make financial savings, but every investigation has shown that savings result.

A similar exercise was carried out on a smaller scale in Ceredigion. The investigators did not find a significant amount of over-prescription, but they found that repeating prescriptions of appropriate medicines reduced the total amount of medication and resulted in a financial saving. Professor Alistair Burns and the others who took part demonstrated that large numbers

[Paul Flynn]

of elderly people do not have to suffer from misery and confusion at the end of their days. We all applaud that priceless achievement.

Sadly, as suggested by the report referred to by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, little progress has been made. The reasons are Government timidity and a reluctance to take on the medical establishment and challenge the opinions of doctors. A simple way to find out whether there is abuse would be to publish the percentages of residents in homes who are on dangerous drugs such as Largactil and the other neuroleptics. It would come out clearly that in some homes 100 per cent. of the residents are on neuroleptic drugs and in other homes none are. A health worker who was horrified by the drugs' effects set up his own home and decided not to allow them in. As a result, his home is successful, happy and profitable. Even that simple exercise, which would tell us where abuses are taking place, has not been undertaken.

Age Concern, Action on Elder Abuse and the Alzheimer's Disease Society have published details of heartbreaking cases. In some homes, all the residents are routinely given a pill at 6 o'clock at night. They are then put to bed and miss life, television and everything else that happens. When they wake up and wander around at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning, they are given another pill. That is elder abuse on a large scale. There is a report in the papers this morning about the abuse of illegal drugs, but the greatest abuse of drugs takes place in this age group. We do not measure the numbers who have suffered from over-prescribing since 1993 to 1994, when the issue arose in this country, but they would be not in the hundreds or in the thousands but in the hundreds of thousands.

Is there a way out? There is in America, which, to its credit, went through this process a long time ago. Similar debates took place in the parliaments of countries such as Canada and America in previous decades. They concluded that it was necessary to institute a truly independent system of inspections, with powers attached.

The owners of care homes tell us that it is not they but the doctors who issue prescriptions, make decisions and have the power; one is quoted in the report referred to by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam. Of course that is right. However, there is often strong evidence of collusion; the two work together. The situation is similar to that of doctors in hospitals and prisons. There is a community of interest, and the parties close ranks.

A parallel situation exists in prisons, in which there is a routine knee-jerk reaction to women prisoners who mutilate themselves—a common action by young women who have been abused, perhaps by the care system, their family or their partner. In her book "Invisible Women", Angela Devlin described the almost universal reaction of prison officials. The doctors prescribe antipsychotic drugs, which turn the young women into what are called, in the cruel language of the prison, "muppets". Young women are given drugs that were meant for the deeply psychotic.

I am afraid that the cosy relationship between the doctors and the nursing homes is allowing the problem to continue. Often in such cases, those who are prescribed the drugs do not have an examination, or re-examination, by doctors; they are given them on the say-so of staff in homes. I join the hon. Gentleman in saying that many homes are run in an exemplary manner; the staff are dedicated, and they do jobs that most of us would be reluctant to do, and would, I suspect, be bad at doing. The tasks that they must perform are often heartbreaking, and the financial rewards are very small. They are an army of dedicated people, and I would not criticise such workers in homes for the elderly.

We look to the Government to react strongly. I have a copy of a letter that I sent to Ministers in the past, which contains terms similar to those used by the hon. Gentleman. Pleas have been made again and again, but progress is small, if there is any at all. We want to ensure that all homes are inspected. In America, prescriptions are checked monthly, then rechecked and improvements are made. If that does not happen here, the misery of a large number of unprotected and defenceless people will continue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Frank Cook): I seek to help hon. Members. In these 90-minute debates it is the common convention to start the winding-up speeches of the two Opposition spokespeople and the Minister 30 minutes before the end, but we are well ahead of that stage at present. In similar situations in the past—on two occasions, in my experience—a Member who spoke early has taken an inordinate length of time, which is not fair on other Members, nor on the replying Minister. I therefore earnestly appeal to hon. Members not to extend their contributions unduly, so that the time available is equitably shared.

11.32 am

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—but you have obviously never heard me speak before, because I do not tend to speak at length.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) for securing the debate. This is an important subject, and I echo the thoughts of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) that it is disappointing that so few hon. Members are in the Chamber. It has been a big disappointment for me on coming to Westminster to find that debates on health topics are frequently among the less well attended, and combining the subjects of health and the elderly seems to create a double problem.

I shall begin with some anecdotal evidence. I have taken a close interest in nursing homes since I was a mayor. One of the delights, or otherwise, of being a mayor is visiting all the nursing homes and care homes at Christmas, and it struck me powerfully that one could judge a home as one walked in. In some, residents are happy and lively and chat to each other—one can have an enjoyable visit, perhaps meeting old suffragettes, and all sorts. In others, residents sit in chairs and no effort is made to encourage people to communicate with one another. Often that is a result of the leadership of the owners. It is a subtle rather than a deliberate form of neglect. I found it upsetting to enter those homes, and I wondered who spoke to the residents all day.

The chemical cosh has been a problem for some years. Nearly 20 years ago—I was a pharmacist at the time—doctors were bulk prescribing for nursing homes. Prescriptions for packets of 500 tranquillisers at a time were common. Thankfully, that has changed and things have got a bit better over the years. GPs now have to take more care and pay more attention to their prescribing. They often officially endorsed whatever was going on in the nursing home—that has been hinted at already. They took the word of the nursing home owner at face value. Questions arose in my mind about that when one home that I regularly dispensed medication for changed hands. The prescriptions for antipsychotics dropped dramatically. As a pharmacy manager, I had a problem because they were left on my shelf, so I quizzed the new owners, who said that the drugs were not necessary. Since they had got over the hurdle of withdrawing them, they felt that the residents were healthier, happier and livelier—and they did not have a problem with that, because they thought that older people should be lively. Their view was certainly not that of the majority.

The research by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam has highlighted a 70 per cent. increase in the use of atypical antipsychotics among the over-60s in 1999-2000. We must be careful when we refer to percentages; it might be easier to use numbers, so I shall say that that means about 150,000 prescription items. There was a corresponding drop in prescribing traditional antipsychotics with more side effects, but only a drop of 2.9 per cent. There has been a big increase in the prescribing of chemical coshes.

Part of the problem—here it would be useful if the Minister could tell us what information has been given to GPs—is that when introducing such drugs one cannot treat older people in the same way as the rest of the population. Many older people are already taking various types of medication that may interact with each other, which is called polypharmacy. Because of failing kidneys or liver, they are less able to get rid of drugs when they are administered, so it is important that they begin with a low dose. If such good practice is not followed, the risk of side effects is considerable, including mental impairment, uncontrolled and involuntary movements, tremor, problems with blood pressure, sweating, incontinence, and dizziness. Those are all normal side effects of the drugs, but older people are less likely to be able to cope with them.

The side effects are very unpleasant, and could also exacerbate existing problems to a small degree. It is vital that we train staff, and GPs, in understanding the problems of older people, particularly dementia. Not enough work has been done to understand that problem and find ways to deal with people without resorting to chemical methods or some form of abuse. The poor wages in the sector have already been highlighted. Often there may be a very willing nursing home owner, but because of frequent changes of staff—working in a home is not a popular job—it is difficult to get that message across to the staff consistently.

GPs have many demands on their time, and probably do not have the time or the money to devote to this issue. Standard 9 of the national minimum standards is designed to protect people from inappropriate medication, through clear policies and procedure for dealing with medicines. However, many concerns have been raised about the fact that that the question of who will monitor that standard has not been adequately addressed. The Minister may respond to those concerns today.

Any form of restraint is a problem. I have highlighted the problems of incontinence and other side effects, and if people experience those, it can create a vicious circle. People simply sit there, not reacting to their surroundings, and the problem continues. Who will police the carers? I echo the concerns that have been expressed about the provision of adequate resources to protect people.

There is a case from close to home that, unfortunately, illustrates the point that I am trying to make. There is a nursing home whose owner has high standards, the home is kept very nicely and the residents are generally happy. However, the owner admits that he has problems from time to time, one being that he cannot be there every hour of the day. He arrived one morning to find a patient very distressed, which was unusual, because the lady in question was usually bubbly and happy. Something had obviously gone wrong. In talking to her and to the staff, who were keeping fairly quiet, he discovered that she had been taken to the toilet early in the night and forgotten, so she had been left there for hours getting cold, frightened and distressed.

The owners took that seriously, and promptly sacked the nurse in question. The nurse appealed and took them to an industrial tribunal, but they were on safe ground. I found it particularly appalling that the nurse was then able to enrol with an agency and earn a living filling in at nursing homes throughout the area. The story has a relatively happy ending, because the nurse eventually appeared before the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, which removed her from the register. However, for 18 months she had been able to subject other old people to neglect or abuse.

Sometimes the abuse is unthinking rather than deliberate, which is why we need to get the message across about positive ways of looking after our elderly people. A Counsel and Care publication, putting it very well, says:

> "An act of omission rather than a deliberate act of tying a knot or turning a key can restrain residents, and staff may not be consciously aware that they are doing it."

The phrase "consciously aware" is the key. The problem is connected with education. The publication continues:

> "Staff might think that, "He has had a good day today, he has been sitting quietly in his room." In fact, the resident might not have been given his walking stick, or he might still have his breakfast tray fastened across his lap. He might desperately want to get up to go to the toilet, go for a walk, or simply relieve the pressure on his lower back, but he can't. So he sits, having a quiet day."

There is a cultural perception with older people, as there is with children, that if they are quiet it must be good. That is not necessarily the case.

I would also like to echo the comments of the hon. Member for Newport, West about how residents feel that they cannot stand up for themselves, while their

[Sandra Gidley]

relatives, who perhaps do not visit as often as they should, do not want to make a fuss either. There is often an advocacy problem. Has that ever been considered or dealt with?

To sum up, I will list certain ideas or suggestions. First, does the Minister agree that it would be helpful to have an annual review of prescribing for elderly people? If that could not be done for all elderly people, perhaps a way of monitoring prescribing in care homes could be devised. If over-prescribing is a growing trend, that is a problem, particularly with an increasingly elderly population.

Mr. Burstow: A comprehensive annual review would undoubtedly be a useful tool. As the hon. Member for Newport, West and I have said, medication reviews need to be much more frequent to prevent the damage and harm that can be done in a very short time. If the concentrations are wrong, the effects can quickly become devastating.

Sandra Gidley: I agree with my hon. Friend, but much of that comes back to the fact that GPs do not necessarily have the time or the inclination to deal with what may seem a small part of their work load. We certainly have to address the problem from an educational viewpoint. Here I should put in a plug for my fellow professionals, the pharmacists, who are in an ideal position to monitor medication. Some already do so, and are paid for visiting homes, but not all homes are keen to take up that offer. Perhaps we should move in that direction.

Who can give real advice about antipsychotic drugs? One could accept guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence if nothing else was available, but the trouble is that NICE considers only one drug at a time. It does not consider other drugs that could be prescribed for the same symptoms, and its prescribing recommendations can mean that other medications suffer. We need some helpful guidelines on when it is appropriate to prescribe particular types of antipsychotic.

The problem has been highlighted for a number of years, but the impression that I gained from listening to the hon. Member for Newport, West was that little has been done and that the problem is ignored—probably for the same reasons as there are so few of us here today. Have the Government any plans to study the abuse of the elderly, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam? Will increased resources be made available to the National Care Standards Commission?

The other problem, at least in my locality, is that the local authority rate paid to nursing homes is low, and most relatives are forced to top up the nursing home fees. The problem about a low rate being paid is that inadequate attention is sometimes paid to providing the best possible service. However, some homes manage it, and we need to find a way of spreading that best practice. Increasing the grant from local authorities might help. We would then be assured that nursing homes would not have to resort to the measures that have been highlighted so eloquently today.

11.46 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) for giving us the opportunity to debate this important issue. As he said, it is a taboo subject to many people.

All too often, when considering abuse one thinks of child abuse. That emphasis can be seen in many social services budgets, because a significant proportion of their money each year is spent on the protection of children and their interests. I do not criticise that, but society concentrates on the problems of children and the horrendous problems of child abuse, with which we are far too familiar, to the exclusion of elder abuse. That is partly because many people do not realise that such a problem exists. It is either swept under the carpet or, because we are dealing with adults, people are unable to reconcile themselves to the fact that it occurs. As previous speakers have made clear, that fallacy needs to be addressed.

Sadly, far more elder abuse takes place than one realises, although as hon. Members have said, part of the problem is a general lack of understanding. There is also a lack of information, which, together with the fact that people do not understand the problem, means that one cannot realistically quantify the level of abuse that exists. There are various types of abuse. The obvious forms of abuse are physical, but far more insidious is psychological abuse. The latter is particularly cruel to the vulnerable and the weak, but it is also particularly difficult to prove and to combat.

There are also financial abuses. The Court of Protection can of course help, but all too often it does not play as sound and vigorous a role as one would hope in protecting the interests of those who can no longer look after their own financial and other affairs. Finally, there are the issues of sexual abuse—however distasteful that may be—and neglect, which, like psychological abuse, can be difficult to pinpoint and combat.

One difficultly is that abuse can happen anywhere—in the homes of the individual or of a carer, in residential or nursing homes, and even in hospitals. None of us should make the mistake of grossly generalising and tarring everyone with the same brush. The vast majority of privately owned and local authority owned residential and nursing homes, and the vast majority of medical staff in national health service and private hospitals, do a first-class job of looking after the elderly and other members of society. It would be unfortunate if carers and professionals in nursing were tarred with the same brush as the few who cause the elderly so much misery and suffering.

The scant evidence available suggests that, ironically, most abuse is carried out by individuals who are well known to the person who is being abused. We have a duty to ensure that elderly members of society have the right to a standard of living that is as high as possible—the standard that we would seek for ourselves. We also have a duty to ensure that they enjoy the dignity to which they are entitled.

The sad fact of life is, however, that changes that have occurred in society over the past 20 to 40 years are placing a strain on the elderly. I have in mind greater mobility—younger family members sometimes need to leave the traditional home to search for work in other parts of the country—and the breakdown of the concept of family that existed 40 years ago. Family members often do not live close to each other, as they would have done 40 years ago. There is, therefore, no family support system, although the problem does not affect the elderly alone. Young families with children often do not have the stabilising influence of grandparents who can provide support. All too often, family members move away from the area in which they were born and brought up, and grandparents and elderly parents become isolated because there is no family support system. There is, therefore, an increasing reliance on agencies and on other forms of accommodation for the elderly, which can give rise to a greater propensity for abuse.

One comes to realise, from acquaintance with organisations such as Action on Elder Abuse, that there is great ignorance on this subject, and that abuse is carried out for a variety of reasons.

There are elderly people who are fortunate enough to be still living in their own homes, possibly with a carer or a domiciliary care package to help them to remain in those familiar surroundings, but abuse can arise from poor long-term relationships in the home, or a carer's inability to provide the required level of care. Sometimes the carer has mental or physical problems. There is a considerable and increasing burden on carers. The statistics, which reveal a worrying prospect for the future, show that people who care for elderly people are becoming older. Many of them are pensioners themselves. That causes a problem, not just because of the strains, frustrations and difficulties of caring for someone, but because the carers will have their own problems and hardships.

In other settings, such as residential or nursing homes, abuse is thought to be more often a symptom of staffing problems. Some staff may be poorly trained or supervised, or have little support from management in carrying out their duties. They may also work in isolation, which puts strains and pressures on them.

It is necessary to consider how to move forward. That does not involve the Government alone, although of course they have a role, which I am sure the Minister will fully accept. There are no differences of opinion among hon. Members about the problem, and I suspect that there will be little difference between our views about what we need to achieve. However, we should also pay tribute to the organisations that work with the elderly, providing support and back-up and playing a key role in enhancing elderly people's quality of life, as well as trying to minimise opportunities for abuse.

More needs to be done. Many hon. Members have talked about raising care standards, which is critical. As the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said, we are not talking about the size of rooms, or whether there is a lift. We are concerned about raising standards among people who look after elderly people in residential or nursing homes and people who provide domiciliary care for those able to remain in their homes. Of course the National Care Standards Commission has an important role to play. Similarly, more care and help is needed for carers, to reduce their feelings of isolation and frustration.

Ironically, it was only this morning that I was talking to someone who told me about the frustration felt by carers when, with all the other work that they do, they need to talk to someone from the authorities, such as a doctor or representative of the social services department. All too often they are told that the person in authority is not prepared to discuss the problem with them, but will speak only to the individual concerned. That is ludicrous in many cases, particularly if the elderly person is suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's disease. Such people cannot rationalise the problem that must be discussed with the agency, and there should be a more sympathetic and realistic approach.

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Many have experienced the practical difficulty that the system does not allow for another person to take decisions on health and welfare matters when someone has lost the mental capacity to make decisions on their own behalf. Would he agree that there is a need to examine and change the law in that regard?

Mr. Burns: I would agree that the matter must be reconsidered carefully, because the situation is unsatisfactory, but I hesitate to give a knee-jerk reaction in favour of new legislation, even after the hon. Gentleman's valid intervention, without seeing more evidence about the extent of the problem and hearing further suggestions about sensible improvements. It is dangerous to call automatically for legislation as a solution. If one has enough evidence to justify changes in the law, they should be considered, but I would not want to give a blanket call for a change in the law at this stage. I agree that something must be done to provide more co-operation and assistance for carers in that respect, as it is deeply frustrating for them to have to cope with the bureaucracy on top of everything else.

All the hon. Members who have spoken have talked about the use of medication. I do not think anyone would disagree that it is deeply distasteful and morally wrong to fill elderly people up with pills and keep them sedated and quiet simply to give those who look after them an easy life. It is not right to take the easy option of pill-popping for a quiet life. More must be done to solve that problem, and we must discover sensible ways of stopping that from happening.

More protection must be given to those vulnerable people, especially those who are senile or approaching senility and who do not have complete control over their lives. One hears stories of unscrupulous staff who, while in a position of responsibility looking after those people, plunder their assets.

I know of a case of an elderly lady, living in a residential home, who owned an original Lowry and kept it in her room. When she died, the picture had disappeared by the time her stepdaughter arrived at the home a few hours later. The nurse who had been looking after the lady was a locum who, as was established after a complaint to the police, had taken the picture upon her death. When the police tracked the nurse down, she said, "The picture is mine. The old lady said I could have it when she died." When the old lady had entered the nursing home, however, she was in no fit mental state to give anything to anyone. I have serious doubts that the picture was ever promised to the nurse—indeed, it could not have been, because the lady was not of sound mind. Yet in the light of that interview the police decided not to pursue the matter any further. Only when the stepdaughter decided to take out a private prosecution,

[Mr. Burns]

because the picture had turned up for sale at an auction house in Sussex, did the nurse back off and return the picture. However, there was no prosecution and the family involved in the situation—which dragged on for about 18 months—felt let down by the police because it seemed clear that the lady concerned was in no fit mental state at any stage, from the moment she entered the residential home, to make a rational decision about giving her possessions to anyone.

I wonder how frequently elderly people are abused in that way by a small minority of unscrupulous people who prey on them in the hope that they will never be prosecuted, or even found out, because of the state of their victims? More attention should be given to the matter. The picture was sold at Christie's in London about two years later and reached the record price for the sale of a Lowry. This was an object worth not a few hundred pounds, but—from memory—almost six figures.

We have been fortunate in the success of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam in securing this debate. The issue is too often swept under the carpet; people either refuse to accept that there is a problem, or, because it is in many ways such a horrendous problem, they do not want to confront it. More must be done to eradicate this obscenity from our society.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the Minister to reply, may I indicate that as this is a critical debate—indeed, I am sorry that I was not in the Chair for the beginning of it—I hope that she will use the maximum time permitted for her reply if she needs it.

12.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I begin by concurring with your comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is an extremely important debate. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) has secured it and given us an opportunity to hear from other hon. Members. I am sorry that there are not more of our Back-Bench colleagues present, although the quality of the contributions has not been any the lower for that. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) has a long and proud record of having raised such issues, particularly in relation to medication, on which he is probably far more of an expert than I shall ever be. He has made a great contribution to the on-going debate and it is important for us to pursue it.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam for having given me notice of the areas of concern that he wanted to highlight. I hope to cover them in some detail, and, perhaps, to offer him reassurance. The first is the overarching legal framework in which the issue of elder abuse can be addressed. Secondly, he mentioned training, qualifications and the standard of staff providing care for elderly people—a crucial issue. As he said, quality of care is not about the width of doorways, passenger lifts, and room dimensions—although those things are important; physical standards and the environment in which people are cared for are matters of great concern. The time taken to talk, to listen and to interact with elderly people is key to their sense of well-being, so I particularly want to talk about training.

The third issue is resources. We must look at the adequacy of the National Care Standards Commission, what its budget will be, whether it will be able to monitor not just physical standards but the quality of care given in residential settings, what the numbers of employees will be and how they will draw on the work of other professionals, not simply the commission, to ensure that the picture is fully rounded.

The final subject raised was the important issue of medication, which prompts several questions, such as how often medication should be reviewed, and what systems are being put in place to prevent inappropriate prescribing and over-prescribing of medication for elderly people, particularly, but not exclusively, in residential care settings. Many elderly people are now supported to live in their own homes by intensive domiciliary care packages, which will be regulated for the first time. We should not think that the care of elderly people is only about residential care. I hope that in the future, it will increasingly be about maintaining people's independence in their own homes, which is how most elderly people want to be cared for.

I hope to cover a great deal of ground in my response. The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) said that on her visits to care homes, she had seen dramatic variations in standards of care. I am sure that all hon. Members will have visited care homes, either to see family or friends or to see constituents, and many of us would echo the hon. Lady's comment that to lay people, standards of care seem to vary dramatically from one care setting to another. This is an issue involving leadership, and the ethos set for their staff by people who run care homes. That brings me back not only to training, but to the stability of the care home sector. Stability is important so that people can plan for the future and provide not just a business but a residential care establishment of high quality. Therefore, some issues go beyond care standards and relate to the stability of the whole sector. If we want a substantial well founded residential care sector that can meet the necessary standards, we must think ahead to where we will be in five or 10 years' time and consider the sort of care that can be provided.

The Government share hon. Members' concern about elder abuse. We are trying to ensure that there is a comprehensive framework to minimise the prospect of such incidents occurring. However, I want to put it on record at the outset that cases of deliberate elder abuse are very few, and I am thankful for that. Our real concern should be directed towards abuse that results from poor quality and inadequate care. Cases of deliberate neglect and abuse are in a tiny minority.

Sandra Gidley: Would the Minister not describe the over-prescribing of neuroleptics as deliberate?

Ms Blears: If a deliberate decision were taken that was not in the best interests of a patient who was receiving medication from their GP, that would be a matter of concern not only to the Government but to the authorities who regulate health care professionals. We are talking about the extent of prescribing and the effects of over-prescribing. A deliberate clinical decision to harm a patient would be abuse, but we are not talking about that. There are issues surrounding the over-prescribing of antipsychotic drugs, but I am certainly unaware of any widespread, deliberate clinical decisions to harm patients, so it would be wrong to consider the issue in those narrow and restricted terms.

I want to put on record my appreciation of the immense dedication of thousands of members of staff who work in sometimes intense, pressured situations, caring for elderly people in residential care settings. Many of them do a first-class job caring for people, so we should ensure that our debate remains in that context. One of the worst things that we can do is to drive down the morale of people who are working extremely hard, often on very low pay, at the sharp end of care in our communities.

I also want to thank the charities and other organisations that advocate for older people and try to push relevant issues up the agenda. Action on Elder Abuse has campaigned tirelessly to ensure that the issues are in the public domain. Local authorities such as Lewisham, Cornwall, Sheffield and Surrey have developed adult protection procedures through their social services departments to co-ordinate the response of relevant agencies to abuse. That mirrors the child protection multi-agency machinery that we are developing.

Such matters are not the responsibility of one agency. There are several statutory and voluntary organisations that must work together to ensure that incidents are minimised and that when they do occur, there is a proper, considered response.

Paul Flynn: My hon. Friend is rightly focusing on the positive aspects of the care of the elderly, which should be stressed. Perhaps we have neglected one area during the debate: the wonderful work done to expand the lives of elderly people through new technology. The infirm and those who are seriously handicapped can be liberated to roam across the vast prairies of the world wide web. That has greatly expanded the life experience of elderly people. We should commend organisations such as Hairnet, and the local authorities that have encouraged the development of fuller and richer lives for elderly people in residential homes and elsewhere.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right. I read a report about that from a community organisation in my constituency, where some elderly ladies in their late 80s have obtained their first new technology qualification. They are surfing the web with real enjoyment. That means that increasingly well armed and knowledgeable constituents will raise serious issues at our surgeries. New technology can allow interaction with the outside community even for people with physical infirmities.

The Government take the regulatory framework seriously. We began with the White Paper in 1998, and subsequently passed the Care Standards Act 2000, which put the aspirations of the White Paper into law. New regulatory frameworks are being introduced for residential care and nursing homes and agencies. Moreover, for the first time we will regulate domiciliary care agencies. The framework will be overseen by the National Care Standards Commission. Those are significant steps, and I am glad that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam welcomed the introduction of the commission, and the national service framework for older people. Those are recent significant steps in ensuring that we have a more coherent regulatory framework for the care of the elderly.

I would like to draw the attention of hon. Members to the creation of the protection of vulnerable adults list. In health and social care for vulnerable adults, the list will introduce a ban on workers who have harmed such individuals. The list will be similar to those in other public services: if it is proven that someone has harmed a vulnerable adult, they will not be re-employed. That is a significant step in providing real protection for older people.

The gateway to the system will be through the already established Criminal Records Bureau. A person included in the list must not be offered employment in a care worker position. If an employer has a reasonable belief that a care worker has abused a vulnerable adult, that worker must be referred to the Secretary of State for provisional inclusion on the protection of vulnerable adults list, even if the person is an ex-employee or retired. If the Secretary of State decides to include the person's name provisionally, inquiries will be undertaken to decide whether that inclusion should be permanent. Individuals may appeal to the tribunal if they have been put on the list. That is a significant step to ensure that we have a proper record. As in the case raised by the hon. Member for Romsey, if someone has harmed an older person, that individual should not be re-employed in the same service and allowed to continue such behaviour.

We also have the General Social Care Council, which will regulate the work force. Qualified social workers will be the first group to be registered, but we expect residential care home managers to be in the next group. In order to be registered with the GSCC, a person will have to demonstrate that they are of good character, physically and mentally fit to carry out the work for which they seek registration, and competent to do so, having attained a proper level of training.

Mr. Burstow: Can the Minister tell us when she expects front-line care workers to be registered with the GSCC? Given that she has said that a small minority of staff go through due process and are reported for direct abuse, does she agree that although the list is a welcome addition, there is still a need for research that will give us a better picture of the entire iceberg, and not just its tip?

Ms Blears: I will come later to research—an important matter, which the hon. Gentleman has already raised. I cannot give him a specific date on which front-line workers will be registered, because the process is on-going. We are starting with social workers and moving on to residential care home managers. We want to ensure that the whole of the work force who are in contact with elderly people are properly regulated and trained. Those are new measures, which are part of the new regulatory framework. Let us see how it settles down and beds in, and how we can begin to roll out a more extensive programme.

It is easy to call for overnight action on issues that have been outstanding for decades. Action is beginning to be taken, and we have to ensure that we set

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challenging targets that are also realistic. There are people out there who care for many elderly people. If our targets are not realistic and do not inspire confidence that they can be achieved, we will be in danger of setting our sights too high and setting people up to fail, which is the last thing we want. The most sensible way forward is the twin-track approach of setting new challenging targets and seeing how we can meet them.

In terms of training, we have set up a new fund specifically to ensure that we train people on induction standards when they first come into the sector. We should try to have a properly qualified social care work force, wherever people are working. Again, the record on that issue is poor. The National Training Organisation for Social Care published its training strategy—the first national strategy—in July 2000. That strategy includes details of the training and qualifications that care staff should have, starting with induction training for new staff.

In 2001-02, £2 million was set aside for induction training. Those standards cover essential elements such as understanding the principles of care and understanding the experiences and the particular needs of the service user group. The standards look at training from the point of view of the people who are being cared for, rather than from the point of view of the profession. That is a significant change that places patients and service users at the centre of the services that we are trying to set up. It will ensure that training is relevant to the needs of the people who are being cared for.

The National Care Standards Commission's national minimum standards include standards for training and qualifications for both care staff and managers. Those standards start with the induction training that new staff should undertake within six weeks of commencing their employment. They will move through foundation training to a competence-based qualification. In that way care staff will be more confident about their work, and I hope that they will take a more mature attitude to it.

There are about 1 million people in the social care work force, but only 20 per cent. of them have a relevant qualification. As I have said, we have to be realistic because we cannot expect to get everybody qualified overnight. We must ensure that services are still provided while staff are undertaking qualifications. We also have to know that there is sufficient capacity on the supply side with staff coming through. We must address the relatively low pay, and the fact that that kind of work has been undervalued.

Mr. Burstow: The Minister is right that there is a question about capacity. Can she assure us that when we get to 2005 and half of all care staff have to be trained to NVQ2 level, capacity will not become a reason for allowing the standard not to be applied in full from that date?

Ms Blears: We have set a target for 50 per cent. of care staff in residential care homes for older people to hold an NVQ2, and we aim to meet that target. There should be no excuses for having unqualified staff in a very important service. One way of raising the value of work in the sector, and thereby attracting more people to work in it, is to ensure that there is access to proper qualifications. We want to make faster progress if we can; that is why we have set that target.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned staff struggling with numeracy and literacy. There are some 10,000 people in the national health service as a whole who have such problems. We have a huge problem with access to basic skills in this country, so training in that area must also be considered.

We have care standards, the protection of vulnerable adults list, the qualifications required by the GSCC, the No Secrets guidance and the National Care Standards Commission. Let us see how that regulatory framework beds in and works. The overarching criminal law also provides for action to be taken when there are unfortunate incidents. We believe that that regulatory framework is an appropriate way forward.

Several hon. Members have mentioned over-medication and the over-prescription and inappropriate use of antipsychotic drugs for older people. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam has set out some of the research on that in his report, and I understand that he is awaiting a reply from the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), which I am sure he will receive shortly.

We agree that excessive and inappropriate use of antipsychotics is a form of abuse. Because of our concern, we have tried to examine the available data on the change in prescribing rates of typical and atypical antipsychotics. The picture is complex and there is not one single explanation for the changes. The data that we have are captured from the Prescription Pricing Authority are about changes during the past year. The hon. Member for Romsey quoted the figures that show that prescribing of atypical antipsychotic drugs has increased. There is a reduction in the prescription of typical antipsychotic drugs, but that does not account for the whole difference in prescribing.

We are currently considering research on antipsychotic drugs in different care settings and the recommendation to ask the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to produce guidance on the use of such drugs for older people. That is an important field of research. It is difficult to drill down into what the data from the Prescription Pricing Authority really mean in residential care settings and in the community for older and younger people.

It is possible that the prescription of atypical antipsychotic drugs has increased because care for older people is catching up with trends in care for younger people, where there is an increasing use of modern drugs that have fewer side effects and are more beneficial. However, I do not think that that is the full explanation. The request for research is important.

On restraint, and the report from Counsel and Care, I reassure hon. Members that the care standards require that

> "service users are safeguarded from physical, financial or material, psychological or sexual abuse, neglect, discriminatory abuse or self-harm, inhumane or degrading treatment, through deliberate intent, negligence or ignorance, in accordance with written policies."

I believe that that standard is sufficiently wide to cover inappropriate restraint. That is important, and enforcing the standard will therefore be the key.

We have been asked how many inspectors the commission will have. I understand that the ratio of inspectors to homes will be approximately the same as at present—one inspector to 27 establishments—but because there will be a single and consistent regulatory regime, the arrangement is likely to be more efficient. At present, there are several different regimes, and people operate to different standards, which means that we do not make the best use of available resources. Increasingly, new technology will be used, which will give us an opportunity to do that.

I understand that inspectors will have access to 66 full-time equivalent pharmacist inspectors, who will help with the whole medicines management programme. Pharmacists play a key role in ensuring that medicines are managed properly and that there is regular review. We are beginning annual reviews for people over 75, and the prescriptions of people taking four or more medicines will be reviewed every six months. Let us see how the reviews work, because they represent significant steps forward in ensuring that medicines are managed properly.

Planning (Community Involvement)

12.30 pm

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): In my 15 years' experience as a councillor and almost five years as an MP, it has become clear that planning issues are one of the most prominent vehicles for promoting interest and involvement in local democratic processes. Popular involvement is not just a product of NIMBYism or of a knee-jerk reaction against change, but of people's genuine concern for their community, their environment and future generations. Members of Parliament talk a great deal about the decline in democracy. We want to overcome apathy and answer the charge that we do not listen. If we are to rebuild our democracy from the ground up, what better place to start than with a review of planning?

There are some positive aspects to the planning Green Paper. For example, all councils will have to open up planning committee meetings to public participation. The Government are to expand the planning advice service. I stress that the details must be worked out soon and the resource commitments made, so that the Government can ensure that communities genuinely believe that their role is being enhanced and supported. Councils will be required to give reasons for decisions to approve planning applications, with reference to planning policies; that is already good practice among many local authorities, including Leeds city council. I understand that the Government are reviewing current enforcement arrangements and whether a deliberate breach of planning regulations should constitute an offence immediately pursuable through the courts; that would be welcome. I am also attracted by the idea floated in the Green Paper regarding mediation, which might help deal with some of the cases that come to Members' attention.

The accent on community involvement in local development frameworks and action plans is a welcome principle. However, the plans must be relevant to people, communities and their perceptions of problems and challenges; otherwise, they will appear to be abstract and bureaucratic exercises, and will attract little participation. The deficiencies of plans will come to the fore when they are tested and found wanting against specific planning applications that excite real community attention, anxiety and opposition.

The development frameworks and action plans must clearly and specifically address the concerns of our constituents on issues such as housing and other developments that place extra pressure on the local infrastructure of roads, public transport, school places and health care provision, such as GPs. They must also place mobile phone mast applications in a clear structure and move away from the current ad hoc approach.

Contrary to the Green Paper's assertion, compiling and keeping local development frameworks and action plans up to date will be labour-intensive, especially for large local authorities such as Leeds city council. Drawing up action plans in an area such as Leeds will be very time-consuming, and I cannot think of many communities in my constituency, or across the whole of the city, that will not want their own action plan in addition to the local development framework. Will the Minister explain who will decide where action plans are desirable or required?

[Mr. Paul Truswell]

The idea of developers engaging the community as a material consideration in the planning process is also a worthy principle. In practice, it is unfortunately more of a selling job than an attempt to find common ground. On two recent occasions, I have heard developers quote planning policy guidance 3—PPG3—to justify inappropriate and over-intensive proposals, and portray that as a simple wish to carry out the Government's will. Surely it is not the Government's intention that such cynical engagement with the community should count in developers' favour.

I am worried about what is contained in paragraph 4.26 of the Green Paper. It refers to representation at inquiries into local development frameworks and action plans. It implies that the Government are thinking about withdrawing the right to have objections to a local plan heard in front of an inspector at a public inquiry. The Green Paper states that such a system has proved to be "time consuming and adversarial".

I hate to be a cynical old student of humanity and human psychology, but relationships between communities and developers are often hostile and adversarial—that is inescapable. Communities regard the situation as a David and Goliath battle, and we have often seen headlines couched in such terms. However, as I read the Green Paper, it seems that the Government have taken pity on poor old Goliath against the upstart David. The Green Paper also suggests that the future system might be based on informal hearings or examinations in public. The Government seem to be proposing the removal of a tangible and defined statutory right of participation and replacing it with something vaguer that relates to public involvement.

To be effective, public participation must be founded on real, legally enforceable rights, not on a set of voluntary or discretionary opportunities. The system must cater for conflict and aggrieved parties, as well as promote consensus.

In paragraph 5.2, the Green Paper states that the present system of development control is not customer friendly. Who do we mean by customers in that context—the applicants? Are not individuals, neighbours, council tax payers and communities customers too? They certainly pay for the services and expect to have their interests protected. The paper provokes other fears that local community interests may not be adequately protected. For example, new business zones will be introduced in which developers will not have to apply for planning consent.

Under the previous, Conservative Government, we witnessed what can happen when areas are excluded from the normal democratic and accountable planning processes. We have some good examples in Leeds. The Green Paper tells us that important national policy, such as planning policy guidance notes on nature conservation, will be slimmed down. Can the Minister confirm that that is not a euphemism for diluted? It states that Parliament will be able to grant permission for a wide range of projects, including large-scale quarrying and opencast mining, chemical plants and roads over 30 km. However, Parliament is not best placed for dealing with major site-specific proposals. Lobbying an MP—no matter how brilliant we are—especially on whipped business, is not the same as having access to a public inquiry.

The Green Paper seeks to strip powers from directly elected county councils and unitary authorities, and to hand them to unelected regional planning bodies. The membership of those bodies is not made clear, but Lord Falconer confirmed in his evidence to the Select Committee that the Secretary of State would have the final veto on their membership. The Green Paper refers to local strategic partnerships and their importance. Those organisations may fulfil a useful economic regeneration function, but are not democratically accountable and should not be given influence in establishing the grounds for local public participation.

Finally, I turn to my hobbyhorse, on which I have tabled questions and an early-day motion: the third-party right of appeal on planning applications. In the Green Paper, the Government, quite wrongly, dismiss out of hand that right of appeal. They may have thought that dismissing the idea at the outset would make it go away; as always, the reverse it true. We have a system under which councils are held to be infallible when they grant planning applications, but fallible when they refuse them. In other words, developers can appeal if planning permission is refused, but communities cannot appeal when it is granted.

When I say that there are many reasons why we need at least a restricted right of appeal, I am talking not about Mrs. Scroggins appealing against the granting of planning permission for her next-door neighbour's conservatory, but about important major applications. I say that we need such a right, because, as a former council member, I am more than aware of the fact that councils are not perfect. Decisions can be finely balanced, and developers can be given the benefit of the doubt. Pressure from the district auditor can sometimes make councils sensitive about refusing too many applications, because those involved might appeal. Local authorities are also under pressure to meet housing quotas and—sometimes spuriously, as I shall show in a moment—to protect jobs. In some cases, they might even be the applicants. Finally, there are cases in which planning officers have recommended refusal, but local authority members have exercised their obvious prerogative to overturn that recommendation.

The case that the Government make in the Green Paper against a third-party right of appeal is intellectually and politically unsustainable. I hope that the Minister will not use her Department's intentions to improve the front-end community involvement aspects of the system as a pretext for preventing people from picking up controversial planning applications through a third-party right of appeal at the end of the process. I am sure that she will not suggest that calling in by the Secretary of State, judicial reviews or reference to the ombudsman will help to redress the balance as far as the community is concerned. Improving the pre-decision community involvement process is valuable and to be welcomed, but it is no good on its own. It is a bit like saying that someone can have the best defence lawyers that money can buy but that he will have no right of appeal if the jury convicts him, no matter how perversely.

Lord Falconer has impressed many people—including myself, I must say—with his grasp of the planning brief, his advocacy of the Green Paper, his willingness to debate and his huge charm. I should, however, tell him that one can be a friend of businesses without being its fall guy.

There are numerous examples in my constituency of sites that have been redesignated from employment to housing use. If the local development framework or the action plan can be ignored as easily as the unitary development plan is, we shall be back at square one. Again, that reinforces the need for a third-party right of appeal over major applications. What use is a unitary development plan, a local development framework or an action plan to the community—even where the community has been involved in drawing it up—if departures from it cannot be challenged on appeal? If there is a third-party right of appeal against such departures, the onus will surely be on the council to ensure that it gets its plans right in the first place.

Let me conclude with an example that best demonstrates why we need a third-party right of appeal. Silver Cross, the renowned pram maker, is based in Guiseley, in my constituency. Several years ago, the old family-owned company was in trouble. Consultants arrived on the scene, immediately cut the work force to 30 and came up with a recovery package that required the sale of half the site for housing. If that was not done, they threatened, the company and the remaining jobs would disappear.

The community was rightly up in arms, given the congestion that already existed on the A65 and the pressure on school places and facilities such as GP practices. The council, however, being only human, reluctantly succumbed to the threat contained in the planning application. Half the site was redesignated for housing, and planning permission was subsequently granted. The consultants then pocketed the £2 million proceeds from the sale of the site and sold the company on. The current owners, who are making a real go of the business and taking on 50 workers, are left bemoaning the loss of the rest of the site and the valuable warehousing that it contained. We are looking at massive community opposition, a reluctant council with a gun held to its head, a change in the designation of the site from employment to housing and the serious undermining of the viability of the remaining employment site. If ever a case called for a third-party right of appeal, this one does.

The Green Paper and the planning review teeter on the brink of enhancing community involvement and protecting the planning process. On behalf of the communities in my constituency, which are probably no different from those throughout the country, I do not ask for the earth; I ask only for some level ground.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) for raising this important matter. Issues relating to planning and development often generate intense community interest and scrutiny. It is often thought that planning is a dry subject, but his experience and mine do not support that view. People can be dramatically affected by the quality of their environment; they care deeply about what happens to it and about changes that take place around the areas in which they live and work.

The Government recognise the need for a planning system that engages people in shaping the future of their communities and gives them the chance to have a say. To be successful, the planning system must have the confidence of all parties. My hon. Friend asked who the consumers are. Anyone who is affected by plans and planning applications is a consumer—the term embraces the public, the business community, who have an interest in seeing successful results, and all who care about proposals for the development of their areas.

I shall deal partly with the existing system and partly with the Green Paper, on which we are still consulting. I assume that part of the point of today's debate is to ensure that the views of my hon. Friend are fed into that consultation.

It is right that people who are affected by a plan or who have an interest in the development of an area should have the opportunity to make their views known and to have them taken into account. The system already provides such opportunities. However, in the past, people either heard about planning proposals far too late or, although they theoretically had a right to be heard, were not able to exercise that right.

The planning Green Paper, published on 12 December, puts forward robust proposals to rectify that. They are designed to strengthen the opportunities for people to comment on and influence development proposals, even before a planning application has been submitted.

I shall explain some of those changes, including the third-party right of appeal, in which my hon. Friend is particularly interested. There is an issue about the local development frameworks. In recent years, the scope for communities to participate effectively in the planning process has been enhanced by the requirement that development plan policies be adopted only after widespread consultation, and the statutory requirement for all planning applications to be publicised. However, we must do more than merely consult. We intend to deliver a planning system that better engages communities and secures their effective involvement and ownership.

We propose real community participation in the preparation of our new local development frameworks, especially in drawing up action plans—I shall deal with my hon. Friend's question on those—which bear on local areas and may result in the regeneration or conservation of particular neighbourhoods. I am sure that my hon. Friend will recall development plans that ended up being 10 years out of date before they were even produced. One of the aims of the proposed changes is to ensure that we have documents that are current and relevant to a changing built and natural environment, and that are not out of date before they are completed.

The confusing complexity of the current system does little to promote public confidence or to encourage community engagement. We shall simplify the complex hierarchical system of plans and replace local plans with new local development frameworks. Those will connect with the local community strategy and help to put into practice the policies that it contains. The framework will

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include a clear set of criteria by which local authorities will be able to steer development and use growth to bring about the vision for their areas. Action plans will be drawn up for town centres, neighbourhoods and villages, and those will be the focus for local participation.

My hon. Friend asked whether local communities would be able to requisition, as it were, the plans. I appreciate his point, but we do not envisage that; however, we expect close working relations between a local authority and the community, and the local authority should be sensitive and responsive to the views of the community with respect to a range of activities.

Mr. Truswell: The point that I was trying to make was that a framework that applies to a whole city will necessarily be somewhat vague and not relevant to particular communities. If those cannot, to use my hon. Friend's term, "requisition" a local action plan, I fear that the Government will fail to engage them any more than the current process does.

Ms Keeble: I take my hon. Friend's point, but we expect the local authority, through such mechanisms as a community strategy, to be alive to the concerns of communities and the areas in which action plans are needed. My hon. Friend was also concerned about local strategic partnerships and I want to go on to deal with them.

Under the present system, everyone has a right to make objections to draft local plans, and to have those heard, usually in a public inquiry. However, that approach can sometimes be time consuming and adversarial. We seek a better way to test the new local development frameworks. Under our proposal, we shall encourage all local authorities to work with local strategic partnerships to establish effective mechanisms for community involvement, building on their work preparing community strategies.

My hon. Friend questioned the democratic credentials of the local strategic partnership. They are being carefully developed around the country, but in particular in the most disadvantaged areas, with careful structuring to involve local businesses, residents, tenants and voluntary groups. We see them as extending, not replacing, the democratic credentials of the local authority and extending the effectiveness of the local authority's links with the community. The proposals on community advocacy in the Green Paper would support the ability of relevant groups to prepare and present their cases more effectively.

We propose that the local development framework should contain a statement of community involvement, setting out how the community should be involved in the continuing review of the framework and in commenting on significant planning applications. The statement will set the standard for good practice in engaging those with an interest in proposed developments. I hope that that provides some reassurance.

My hon. Friend mentioned large developments in particular. We propose that compliance with the terms of the statement, and its requirements for engaging the community, should be a "material consideration" supporting a planning application. As my hon. Friend probably knows, that term, used by planners, would denote that the amount and quality of public consultation would be a factor that could be taken into account in determining a planning application. That is in keeping with our view that there is mutual benefit to developers and communities in working together to plan developments that are likely to have a major impact on a locality.

My hon. Friend referred to the David and Goliath relationship that is usual between community and developer, and the fact that they are seldom in agreement. That is sometimes so, but equally in some cases the developer and the community work hand in glove and the developer is careful to ensure that the community is supportive. Some might cynically say that that sometimes happens if the proposed development would conflict with a PPG, but that is not necessarily so. Best practice would avoid conflict between the developer and the community.

I shall deal with some of the issues surrounding development control, so that I can deal with some of my hon. Friend's points. Master planning of major sites will help developers plan for higher quality development in partnership with local authorities. There will be clearer information for planning applicants and new requirements for openness and accountability within the planning process.

Master planning means that an overall vision or development brief for an area is set out so that people can understand clearly what the future may look like. It enables the community to be directly engaged with big development or redevelopment proposals.

We propose that local authorities should now give reasons for approving a planning application as well as for refusing it. By listening to people's concerns up front and ensuring that people can see why a particular decision has been reached, we aim to minimise the need for action after a decision has been made, which is often the least satisfactory route of all for local communities.

We recognise that elements in the planning system are a mystery to many in the community. Therefore, we are considering whether we can provide more support to Planning Aid, a voluntary network of planners who provide professional advice to the public. In collaboration with the Royal Town Planning Institute, we are investigating how that organisation might be expanded and better funded.

Before dealing with the third-party right of appeal, I would like to touch briefly on some of my hon. Friend's other points.

Mr. Truswell: May I return to the question of Planning Aid? Does the Minister accept that it is pivotal to local communities, because structures are always regarded as bureaucratic and complicated, and the only way in which ordinary people and community groups can get round them is with the sort of advice provided by organisations such as Planning Aid? That, rather than the structure, is the key.

Ms Keeble: I certainly agree that it is essential that communities, particularly the more disadvantaged ones, be supported, so that the planning system is made to work for them.

I would like briefly to deal with three points before I go on to the third-party right of appeal. Making PPGs slimmer is designed not to weaken them but to make them more effective. Much of what is in the current PPGs consists of general statements of practice and does not represent the hard core of policy. Slimming them down is designed to make them more comprehensible, better tools in the development of planning policy. I assure my hon. Friend that it is not our intention that what he predicted should come about.

My hon. Friend also asked about debates in Parliament on general policy. It is essential that we have proper policies on major infrastructure issues, which are often among the most hotly contested in planning terms. For example, for the country not to have a proper policy on airports would be an abdication of our responsibility in that important area. It is essential that the Government propose policies on such issues and that Parliament debate them. That provides a framework for the way in which we approach the provision of that infrastructure.

We propose that counties retain their responsibility for minerals and waste. They will also retain an involvement in some other planning issues, but we envisage a slimmer planning structure. Retaining the strategic and local levels means that that tier disappears.

On the third-party right of appeal, the Government's view is that such a right would not be consistent with our democratically accountable system of planning. Elected councillors represent their communities—they must take account of the views of local people on planning matters before decisions are made and justify their decisions subsequently to their electorate.

Third parties do not have a right of appeal against planning decisions in the way that applicants do, because it is the responsibility of local planning authorities to act in the general public interest when determining planning applications. Local authorities must determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan for the area, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, which can include views expressed by local residents and other third parties.

The right way forward is to make the planning system more accessible and transparent and to strengthen the opportunities for community involvement, which we believe would be a major benefit of the proposals in our Green Paper.

NHS (Gloucestershire)

1 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Two hon. Members have sought my permission, and that of the proposer of the debate and the Minister, to participate in the debate very briefly, so that the Minister may reply in full.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): I am pleased to have secured this debate and to see the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), in her seat. I thank her for coming to reply. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) and the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) for being present. They both have an interest in the debate as they represent constituencies in Gloucestershire.

I have been applying for this debate for some time but have been unlucky in the selection procedure. My desire to have the debate began on Christmas day, when I made my usual round of hospital visits, as I am sure all hon. Members do. My visit to my local hospital was unhappy: when I arrived, I discovered that a ward was closed due to a shortage of staff. Not even agency staff could be found on that occasion. I also found a great many patients who should not have been in hospital but were waiting for nursing home places. One poor chap had been waiting for six months for a place at a specialist spinal unit.

All hon. Members receive letters telling us of problems with the health service, but when we go to hospitals and meet such people, the problems become very real. When we see the problems at first hand, they have a great effect on us. For example, I am concerned about the oncology ward in Cheltenham general hospital, at which people who are in a very sickly state sometimes arrive first thing in the morning and have to wait all day for treatment. As all hon. Members will have done, I have spoken to doctors, nurses, scientists, therapists and carers in my area, who feel not only short-staffed but extremely stretched in their work. I do not want to paint too black a picture, but I have become aware of those problems over the past year, especially in the Christmas period.

I do not blame the doctors, nurses or other staff, or the health authority in that area. The health service has national problems, to which I do not want to refer too generally, given that the debate focuses on Gloucestershire. However, there are national problems with funding, despite the Government's claims that they are increasing funding and despite the previous, Conservative Government's increased spending. Without taking into account the private sector contributions, Government spending on the health service puts this country ahead of Luxembourg, Ireland, Finland, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy. However, we fall way behind Germany, Denmark, France, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands and Austria in that respect.

There are also problems with what is known as the postcode lottery, whereby drugs such as beta interferon, for the treatment of relapsing and remitting multiple sclerosis, are prescribed in some areas and not in others. People understandably find that unacceptable, given that the NHS is supposed to be a national service.

[Mr. Laurence Robertson]

One reason why problems have been made worse for the health service is that it has been the victim of its own success. It has kept people relatively well and allowed them to live longer. Only 50 years ago, there were 4 million pensioners in the country, whereas now there are 11 million. Although I do not want it to appear as though I am blaming pensioners for the problems, hon. Members will recognise that their greater calling on health services presents the NHS with another problem. The fact that there are also new drugs, new treatments and new operations has created greater demand. There is also a greater public awareness, and a greater expectation of public servants. All those factors add to the problems of the health service. I fully recognise that the Gloucestershire health authority and the staff there are doing the best that they can in a difficult situation.

When I visited Tewkesbury hospital on Christmas day, I found that delayed discharges, which are unkindly known as bed blocking, are a big problem. I raised the matter with the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health. The picture in Gloucestershire is bleak. There was a time when Gloucestershire had many nursing home places. I do not want to be party political, but in 1997 the county had 4,047 nursing home places; now it has only 3,064. Those figures were kindly provided by the Minister in a written answer, so I can only assume that the figure of 983 for the home care places that the county has lost is accurate. That is a significant fall.

What are the reasons for that fall? Again, I do not want to be party political, but people have told me that they have to work to the national standards, and say that other factors such as employment regulations and a shortage of staff have all added to the problem. We are all aware that the situation is unfair to those waiting to be discharged from hospital, their families, the hospital staff, and to those waiting for operations and for the beds that are unnecessarily occupied. It may be a bigger problem in Gloucestershire because the county has a slightly older population than some other counties. I draw that to the Minister's attention, although I am sure that she is aware of it. Unfortunately, over the past few weeks there has been another flurry of nursing home closures in the county, which will add to the problem.

As I say, I do not want to paint too bleak a picture, because many people are trying their best to make something of the situation. For instance, there is a sheltered housing scheme and a hospital home care discharge scheme, and the new trust will bid for development funds to provide further beds to be commissioned as and when they are wanted. Some initiatives are being taken, but the picture is not good.

I want to mention health service staffing in Gloucestershire. I mentioned the closed ward in Tewkesbury hospital; it was certainly needed. Staff could not be found, not even agency staff, to run the wards. When I spoke to nurses in other hospitals in Cheltenham and Gloucester, I was told how stretched the staff were and how short-staffed the service was. I was told that nurses are leaving the NHS to work for agencies, only to be employed by the NHS at a huge extra cost. No one can blame those who take advantage of that, but it benefits neither patients nor the NHS budget.

Scientific staff carry out a vital job behind the scenes. Most people never come across them, but they do important work. They, too, are stretched, as is the ambulance service. The rurality of Gloucestershire makes it difficult to provide an effective ambulance service, and it is a great tribute to those who work for it that they manage to provide such a good service. Therapists, too, are stretched, and we have far too few carers.

A great deal more is expected of public servants today, not only in the health service. However, it applies particularly to the health service, and we must consider the rewards that health service staff receive compared with what they could earn elsewhere. We must also consider their conditions of work. On a recent visit to the ambulance service in Gloucestershire, I was reminded that those who train as paramedics get very little more than those who do not. I am sure that the Minister will want to address that, as it is a big problem. If we want to provide the kind of immediate service that people want, we must ensure that we have the staff to do it.

I also want to talk about waiting times. I have been a little concerned by some letters that I have received—I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold and the hon. Member for Stroud share my concern—about people having to wait a long time for treatment. The national figures for people who wait 12 months or more are not impressive, and have increased during the past four years. That is reflected locally. I am worried about people who have to wait for heart bypass operations. They suffer from an extremely serious condition, and we all know of people who have waited far too long for such operations.

Several drugs have been developed to treat serious illnesses, and it is a tragedy when they are not prescribed. Gloucestershire was certainly not helped by the uncertainty created when the National Institute for Clinical Excellence seemed to point in different directions on beta interferon. To its credit, the health authority did its best to provide funding for some patients, but it was by no means enough. When a serious illness could be, but is not, treated by a drug, we have to ask what is going on and whether we have a national health service at all.

Another example that concerned me recently was brachytherapy, a treatment with which I am not familiar. I am sure that the Minister will correct me if I pronounced it wrongly. It is a treatment for prostate cancer that is considered to be far less traumatic and to have fewer side effects than others. Cheltenham has a machine for it, but I am told by the Gloucestershire prostate cancer brachytherapy unit trust that it needs to raise £50,000 a year itself during the next two years to pay for the machine to run. That concerns us, given that we are supposed to have a national health service. The service seems rather patchy, and I hope that the Minister will mention that in her reply.

Some arrangements are being introduced that I hope will improve the delivery of health services. I want to draw attention to two problems. One is the joint emergency services unit, which will be effective in Gloucestershire from next year when the three emergency teams will work together. The ambulance service has told me that it wants comparative pay levels introduced if the emergency services are to work together. The Minister might consider that with her colleagues.

New strategic health authorities and primary care trusts will also be developed. Tewkesbury and Cheltenham will form one of the smallest in the new strategic region. I am a little concerned about that and hope that the Minister will say a word or two on the subject. We are trying to be as positive as we can be about the changes, but we are concerned about the merging of hospital trusts. We hope that it will benefit patients, but we shall have to see how it works.

Gloucestershire is seen as an idyllic place to live—a wonderful place with beautiful countryside. It is a lovely place, and I am sure that all those who live there are proud to do so. However, it has pockets of deprivation and problems caused by rurality and poor health in some areas. That needs recognition. All too often, Gloucestershire is not given the funding or the treatment by Ministers that it deserves. The same may apply to other shire counties as well. I hope that, in future, simply because a county sounds beautiful to live in, it will not suffer through shortage of funding.

I thank the Minister for listening so intently, and look forward to hearing what my colleagues have to say before she replies to my points.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), I should tell him and the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) that the Minister wants a full 10 minutes to reply. I hope that they will show self-discipline.

1.14 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I hope that I shall take somewhat less than two minutes, and no more than my fair share.

I rise to make one point. There is a third acute hospital in the wonderful county of Gloucestershire: besides the Gloucestershire royal hospital and the Cheltenham general hospital, there is also Standish hospital. For some years, we have been waiting for the relocation of facilities to the main site at Gloucestershire royal hospital, but will the Minister reconfirm—if not today, perhaps later in writing—that before services are relocated, the medical uses of the Standish hospital site will be considered? That is only fair and reasonable, and it links up directly with what the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) said. That site could be used to help with the provision of facilities and to overcome the problem of delayed discharge, and we might consider to what other uses the site could be put. Will the Minister consider that and ensure that the commitment given to me by the chief executive of the health authority is fulfilled? Obviously, such matters are not so easy in these days of changing structures. On the day when we saw the launch of Care and Repair England's document, "On the mend", which considers how housing can be combined with health and social services to ensure better care for older people, it is appropriate to consider how the facilities at Standish could be used to play a part in that process.

1.16 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on securing this important debate. As he said, Gloucestershire is a highly rural county. I have one of the top half dozen most rural constituencies, which also contains the third highest number of over-85-year-olds of any constituency in the country. I have made those points before in this Chamber, but the capitation formula for distributing money to the various health authorities does not adequately take into account either rurality or care of the elderly. The elderly and the very young are the most expensive categories to care for, and that should be taken into account.

I want to make one narrow point. Following a debate in this Chamber before Christmas about the future of Cirencester hospital, I went to see the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), and we discussed the need for openness from the health authority and from the new Cotswold and Vale primary care trust. Having dragged out some information from that care trust this morning, I was disturbed to discover that what I understood at that meeting would take place will not now take place. The understanding at that meeting was that on 1 February junior doctor status would be withdrawn and locums would be put in place pending Cirencester doctors being trained to house officer status.

I now discover—I was not told this as Member of Parliament for the constituency, which is disgraceful—that that was not possible and that senior house officers will have to be seconded from Cheltenham general hospital. That hospital is already overstretched. If it has surplus capacity of senior house officers, what was it doing before? That arrangement is tenuous and bodes badly for the future of Cirencester hospital, but above all, it is not in keeping with the spirit of openness that formed part of my discussion with the Minister, who was only too keen that a discussion forum should be launched, and an inaugural meeting will take place on Friday. However, for the local Member of Parliament to have to find out about proposed changes at Cirencester hospital from the local press is unacceptable, and I ask the Minister to speak to her officials in Gloucestershire to ensure that I am kept fully in the picture in future.

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I welcome the decision of the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) to hold a debate on the national health service in Gloucestershire, and congratulate him on his success in securing the debate. Clearly, the NHS is vital to his constituents and to people throughout the country.

I shall start by briefly addressing the points made by other hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) raised the question of Standish hospital, and I shall look into his remarks on the site's future medical role.

I was not aware of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) about Cirencester hospital. I shall discuss them with my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), the Under-

[Yvette Cooper]

Secretary of State who has responsibility for the region, and we shall get back to him. We have discussed the capitation formula before, and although he pointed out the importance of considering the elderly in that context—I completely agree with him—he will be aware that other parts of the country make equally strong representations that they are penalised by a focus on the elderly. In areas where life expectancy is much lower, there is a lower elderly population, so people feel that health inequalities in their areas need to be addressed in the capitation formula. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the capitation formula is under review, and that all those points are being taken into account.

The hon. Member for Tewkesbury raised a series of issues concerning the NHS in Gloucestershire, and I shall try to address some of them. Many of them were broad issues that apply both to Gloucestershire and to other areas across the country. We should be clear that there are pressures in Gloucestershire and elsewhere. Patients in many parts of the country wait too long for treatment, too many operations are cancelled at the last minute and too many patients who could be discharged are waiting in hospitals. Those problems result from years of underfunding and under-investment, which have reduced the NHS's capacity to respond. The Labour Government inherited a situation in which there were too few doctors and too few beds across the NHS.

We must also recognise the improvements that have already been made and that are being made. Such improvements are often a result of the hard work of health professionals both in Gloucestershire and across the country. The extra investment needs to be sustained into the future; we are working to provide improved care for patients in the NHS in Gloucestershire and elsewhere, but we need to go further.

Through the NHS plan, we have increased the number of doctors, nurses and other health professionals in training, we have reversed the decline in bed numbers for the first time in 30 years and we are increasing the amount of money invested in the NHS by record amounts. In Gloucestershire, as in the rest of England, that is starting to deliver changes to the services that people receive. Extra investment and extra capacity are extremely important. The hon. Member for Tewkesbury made many points concerning additional staffing, capacity and equipment, and about facilities for staff to use. I agree with him, but it is all about putting in extra investment.

The health authority has received a 5.7 per cent. real-terms increase in its budget in 2000-01 and this year. Next year, the health community's allocation will increase by 6.7 per cent. in real terms. Compared with a historical average across the country of some 3 per cent. in real terms, that is substantial additional investment in the health service. We need to look into the long-term needs of the NHS, which is what the Wanless report was about. That requires decisions about how we shall fund continued investment in the health service.

Although Westminster Hall is not a party political forum and I respect the tone in which the hon. Gentleman made his comments, he needs to debate the matter within his party, and not simply raise it with Ministers. I agree that the NHS needs greater capacity, and that we should find additional capacity. However, he may want to raise that issue with colleagues in his party.

More than £1 million has already been allocated from the modernisation fund to improve accident and emergency services at Cheltenham general hospital, where £413,000 was used to create a new surgical admissions lounge and improve security, and at the Gloucestershire royal hospital, where the accident and emergency department was refurbished. Additional investment has enabled the number of beds in the Gloucestershire health community to increase for the first time in more than 30 years of reductions. From 1999-2000 to 2000-01, the number of beds increased by 126, or 6.6 per cent.

From 1997 to 2001, the number of doctors employed in the hospital and community health service in Gloucestershire increased by 28 per cent. Additional investment has been targeted at critical care facilities—intensive care and high-dependence beds at Gloucestershire royal and Cheltenham general hospitals. Further investment will be made during the next few years. Gloucestershire royal hospital is developing a major £32 million capital scheme under the private finance initiative.

Extra investment has enabled the health community to tackle long waits. In the two years to September 2001, the number of outpatients waiting more than 13 weeks for a first outpatient appointment fell by 31.5 per cent. and the number waiting more than 26 weeks fell by more than 46 per cent. Plans are in place to ensure that no patients wait more than 26 weeks for a first outpatient appointment after the end of March this year.

Clearly, waits must be much shorter for cancer and other urgent referrals. The target for a GP referring someone with suspected cancer to a consultant is two weeks. The Gloucestershire health community has achieved that target for all patients covered by it since last July. In the three years to last September, the number of in-patients waiting for treatment fell by 12.6 per cent.

The Gloucestershire health community is making progress and plans to deliver the targets on waiting times set out in the NHS plan, which should make a considerable difference for patients in Gloucestershire and across the country. However, we must not only put in place the extra capacity, but introduce the right reforms and ensure that money is well spent. The hon. Member for Tewkesbury mentioned the postcode lottery. I agree that we need national standards in a national health service. For the first time, in the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, we have an authoritative body able to produce national standards for treatment and drug use that must be followed by health authorities and primary care trusts across the country.

The national service frameworks for coronary heart disease and cancer are providing national standards. New national service frameworks, for example, for children and for long-term conditions, will also come on stream. Many modernisation projects are already under way in Gloucestershire—"action on" and "collaborative" projects are leading the way in the modernisation of services and improved care for patients. They include the booked admissions project led by the Gloucestershire royal hospital, by which all surgical day cases, physiotherapy and routine radiography appointments are electronically booked.

"Action on" programmes are leading to shorter waiting times for patients. The ear, nose and throat programme at the Gloucestershire royal hospital is developing a GP specialist role to promote direct access for routine tonsillectomy. The action on cataracts programme at Cheltenham general hospital is improving efficiency and patient care so that patients can be treated more quickly. The orthopaedic collaboration, working across the acute hospitals, has reduced the length of hospital stays for routine hip replacements by improving pre-operative care, including physiotherapy to reduce recovery time. Discharge has now been reduced from 14 to seven to eight days.

The hon. Member for Tewkesbury raised concerns about delayed discharges. He is right that there are too many, not only in Gloucestershire but across the country. Gloucestershire social services received an additional £1,463,000 last October to tackle that problem. The average number of patients waiting to be discharged has declined by more than 60 per cent., from 109 in July to 48 in January. Progress must continue, but it is already under way.

Changes to the structures of the health service in Gloucestershire are already in place. Those will allow more decisions to be made locally, provide more resources to front-line clinicians making decisions about care, and provide a better structure and better reforms with which to use the considerable, additional investment already going into the NHS.

Cattedown Sewage Treatment Works

1.30 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): The lives of some 4,000 Plymouth, Sutton constituents have been blighted by potent "bad egg" sewage smells for more than four years. Cattedown and Prince Rock residents are those most affected. However, when the wind blows in a certain direction, residents of Oreston in the constituency of the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) are also affected.

Cattedown, Prince Rock and Coxside are part of the £18 million regeneration east end renewal project area. For several years, the residents have been working hard on their plans for regenerating the area, which focus around a healthy living project. It is ironic that the blight on the area, represented by the Cattedown pong, should be something that makes people feel sick. It is absolutely essential to the success of the project that a final solution is found to the Cattedown pong.

The residents and I know that South West Water has an action plan, but I am afraid we have heard this before. Plymouth city council had powers under the Environment Protection Act 1990 to issue an abatement notice, which could insist that a time scale be attached to such action. However, that reassurance seems, like the proverbial rug, to have been pulled from under our feet.

The plant was built in 1998, and 4 km of tunnels, 25 m beneath the streets of Plymouth, were constructed to carry sewage from more then 70,000 homes to the Cattedown treatment works. The project, which brought to an end decades of raw sewage being discharged into Plymouth Sound, was a key part of South West Water's on-going £1 billion clean-sweep programme to improve water quality standards around the south-west coast.

Residents raised many questions at the time of the proposal. After all, a sewage treatment works—or waste water treatment works, as it is more properly known—is not what one would choose in the neighbourhood. Reassurances were given that it was a state-of-the-art treatment works, so there would be none of the smells that people traditionally associate with such works. Assurances were given to residents and their representatives, including Councillor Jean Nelder. I am indebted to her for her helpful recollections, based on her diligent work in representing residents' interests.

In supporting residents in their battle to end the pong, I was approached by people operating businesses and leisure pursuits from the Cattedown wharf, including Ian Sleep, who operates a boat storage and maintenance business called Shore Store. The two problems are related, because they raise issues about the original design of the treatment works. I shall deal with each issue in turn.

Apart from the unpleasant nature of the pong, people worry that the smell is contaminating washing lines, decreasing property values and may result in ill health. As one of the residents told me,

> "we were assured that there would be no smell from the new works but there is, to us it is a clean sweep under the carpet by South West Water."

[Linda Gilroy]

The bad egg odour is, of course, hydrogen sulphide gas, which is a natural product of decay. While high levels of hydrogen sulphide can be harmful, even deadly, it can be detected by the nose at an extremely low level—at concentrations of one 400th of the threshold for harmful human health effects. Apparently, the levels of H_2S at Cattedown are lower, and I am advised that they do not represent a health risk per se. However, as anyone who has experienced the bad egg smell will know, the unpleasant, putrid odour can make people feel sick, to the extent, sometimes, that they become sick. It affects the quality of life in a way that could lead to or compound depression.

Plymouth city councillors and officers and I have received complaints from members of the public since 1998. They increased and became so frequent that the council officers met representatives of the water company in March 2001 and obtained commitments to a series of improvements. Following the initial meeting, complaints continued and the council officers, having experienced the odours on several occasions, concluded that a statutory nuisance existed. In July 2001, it served an abatement notice under section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act, which required South West Water to manage the waste water treatment works to ensure that any odours emanating beyond the boundary of the area did not amount to a statutory nuisance.

The company was given three months to comply. Subsequently, South West Water confirmed that urgent action was being taken at all three sites to secure improvements. There is also a problem at Camel's Head and Ernesettle in the neighbouring constituency of the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson). The company asked for six months rather than three to do the work, and the council agreed to extend the notices, but not to the full six-month period. South West Water appealed against the notices and concurrently continued with the programme of works at each site.

Early last year, I had the first in a series of meetings with representatives of residents associations and learned that complaints made directly to the water company were not handled to the high standards that we expect of a modern utility. I could see that Plymouth city council were taking appropriate enforcement action, but I felt that residents deserved better information about what was happening. A polite response to my letter to the chief executive of South West Water informed me that the matter would be attended to. However, after a bad pong episode several months later, residents told me that things had not improved, and we decided to call a public meeting and invite all the parties to come and explain what was happening.

The meeting was held on 25 September 2001 in Prince Rock primary school. More than 60 people attended, as well as officers of the council, South West Water, the Environment Agency and the secretary of the Ofwat consumer committee. The company outlined its action plan in some detail. It is fair to say that, at long last, people felt that some commitment and resources would be applied to tackle the problem.

However, South West Water continued its appeal against the time scale attached to the abatement order. At a hearing on 29 November, the solicitors acting for South West Water requested an adjournment until 20 December 2001. At that point, people were still confident that the action plan would result in an end to the problem within a reasonable time. To that end, we have monthly meetings of the relevant parties to keep the spotlight on the issue and to ensure that residents have an opportunity to contact directly the company and the people who have the power to resolve the issue.

The appeal hearing on 20 December was adjourned, it having emerged that recent case law might have a bearing on the proceedings. To our dismay, that turned out to be the case: East Riding of Yorkshire council *v.* Yorkshire Water Services Ltd. in 2000 made it likely that a court would not regard the treatment works as premises under part 3 of the 1990 Act. Based on legal counsel's opinion, the local authority felt that it had no option but to withdraw the notices. Officers remain convinced that the 1990 Act was intended to include sewage treatment works among the premises that come under its control and are now considering alternative action, which may include common-law litigation.

How can local residents have confidence in a provider who is prepared to exploit legal loopholes to escape regulation? The Yorkshire case seems to have involved a sewer pipe to one cottage. It is regrettable that South West Water chose to seek its application to a whole treatment works that blights 4,000-plus households—a rather different kettle of fish. Residents received a slap in the face from that legal loophole. The company used it to avoid the notice, particularly the time scale attached. My constituents feel let down, and once again unsure that a light—or, more appropriately, fresh air—is at the end of the tunnel.

Our local paper, the *Evening Herald*, is fully behind the residents in their campaign. I ask, as did its recent editorial, whether the situation would be different if South West Water executives lived in the pong areas. Perhaps any review of enforcement powers should stipulate that after, say, three months of the uncontrolled nuisance, company executives should have an order placed on them to reside in the area.

Any court faced with the issue is likely to hold that the waste water treatment works are not premises on which an abatement notice may be served pursuant to section 79 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. When the Act was introduced, water authorities, which took over from local authorities in 1972, were replaced by sewerage undertakers following privatisation. However, Parliament seems to have continued to use the word "premises" without redefining it to accommodate that change. The long title of the 1990 Act refers to the intention to

> "restate the law defining statutory nuisances and improve the summary procedures for dealing with them",

but there is no material redefinition of the word "premises."

Consideration can be given to the bringing of proceedings for an injunction to restrain common law public nuisance, but that is much less easy to prosecute than an offence defined in specific legislation. Local authorities the length and breadth of the country are left in a position far less clear than that envisaged by legislators and enforcement officers.

I turn now to problems that have been encountered, over which [illegible] Environment Agency has enforcement powers. In May 2001, Ian Sleep of Shore Store wrote to me:

> "We have to complain about the South-West Water sewage works in Finnigan Road Cattedown. We have complained to South West Water and the Environment Agency for more than 2 years now with no improvement at all. In fact the situation is getting worse. South West Water are using the River Plym as an open sewer, and their so called storm outlet is situated under the next wharf down, about 400 yards from us. It constantly empties raw macerated sewage, untreated into the river regularly without any logical reason. Whether the tide is flowing or ebbing the whole area is a massive cess tank which is full of sanitary towels, condoms, needles and even babies nappies. So much for cleaning up the environment."

The letter was accompanied by photos and a daily record of the sewage and the foul smell from the treatment works from April 2000 to May 2001. They showed that sewage was observed on 171 days, and the smell was present on 66. I visited the business with officers from the Environment Agency. A report from the agency following the meeting confirmed that the operation of the treatment works fell far short of the consents order. On 28 June 1998, the agency had granted a combined sewer overflow consent in respect of the treatment works to South West Water. It was granted for the Plymouth Hoe east and west bathing waters to achieve compliance with the mandatory bathing water standards, required under the European Community bathing water directives, and to address aesthetic impacts from the discharge. The consent specified an operation that should have been better than the agency's bathing water policy requirements, and a 6 mm screening requirement to remove sewage-related debris on the discharge.

In a letter of 31 August, the agency confirmed:

> "It is now known that infiltration of groundwater gaining access to the sewerage system was significantly underestimated by South West Water (SWW) and this has resulted in far more frequent operation of the CSO than expected. This discharge should be weather related, although the large size of the catchment could cause overflow to continue to operate after rain has stopped falling. SWW are required to improve the performance of the CSO as part of the AMP3 (Asset Management Plan 3) investment . . . Regrettably, the scheme is behind schedule . . . SWW have asked for additional time before this work is commenced".

An action plan has been developed and should bring overflows from the treatment works back in line with the original consents order by the end of this year. The agency is monitoring the effect of recent works to increase capacity through new plant and engineering, although I understand that a combination of additional storage for storm flows and separation of infiltration water from the sewerage system will still be necessary.

The Department has many important environmental issues on its plate, and I have not lightly used the opportunity of my second debate on water-related matters in the past three months to bring the Minister to the Chamber. Will he let me have his observations on the legal powers available to local authorities to deal with odour problems around sewage treatment works, and will he review those powers? Will he take an interest in the work that local Environment Agency officers are doing to deal with the apparent breach of the combined sewer outflow consent? Will he also take an interest in my approaches to the director-general of Ofwat and the south-west customer service committee to ensure that the cost of this expensive nightmare is met by the shareholder, not the consumer?

Finally, does my right hon. Friend agree that the patient people of Prince Rock, Cattedown and the other affected areas merit special consideration by South West Water for the four years of pong, pollution and misery that they have endured? I ask that in particular because, as my right hon. Friend well knows, we have the highest water bills in the country, and charges for sewage treatment form the largest part of them.

1.46 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) on her success in securing a debate about the problems at the Cattedown sewage treatment works in Plymouth and on the succinct way in which she dealt with them. I have visited Plymouth several times, and I know how assiduously she tackles issues that affect her constituents and how connected she is with the local communities.

I have considerable sympathy with local residents who have had to endure the offensive odour problems around Cattedown and with those who have experienced similar problems around the works at Camel's Head and Ernesettle. In many ways, these are classic constituency problems, which most of us have encountered at one time or another. One of the strengths of this place is that we can bring our experience to bear on such matters, and when I first examined the problems at Cattedown I was reminded of problems that had arisen in my constituency when odours from a tip caused intense misery to many people in the area.

My hon. Friend is right to identify real and perceived problems and to ask whether issues are a nuisance or a threat to health. When an odour is offensive, however, the worry is genuine and palpable in the local community. I have great sympathy with my hon. Friend when she talks about the relationship with the healthy living centre. There are two such centres in my constituency, and I have seen the positive influence that they can bring to bear on the health and confidence of the local community. When problems arise, they can undermine the work of such centres.

I understand that the route for resolving statutory nuisances such as odour problems around sewage treatment works, through the Environmental Protection Act 1990, does not apply, and I shall return to that in a moment. Today, I read a letter dated yesterday from the chief executive of South West Water. It sets out the efforts that the company has made and intends to make to solve the problems to the satisfaction of local residents and businesses. I shall provide my hon. Friend with a copy of the letter after the debate, and she will see that the company expresses its commitment to solving the odour problems at Cattedown by April 2002.

[Alun Michael]

Furthermore, the letter sets out the action that the company will take to reduce the spill frequency of the storm water overflow from the works by the end of this year. Officials at the Environment Agency are working closely with South West Water to ensure that that deadline is met, and I have asked my officials to keep me informed of progress. I would be happy to join my hon. Friend in keeping in touch with those developments and keeping an eye on them, especially in view of her points about previous timetables. It is hoped that this and other improvement works will achieve more regular compliance with the standards of the bathing waters directive, and limit pollution of the River Plym.

My hon. Friend expressed concern about who would have to meet the costs of necessary measures. I can assure her that the people of Plymouth will not be asked to pay for putting right any mistakes made by South West Water. The price limits set by the Director-General of Water Services in 1999 and revised last December limit the bills that the company can charge its customers. Those price limits already provide for the standards and consents set by the Environment Agency, including the cost of Operation Clean Sweep. If the company finds that it costs it more, that is its risk, not that of its customers.

The water company would be able to ask the Office of Water Services—Ofwat—to look at its price limits only if it were asked to undertake measures that were not on the table in 1999 when its price limits were set. Both my Department and Ofwat have always made it clear that the control of odours and other nuisances is something that a sewerage company should be doing as a part of its day-to-day running costs, not something that requires extra funding.

I am told that the Ofwat customer services committee for the south-west, which is the statutory champion of water customers, has been energetic in pressing South West Water to solve the odour problem quickly.

Linda Gilroy: It is interesting that none of my constituents approached Ofwat. The regulator's title causes problems. It relates to water and people do not perceive that consumer committee as being able to deal with sewage issues. We should draw further attention to Ofwat's powers in that area.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. The purposes for which that committee was established and its remit are clear, but I agree, from my own experience, that public knowledge and understanding of it are comparatively limited at local level. There are several issues surrounding the work of the committee that my hon. Friend may wish to explore further, along with the subject of price controls. I invite her to contact the Director-General of Water Services, Philip Fletcher, who would be happy to discuss those issues with her. We should investigate ways of making people more aware of what Ofwat is there to do on their behalf.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of statutory nuisance legislation. I am assured that there is no flaw in that legislation in terms of enabling local authorities to deal with odour nuisance from sewage treatment works. The definition of "premises" under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and its predecessors clearly does not include sewers or sewage treatment works; nor did Parliament intend it to do so. If one examines the history of the definition, one finds that statutory nuisance provisions do not apply to public sewers and sewage treatment works and that that was established by 19th-century case law. It is not a recent development or the result of a lacuna in the recent legislation to which my hon. Friend referred. The courts held that Parliament could not have intended that magistrates, through enforcing local abatement notices, should direct how those constructing and operating such works should go about it. If that were the case, the establishment and running of a system for the benefit of a broader society could be undermined.

That is quite logical, but ensuring that there are ways of dealing with local nuisances is also important. There is no obstruction in the current situation. There is nothing to stop local authorities and water undertakings working closely together to identify problems and find solutions without having to resort to legal action. There is at the end of the day, as my hon. Friend said, the possibility of taking action through common law, although that may be more of a backstop than an approach that leads to immediate action. I would be happy to look at the history of this case to discover whether there are any lessons that should be learned. However, in the short term, we must deal with the matter.

We are committed to meeting our obligations under the urban waste water treatment and bathing water directives and, as a result, the Cattedown works have been built to treat sewage from Plymouth to the required standards of the directives. The provision of secondary treatment and ultra-violet disinfection since 1998 has had a positive effect on the quality of bathing waters at Plymouth Hoe east and west. For example, in 1999 and 2000, bathing waters in both areas passed the mandatory standard, and Plymouth west again passed in 2001. Unfortunately, Plymouth east was a marginal failure that year.

I commend my hon. Friend for the commitment and support that she has given her constituents in solving these problems. For example, she organised public meetings involving the relevant parties to ensure that everyone knew of the problems and of what was being done to solve them. I understand her concern that the problem appears to have taken longer to deal with than was desirable and than was suggested at an earlier stage. The letter that I received from South West Water, which I shall pass to her, gives assurances in that regard.

Linda Gilroy: During the procedures that Plymouth city council has followed on behalf of the residents of Cattedown, it has taken legal advice and received legal counsel's opinion. I am surprised to hear the Minister say that no powers exist under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 with regard to serving abatement notices. Will he meet the environmental protection officer to discuss that further, as it is perceived to be an issue not only by the local environmental health officer but by others?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend goes slightly beyond what I said. I referred to the definition of "premises" under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and the fact that that is clearly based on earlier case law. Rather than pretend that I am an expert on the law, I shall happily consider any advice provided to my hon. Friend, whether by the local authority or anyone else, and ask my officials and those in the Environment Agency to consider that advice and respond to any points that arise.

I shall share with her the letter that I received from Mr. Robert Baty, the chief executive of South West Water, which was written only yesterday and is probably the most up-to-date communication on these matters. In addition, I shall look into the matter with her, to ensure that the timetable that has been given is adhered to, so as to end the nuisance to her constituents. At the end of the day, it is most important to ensure that her constituents enjoy a pleasant environment.

Linda Gilroy: I thank the Minister for that, and acknowledge that he is a frequent visitor to the far south-west. I hope that those visits will not cease and that he will visit the area—and, perhaps, our healthy living centre—without having to experience the pong. I am sure that his words will be greatly appreciated by my constituents.

Alun Michael: I share my hon. Friend's desire that I should visit her area in safety, rather than find that it has a continuing problem. As I said, the important thing is that the problem should be overcome. Clearly, that cannot be done overnight and, clearly, it has gone on longer than was originally promised, and longer than is desirable.

I hope that what I have said today will give cause for optimism about ridding my hon. Friend's constituency of this nuisance. I hope, too, that everyone engaged in the matter—from the company to the Environment Agency, and to officials in my Department—will consider what can be done to accelerate the process and to learn lessons for the future, so that constituents elsewhere find that such matters are dealt with more speedily.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 14 February 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Paramilitary Intimidation

[Relevant documents: Third Report from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Session 2000–01 HC 59 and the Government's response thereto HC 461]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): First, I thank the Liaison Committee for allowing the debate. It is important that the subject is aired, and if we cannot air it on the Floor of the House, it is as well to do so here. Secondly, my hon. Friends know, but not everyone will know, that the report was prepared before the last general election, and therefore not under my chairmanship but under that of my noble Friend Lord Brooke. I pay tribute to him on behalf of my colleagues for the sensitive and light touch with which he handled the Select Committee for five years—I am not allowed to notice him in the Public Gallery today. I am trying hard to follow his difficult act.

The report inevitably touched on devolved matters. One problem with the new devolved institution in Northern Ireland is the involvement of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in providing support for victims who have been removed from their homes. I am happy that the executive supported the Committee's inquiry, and provided a response, for which we are grateful. During this Session, that was printed with the Government's response in the fourth special report.

The inquiry was launched in 2000; evidence was taken then, and at the beginning of 2001. Disappointingly, the Government did not respond to our report until the beginning of December, eight months after the report was published, and well beyond the deadlines that Government set themselves. That disappointing delay can be explained partly by the intervention of the election and the summer recess, but eight months cannot be entirely explained away.

Most people think that, with the ceasefire and the ending of violence in Northern Ireland, many problems have gone away. They may think that punishment beatings, expulsions and evictions by intimidation have disappeared. That is far from the case, and some statistics show that the opposite has happened. The Base 2 project run by the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, which works for the reintegration of individuals into the community, shows that the number of referrals to NIACRO has increased steadily year on year. In 2000, 346 people had to be moved out of their houses into other ones—that is almost one each day. The problems have not gone away.

That figure reflects only the cases that are reported. People who steal away after they have been ejected, or who move because they are frightened to stay after being threatened and intimidated, but do not report that they have done so, do not appear in the figures. It is therefore probable that the figure is higher. Many people may think that young men who have been involved at the fringes of paramilitary activity are mainly affected by such threats and intimidation, but that is not the case. It affects men and women of every age, and often children too. The article that recently appeared in *The Times* under the headline "Get out or be killed" paints a sad picture of the effect that intimidation has had on one family.

Intimidation is not something that occurs on one side of the community or the other. It happens between Protestants and Catholics, and Unionists and nationalists—one can use whatever phrase one likes. It happens in the Protestant-Unionist community and in the Catholic-nationalist community; people intimidate their own people. It is so widespread that one cannot define it as sectarian intimidation. A culture of no respect for the normal course of law and order grew up during the troubles and after the ceasefire. The Minister will agree that that is the first thing that needs to be addressed.

Sometimes intimidation just takes the form of a threat; sometimes it takes the form of real violence, and we all know of recorded cases of violence. Sometimes it is against individuals; sometimes it is against whole neighbourhoods, of which the recent sectarian trouble in north Belfast is a good example. More than 1,000 people have had to leave their homes because they are frightened to stay there or they have been intimidated out of staying there.

The question that we must ask, and which the report addresses, is what we can do about it. I am sure that the Minister has heard more than enough pleas for more money, more housing, better social conditions and this, that and the other. We all echo those pleas and hope that they will be answered as and when they can be. I understand the constraints under which the Minister operates.

I should make it doubly clear that I am speaking for myself; I did not take part in writing the report. Somebody, somewhere has got to make the paramilitaries understand that they cannot go on behaving in that lawless fashion. It is easy to criticise the police and say that the Police Service of Northern Ireland should do better and should not tolerate lawlessness. We know, however, that in many parts of Northern Ireland the police writ does not run.

The problem is more fundamental than that, but there is a way round it that the Government should be trying, and I am sad that there is little sign that they are. All sorts of concessions or all sorts of—if one does not like the word "concessions"—moves have been made since the Good Friday agreement. The agreement was painfully negotiated, and things happened such as the release of prisoners, in the interests of preserving the fragile peace to implement all aspects of the agreement and make Northern Ireland a normal society once again.

It appears to most that the people who have not moved and changed their ways are those who are carrying out the intimidation, the beatings, the punishments and the expulsions. They have not needed to change because they have been getting almost everything that they want. The Government have been slower to tackle that problem than many of us would have wished. It would have been easy to negotiate some sort of return of released prisoners, and not made their

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release completely unconditional. Indeed, in Northern Ireland before the referendum, the Prime Minister gave an undertaking to the people of Northern Ireland that there would be parallel progress in the return to normality. Nobody could say that progress in the return to normality has been parallel.

Now it is late, but not too late, for the Government to insist that before any more concessions are made, the problem of people who have been evicted be properly addressed. It should be made perfectly clear not only to the paramilitaries but to the political parties associated with them that that behaviour can no longer be tolerated in a society in which they want to be part of the normal political process. That is the deal that should be done.

A lot of offence was taken when Sinn Fein Members were allowed to come into this place. I echo the sentiments of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), who asked the Prime Minister a question about them yesterday. He said that he wished that they were here so that they could take part in the debate and be—*[Interruption.]* Are they here?

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): They may be listening.

Mr. Mates: They may be listening, but they are not here. If they were, they could stand up and justify the activity that is going on in the communities that they have been elected to serve. Surely those elected to serve in democratic forums owe it to those forums to ensure that what goes on in their communities, in so far as they can help it, is democratic and peaceful. They are making no attempt to do that, because it is not in their interests, and it has not been made in their interests, to do so.

Others will have different views to express, but I hope that what the Government take away from the debate is that now, no further concessions should be made without getting something in return. The most important thing to get in return is a recognition that it is unacceptable for people to be intimidated out of their homes, exiled or beaten up. Would it not be the ultimate irony—I said this to the Prime Minister yesterday, and got a very constructive response—for the Government to introduce a Bill giving amnesty to convicted criminals who have escaped from prison and to those wanted for the most serious terrorist crimes when there were no corresponding amnesty, so to speak—this is not really the right context in which to use that word—for those who have been expelled from their homes and cannot live in the communities in which they were born and brought up?

Jane Kennedy: I am listening with great care to what the hon. Gentleman says, and I have read the report in detail. Does he accept, as the report identifies, that the causes of the displacement of people that we are discussing are many and complex? Doing a deal, as he and others are urging the Government to, is not the simple, straightforward step that he portrays. There are paramilitary organisations participating in such unacceptable violence that are not party to, and would not count themselves party to, any such deal. They cannot be let off the hook.

Mr. Mates: Far be it from me ever to have suggested that anything in Northern Ireland is simple. I once did the Minister's job, so I do not think that she needs to accuse me of that. I know how complex such matters are, but I am asking why we have not said at some stage along the road, "Hang on, we're doing all of this, so why are you not responding?"

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was waiting for an appropriate moment, and I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman's flow. I put on record my slight regret that I arrived late because there are two simultaneous debates on Northern Ireland going on. Is there any way, through the channels that you have available, Madam Deputy Speaker, for you to ensure that such double booking can be avoided in future? Several hon. Members who would like to be participating in this debate are detained in the Standing Committee that is considering the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. However, I think that the business managers of this House will take note of what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Mates: I was about to give way to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth).

Rev. Martin Smyth: On the point that the hon. Member has been trying to explain, and to which the Minister responded, the key point can be made in the words of Monsignor Denis Faul, who cannot be described as a partisan politician, although he may have different political views from me. He asked the Government to make no more concessions until those who are in a position to deal with the issues start doing so. The hon. Gentleman referred to the article in *The Times*, which also describes a lack of confidence. A Member of Parliament gave permission for an exile to return on the understanding that nothing would happen, but that person ended up dead. We cannot hide behind those who are not in a position to do something, when those who are in such a position do nothing.

Mr. Mates: I have nearly reached the end of what I wanted to say. I understand that the situation is complicated. There are no political fronts for some paramilitaries. If we were to tackle the main sources of the problem in Sinn Fein-IRA, the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Democratic party, that would be a start because the other groups are something of a minority. We must not justify inaction by saying that the problem is too difficult. It is intolerable that people take part in the democratic process who do nothing to prevent undemocratic behaviour.

Although I am sure that all Governments will do their best to improve the social and living conditions of the people, which are part of the problem, a robust attitude and a greater acceptance of the police are needed. It is a shame that the Sinn Fein MPs are not here to explain to us why they cannot support a police service that has been remodelled largely because of their demands. Communities must not look the other way as intimidation happens because it will not stop if they do. All of us who care about the problems must see that they are taken care of, and that such intolerable behaviour does not continue.

2.47 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): For a moment, I would like to follow the theme touched on by the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates)—the complexity of the problem. Those of us who live in the communities where such horrific events happen are sometimes puzzled ourselves as to their root cause. There is a heavy preponderance of headline intimidation from the paramilitaries, which often involves beatings, mutilations and shootings. That situation comes about for complex reasons. Sometimes, the reasons are paramilitary or political, sometimes they are drug-orientated or concerned with territorial control; they relate to protection rackets and the other sources of the paramilitaries' illegal income.

That people are visited with the injustice of exile, if you like, without any time to prepare themselves, their families or their children for the journey is one of the most unacceptable aspects of the remnants of 30 years of violence in Northern Ireland. Another element of intimidation is an intercommunity problem, which is more difficult to handle. It has been endemic since the events on Bombay street and Hooker street in 1969. That was the first great exodus, which was caused by the state, I hasten to add. In two weeks, we saw the greatest movement of people in western Europe since the second world war. Many came to my town, where they were fed and housed in halls and huts throughout the constituency. Historically, such unacceptable examples of intimidation have taken place.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McGrady: I will in a moment. Intimidation is now seen as a weapon because more obvious violence such as bombings and shoot-outs are no longer acceptable. However, the communities themselves often engage in counter-intimidation. Sometimes it is deliberate; sometimes it is spontaneous. That issue will be the most difficult for our society to address.

Underneath that, there is another layer of intimidation and expulsion. Individual action is taken by persons who are not attached to any paramilitary organisation or who perform the action at the behest of an organisation or on its behalf. Often, acts of sheer personal vindictiveness occur in certain streets on certain estates. That wide spectrum of actions and attitudes forms part of the statistics, so the situation is extremely complex. Ultimately, there will be only one way to handle it.

I remember saying in the first debate that took place in the House after the ceasefire that, although we hoped for it, we could not expect an immediate return to normality after 30 years of crass abnormality, brutality and lack of esteem for the sanctity of life, never mind the ordinary laws by which we should abide. I said that it would take time for that to happen. It is taking longer than some of us would like but, in the end, the core issue is the creation of an acceptable, effective and efficient police service supported by the entire community. Only when the community has confidence in the police—and the police in the community—will we be able to address the problems that are occurring on the streets. We have made considerable progress on the establishment of the new cross-community police force. It is getting a fair wind at the moment, and I hope and pray that that will continue.

As regards concessions to paramilitaries, the reason why I tried to illustrate the complexity of the problem is that doing or not doing deals with paramilitaries addresses only part of the problem. Immediately one addresses it, it disappears and arises under another heading, in a different way, with different people. The real carrot is to create an atmosphere of non-sectarianism, and respect for rights, liberties and law and order. I can only hope that rationality will be achieved as experience between and within the communities is gained, but it will take time.

I should like to make a few points about the report and the responses of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Office to it. Much is said about the co-ordination of the focal point of information. We are assured that such co-ordination is happening; that every agency is doing its thing and knows about the others. However, there is a problem, in that there appears to be no focal point for helping to ease the burden and trauma of people who are intimidated. We must organise that, highlight it, headline it and make it available. There must be a lead agency; in other words, people who are intimidated need to know where they should go as their first port of call. That is an important, practical aspect.

Another issue is the seamlessness of victim support systems in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain. The report correctly dealt with that in considerable detail, but it is difficult, in practice, to experience a seamless approach, particularly because of the Sheugh, as we call it—the little waterway between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. There is a complete transformation of environment for people who move from Belfast to Birmingham. They are both cities, but they are different and the experience is traumatic. There should be a handing over if people are exiled from the island of Ireland. It is an easier process if they are exiled within Northern Ireland from their own community.

Another matter is the response of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for East Hampshire referred to the enormous number of incidents during the past two years and one of the most telling statistics concerns shootings, which rose from 136 to 186—an increase of 50—in 2001. Such shootings are horrific and most people in this Chamber have not seen their result. One lad last week had both ~~his~~ kneecaps and his elbows blown apart. That is the extreme measure of this horrendous problem. We must provide total support for victims and at the same time try to create an atmosphere in which neighbours will try to prevent such shootings or, when they happen, help to bring those responsible to justice as quickly as possible. The agenda is enormous if we are to achieve that.

There have been tremendous difficulties in north Belfast, where two substantial communities have been at loggerheads almost daily. Much of the recent dislocation has been caused by sectarianism rather than

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paramilitarism, drug patrols or protection rackets. I hope that that problem has been addressed, but again it will be a slow process.

The fundamental problem can be reached only by society adopting a new attitude to itself and the forces of law and order. In the meantime, we must address the mechanics of resolving problems for those who are intimidated and forced to relocate. Members of Parliament must address such issues in our communities daily.

2.57 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): First, I want to comment briefly on some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates). I served on the Select Committee that conducted the inquiry, but have since left it and was unaware until I heard from my hon. Friend that the Government took eight months to respond. I endorse the deep regret that he expressed about that. It suggests an attitude of disdain on the part of the Government towards Select Committees. The Select Committee may have hoped that the Secretary of State would be in the Chamber today as a gesture to compensate for that extraordinary delay in replying.

I agree substantially with the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), with one important proviso. I do not believe that the Belfast agreement is the mechanism or contains the means whereby normality can be returned to Northern Ireland.

My contribution to the debate will be brief because some of the salient points have been covered and I need not repeat them. I want to make a personal statement of regret that the subject of the inquiry included the phrase "paramilitary intimidation" because "paramilitary" is a misnomer in this context. A paramedic supports those who provide medical care. Strictly speaking, a paramilitary supports the military, and that is not the role of the "paramilitaries" in Northern Ireland. The danger of that misnomer is that it may divert attention away from the fact that we are dealing with unreconstructed terrorist organisations.

Professor Kennedy supplied the most compelling evidence that the Select Committee heard. In paragraph 58(m) on page 8 of the report, he said:

> "Turning a Nelsonian blind eye to the problem of paramilitary domination of certain areas, including the practice of exiling, is a gross betrayal of some of the most vulnerable, powerless and disadvantaged members of our society . . . We need to break the silence, at all levels of society here. There has to be a fundamental debate about the gravity of the problems posed by paramilitary organisations in this society".

The Select Committee strongly agreed with that argument, and hoped that the report may provide a focus for the debate.

The Select Committee's difficulty in defining the scale of the problem was a manifestation of that blind eye being turned to the problem. We heard evidence that the practice of intimidation and relocation was prevalent in both nationalist and loyalist communities at about the same level. We learned from witnesses that many expulsions and punishment beatings went unreported and unannounced for the simple reason that the victims feared further punishment or violence to themselves or their families.

Neither the police nor the Northern Ireland Office could produce figures for the numbers of people who were relocating in Northern Ireland. That state of affairs fully justified the Select Committee's recommendation for significantly more accurate definition of the problem and the pattern of relocating as a precursor to improving the response to the problem of relocating following intimidation. Publicity is a key element of the response, but is not the only one. As the hon. Member for South Down mentioned, the solution lies in enhancing the effectiveness of the rule of law. It is a matter of opinion whether that will be achieved under the police reforms. I hope that it can, but I have grave doubts. The police force is broken, dejected and demoralised. There is also little evidence that it has any more cross-community support than it did. That is scarcely surprising because in Northern Ireland principles, morality and justice have been sacrificed to appease terrorism.

In paragraph 6 of the introduction to the report, the Select Committee makes an important point:

> "The terms of reference we adopted concentrate specifically on those intimidated by paramilitary organisations into relocating, either within Northern Ireland or elsewhere. Expulsion is, however, only one of the tactics used by paramilitary organisations in relation to their control over areas. Not surprisingly therefore, much of the evidence has tended to reflect the rather broader theme of paramilitary attempts to control communities in their areas of operation, with exclusions viewed as one particular mechanism used."

Another mechanism through which terrorists seek to terrorise communities was drawn to the Minister's attention when she met members of the victim support group West Tyrone Voice in Newtownstewart on 23 January. She was told that West Tyrone Voice has contact with 22 people in its area who are under death threats, either from the Provisional IRA, or from other republican organisations. That number does not include current or former members of the security services, who are always in that situation. Moreover, the number of people under threat of death has been increasing over the past three or four months at the rate of two a month. That is against a backcloth of 98 murders in West Tyrone during the troubles, 24 of which happened in the area of Castlederg, for which no one has been convicted.

Local Sinn Fein propaganda is that the IRA has defeated the British Government and the British Army. The IRA regularly and openly trains in Killeter forest, a fact that is known to the Strabane police, who take no action whatever. Those are the manifestations of the total breakdown of the rule of law and order in much of the Province.

3.5 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The report is extremely important. I share a number of horizons with hon. Members who have spoken so far, the first of whom was the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), but I might sometimes place different nuances on certain aspects. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Members for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), who were members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that produced the report. It is also a pleasure to be discussing a report that was one of the final two produced by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in the previous Parliament under the chairmanship of the now Lord Brooke. I must stop paying compliments to him, because I pay so many. I appreciate the work that he did and the way in which he assisted that Committee to involve itself in serious discussions and to produce a series of valuable reports that did not duck the major issues in Northern Ireland. We have continued in that vein to pick up important matters under the current Chairman.

It is not often appreciated in Britain that Northern Ireland is now more divided in community terms than at any time in its history. The 30 years of trouble and the peace process that is on and off and does not change the balance of communities, have affected the possibilities of reconciliation, advancement and cross-community developments. People are separated in a strong way. As the hon. Member for South Down said, some of the intimidation goes back a long way and is not always exactly paramilitary intimidation, although paramilitaries may have been involved in stimulating and encouraging a great deal of it.

There has been intimidation leading to exile. Some intimidation has come specifically from paramilitaries and some has resulted from communal disputes and uprisings in which the paramilitaries have got involved. Much of that has led to internal exile within Northern Ireland. Some of it is resolved in the sense that people become members of different communities in Northern Ireland. The people whom the hon. Member for South Down described moving into his area, are now part of that community and have developed links and connections. They are not therefore exiles who seek resettlement in the areas that they came from. They have come to accept that their futures lie elsewhere.

As the hon. Member for Basingstoke pointed out, exile is but one tactic of intimidation and control; there are also punishment beatings and strong pressures on communities to conform.

Assistant Chief Constable McQuillan was an excellent person to present evidence to the Committee and respond to questions. He talked about areas where there was considerable paramilitary involvement and activity. They are not no-go areas—the police insist that there are no such areas now—but they might be described as slow-go areas, because the police have to defend themselves in those circumstances. He described the areas as part of Belfast, part of south Down, part of county Londonderry—including Derry—Dungannon and the border territories.

Maranatha, which gave excellent evidence and to which we spoke informally before deciding to embark on the investigation, saw the areas as wider than those mentioned and claimed that the paramilitaries were reaching into areas where they had not previously been and were now in many rural districts. The exiles come from those areas and are handled by paramilitaries in different ways.

I always think that one key element in resisting intimidation, making progress and ending people's exile is publicity. That is needed to tackle the expulsions. Maranatha told us of a case in which a list of 30 or 40 names had been produced to help people expelled from Northern Ireland. As a result of the pressure that was exerted, the organisation involved stepped back from that activity.

Professor Kennedy raised another case. I should first mention that I know the professor well and that we have been involved in a number of activities together, with bodies such as the Peace Train and New Consensus, which had a United Kingdom section and is now New Dialogue, of which I am joint president. Professor Kennedy's evidence was, as ever, extremely valuable, as many other Committee members will agree. He gave an example of a case in Newry—I was active in publicising this matter from the Westminster end—in which five young men were expelled from the Drumlane estate. Two of the families stood out against that decision, and the two men concerned took refuge in Newry cathedral. They later went into hiding, and after four months the Provisional IRA decided to reduce their exile sentence to a year. Within the next week, the men returned to Newry and the IRA took no action against them.

If people are determined enough and have the force of communities and public attention behind them, it is possible to gain reprieves and at least temporary victories in this hideous game. If today's debate is nothing other than an exercise in anti-exile publicity, it will have served the House well and assisted the situation in Northern Ireland.

There are important internal exile cases, but I shall concentrate on cases in which people are forced out of Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland and Britain. In its Base 2 project report, the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders says that an average of 300 people have been exiled a year since 1996. However, they are people who contact the organisation and of whom records are kept. It might be a bit of a problem for those who have been pushed into exile to try to get help from an organisation that deals with offenders if they are not offenders themselves. It has an unfortunate title for these purposes.

Maranatha calculates that 3,000 families from the small Province of Northern Ireland are living in exile at the moment, and one difficulty in compiling the report was getting to them. We could talk to the authorities and to Maranatha, which does invaluable work in smuggling people out of Northern Ireland and assisting them when they are in Britain, but talking to exiles is not easy.

I had the privilege this morning of holding a press conference in the Jubilee Room with Joseph McCloskey and his mother Bridie. Joseph's case is written up in the article in *The Times* on 8 February by David Lister, which the hon. Member for East Hampshire mentioned. Joseph worked at a club. He was there once socially when one of the bouncers had trouble and was attacked by others. Joseph and his brother then moved in to sort

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

the situation out. Unfortunately for them, and unknown to them, the people whom they sorted out were members of the Provisional IRA.

Joseph is now in exile in the north of England with his wife and six children. His wife suffers trauma in connection with the incident and has to take tranquillisers. The children now have great problems in meeting their grandparents, extended family, friends, associates and neighbours. That is just one example of what has occurred, yet Joseph was never involved in any form of problematic activity. Paramilitary groups use the distorted justification that they have to deal with antisocial cases because the police do not operate in an area. They call themselves the substitute community police. That is nonsensical, because many of the cases have nothing to do with antisocial behaviour and, even if they did, there is no justification for self-appointed people acting in such an obnoxious way.

Joseph McCloskey was informed beforehand that the IRA was going to turn up at his home. He was organised. He held a shotgun legally, and when about eight members of the IRA turned up to break his door down, they fled because he and his family showed that they were capable of defending themselves. However, they could not defend themselves indefinitely, so they had to go into exile. Another case reported in the press in Armagh was about a time when the IRA burst in and found a teenager defending himself with a gun. They contacted the police and supposedly said, "This is the IRA. Can you help us?" I doubt whether they got a favourable response.

As Professor Kennedy said, traditionally, young men rather than families were intimidated. Those young men would plead with the paramilitary group to be knee-capped rather than forced into exile, because, despite its horrors, being maimed by knee-capping was preferable to being divorced from their families and neighbourhoods. That shows that, despite the difficulties, there is a quality of life in Northern Ireland that should be nurtured.

As the Chairman of the Select Committee pointed out, I suggested yesterday that, as members of Sinn Fein and their assistants now have access to the House of Commons, they could turn up today and listen to the debate. I have booked the Jubilee Room at 5 o'clock, where the debate could continue; there is nothing to stop members of Sinn Fein speaking there even if they cannot speak in the Chamber because they refuse to take the oath. One reason why I supported their coming here was that I wanted to talk to them and engage in discussion. One of them has a room on the same corridor as me; I would love to see him walking along that corridor and then to pass the time of day or to have a serious discussion. However, as far as I know, no members of Sinn Fein are present, but Bridie and Joseph McCloskey are here listening to the debate. It would have been good if representatives of Sinn Fein could join us at 5 o'clock in the Jubilee Room.

Traditionally, exiles were young, working-class males, but since 1994 the trend has been for whole families to be pushed out. Even if some are problem families, that is no reason for crude policing, judging and executions by paramilitary groups. As Professor Kennedy said, they do not even make an effort to put the gloss of a kangaroo court on their activities or pretend that they are meting out justice. They do not need that sort of cover.

Short of there being an end to intimidation and exiles, what can we do? We can develop the police service and, as suggested by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) yesterday, everyone should involve themselves in the arrangements for the new police authority and not put a veto on its activity. Policing, in the short and long term, is tremendously important.

We can assist exiles; the Government, in their eventual reply, talked a lot about the role of citizens advice bureaux and the assistance that they can give. We perhaps waited rather a long time for rather little.

The report suggested other things that could be considered. It quotes from an investigation in 1991 by the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body—some members of that organisation are present—which does a great deal of invaluable work. It referred to

> "—the importance of assistance to young people coming from Northern Ireland as a result of paramilitary activity receiving further study and support."

The report stresses the importance of educational assistance. It mentioned

> "—the problems of acceptance and assimilation which may be faced in Great Britain by members of the Unionist community, who regard themselves as 'British' rather than 'Irish'; and
>
> —the need to improve information for those coming to major British cities from Northern Ireland."

The different culture and background in the Province causes problems. We must improve the information available to those coming to live in major British cities from Northern Ireland.

A great deal is made in the report about the need for co-ordinated provisions to assist people. Advice bureaux are one answer, but we need to go beyond that. One suggestion emerged from a recommendation of the New Dialogue Peace Group, of which I am joint president. There is a need for an anti-intimidation unit or special body to confront problems. It should link the various authorities dealing with these sorts of activities and be responsive to the needs of this country.

David Burnside: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that another bureaucracy of civil servants and well-intentioned people—replacing what should be a civil police force enforcing the law and maintaining order within the Province—is the last thing that we want? The establishment of another intermediate agency will hinder the hon. Gentleman's objective of securing widespread community support for the forces of law and order, including the now highly demoralised Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Barnes: The police have the most significant role in Northern Ireland and an anti-intimidation unit would not be isolated from the police. It would seek their assistance. I do not accept the premise that organisations of well-intentioned people working for good causes are necessarily harmful. Many organisations, whether peace and reconciliation movements or bodies attempting to stamp out harmful activities, have helped to overcome some of Northern Ireland's problems, so I view them as welcome developments.

The Select Committee called for co-ordination. The Government's response, which is worth reflecting on, was that

> "co-ordination of support activities, as the Committee advocates, would risk sending a signal to paramilitaries that, by working to alleviate the consequences of their actions, the Government was tacitly allowing them to continue with impunity."

I accept the difficulty, but some factors override the objections. If other actions were being carried out, it might be viewed as if the state were conniving, perhaps by providing sticking plaster and bandages to assist people in those circumstances.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that failure to provide a support structure is to add a second injury to individuals who have already been punished by the summary exile that the paramilitaries have imposed?

Mr. Barnes: The case overrides those worries, but people's perceptions are a problem.

The key things are for the paramilitaries to stop exiling people and to call off the dogs. How can we achieve that? Not by appealing to the paramilitaries' good nature or hoping that when their political organisations get what they want, everything will slip into place. We must apply what pressures we can. One is the pressure of publicity. Paramilitaries, particularly the Provisional IRA, adopt the attitude that they and their political links should always act to maximise their advantages or minimise their disadvantages. That is why some decommissioning has taken place and why some arms have been put beyond use. Paramilitaries were in an embarrassing political situation, both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland.

General elections are coming up soon in the Republic. We must remember that there was considerable reaction to extreme events that involved the Provisional IRA. The murder of Garda McCabe in Adare led to a mass funeral in Limerick and to considerable pressures. I hope that the Unionist Members who do not go to meetings of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body because they think that it comes out of the Anglo-Irish Agreement will reconsider their position. Some in the Republic are very worried about the pressures that come from the Provisional IRA and the political pressures that come from Sinn Fein. They worry that the balance of power will fall to those organisations, and that affects their position. Some politicians in the south have problems of self-interest, too.

There are issues about whether there should be trade-offs. I heard what my hon. Friend the Minister said this morning on BBC Radio Belfast, because I followed her. She was given a rough time by one of the interviewers on the question of intimidation because I was lined up next. She insists that there cannot be trade-offs, but that advancement should take place under the Belfast agreement. She thinks that it should not be a case of, "We will give a bit here if you give a bit there," but that genuine arrangements should be made. I have some sympathy with that view, but not in connection with that issue.

Mr. Mates: If the hon. Gentleman has sympathy with that view, how does he interpret the Prime Minister's remarks that there must be parallel progress? That patently has not happened.

Mr. Barnes: One can talk about parallel progress as advances that do not involve any concessions or minuses. Trade-offs are to the fore when considering intimidation that leads to exile. Those who escaped from the Maze prison in 1983 in a mass break-out, and who were involved in the murder of 11 people at Enniskillen, are on the run from justice. Others, such as Joseph McCloskey, are on the run or hiding from injustice. The plight of the exiles seems to me worse than that of members of the Provisional IRA who are on the run. However, there is a symmetry between the two cases, even though one is worse than the other. There is a clear case for considering the two together.

If paramilitaries want clearance for those on the run, there is a price to be paid. I think that action can be taken by certain paramilitary groups in order to achieve that. In that view, I part company somewhat with the hon. Member for South Down. I agree that the process will take a long time, but the various paramilitary organisations have sufficient control over their membership to lay down the line. Why do they not say now that they will do their best to end intimidation and exile, and give us a sign that that has been achieved, resulting in a decline in the figures collected by projects such as Base 2?

3.35 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): At times, I wonder whether we live in the real world. We can study the matter dispassionately, although perhaps I am not the best person to do that. I have ministered for 19 years in north Belfast and have witnessed a mass movement of population which does not even compare with that in the city of Londonderry, which is changing scene entirely compared with other places. I have witnessed the process working in different ways. I have noticed people with removal vans, picking out houses to take over.

The Government of the day were dispassionate and acted strictly in monetary terms throughout. The compensation paid to a widow and her family who were put out of a house that they owned in Newport street, just after the death of her husband, was £10, the rating valuation of the house. It was worth much more.

I understand the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) about the Belfast agreement. However, a response to the report was available in a month, whereas it took the Government of the day in the Northern Ireland Executive six months. Strictly speaking, the terms of reference for a report from Government should be about two months.

I understand that problems can arise that prevent action. However, we recognise the problem of thuggery and of people trying to change a community. At the heart of the issue is exiles, to which the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) referred—not only those who have had to leave a particular part of Londonderry to go across the river or have had to go to another part of Belfast, but those who live in the Republic of Ireland or Great Britain.

We discuss housing and education, but in the response there seems to be no understanding of the personal issues that affect people who cannot return to the place of their birth and the community from which they have been forcibly evicted. Some of the response is glib and reads as though formal arrangements were in place. I am not aware of any such arrangements.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

I pay tribute to the voluntary organisations that did something, but I am also aware of other organisations that claimed to do things for which money was paid. The then press officer of the general assembly, the late Donald Fraser, telephoned me on several occasions and said, "Martin, there is a genuine case. I've examined it and I've been in touch with different people to see whether temporary accommodation can be found, even across the water, to allow things to cool. They can do nothing but, because of contacts on different levels, I was able to help."

There was no formal arrangement then, and I query whether there is a formal arrangement now, although citizens advice bureaux in Northern Ireland have done remarkable work. On the other hand, in Great Britain, facile tribute has been paid to the CAB. Those who have found refuge here have usually achieved that through informal contacts. That causes me great concern.

Hon. Members have referred to Maranatha. It is an apolitical body that crosses different communities and works throughout the United Kingdom addressing various issues for the well-being of the community. It is appalled by the continuing lack of serious intervention by those in authority. That sends the clearest possible signal to the paramilitaries.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke gave us a definition of the paramilitaries. Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland might not support medics, but they give them jobs. They have done that through their brutalisation and injury of men, women and children. They are terrorist gangs or lawless thugs, rather than arms of the state. That is one reason why I refuse to accept talk of decommissioning. It is time that the Government realised that decommissioned arms are the weapons of the state, rather than the weapons of terrorist groups. The world says that it is united in defeating international and home-bred terrorism, but we must start speaking clearly and improve our use of terminology.

I share the concerns of Maranatha. It says:

> "The continuation of punishment for the innocent and liberty for the guilty should surely be unacceptable in any civilised society."

Unfortunately, we are continuing to see that.

On Sunday, I gather, the *Sunday World* speculated that there has been, or might be, an act of decommissioning. I am not holding my breath for that, even during the forthcoming election, because although there may be a degree of camouflage to allow the paramilitaries to gain a little more credibility, my soundings from Tyrone and elsewhere show that there is no serious intention to hand over and destroy weapons, or at least put them beyond permanent use in a way that is verifiable.

I congratulate my colleagues on a remarkably thorough job in difficult circumstances. However, I regret that the Government have shown no urgency in responding to the continuing situation. One can only try to put oneself in the shoes of those who long to see their families at home, united and living in the community that they love. I appreciate that some people have managed to make a new life for themselves, but my knowledge of our people from all backgrounds tells me that they have an ache for the old sod until their dying day. That has worked to the detriment of elements in Northern Ireland because of the romantic dreams of Irish Americans.

We should give a strong message to the Government, who have a responsibility to protect their citizens, that the time for vague generalisations in the hope that those will motivate certain folk to advance a little further along the democratic path has passed. A signal was sent out by the recent events in north Belfast. I regret that that is the case, and I have no wish to defend those events, which were committed on behalf of so-called loyalism, because I know that they are repugnant to the ordinary men and women of that community. However, some people will say, "Governments listen only if you show a little virility."

3.45 pm

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I agree with the Select Committee and the former Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), that the events under discussion are a blight on Northern Ireland. Everyone should condemn and oppose them.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) in thanking the former Chairman of the Select Committee, Lord Brooke, for his excellent stewardship of the inquiry and the report, and for all the help and guidance that he gave me during my time on the Committee.

The Good Friday agreement obliges us to acknowledge those who have been the victims of violence, and to do all that we can to assist them. We must do that, if reconciliation is to achieved. With regard to that obligation, action is urgently required. Although hon. Members may hold different views about the approach that we should take, I hope that we unanimously agree that we should do everything in our power to bring the present situation to an end.

Those who seek to create segregated, homogeneous communities in Northern Ireland are fundamentally wrong. We should not permit paramilitaries to exert such control over people in specific neighbourhoods. As long as it is exerted, there will be no prospect of achieving genuine peace. We have seen in other places that have been blighted by conflict, such as the Balkans, Cyprus and South Africa before the peace agreement, that divided communities perpetuate fear and mistrust, and increase the risk that violence will continue and escalate, by producing further generations filled with bigotry and hate.

As part of its preparation for the report, the Select Committee visited South Africa. I was struck by the effort that was put into attempts at reconciliation in the immediate aftermath of the South African settlement. Although I acknowledge that it is not easy to achieve reconciliation, and I do not wish to deny the important work that has been done by people and organisations in Northern Ireland, more sustained action is needed. If there were ever any doubts about the need for decommissioning, what happened in South Africa in the aftermath of the peace process makes it clear that if we are to secure a long-term and genuine peace, the guns must be taken out of the situation. That is an important lesson, and we must learn it.

One of the tragedies of the attempts to segregate communities in Northern Ireland is that the people who are being divided and those who purport to speak for them have more in common than necessarily divides them. I have in mind particularly the recent horrendous scenes near Holy Cross school. If we stood back and looked at the social and economic make-up of the parties involved, we would see downtrodden communities on both sides, and people who desperately need economic investment and opportunities that would take their lives forward and give their children prospects for the future.

The energy that is used to keep those communities divided on narrow issues fails to make progress on the one thing that would advance all their lives: joint activity to deal with the massive, deep-rooted social and economic problems. We should recognise that those who have a vested interest in keeping the communities apart are not only perpetuating a feud, but denying the progress that would enable everyone to move forward. I cannot help but think that there must be a deliberate and cynical purpose behind such action.

When undertaking the inquiry, it was difficult to assess the real level of the problem. The official figures may be a gross underestimate. As Assistant Chief Constable McQuillan said in his evidence, there are times when the police think that some of the figures may be exaggerated. As my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire said, the police were clear that such activity was not as widespread as some may suggest. I am not trying to underestimate the seriousness of the problem, but it is confined to relatively few areas. When trying to understand the difficulty, we must recognise that it is not necessarily massive and widespread; nevertheless, it is extremely serious when it occurs.

There may be different motives on the part of those who claim to be victims of intimidation and those who claim to be carrying it out on behalf of paramilitaries. There may be other reasons why people say that paramilitaries are intimidating them. People may want cover for other activities in which they have been involved. They may be Walter Mitty characters, such as Mr. Vincent McKenna who, at one time, made great play of such issues. However, we now know that the way in which he chose to exploit the situation was a total falsehood on his part.

We must be conscious that others may behave in the same way. I am not saying that they do so deliberately, but at times we could question some of the activities of organisations that have tried to play useful roles. If an organisation is in receipt of a grant from the Government to tackle the problem, it has a vested interest in making it clear that it is a big problem, as that is the best way to have the grant renewed and to sustain its own activities. We should take into account the fact that, at times, there may be perverse incentives. I draw attention to Families Against Intimidation and Terror, especially when Vincent McKenna was associated with it.

I turn to the NIACRO Base 2 project. It became evident from our inquiry that at one stage the project became dependent on Government grants. Although it had clearly not had agreements with paramilitaries on individual cases, it acknowledged that it had entered into negotiations with paramilitaries. In a funny way, that was well intentioned, but the consequence was that it lent legitimacy to the authority of people who were doing the thing that it was trying to stop.

Mr. Hunter: The hon. Gentleman has referred twice to Vincent McKenna and to FAIT. I am aware of Mr. McKenna's fall from grace, but I am not aware of the defects in his work for FAIT to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Why does he distrust Mr. McKenna's work?

Mr. McCabe: The hon. Gentleman might have faith and confidence in the statements, works and actions of Mr. McKenna, but he is in a minority.

Mr. Barnes: Surely Vincent McKenna was a disaster as far as FAIT was concerned. That was a great pity, as it had such a fine record from its initiation. Nancy Gracey, who took the initiative and afterwards fell from grace, was a determined person. She helped to set up a viable organisation that attracted many responses in the House. It tackled the question of paramilitary intimidation, relating to exile or otherwise, in an important way. The first time that I met her was with a group of five people who had come over to organise escape routes for people out of Northern Ireland.

Mr. McCabe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, and I am happy to accept them. My point was that at times there might be perverse incentives.

NIACRO admitted that it had to enter into negotiations with paramilitaries. Whatever its good intentions, that had the effect of legitimising people against whom we should be opposed. Maranatha told us that it had experienced specific cases in which payments were made to prevent people being exiled. That is not the sort of the thing that we want to encourage.

Lembit Öpik: Before we move on, the hon. Gentleman's point on Families Against Intimidation and Terror needs to be recorded clearly. McKenna's conviction means neither that that organisation was ineffective, nor that his contribution to its work was unimportant; I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree with that. Does he accept that the greatest breakthroughs have been made when the present Government, and the previous Government, negotiated with terrorists? Nevertheless, I accept that payments seem to be beyond the pale.

Mr. McCabe: I do not want us to spend the rest of the debate on this point. In no sense am I trying to attack FAIT. I am casting aspersions on Vincent McKenna, and most people will understand why. I was making the point that we should be careful about the perverse incentives that may occur through steps such as grant funding and organisations being drawn into contact during negotiations with paramilitaries. That might lend a false legitimacy to a situation that we condemn.

Mr. Barnes: I accept that I was one of the people who was conned by McKenna. I brought him to the House for various meetings and activities, and I felt tremendously let down over what was later discovered

[Mr. Barnes]

about his activities. That cast a serious doubt on FAIT, but does not overshadow its earlier contributions through other methods.

Mr. McCabe: My hon. Friend's point is well made.

In the debate so far we have tended to concentrate, for obvious reasons, on the problems experienced by ordinary families or individuals, usually those in social housing areas. The evidence taken during the inquiry from the then Royal Ulster Constabulary highlighted the fact that another form of intimidation often resulting in exile is the intimidation of police, prison officers and other public officials. They are victims, and when we look for a way of tackling the problem, we should recognise that special consideration should be given to them.

Members of the Select Committee visited Dublin last week as part of our current inquiry. In respect of the Criminal Assets Bureau, I was struck by the decision to provide anonymity for those engaged in high-level activity to pursue criminals and people who may have paramilitary links. We can learn lessons from that about the kind of protection that we should afford public officials in Northern Ireland to spare them intimidation.

However serious the problem—I do not underestimate its seriousness—we must be careful not to lump everything together and say that it is all paramilitary intervention and therefore straightforward. The hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), the Chairman of the Select Committee, said that whole families are forced to move. It is true that the Committee uncovered evidence to support that, but Professor Kennedy also told us that the typical victim was a young working-class male. Such characteristics exactly mirror those of the typical victim of violence in Britain. We know that that occurs and should be stopped. We should not automatically assume that some characteristics do not also apply on the British mainland.

Mr. Barnes: Professor Kennedy said that that was the case up to 1994, but families were typical after that.

Mr. McCabe: As I have not marked the spot, I bow to my hon. Friend's superior knowledge. I may return to that, because I am not sure that it is strictly accurate.

Some who are being intimidated, and some who are doing the intimidating, have characteristics that more closely mirror criminal activity than the characteristics that we might associate with paramilitary action. Maranatha expressed concern about the perverse fact that drug dealers who had been forced out of an area because of their activities were able to jump to the top of the housing queue. It argued that something is wrong with a situation in which we condemn paramilitary activity, yet someone who is despised by the community and forced out can benefit in that way. We know that that occurs. Maranatha also made it clear that some of the activities are about the settling of personal scores. That is old-fashioned, traditional gangsterism, although it might happen under the cloak of paramilitary activity. In any other area of society, we would regard it as conventional crime and make a major response to it.

Lembit Öpik: One may find that distasteful, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that if we accept the judgment of the paramilitaries on those individuals and decide not to provide them with the support that we are discussing today, we commit ourselves to the same guilt—blaming those people for crimes for which they have not been formally tried?

Mr. McCabe: Either the hon. Gentleman misunderstands my point, or I have not made it sufficiently clearly. I am not saying that we should accept the judgment of the paramilitaries, but that, when we think about the support that should be given to the victims, we should recognise that a line can be drawn between genuine victims of paramilitary activity, for whom we should do everything we can to increase support, and other people who claim to be victims of paramilitary activity but against whom, on closer investigation, there is often much community support for some action to be taken.

I am not justifying paramilitary action, but most communities on the British mainland, as in Northern Ireland, would be happy to see drug dealers driven out. Many communities are happy to see antisocial families removed, and many want persistent petty criminals removed. We should not ignore the fact that that is occurring in this region. It is rather convenient, on occasion, for some people to take advantage of the very real horrors faced by genuine victims and use that as a cloak for the antisocial behaviour in which they are engaged. That came across time and again in the investigation.

We should try to draw a distinction between genuine victims of paramilitary activity and the other people to whom I am referring. A different response should be made to them. If we look elsewhere in Britain, what we want for people engaged in antisocial behaviour is clear, upfront, robust action from the police and authorities. If the police are to regain control and have the support of a local community where individuals are making the life of that community a misery, it would be good for us, as well as trying to tackle paramilitary influence, to diminish the opportunities that such individuals have to claim local support by tackling publicly and robustly the real problems that communities face. I hope that that clarifies my point.

The Government have promised some moves in that direction, but I do not know what progress has been made on the promises made to the Select Committee by Mr. Denis Haughey. He said that there would be a comprehensive set of measures in place by April 2002, which is recorded in the report. I do not know whether the Minister can comment on that, but it will be interesting to know what progress has been made.

As other hon. Members have said, the way forward is to strengthen the hand of the police where intimidation and violence are taking place. It was interesting that Assistant Chief Constable McQuillan said in evidence not only that there were no-go areas, and that some areas are difficult to police, but that during the past four years there has been a steady rise in ordinary calls for assistance from the west Belfast area. In fact, he said that they had doubled in the past four years. Underneath all the tensions and difficulties that we are encountering, there must be growing support and commitment from ordinary people for the police. Otherwise, it would be hard to explain a doubling of routine calls asking for police assistance from an area such as west Belfast. We have an opportunity to build on that through the new police boards, and I want to see that happen.

Finally, I support the call of my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire for an anti-intimidation unit. With respect to the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside), I do not think that it would be an intermediate bureaucracy. I hope it does not send his blood pressure racing too much, but when I was in Dublin recently, I was struck by the effectiveness and simplicity of the Criminal Assets Bureau. It brought together the key personnel from key agencies to allow a concerted onslaught on specific crimes. That seems to be what my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire had in mind, and it is something that we should be calling for, not resisting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. Before we proceed, it might help hon. Members if I inform them that I shall call the Minister to wind up not later than 4.50 pm. It is desirable that I call a Member from each of the main opposition parties for an equal amount of time before that. Several hon. Members want to speak, and I am anxious that every party should have an opportunity to be represented. Although I have no power to limit speeches, hon. Members might want to bear that in mind when balancing their contributions.

4.11 pm

David Burnside (South Antrim): I begin on the point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) linked to my earlier intervention. If the crime taskforce chaired by the Minister proposes new legislation and new co-ordination against organised crime, which I believe is being discussed by the Northern Ireland Office, I am all in favour of that. I do not want any misunderstanding on that point.

I shall be as brief as possible, so that other hon. Members can make their contributions. Three months after being elected, I informed the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds), who was in the United States at the time, that as defence spokesman for the Ulster Unionist party, I was coming to his constituency to visit the troubled areas of White City, Limestone road and Ardoyne. Everyone has seen the problems of those areas on television. I welcome the debate and the report's highlighting of the amount of intimidation that has taken place.

I had not been in the Limestone road outside Mount Collyer school since I taught there in 1973. I had left Queen's university, did not have a job and did a bit of supply teaching, which was possible then. Mount Collyer was a wonderful secondary school where James Galway was educated, and it is now the Curry primary school.

I went into the grounds and walked across from Mount Collyer into the interface on the Protestant side: the Tiger's Bay end of the Limestone road. I was gobsmacked, and taken aback by the amount of intimidation that is taking place in Northern Ireland's working class communities. It has never been worse during the 30 years of the troubles. When I taught at that school, it was a disciplined school. The area could be called working class, or middle class closer to the Antrim road, but it was a decent, good and respectable area where Protestant and Catholics lived.

The Minister has responded recently with security measures along that interface on the Limestone road. The Protestant homes in the area have steel plates at the back because low velocity shots are fired down the alleyways, and petrol bombs are thrown. What are the working class people asking for? They want security walls that divide communities. There is something seriously wrong on the ground in north Belfast. I sympathise with my colleague the hon. Member for Belfast, North: he has major problems to deal with in that constituency. I have similar problems in my own constituency.

There is no respect for law and order on the ground among the loyalist paramilitaries in the big Protestant working class estates and the republican paramilitaries, who still exist. The Provisional IRA is fully organised, armed and involved in threats, crime, robbery and intimidation. It takes money from drug dealers, and disciplines them only when they do not pay their commission. The loyalist paramilitaries deal in drugs at a serious level. Crime, intimidation, robbery and theft exist at every level of society.

We keep talking about two communities in Northern Ireland, but in some ways there is another—the working class areas that are not being properly policed. They never will be, under the present management of policing by the Government. To police those areas, we need policing on the ground and community policing. There are only three things that matter in policing: morale, manpower and intelligence.

Morale was stripped out of the Royal Ulster Constabulary by its treatment post-Patten, which can be seen from the number of officers turning up for duty. Manpower has been reduced to a level that is totally inadequate to meet the terrorist threat and crime levels. The intelligence ability of the police service is seriously under attack by republicans—that is especially true of special branch, a particular target.

We must start to rebuild policing in Northern Ireland to attack the Mafia culture that applies throughout both communities in a non-sectarian way. There is a Mafia society in Northern Ireland and disillusionment on the ground because of the lack of law and order. Because of the agreement and the way in which it is being implemented—the deals being done, the nudges and winks about another amnesty and so forth—concessions are being made to the criminals and terrorists.

The present Minister of Education in the Assembly has not even regretted his activities in the IRA. In 1972, the same year as Bloody Sunday, 34 people were killed in Londonderry. What police investigations are taking place regarding Martin McGuinness—the 2OC, as he admitted to the Saville inquiry? There is no respect for politics in Northern Ireland when a system operates that disregards law and order.

The Government had better get their act together and rebuild morale within the RUC, because of the intimidation taking place on the ground. That intimidation is of Catholics in some of the council estates in my constituency and other parts of the Province. It is time that it was dealt with by more effective policing, stronger in numbers, intelligence and morale. I welcome the report and the publicity. The

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exiles need to be given help. Publicity brings pressure to bear on the paramilitary organisations that are intimidating them.

The leadership of the terrorist organisation sits in Stormont—Sinn Fein. The loyalist paramilitary leadership is well known. Let them take action. Let them apologise, send military directives down through their organisations and adhere to the admirable Mitchell principles. All terrorist organisations should be forced to adhere to them.

I welcome the report. I hope that it gets a great deal of publicity and helps those internal exiles in Northern Ireland. I tried to intervene on the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) when he mentioned Bombay street. The biggest transfer of population during the troubles occurred when 16,000 Protestants unfortunately had to move across the maiden city. We all find such transfers of Protestants and Catholics—because of intimidation and threat—unacceptable. That is not the sort of society that we wish to look forward to in the future.

Mr. McGrady: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. Having indicated that I would give way, I was then constrained by my own lack of evidence. Of course, I disagree with what he said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. In my inability to read the clock backwards, I chopped half an hour off the debate. I shall be calling the Minister at 5.20 pm.

4.19 pm

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): I welcome the report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and commend the Committee for its work in producing the report, which is a welcome contribution to the debate on a crucial subject. It was a pleasure to serve on the Committee under the chairmanship of Lord Brooke.

I also commend the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), who, in addition to his work on the Select Committee, has sought for several years to highlight the issue in the House. I hope that he feels that the report is a valuable contribution to achieving his objective of seeing the exiles return to their homes in Northern Ireland.

Finally, I wish to commend the work of Maranatha, with whom I have had the pleasure of working in difficult circumstances; my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) referred to the group earlier. I have been involved in cases in which young people in my constituency have been intimidated out of their homes by paramilitary organisations. Like my hon. Friend, I found that there was a lack of Government response and, as a Member of Parliament, I went to enormous lengths to help young people in such situations by getting the agencies involved and trying to co-ordinate a response. However, there was no co-ordination, and response was lacking. That has been clearly brought out in the Select Committee's report, and the Government's response is inadequate.

Figures produced recently in NIACRO's annual report indicate that, in my constituency, there were 23 cases of intimidation of individuals in 1999; that rose to 26 cases in 2000. The trend across Northern Ireland is upward. In the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), the figures for Bangor rose from 21 in 1999 to 29 in 2000. I could give many other examples.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said that we were in a period of transition and that we should expect some continuing violence. Are we to expect that intimidation should increase, when we were told that we would see an end to paramilitary violence? Intimidation is a form of violence.

Mr. McCabe: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman can break his figures down any further. Would he concede that some of the violence is internal paramilitary feuding and that, sadly, it might be reasonable to expect some of that at the beginning of a peace process?

Mr. Donaldson: The hon. Gentleman's point may be fair. Unfortunately, I do not have a breakdown of the statistics. I do not dispute that internal feuds of paramilitary groups may be included. Nevertheless, in any circumstances, it is worrying that the trend is upward.

At the heart of the peace process, as it has become known, are the Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence. My hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) referred to them earlier. I remind the Committee that two of the principles have particular relevance. The first is:

> "To renounce for themselves, and to oppose any effort by others, to use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the course or the outcome of all-party negotiations".

We are not in negotiations now, but the principle still applies. Parties who signed up to the agreement were to renounce violence and the use of violence, and intimidation is a form of violence.

The second relevant principle is:

> "To urge that 'punishment' killings and beatings stop and to take effective steps to prevent such actions."

We know that punishment attacks are related to the case of the exiles. Therefore, I believe that some of the parties who signed up or gave their consent to the agreement are in breach of those principles. They are also in breach of the principles when they fail to act to deal with the problem of intimidation.

I listened carefully to the Minister when she argued that the Government could not influence the paramilitary organisations, as they were not parties to the agreement. Perhaps she will correct that point in her speech. She referred specifically to the influence that can be brought to bear on paramilitary organisations. The Government can bring an influence to bear on those organisations, as can the parties linked to them. After all, the concessions that were made during the agreement, and which have flowed from it, were designed to bring influence to bear on paramilitary groups, presumably to assist them to make the transition from violence and terrorism to peace and democracy.

One is concerned about the extent to which the Government are using their influence. They could, and should, do more. I hope that the Minister would not seek to make a distinction between the paramilitary groups and the political parties that represent them with regard to the influence that the Government could bring to bear. I am not suggesting that she is seeking to do so, but I remind her that the Prime Minister said that the paramilitary groups and the political parties were inextricably linked. Pressure can therefore be brought to bear on the paramilitary organisations through those political parties. That is long overdue.

The paramilitary organisations are not reciprocating as they should in return for the major concessions that have been made to them. There is evidence that they have continued with intimidation and exiling individuals and families from Northern Ireland. In the report's conclusion, Professor Liam Kennedy stated:

> "Turning a Nelsonian blind eye to the problem of paramilitary domination of certain areas, including the practice of exiling, is a gross betrayal of some of the most vulnerable, powerless and disadvantaged members of our society".

That is the case. The Government and political parties have a responsibility to deal with the issue. However, the Select Committee's report highlights the fact that it is not being dealt with properly. I am not impressed by the official Government response, which was:

> "Formalising the development of policy and the co-ordination of support activities, as the Committee advocates, would risk sending a signal to paramilitaries that, by working to alleviate the consequences of their actions, the Government was tacitly allowing them to continue with impunity."

I do not follow that argument. People often find themselves in circumstances that are not of their making, and if they need help, they should have it.

A potential link was mentioned between the proposed amnesty for terrorists on the run and the exiles. The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire rightly pointed out that we cannot equate the two, as one deals with those who are on the run from justice, and the other deals with those who are on the run from injustice. I would be concerned about such an equation, and we must be careful.

The proposed amnesty bears brief consideration. As the hon. Member for South Antrim correctly pointed out, it goes to the heart of a deep sense of injustice that is felt by many people in Northern Ireland about how the Government are handling the process and about the implementation of the agreement. We must consider the contrast between the Government's approach to those people who are on the run and the lack of consideration given to exiles.

We are talking about people who are on the run from justice: people such as Dermot McNally who has been on the run for a number of years. He is one of 38 IRA prisoners who escaped from the Maze prison. Robert "Fats" Campbell is a member of the M60 gang who escaped from the Crumlin road jail in 1981, having been sentenced to life in his absence for the murder of SAS Captain Westmacott. Nessan Quinlivan escaped from the Maze in 1983 while serving a 25-year sentence. Liam Averill escaped from the Maze dressed as a woman during a Christmas party held for prisoners' families. He had been sentenced to life for the IRA murder of two innocent protestants in Garvagh in 1996. Owen Carron, the former Sinn Fein Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, is on the run having skipped bail and successfully overcome attempts by the UK Government to have him extradited to face trial in Northern Ireland. Rita O'Hare, who was part of the Sinn Fein talks team that went to America in the early and mid 1990s, is wanted for questioning about IRA attacks in west Belfast. Again, this is evidence that Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked.

Charlie Caufield is wanted by the police in Northern Ireland for questioning about the massacre on Remembrance Sunday in 1987 in Enniskillen when 11 innocent people lost their lives at the hands of the Provisional IRA. Those are the kind of people to whom the Government are considering granting an amnesty. They are on the run from justice; some have not even faced the courts to account for their evil deeds.

What are the Government doing for the exiles, many of whom are innocent people who have been driven from their homes and from Northern Ireland? Are a few lines saying that the Government are not sure whether they should co-ordinate support activities for these people the best that we can get? What efforts are the Government making to use the leverage that they have through the concessions that they are making to the paramilitary organisations to get them to end their intimidation and violence and end the exile of people from Northern Ireland? We are entitled to answers to those questions.

The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire suggested an anti-intimidation unit. I would go further. Some time ago, I proposed the establishment of a victims commission in Northern Ireland. We have a commission for just about everything else in Northern Ireland, but we do not have one for the people who have suffered through 30 years of terrorist violence. If we had a victims commission, the hon. Member's proposal could be incorporated into it. The exiles are victims of paramilitary activity. The Government should consider granting funding to establish a proper commission to co-ordinate and meet the needs of the victims of violence in Northern Ireland, which I and others have been urging for some time.

This is an important issue. It is about justice. It is also about free speech. We hear a lot today about human rights. This issue is about the right to live in peace in one's home with one's family free from fear. It is fundamentally about the kind of society that we want to create in Northern Ireland. In essence, it is about breaking the grip of paramilitarism that rules through fear in many communities in Northern Ireland.

In saying that, I will be painted as a hardliner, but is it hardline to stand up for decent people who cannot through fear speak for themselves? Is it hardline to speak out against the paramilitaries who think that they rule the roost in many parts of Northern Ireland? I do not think so. The hardliners are the people who put on the balaclavas. They go with their guns, baseball bats and nail bombs. They rule through fear, intimidation and violence. They are the hardliners in our society, and I make no apology for standing against them.

I urge the Government to take the issue seriously. If the report and this debate do nothing but ensure that they take the issue more seriously than hitherto and that they take more effective action to deal with people's rights, we will have achieved something. I hope that the Government are listening.

4.35 pm

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the debate. I am sure that all hon. Members share my view that it is outrageous and deplorable for anyone to be intimidated out of their home, community or family, and that that should be condemned whatever the circumstances. We have heard about various categories of people who have been intimidated and exiled from their homes for a variety of reasons, but whatever the circumstances, nothing justifies someone taking the law into their own hands and putting people out of their homes.

An hon. Member said that people had been intimidated and exiled and that, in many cases, the community would not only turn a blind eye but would welcome that. We have undoubtedly come across such cases, but as democrats and believers in the rule of law, we have to say that that practice should not be tolerated or accepted. It needs to be understood and accepted as a reality, but it should not be approved or condoned.

That is why I am often worried about the way in which the Government have treated many paramilitary organisations, and leading individuals in them, on both sides. In many cases, the Government have lent not just an air of credibility but real credibility to people who take the law into their own hands and undermine the forces of law and order and those of us who work within the law and the usual democratic and judicial processes.

This is an important debate. I share the hope expressed by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) that it will receive publicity and that people will focus on the issue. I know that he and others have taken steps to ensure that there is publicity, and I hope that that will bring some pressure to bear on those who are responsible for the exiling and intimidation.

Members of the House and those further afield who are ignorant—sometimes wilfully so—of what is happening in Northern Ireland sometimes perpetrate the myth that such activity no longer takes place and that, as a result of the peace process, life in Northern Ireland has changed so greatly that we should not dwell on these issues. There is a notion that we are being negative and, as the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) said, hardline when we focus on the activities of paramilitary organisations, and the fact that they and their arsenals are still entirely intact and they are actively recruiting more people to their ranks under the noses of Government, the police and security forces. If that is a hardline position, the vast majority of Unionist people, certainly in Northern Ireland, are now hardline. In fact, we are mainstream when we speak of these matters, because the reality on the ground is that paramilitary organisations on both sides are still active in recruiting, targeting and intimidating people. They still hold sway on many housing estates and in many areas in north Belfast, other parts of Belfast and other areas of the Province.

When I listen to people speaking, it is often clear that they either do not visit Northern Ireland or, if they do, they turn the Nelsonian blind eye to these issues. Everything is supposed to be wonderful and tremendous with the peace process bringing dividends, yet many of my constituents do not recognise a peace process at all. They see a process that rewards terrorists and strengthens paramilitary organisations' control over their areas. The terrorists are treated in a way that politicians democratically elected at the ballot box are not. Their voices and views are heard and responded to with more intensity and alacrity than those of democratically elected politicians.

I am pleased that we are having this debate and that we are focusing on problems which, despite the ceasefires and the Belfast agreement, are continuing. As some hon. Members have observed, problems are getting worse in many respects. As stated in paragraph 18 of the report, Maranatha maintains that

> "many expulsions and punishment beatings go unannounced and unreported".

I know from my constituency work of people in north Belfast who are afraid to report what is happening to them to the police. They are worried that they will end up on the receiving end of summary justice from these organisations and, worse, that if they reveal why they are being forced out of their homes, their family or friends will also suffer from intimidation.

North Belfast faces continuing difficulties with intimidation and exiling. As I said in the Northern Ireland Assembly recently—wearing my hat as the Minister for Social Development with responsibility for housing—the figures from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive reveal that, in December, only a proportion of intimidation cases originated in north Belfast. The majority of cases are outside Belfast altogether. It is a serious problem. Many people are being intimidated out of their homes as a result of paramilitary activity and threats, and it has spread far beyond north Belfast, affecting many parts of the Province.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) talked about a return to normality and acknowledged that that was not happening as quickly as he hoped. Far from moving towards normality, the reality is that positions are becoming more and more entrenched. The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire was right to say that division and separation have never been as bad. The causes cannot be divorced from the political process that has been under way since 1993, which created a legacy of bitterness and alienation.

Decent, law-abiding people feel that an agenda is at work to appease men of violence, particularly if that violence is directed towards the City of London or the mainland. It is no wonder that there is so much despair. In my public life and having represented north Belfast for 15 years as a local councillor, an Assembly Member and more recently in this House, I have never witnessed or heard at first hand such feelings of despair, alienation and anger at the way in which paramilitary and terrorist organisations have been allowed to set the agenda. Those organisations have seen their demands met and their personnel rewarded, even with positions in government, while the needs of ordinary people on both sides have been relegated beneath the need to pander to terrorists and their fellow travellers.

We are debating intimidation and the exile of people from their homes but, as other Members have said, that is just one facet of what goes on in some areas. We have continuous reports of so-called punishment beatings and shootings, and of people being verbally threatened and having their windows put in and their cars smashed up. Much of that goes unreported, because people are afraid of the consequences.

No one should be under the illusion that, as a result of the peace process, we are somehow moving towards normality in Northern Ireland. I have yet to hear an indication from any paramilitary organisation that it will move to a state of complete disarmament or even begin to dismantle its structure. I hear all sorts of demands for the Army to be taken out of Northern Ireland, security installations to be dismantled, and the police to be reformed, yet I read reports in the newspapers that the various paramilitary organisations are stepping up their recruitment, increasing their activities and focusing on certain issues. Even when the police were reformed, there was little or no reciprocation. The Government have not dealt with that at all.

Members have referred to various types of intimidation. Clearly, there has been a major problem in north Belfast with the feud in the loyalist community, which has resulted in a major dislocation of population in certain parts of my constituency. That has not helped in trying to deal with some of the problems that already existed. There has been a campaign against the police, prison officers and others in Northern Ireland. One of my constituents was recently intimidated out of his home. He had lived for 20 years in a part of north Belfast, but one night a petrol bomb was thrown through his front window by a so-called loyalist organisation. That is an absolutely deplorable and outrageous event. His only crime was that he was a member of the police.

I know prison officers who have been likewise intimidated, and people have come into my office who are being forced out because they have been branded as guilty of antisocial behaviour or criminal activity. The people who brand them are themselves engaged in massive drugs and extortion rackets and all sorts of criminal activity, and are well known to the police.

A couple of weeks ago, a lady came to my constituency office to report that she was the victim of intimidation. She had been told that she must get out of a loyalist area because she had run foul of some family member of the people who were intimidating her. It was simply a case of them saying, "We don't want you here anymore. Get out." The lady's family, including five children who were all settled in school, were making a contribution to society, yet thugs forced them out.

People are forced out by intimidation on sectarian grounds, to which the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) and others referred. I could take hon. Members to houses in Twaddell avenue, Gunnell hill, Hallidays road and Serpentine gardens in north Belfast, where people were living three months ago, but which are now vacant. I know a family with three children who lived in Gunnell hill for 15 years who have been moved out because they are being harassed and intimated on sectarian grounds. Despite a peace fence having gone up behind them and our representations, there is an agenda to force Protestants out of the White City area of north Belfast and, unfortunately, they have gone. Two families in Twaddell avenue, one of whom has lived there for 40 years and been through the worst of what is euphemistically called "the troubles", have had enough and are moving out.

That is horrendous; it is a despicable situation, but that is what is happening in Northern Ireland, in Belfast, in 2002. It is four years since the Belfast agreement and eight years since the first ceasefire, which was interrupted by the IRA's decision to go back temporarily to murdering people, including two police officers in Lurgan. Indeed, the IRA attempted to murder me as I visited my sick son in the Royal Victoria hospital, and injured a policeman in the process. That is all conveniently forgotten.

Sinn Fein-IRA Members talk about their concern for children. Mr. McGuinness is Minister of Education, but he refused totally to condemn that incident in the Royal Victoria hospital when shots were fired through incubators. Let us realise whom we are dealing with when we deal with Sinn Fein-IRA. I am speaking about the reality for many of my constituents in Belfast, North. People are today being intimidated.

Concessions have been mentioned. Why do people turn to paramilitaries when it comes to dealing with antisocial behaviour? Many politicians in Northern Ireland are grassroots-based and we go to a lot of meetings of tenants' and residents' associations. I was at one the other night in Twaddell avenue and heard at first hand that the police cannot cope. People said that there were no police available in the numbers required to deal with antisocial behaviour such as crime and burglary, never mind enough to provide the security that would give people the peace of mind to live in interface areas. That is what people are saying.

I meet Assistant Chief Constable Alan McQuillan almost every week to discuss security issues in north Belfast, and I have always found him helpful in trying to deal with those matters. He and other senior police admit that they are in difficulty because of the lack of resources and because the police force is so demoralised that many of them are off sick. The Government must address those issues and face up to the fact that the way the police have been treated has exacerbated the situation.

I reiterate the appeal that I made to the Minister yesterday. At a time when we are facing all those problems, especially in my constituency, the York road and Greencastle police stations, the only two police stations in lower north Belfast which cover the Whitewell road, White City area and the Tiger's Bay, Newington area—the two areas with the worst trouble in north Belfast—are scheduled for closure. The police admit that that will not result in extra resources being made available, but will simply make up for accounting losses in the police budget.

What sort of signal will it send to my constituents and to ordinary, decent, law-abiding people if the decision to close those police stations proceeds? It will lead them to the conclusion that, if the police cannot protect them, only one group of people will. I do not want that to happen, and decent, law-abiding people do not want that to happen. It is the last thing that they want, but they say to me and I am saying on their behalf that steps must be taken to ensure that the police and security forces do not abandon people by ceasing their commitment to on-the-ground, community policing.

I endorse what other hon. Members have said, especially the hon. Member for South Antrim, about the process on concessions that is under way. It is little wonder that some people believe that they can get away with such activities when, far from being subjected to sanctions, they receive concession after concession. The

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Minister of Education in the Northern Ireland Executive refuses to endorse the police and refuses even to ask people who have information that might lead to the apprehension of the Omagh bombers to provide that information. What sort of signal does that send to those who say that they will take the law into their own hands? A Government Minister, who is a self-confessed IRA commander, refuses to support the police and will not even ask people to give information to the police. It is little wonder that we have such a sense of lawlessness.

I have listened with concern to the notion about the amnesty that the Government may introduce to allow on-the-run terrorists to escape justice. The hon. Member for Lagan Valley named some of those who may benefit from that legislation. I have difficulty with the notion that some acts are distasteful and wrong but may be acceptable as part of a trade-off. I listened to some hon. Members expressing concern about an amnesty and then saying that it might be acceptable to allow on-the-run terrorists to escape justice if there was a move by the Provisional IRA, Sinn Fein-IRA and others to lift the bar on exiles returning to Northern Ireland.

On one hand, it is suggested that if illegal, terrorist activity is given up, the Government will in turn provide a reward by throwing justice into the gutter and allowing on-the-run terrorists to escape scot free. That is not much of a trade-off, and not many people in Northern Ireland believe that it is. Governments should not be involved in trade-offs. If the Government are so minded and other parties are minded to support them, that would be seen in Northern Ireland for what it is and would reinforce the notion that the Government are engaged in a process with paramilitaries and terrorists who equate their illegal, terrorist, immoral and filthy acts with what the Government are doing. There is no equivalent and there should not be such trade-offs. To engage in such a process is reprehensible and brings the Government and democracy into disrepute—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Lembit Öpik.

5 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I apologise to the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) for being a little late. I heard only a third of his speech. No doubt had I been able to listen to all of it, I would have enjoyed it three times more. I apologise if I make some points that have been made already. As hon. Members will be aware, I was detained by the simultaneous discussion in Committee of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill. It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) speak. He always brings such helpful insight to the debate. He makes people understand the two issues involved, as do other hon. Members who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland.

I thank members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee for compiling such a clear and concise document. I pay particular tribute to Dennis Wigley of Maranatha, to the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and to the voluntary organisations that have over the years done so much to assist those who have been intimidated out of their homes and sometimes out of their homeland by the paramilitaries.

Article 6 of the European convention on human rights states:

> "in the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing ... by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law".

If we allow ourselves to countenance paramilitaries invoking summary justice and justifying it on the basis that they are maintaining law and order, we are not only violating the principle of article 6, but guilty of not trying to enforce law and order in Northern Ireland. However much individuals involved in such intimidation attempt to justify it, we need to recognise that normality in Northern Ireland will not be achieved until the rule of law prevails—regardless of how frustrating that may seem to some individuals who probably sincerely believe that actions causing individuals to relocate are justified in the interests of their community.

Furthermore, those individuals who we are told violate the interests of the community do not represent the bulk of those who are intimidated out of their homes. The police have identified six principal categories of victims: victims of sectarian intimidation; victims of paramilitary feuds; members of the security forces, prison officers and public officials; alleged criminals; those who have disputes with paramilitaries; and victims of racial intimidation.

Maranatha maintains that many of the victims whom it has assisted had no involvement with paramilitary or criminal organisations. We must recognise that many of the people who have been intimidated are in the category of individuals described by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes): on the run from injustice. That is a more effective description than on the run from justice.

Exiles and their families suffer many consequences, but on-going trauma requires extensive medical, psychiatric and counselling support. Individuals who cause victims to become exiles must recognise that they are almost creating a counter-productive environment. Sometimes they cause people not to face the alleged crimes that they have committed. Furthermore, they cause great suffering to individuals who have done nothing. Therefore, we must recognise the importance of formal agencies in order to address the difficulties that are experienced by those who have been exiled.

I welcome the response of the Northern Ireland Executive to the Select Committee's report and, especially, the reference to an action plan to outline commitments to meet the needs of victims. I also look forward to reading the *Hansard* account of the debate on exile proposed by the Alliance party of Northern Ireland, which is planned for Tuesday.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) said that although some victims are genuine, some people masquerade as victims. There must be a process of law to determine the difference between them. Until individuals have gone through such a process of law, we must adhere to the British principle of justice that a person is innocent until proven guilty, however galling that may seem. The consequences of the paramilitaries' efforts to exile individuals should inevitably lead to support, and may be a barrier to ensuring that the justice that the paramilitaries mete out in an ad hoc way is achieved.

I was somewhat disappointed by the support that the Government gave to the report. They said that they are

> "satisfied that the support necessary for victims of intimidation resettling in Great Britain is in place ... Formalising the development of policy and the co-ordination of support activities, as the Committee advocates, would risk sending a signal to paramilitaries that, by working to alleviate the consequences of their actions, the Government was tacitly allowing them to continue with impunity."

That is like saying that the Government tacitly endorse road accidents and domestic violence by putting accident and emergency departments in hospitals. Accident and emergency departments exist because accidents and violence happen, despite our efforts to prevent that. Despite the Government's best efforts, the exile of people continues. Until that stops, it is unreasonable to punish the exiles by not giving them an efficient support structure. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to that.

We require a three fold approach. First, we need an initial focus point that victims can contact after they have been subjected to intimidation or attack. That could put victims in touch with an appropriate organisation in Northern Ireland or Great Britain that could establish their needs and circumstances.

Secondly, we need to increase awareness of the services that are available to people who are forced from their homes. Such people must know where to turn in order to get specific help. It is difficult to define the scale of the problem. However, if the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire is correct to say that 3,000 families are in exile, and if that were factored up to the United Kingdom's population, it would represent the equivalent of 120,000 families in exile, which would be more than 250,000 people. Therefore, the problem affects a substantial proportion of people who live in Northern Ireland, and we can assume that the support services would have a significant work load if they were based in Northern Ireland. They must be resourced effectively, although such resources should be available on the mainland.

Thirdly, we must ensure that we support the police in order to encourage communities in Northern Ireland to gather behind the forces of law and order. That would allow us to collect more accurate figures. Crucially, the replacement of the self-appointed paramilitary organisations by the police services would do much to remove the problem per se.

I add my voice to an appeal that we have already heard during the debate. The individuals who are responsible for guiding the organisations must think seriously about supporting the police of Northern Ireland in providing a legally binding solution that is acceptable to all communities.

I agree with the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson), who said that the Government have the capacity to engage with the groups. It is evident that Sinn Fein and the IRA are connected. That is not a secret. The Ulster Defence Association, which has been disfranchised to an extent by the decline of its political wing, has the opportunity to re-engage in the political process as a result of the work of the Ulster political research group. Frankie Gallagher is actively involved in that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Quentin Davies.

5.10 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I congratulate the Select Committee on choosing this pertinent subject, and for doing such [illegible] thorough job on it. This has been a high-quality debate. There have been some powerful speeches, especially from [illegible] hon. Members who represent constituencies in the Province, and who speak from experience about its problems. Those speeches have highlighted the importance of the subject under discussion.

There is bound to be continuing doubt about exactly how many people have been involuntarily exiled. However, it is clear that the problem is significant and that it continues to this day. There are two types of involuntary exile and displacement. First, there is the displacement of entire communities—the attempt to push people of a different religious background out of an area. As the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said, sadly, Northern Ireland has a long tradition of that.

Secondly, there is the phenomenon of gang bosses—terrorist bosses—enforcing their hideous discipline by terrorising the people of their own communities. They decide who is allowed to live there, and they dispense the atrocious punishments about which we have heard so many descriptions. The more I read the report and listened to the descriptions, the more I thought that the situation is exactly comparable to that in Palermo or Chicago during the worst periods of Mafia domination. Parts of Northern Ireland are suffering from mafioso justice and terror, and it is of concern to all hon. Members that that continues to be the case.

I have one reservation about the report's recommendations, although the Minister will be pleased to hear that I support the Government's response to the Select Committee—and in particular the response of the Northern Ireland Office. Although I understand the reasons that have motivated the Committee to suggest that a new mechanism—to use the Committee's term—should be put in place to handle the problems that are created when people are involuntarily expelled from their homes, that approach might present dangers.

I do not want to reject entirely the introduction of such a mechanism, but it should be given careful thought, because our priority must be to do nothing that might suggest for one moment that we are acquiescing to these terrorist—or Mafia—bosses by accepting that they have a right to expel people, or by making the procedure to handle such expulsions a normal part of life in Northern Ireland. We must be very careful not to do anything that might give that impression, but we must do something to attack the underlying problem and to solve it.

As I have said in the House, we must implement the community policing provisions of the Patten report. That report has been justifiably criticised on many grounds, but its community policing aspects are important and, sadly, the Government have not sought to implement them.

"Community policing" is an ambiguous term. What I mean by it is what Patten meant by it, which is neighbourhood policing. Normal policing must be restored in Northern Ireland. I want police officers to return to the beat so that they can get to know the people in their area, and to start to work with initiative rather

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

than just respond to situations. There is no hope unless we can somehow make progress in reinserting such policing into society in Northern Ireland.

That relates directly to the issue of resources, and is why I continue to press the Government, as I did yesterday, about their intentions on the full-time police reserve in Northern Ireland. In their heart, the Government take seriously the need to make a success of policing in Northern Ireland. It is therefore crazy that the service should be run down. Yesterday, the Government put the onus for a decision on the Chief Constable. I think that I know what his response will be, but we must remove the uncertainty.

We should also reconsider the availability of witness and citizen protection schemes in Northern Ireland. It is clear from the evidence given to the Select Committee in column 81 by the Assistant Chief Constable, Alan McQuillan, that the only systematic protection scheme applies to people who are known as "key persons". That is a great problem. Any citizen has the right to be protected if they are in danger of their lives, whether they are a judge, a politician, an important or unimportant person. Police resources in Northern Ireland are inadequate, but protection should be an absolute priority in the activities of the police and a first call on their resources, whatever those resources are.

I recently spoke to a minicab driver in Belfast who had been hijacked by paramilitaries. His car had been used in a shooting, but he never reported it because he was more frightened of retaliation by the terrorists who had taken his car than of the justice system. He laughed when I asked him whether there was any witness protection system from which he could benefit. His laughter was justifiable, which is sad. There is no hope if that continues, as there is a vicious circle.

If we want to catch terrorists, we must ensure that people are prepared, and brave enough, to stand up to them. We must ensure that they are encouraged to do so, and can do so without believing that their lives and those of their families are at risk. Unless something is done and real investment is made, we will get nowhere. The Government are prepared to spend £2,500 a day on their counsel in the Saville inquiry. That would provide a lot of police protection, and might save some lives. I hope that they think that that would be a better use of their money than paying Mr. Mansfield QC, or others of their favourite lawyers.

We must persuade those who say that they have given up terrorism and taken the road of democracy to live up to their declarations by ensuring that such dreadful evil comes to a rapid halt in the communities where they have influence. The Minister has heard me say so many times in so many different contexts in the past few months that there must be a quid pro quo where the Government are making concessions. Concessions must not be forthcoming, and must not be continued, unless there is an appropriate response from those groups that demand them or have benefited from them. It is as simple as that. It is vital that a new rigour of that sort enters Government thinking before too long.

The Minister said that it was not possible to link an end to paramilitary intimidations and the amnesty to on-the-run terrorists, to which the Government appear to be so wrongly committed, as such terrorists came in so many categories. Some had accepted the Belfast agreement, and some had not. That is not a problem. One could say that the only terrorists that benefited from the amnesty were those associated with organisations that appeared to be observing their commitments. I do not believe that any move by terrorists or former terrorists would be sufficient to justify the enormous concession of an amnesty.

The amnesty is contrary to what the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said disingenuously at the Dispatch Box yesterday. That is not required by the Belfast agreement. It has nothing to do with it. It is a gratuitous and unnecessary concession offered by the Government without any linkage, and, therefore, entirely irresponsibly. It seems wrong to consider such a concession except as part and parcel of the completion of decommissioning and the end of armed struggle and terrorist activity, including intimidation—an unpleasant aspect of terrorist activity about which we have had a memorable debate this afternoon.

5.19 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I pay respect to the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), the Chairman of the Select Committee, and Committee members for the Committee's work and the quality of the report, as I do to Lord Brooke. Both the hon. Gentleman and Lord Brooke are parliamentarians with great experience in the field. We take their comments on the subject seriously and, as the Prime Minister said yesterday, we listen to what they and the Select Committee have to say.

I stand before hon. Members and hang my head. To be criticised for the content of the Government's response is well and good and part of the democratic process of debate. To be criticised for such a long delay in the Government's response is perfectly valid criticism, too, and I can say little in defence other than refer to the general election, a new ministerial team and the fact that, as I hope hon. Members will accept, it has been an especially difficult year for a new ministerial team to come into office. I hope that the Select Committee will accept that humble apology and my undertaking that we shall not allow such a lapse to happen again. I hope that the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) will accept that that long delay does not reflect a lack of interest on the Government's part, as I hope to show him and his colleagues in my response today and in further communications with hon. Members.

A comment was made about Sinn Fein not being present. I associate myself and the Government with those who have regretted the fact that Sinn Fein Members have not even taken the opportunity to sit beyond the Bar and listen to the debate. We hope that their staff have taken note and used the facilities that are now available to them to listen to us and that they will read our deliberations.

It has been an interesting and worthwhile debate. It will not be possible for me in 10 minutes to do justice to both the debate and the report on this important subject. However, I shall try to respond to as many of the points that have been made as possible. It is beholden on me to respond to a few.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) pressed me on the improvements that had been promised by Minister Haughey in the devolved Administration. The office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has completed its public consultation on its strategy for co-ordinating the Northern Ireland Office's response to victims' needs. I cannot say when the strategy will be published, which is obviously a matter for that office, but it is being finalised.

In an eloquent and passionate speech, the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson)—I am sorry that I shall not be able to pay tribute to all hon. Members who participated in this interesting debate—urged us to do more in bearing down on paramilitaries engaged in such unacceptable activity. I refer him to the comments that the Prime Minister made yesterday, at column 206 of *Hansard*. No one could hear or read those comments without hearing the clear message that we use every opportunity at our disposal to press those who have influence to use that influence to make paramilitary organisations desist. I did not want to imply in my intervention that because that is difficult we are not making the effort.

The hon. Member for Lagan Valley also pressed me on the question of the victims' commissioner. I acknowledge that the Bloomfield report recommended that consideration be given to the establishment of such a commissioner to act primarily as a watchdog over the delivery of services and to give advice to victims. We have not pursued the recommendation, but the matter is still open. However, we have established a Minister for Victims—my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary—who will keep the strategy for responding to victims' needs under regular review. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley will accept that that answers his point in part.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke pressed me on the question of the West Tyrone Voice. I should prefer to reply to him in writing, if I may. I would then be able to reply more fully than I could now.

I am grateful for the measured criticisms made by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) and for his support for part of the Government's response to the report. As we said, our policy in this area is to encourage people to liaise with the police in order to try to make them more secure in their community, or, if they felt obliged to move, to work towards their reintegration.

We need to support those forced to leave their homes, but I urge hon. Members to accept that the mechanisms to do that are already in place. In paragraph 26 of the report, the Select Committee noted:

> "Those forced out of Northern Ireland often face a number of practical difficulties, such as finding a doctor, suitable housing accommodation, suitable employment".

Hon. Members gave some moving examples of those difficulties today.

Those who travel to Great Britain from Northern Ireland as a result of intimidation form part of a wider homeless population, which the Government are addressing strategically as a matter of policy. As a result, there has been considerable success at the hard edge of homelessness. We have cut the estimated number of rough sleepers by more than 71 per cent. since 1998. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has taken on responsibility for victims and has moved the Government's programme of support forward.

I hope that the Committee accepts that we have allocated more than £18.25 million for victims' issues and have put in place a comprehensive series of initiatives to provide much needed support for victims and their families. Some £250,000 of that amount has been allocated to the Legacy project, which is being delivered by the Tim Parry Jonathan Ball trust at the Warrington peace centre. The aim of that project is to identify and meet the needs of victims of the troubles living in Great Britain. That includes not only members and families of members of the armed forces who served in Northern Ireland, but residents from Northern Ireland who were forced to relocate to the mainland.

We are considering how the remaining £250,000 could best be put to use. It goes without saying—although I will—that we utterly condemn all paramilitary violence and intimidation. We acknowledge the need to help those who have been displaced, but we consider that our first responsibility is to tackle the cause, as we have been urged to do today, rather than the effect. Even though the main paramilitary organisations have had ceasefires in place for some years, we have always acknowledged that those ceasefires were imperfect because we were in a period of transition.

Many hon. Members criticised the Government's assistance, management and support of the police service in Northern Ireland. It is worth drawing attention to Assistant Chief Constable Alan McQuillan's response, which is quoted in paragraph 32 of the report. I accept that that response was made on 13 December 2000, and that a lot has happened in the past difficult year. However, he told the Select Committee that in

> "parts of West Belfast, the last three or four years, we have seen the number of calls, routine calls, to the police for assistance virtually double."

He cited that as evidence that people in those areas wanted to get back to normal policing and were rejecting the paramilitaries. We in government will do everything that we can to reinforce that trend.

The organised crime taskforce, which I chair, has had considerable recent success in the fight against organised crime. One of the ways that we can crack the paramilitaries' control is by hitting their resources and their ability to organise. The taskforce is taking that work forward. The successes of the taskforce and those agencies will impact directly on the finances of the organisations concerned. We in government will keep up the pressure on the paramilitary organisations.

I believe that, given good will and support from all sides—particularly support for the police in Northern Ireland—we will turn the tide. I believe that people in Northern Ireland will come to see that rejection, rather than fearful acceptance, of paramilitary threats is a viable option, and when they do, the control of those organisations will be broken. Until then, the Government will continue to make appropriate provision for those forced from their homes. We believe that we can best serve them by working to create circumstances in which they feel able to return home.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half past Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 26 February 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Care Homes (Lancashire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I welcome the fact that I have been given this opportunity to raise a matter of huge interest to my constituents in Pendle and to the wider public in Lancashire. It is the proposed closure of a large number of residential homes run by Lancashire county council. I shall not speak for long because I want to leave time for hon. Members of all parties who represent the other Lancashire constituencies to contribute to the debate. However, my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) will have to leave before the end of the debate for an urgent meeting at the Home Office, and he will not be able to contribute as he would have wished.

These are days of tremendous anxiety for the many elderly people in my constituency. They and their relatives are fearful about what is to happen. I have seen nothing quite like it. Action groups have sprung up around the county. The county council's proposals have convulsed the local communities. In public houses, petitions saying, "Sign the petition to keep the old folks' homes open" have been raised spontaneously. On Friday, my constituency Labour party carried a resolution to fight the proposals.

We read in the local press of people's despair about the proposed closures, yet the area has a Labour MP, a Labour Government, a Labour district council and a Labour county council, so no one else's fingerprints are on it. There are no Liberal Democrat or Conservative fingerprints on it. The issue has to be resolved by the Labour party—by the Government and the local authorities.

The sheer scale of the proposal meant that it struck as a shell burst. Residential care homes have been closed before, but the county council proposes reducing the number of homes in the county from 48 to 13, and although the residual 13 homes will still be owned by the county council, they may not be managed by it. The justification for that cataclysm is that the county council, with an annual budget of close to £1 billion, cannot afford to bring the residential care homes up to the standard that has been set by the Government.

The county council talks of its vision for the future and the provision it wants to make for elderly people, but that vision has been obliterated by the headline fact of the closures. That fact dominates, and everything else cascades down from it. We cannot hold a discussion or an intelligent conversation about future provisions because of the headline fact that many of the homes will close.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I agree with my hon. Friend that funding is a headline fact, but the substantial issue is not funding but the provision of quality community care in a county that is under special measures—partly as a result of its over-concentration on institutional forms of care.

Mr. Prentice: My hon. Friend will be able to develop that point in his own speech.

People are angry about a consultation exercise that they perceive to be bogus. The county council has presented one option, not a series of alternatives. When people ask what the alternative is to the closure of residential homes, the county council promises consultation with other providers, but there is nothing substantial for people to get a grip on.

Last week I visited the five residential care homes in my constituency—I have visited them many times over the years—because I wanted to see how far they fell below the standards that we hear so much about. I visited Favordale in Colne, the home that has been identified for retention; Pendle Brook in Barrowford, a very popular home; and Wheatley Court in Fence, where the oldest resident is 102, going on 103. We are talking about very elderly, frail people.

I asked the manager of Wheatley Court, a small home with 15 bedrooms, how many bedrooms do not meet the standards. I was told that 14 meet the standards and only one does not. At Cravenside, a larger home in Barnoldswick, where I live, people are bemused. When I asked them the same question, I was told that 44 of 45 bedrooms meet the standards. Cravenside was built 16 years ago, so it is a relatively new home. People there are mystified when they read in the consultation document that homes must close because they cannot be brought up to standard.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Does my hon. Friend agree that much of the debate on standards has centred on the fabric of the buildings and the size of the rooms, whereas to many of the residents and their relatives the standards and quality of care are most important? In fact, they value the quality and the high standard of care in Lancashire county council homes so much that they want to stay in them and want the homes to be retained.

Mr. Prentice: That is true. Many people who have the option want to stay in a county council residential home rather than enter a private home. What really rubbed salt into the wounds in Barnoldswick, which is a town of 12,000 people, was that just after the bombshell was dropped that Cravenside—built 16 years ago and up to standard—was destined for closure, through the letterboxes fluttered a leaflet that said:

> "Our home is your home. High quality residential care for the elderly . . . Thornton Hill"—

That private sector home just outside my constituency is cashing in. People tell me that they have nothing against Thornton Hill or other private homes for the elderly, but they want their elderly relatives to remain in a county home. They do not understand why they should be driven out of the county sector.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) and others may feel that I think that the county council is acting with malign intent, but that is not so. I believe that the chair of social services, the

[Mr. Prentice]

leader of the council and my colleagues in Preston are acting with the best intentions. I do not believe that they have it in for the elderly. They have considered the Government's proposals for the future care of elderly people and are trying to tailor their services accordingly, but it has all gone badly wrong. By alleging that it has insufficient money to bring all the homes up to standard, and then compounding it by saying that it is being forced by the Government to close homes, the county council has lost a lot of sympathy.

We are all signed up to the Care Standards Act 2000. We do not want the elderly living in tiny bedrooms in which you cannot swing a cat. I visited the Walverdene home in my constituency and asked the manager to show me some of the rooms that did not meet the standard, and I was quite shocked: Walverdene was built in 1974-75—none of the buildings that we are discussing are Victorian workhouses—but, incredibly, it was not possible to get even an armchair into those rooms; there was room only for the bed and a washbasin in the corner. So cramped were the surroundings that no one should be expected to live in them.

All parties signed up to the Care Standards Act, and we all want to drive up standards. The county council said that meeting the necessary standards would cost more than £14 million, but that is a bogus figure: the true one is a third of that. The county council told us that essential associated remedial renovation work would take the cost to £14 million, but that is not true.

Another claim is also not true—although I say that respectfully, because it was made by a Labour party colleague. On 15 February, the chairman of the social services committee, Councillor Chris Cheetham, told my local paper, the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*:

> "If we just do nothing"—

about getting homes up to standard—

> "then all the homes will close in 2007—simple as that."

Well, it is not as simple as that. I have read the circulars and the Minister's letters to the National Care Standards Commission, which were presumably copied to all the social services authorities. The word that appears over and over again in those documents is flexibility—no one will be driven out of a home for the elderly that marginally failed to meet one standard.

We are all signed up to the vision that the county council paints for us. I am not wedded to a specific sort of institutional care for the elderly, nor do I believe that we must preserve in aspic the form of residential care that we have in Lancashire. Last week, the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, which deals with social services, reminded me that there is no institutional care for elderly people in Denmark: they are looked after in small sheltered housing units, and that works well. The answer to the question why we cannot have such provision in the UK is that we can, but it will cost money, just as care in the community does.

The county council has discussed bringing in providers from the private and voluntary sectors, but there has been no detailed discussion with them. The consultation document mentions workers' co-operatives, but I cannot get a handle on them; I have asked staff, but no one knows about them. They have simply been dropped in to the document, and, like so much else, have not been thought through. The county council has not discussed the options with providers or with the national health service in the north-west. If lots of frail elderly people leave residential care, they may end up bed blocking in our hospitals, and who wants that?

As far as I can gather, there has been no discussion with the district councils or with the housing associations that are flagged up in the consultation document and would be expected to provide sheltered housing for the elderly. I believe—this is a divide between me and the Prime Minister and a few others—that councils that want to be should be in the business of providing residential care services directly to the public. We should not contract out all such services so that we get bargain basement prices for everything.

We should do what works, but not if what works is putting people into the private sector where they are paid the minimum wage and have lousy terms and conditions. I do not want that. If my mother were in residential care, I would not want someone looking after her who was scraping by on the minimum wage with poor terms and conditions. Many people want their relatives to be in a residential care home that is run by the county council, because the staff in such homes are treated well. The council document states that staff in the county homes would have to be paid less to make the homes competitive with the private sector. What state of affairs have we reached when we read that in a Labour council document?

The county council must withdraw the proposals. The sword of Damocles hangs over the homes, their residents and the wider community. The county council should start talking to the other providers in the private and voluntary sectors, and propose a plan for care for the elderly in Lancashire.

I always want something from the Government, and sometimes I am disappointed. I want them to reconsider funding for social care. Many of us received the document from the social policy on ageing information network, which lists the main actors in social policy that have signed up to it, including Age Concern, the Alzheimer's Society, Anchor Trust, Arthritis Care, Carers UK—the list goes on and on. The document states:

> "Social services departments routinely budget more than 10% (almost £1 billion) above government guidelines for social services, and even so, they overspend."

On 1 February, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) gave an interview to *The Independent* that appeared under the headline "Minister admits more should be spent on care for the elderly". That is common ground between us. It is what I believe.

I grieve that we have got ourselves into a situation in which so many elderly people are wracked with anxiety. We can correct that if the county council can sweep the proposals off the table and have an intelligent conversation with the other providers and the Minister.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. A great many hon. Members—at least eight—applied in writing to speak in the debate. There are 45 minutes available to them. If the arrangement is to be consensual, those 45 minutes indicate the length of speech required if everyone is to catch my eye.

9.48 am

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I congratulate the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on securing the debate. I agree that the council's proposal should be withdrawn. During the constituency break, like other hon. Members, I visited homes that the proposal affects, and I found that people were very emotional. An 86-year-old lady broke down in tears when I talked to her about the proposal, and all the residents at one home said that it was their home and that the care was fantastic. I wonder how Councillor Cheetham would feel if someone walked up to his front door, told him that his home did not meet the required standards, and invited him to move out. I suspect that he would give them short shrift and send them away. That is how many people feel.

Just before Christmas, I wrote to the county council about my concern that because of the many recent closures, there were not enough nursing home or care places in Fylde to enable people to be discharged properly from hospital over Christmas. The council replied that the work was being done. In December, the council did not know the relationship between the capacity of the care sector and the requirements of the hospital sector. Just as I was recovering from that, suddenly, like that Volkswagen commercial where the car arrives out of the blue into the midst of a group of surprised people, so dropped the consultation document.

It is ironic that I received a letter this morning from a Mr. Slater of the county council telling me that the county council is holding a consultation exercise on the closure of old people's homes; he asked me whether I would like a copy of the document and to take part in the consultation. For weeks now, the argument about our old peoples' homes has been raging in Lancashire's newspapers. As the hon. Member for Pendle says, the proposal looks like a fait accompli.

Nobody who knows anything about care for the elderly can be ignorant of the changes that have taken place. The Care Standards Act has been passed and more people are being looked after in their own home, but where is the analysis? How do we know what is happening in our constituencies?

I asked Councillor Joyce Stewart, the Conservative spokesman on social service matters in the county, whether she had seen the consultants' document that had been produced by the county council justifying its policy. She replied that she had not. It had not been shown to county councillors. Why has that document not been made available to us all? We need to know how the decisions are made. Mr. Slater, who describes himself as an "assistant director special projects", wrote to me and other colleagues on 8 February enclosing a document marked "Private and Confidential". I will not reveal all the information in the document, but it purports to tell us how the various sites were selected. There is nothing about occupancy rates or running costs.

I am a veteran fighter for one of two homes in my constituency that have been fingered to have their day care facilities removed. Our campaign to save Milbank in Kirkham from closure was based on the fact there was a real need for that type of facility in rural Fylde and the private sector had not fully catered for the demand. We won the argument. I do not know what the reasons now are for taking the day care centre out of Milbank, but I know that an unspecified sum of money is to be spent on making it one of the survivors. That is all well and good—but hang on a minute. What about all the people who are not in rural Fylde who would not find it easy to go to that home? What will happen to the people who use the day care facility at Milbank in Kirkham? I do not know.

Crossacres, which is threatened with total closure, does not look run down inside, although it needs some en-suite facilities. About £250,000 needs to be spent on it. However, one can almost see from the external fabric that the decisions about its future have already been taken: it has been allowed to run down. The county council thought about all of that a long time ago.

The problem is that we do not know or understand what the options are. Take the day care out of Crossacres and where do those people go? There is only one day care centre left in the Fylde constituency—the Church road Methodist day care centre—and it is already chock-a-block. It is basic details like that that are completely lacking from this inhumane method of consulting elderly people.

I saw a copy of a letter dated 31 January from Councillor Cheetham to our elderly people. I asked the staff and the elderly residents whether they understood what was happening. Had anyone sat down with them and gone through it? Yes, there were meetings, but many of the elderly people are frail and confused. They are in their 80s, 90s or bordering on a century and, with no disrespect to them, it is difficult for them to understand and properly contribute to a sophisticated consultation exercise. When I asked them where their loved ones were, the replies were varied, but they included Canada, New Zealand, and the south of England. Those people had no back-up and no one to help them. Some people's relatives were present because they knew I was coming, and they spoke to me, but it is difficult to have a proper consultation in such circumstances.

Where is the imagination in the proposal? All it talks about is closure and sale-of-site values. There was no thought about whether Crossacres could be developed into a more advanced care village. Much about the consultation exercise rings of fait accompli. The facts have not been put before us. I agree with the hon. Member for Pendle that the proposal should be withdrawn straight away. A proper study should be done which takes into account all the needs of the elderly in every part of Lancashire.

9.55 am

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on securing the debate on a subject that is important to elderly people living in homes throughout Lancashire, and to their families. The equation proposed by the county council does not consider what will happen to the private sector, which, if it is to meet the Government's requirements, faces major challenges. I have grave fears that there is not enough capital in the

[Mr. Peter Pike]

private sector to bring in the new standards for homes, and many will lose bedrooms, which will make them uneconomical and so likely to close. If that happens, the number of private sector homes in Lancashire will decrease at the same time as the closure of a large number of county care homes is being proposed. It is extremely important to consider that possibility before any closures are agreed.

Sheltered housing has been mentioned. Everyone, including the county council, accepts that normal sheltered housing would not be adequate, and "super-sheltered" housing has been mentioned, but that would need more staff, supervision and care than there are at present. That is another factor in the equation that we must consider more closely before any hasty decision is taken after the consultation.

I was first approached on the matter of the new standards on 4 May 1999, when a Mr. Porter of Jalna, a private home in my constituency, raised the issues with me. I looked into the matter and I have been in correspondence about the size of the rooms with the county council and Ministers for the past two or three years. I accept that the type and size of the rooms described by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle are nonsensical, but one must accept that the old rooms containing four or five beds were also nonsensical, and that Lancashire got rid of them. We must look carefully at room sizes.

I have received letters on the subject of en-suite provision asking how many old people will actually be able to use such provision given the care and assistance that they need. Is it really necessary to incur such capital costs, whether they are met by Lancashire care homes or by the private sector?

In January, I visited all six Lancashire care homes in my constituency, five of which are proposed for closure, which is more than in any other constituency or borough in Lancashire. I have visited the homes every year in January since I became a Member of Parliament. The standard of the care that they provide is excellent. I have also visited some private homes and was present when the unions signed an agreement with the Lancashire Care Association on standards and training for staff. Some of the old arguments used many years ago against the private homes no longer apply, because there is a much greater acceptance that a good standard of care needs good staff.

As I went round the homes, not knowing that the proposal would advance so speedily, it struck me forcefully that most of the people there were in their 80s and 90s, or even more than 100 years old—the number of people there in their 100s is incredible—and that 90 per cent. of them would not be able to go back into the community or back to their own homes. They had gone to the residential home because that was the only way in which they could get the care and the lifestyle that they needed and to which they were entitled. I visited one of the homes for which closure is proposed, Ebor House. As Labour party organiser in Burnley, I attended its opening in the mid 1960s. The age profile in the home at that time was different: most residents were in their late 60s and 70s.

The £4 million that has been mentioned to improve homes to meet the new Government standards, and the £10 million in county council budgets for the period until 2007, are chicken feed. We must ensure that the consultation is genuine. Society as a whole, the Government, county councils, local authorities and all of us in public life are judged by the care and attention that we give our vulnerable people and the elderly.

I have received a mass of letters from my constituents on the subject, as I am sure has every hon. Member. I shall quote a letter from Hazel Harding, the leader of the county council, to my constituent Mr. Beint. She says:

> "I would like to assure you that this is a true consultation stretching over many months in which all views will be listened to."

If the county does not withdraw the proposals, I hope that that assurance proves genuine. I also hope that the other parts of the equation to which insufficient consideration have been given—the private sector and the new super-sheltered accommodation—will be taken into account. Whatever changes take place, we will be judged by the care that our elderly people in Lancashire receive.

10.1 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on securing the debate. I am sure that we have all been inundated with letters and that we have all been visiting care homes, especially over the past few weeks. I am proud of both my private care homes and my local authority homes, which seem to be of the highest standard.

The so-called consultation has not been properly thought out—indeed, the way in which it has been carried out is tantamount to abuse of the elderly. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) said, we are talking about very vulnerable, confused people, who are now fearful for their futures. Does Councillor Cheetham understand what he has done by initiating the consultation in such a fashion? On page 6 of his consultation document he says:

> "Clearly the closure of Local Authority homes is distressing for residents and their relatives and staff."

That is an understatement. In the letter that accompanies it he says:

> "I realise that putting the plans into practice will disrupt the lives of many residents."

Of course it will—so why has he embarked on the exercise in such a way? I spoke to Councillor Pat Case, who was unaware of the proposals.

I have visited Castleford in Clitheroe and Fell View in Longridge—two excellent homes. The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) will know Castleford because there a few years ago she opened the day centre, which receives up to 120 people a week. They get meals there and are properly looked after and monitored, which would not happen if they were living at home. Some of those people live in the most isolated and rural parts of the Ribble Valley and they look forward to coming to the day centre, where they can mix with people of their own age who have the same interests. They are picked up from their home, taken to the day centre, and taken home at the end of the day. They can have two meals and breakfast, which they might not get if they are isolated at home.

For some of those people, their home can be a prison. If the council thinks that condemning such people to confinement in their home will create no cost, it should think again. It would have huge implications for social care if people had to stay in their homes 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Homes also provide entertainment for the elderly. They can be taken out on day visits to other parts of the country. Rehabilitation is another important part of the day centres' work. Those who have gone into nursing homes from hospitals are taught again how to use kitchen and bathroom facilities. Who will carry out such important work in future? Elderly people who come into day care centres regularly can be properly monitored, weighed and checked to see whether they are eating properly. If they have any ailments or are taking medication, they can be supervised.

Should the proposal go through, the residential part of Castleford would be expanded slightly, but the day centre would go. That would be a cruel policy to people living in that area. I congratulate Eireen McGee and all the staff there on the work that they do. They are dedicated and skilled professionals.

Fell View, which opened in 1967, is in exactly the same position. I was shown around by Margaret Buckingham, who has worked there for 21 years. What price can be put on her skills? I have a letter from the Royal British Legion saying how important the home is to local people. Some of the residents are regularly visited by their spouses who still live in their own home. What would happen to the bathing facilities, rehabilitation and medical supervision if that home closes? We know that if elderly people are confined to their homes they become ill more quickly, are confined to hospitals more regularly and block beds.

When the announcement of proposals to save money was made, the county council published an advertisement that was an insult. "'Dynamic duo' to spin closures tale" was the headline in the local press. The county council seek to spend £50,000 on a couple of spin doctors to try to dress up their policy as humane. They must be joking. The hon. Member for Pendle mentioned that the misinformation is about the cost of bringing care homes up to standard. The council has been giving one set of figures, but the real cost is a fraction of that. It is time that we had some honesty about what the council intend to do and why.

A member of staff at one of the homes told me that she was thinking of putting a poster in the window that says, "They fought for us. It is now time that we fought for them." That is absolutely right. I say to councillor Chris Cheetham, "Think again and ditch these proposals." Let us ensure that we give proper care to the elderly in Lancashire.

10.7 am

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): It is unusual that I agree with everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) says, and rare that I agree with everything said by the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), but it is completely unheard of for me to agree with both of them. It is a measure of the seriousness of the issue that there is such consensus among Lancashire Members of Parliament.

I am a friend of the county council and a personal friend of its leader and deputy leader. Sometimes, it is a friend's duty to let people know when they have got it wrong, when they have made a mistake. Today I say in public what I have already said in private to the leadership of the county council: they have got this matter completely wrong and mishandled it from the beginning. They must take the proposal away and think again.

Like every other Lancashire MP, I have been inundated with letters from constituents and concerned relatives. One said that residents want to be treated

"with respect, not like animals . . . herded like cattle, placed here and there in an area that they do not"

call their home. Another said that

"they give you tablets to keep you going and then"

when

"they do this to you, I . . . wish they would give me a tablet to end it all".

One old lady was in tears: she had no family and was not sleeping; she did not know where or when she was going. The letter ends by asking me

"how would you feel if she was your mum"?

I feel pretty unhappy even though she is not my mum. The proposals are completely wrong-headed and must be withdrawn.

We need a mature debate about the future of the sector. That debate should include carers, residents, the private sector and local health trusts. It is shocking that Lancashire has not engaged properly with the local health service, or with the private and voluntary sectors. It would have been sensible to have held the consultation and debate before any concrete proposal was made. However, such a debate is not possible when, as my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle said, certain homes have the sword of Damocles hanging over them. Lancashire must withdraw the hit list—there is no other appropriate term—of 35 homes.

I think that we would all agree that some homes might have to close. The current number of 48 homes may not be right for Lancashire. Demographic trends are changing, and an increasing number of old people do not want to go into a home—they want to remain in their own home and be looked after there. Perhaps 48 is not the right number, but it is impossible to have a proper debate while there is a hit list of homes. I repeat, Lancashire county council should withdraw that list.

Local Labour MPs met the county council a fortnight ago. We had a robust exchange of views. My understanding is that the council refuses to rethink its position. I am sure that we can all think of examples of politicians refusing to withdraw unpopular policies because they think that to do so would be a sign of weakness. It is a sign not of weakness, but of strength to hold up one's hands and say, "I've made a mistake." It is a sign of confidence in one's own politics, and I urge my good friends and colleagues on the county council to take that brave step and admit that they may not have handled the matter terribly well. They should acknowledge that it would be sensible to withdraw the hit list and invite everybody to have a proper debate.

10.11 am

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope), because I want to reinforce some of the points that he made and set our debate in the context of the Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Act 1992, which was passed under the Conservative Government and which received all-party support, as does the current debate on care standards.

The 1992 Act was debated and passed with everybody agreeing that we needed to look after elderly people in a variety of different settings, that residential care was not the right answer for everybody, and that more and more people needed and wanted to be supported in their own home. That legislation placed a burden on local authorities to manage a process of change from residential to domiciliary care. However, in many parts of the country there has been a substantial reduction in the amount of residential care available, which has resulted in problems of bed blocking and elderly people not receiving the support that they should receive.

We in Lancashire are in a fortunate position: we still have both county council care homes and a private care sector. We ought to take advantage of that fact and have a debate about how many care facilities and what sort of increased domiciliary care or day care provision we need. We should ask how we can best use our existing residential provision. We should not lose the opportunity to do that and end up in the same position as many other local authorities, which do not have that sort of provision. Let us have the informed debate for which we have all been asking. Let us examine the needs of our elderly people.

The care homes run by the county council do not provide only residential care and day care. Excellent facilities such as the one referred to by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans)—I remember opening that day centre—also provide respite care. Many people neither need nor want full-time residential care, but need respite care on occasions.

Like other hon. Members, I have taken the opportunity to visit the two homes in my constituency that are involved in this debate. Worsley House is earmarked for closure. The local authority must face up to the fact that an area as large as the district of Wyre contains many towns. Fleetwood has its own identity, and those of its people who use Worsley House do not want to go to the far end of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson)—I hope that he will forgive me—even though it is in the same district. They want to have the choice of a Lancashire county council home or a private home in Fleetwood, and they feel strongly about that.

It is suggested that Thornton House be retained, but its residents would still have to be moved out because an enormous amount of work needs to be done to remodel the home as the county council suggests. There will, therefore, be disruption even in homes that are proposed for retention.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for seeing a delegation from the Lancashire private sector last week. As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) emphasised, the proposals would affect the private sector. The number of residential placements has decreased. We must take all care providers into consideration. We must value the work that they have done to improve the care that they offer and the buildings in which they offer it.

Let us think about the needs of the people of Lancashire and ensure that they have respite care, nursing care, rehabilitative care and day care when they need them. Domiciliary care, too, is important. Many constituents tell me that they want that to be improved so that they can remain in their own homes for as long as possible, until they really do need residential care.

10.15 am

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) for securing this important debate. We have reached the same conclusions, although by very different routes.

I support change, because there is too much residential care provision in Lancashire. I want facilities to be transformed to provide better day care services, better support in the community, and better support for sheltered housing. The action that Lancashire county council has taken shows that it is trying to work within the framework of the good policies that the Government have laid down. It is trying to work in the serious, stringent context of special measures.

Changes are always difficult, even those that will improve the lives of the current generation of vulnerable people who live in residential care. Those people must have the first call on everyone's support, compassion and assistance. I do not always support the council, but it is only fair to acknowledge its record of helping elderly people through difficult and traumatic changes in compassionate, caring, sensitive and highly professional ways.

I believe that the consultation is genuine, but fatally flawed, and hon. Members have drawn attention to the lack of partnership with health services. The national standards framework for older people requires the council to enter into such a partnership. A couple of weeks ago, I and my colleagues were told that the health service was unable to meet that requirement because it was in a process of transition, but that excuse is unacceptable.

The council needs to enter into a powerful partnership with the private sector. On Friday afternoon, I held a meeting with a couple of representatives from the Lancashire Care Association and with County Councillor Chris Cheetham. It was a good meeting because there was real communication—people said that it was the first time that they had been able to communicate. It is unacceptable that the proposals did not emanate from a robust partnership between social services, health, the private and voluntary sectors and the district councils. That is why the consultation is flawed and must be reconsidered.

There are important issues to tackle in Lancashire, and we desperately need to improve services. The argument is not about money, nor can it be until proper structures, proper communication systems and proper ways of working in partnership are in place. We must get those partnerships going. The county council operates good services and is trying to implement changes in difficult circumstances, but the structures work against it. I was told on Friday that there is a structure for consultation with the private sector, but the fact is that there is no substance or content to the process. There is a crying need for a health and social services trust. We need to use the greater flexibility that the current Government have introduced because we need major changes to the way in which services operate.

10.20 am

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Like many hon. Members, I visited the care homes in my constituency last week—Peterfield House in Penwortham, New Manor in Longton and Broadfield House in Leyland. I had constructive meetings with residents and their families at all three homes, but I was unable to reassure residents about their future as they get older.

Figures in the consultation document demonstrate that in December 2001 there were sufficient care home places in the private sector in Lancashire. Under the proposals, 746 places in the county council sector would be closed. At the end of December, there were 1,215 vacancies in the private sector. That would mean that 65 people in South Ribble would have to be moved out of Lancashire care homes. There are currently 82 vacancies in the private sector.

The problem with the document is that the county council has not consulted the health service or the private sector, nor has it analysed probable future need for residential care. Hon. Members have heard tales of the potential closure of private care homes in the next few years, and it is self-evident that some will decide not to spend their money to bring their care home up to the new standards. The demand that will be placed on the residential care sector is unclear, but in three years' time, I do not want to have to tell a constituent with an elderly relative who visits my surgery that there are no vacancies in South Ribble, and that they must go to Manchester, Yorkshire or Merseyside to find a vacancy.

I want to ensure that there will be vacancies for respite care if people who are caring for elderly relatives need to make use of it. I want to ensure that residential care will be available for people who have been in hospital but are not fit to go straight home, and that that care will be available to them until they are sufficiently recovered. I want to ensure that the right sort of residential care in the right place, which is in people's communities, is retained. That provision might not be in a Lancashire county council care home, but I am not convinced that the county council has a clue about whether there are enough places now and whether there will be enough places in 2007 or 2012. Until it is sure, the document should be withdrawn. The necessary information should be obtained so that we can have a grown-up, constructive discussion about all the issues.

10.23 am

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on enabling us to take part in an important debate about the future for old people in Lancashire.

I am one of the first to say that the decision is crass and should never have been taken in such a way. Of the three homes in Chorley, two are to be closed and one is to remain open—what a lottery. Care homes in Lancashire are 98 per cent. full. It is unacceptable that a Labour-controlled Lancashire county council should scuttle around Lancashire announcing closures, upsetting some of the most vulnerable people in society, and leaving them with no hope and no future.

People turned to Lancashire county council when they applied to its care homes, which offered provision of which we could all be proud. Two days before Christmas, a private home closed in Chorley. Where was the safety net when emergency beds had to be found? It was with Lancashire county council. That safety net will disappear if we allow the proposals to be implemented.

Lancashire county council must withdraw its proposal immediately and ensure that people have a choice. People should be able to choose to live in private or county homes—or to remain in their own home, with appropriate support. I accept all that, but if our county provision is taken away, there will be nothing left for those who need it. Will we have to tell a 95-year-old, "I am sorry, but this home is down for closure. You will have to find somewhere else"?

People living in the homes have already been told to start looking for private accommodation. Sadly, they are being told that they must look around quickly, because there will not be enough accommodation left if they all look at the same time. The danger is that those vulnerable people will opt for a private home that might close in four or five years' time. That is not acceptable.

There is nothing wrong with the homes in Chorley. I invite the Minister to come to my constituency to see the quality of those homes and to see the damage that is being done by our county council. It should withdraw its proposals now, so that people can feel once again that we have a listening county council.

10.25 am

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on obtaining today's debate. I am saddened and angered by Lancashire county council's proposed closure of 35 care homes. I am saddened because over the years the county council has, by and large, provided good service to the people of Lancashire. I am extremely angry about the acute distress and bewilderment that has already been inflicted upon the elderly residents of those homes as a result of the cavalier and uncaring way in which the proposals were announced.

Three of the care homes threatened with closure are in my constituency—Beaumont View, the Craggs and Slyne House. All have an excellent reputation for providing high quality care. Before travelling to Westminster yesterday, I took the opportunity to visit Slyne House and the Craggs. It was heartbreaking to hear people in their 90s saying that they were being well cared for and looked after, and how much they dreaded being uprooted and moved elsewhere.

One elderly resident had his wartime medals in his bedroom. That an elderly gentleman who had fought in the war should now be rewarded in such a way is heartbreaking. Another resident, a wonderful lady, is celebrating her 100th birthday today, but it has been overshadowed by the proposals: she is frightened that she will lose her home. It is not only the elderly residents who will be affected, but their relatives. I spoke to the sons and daughters and the husbands and wives of

[Geraldine Smith]

residents who were distressed and worried about their elderly relatives. That is cruel. Many of the residents were at a loss to understand why their home was going to close. They were desperate to know what was to become of them. I felt ashamed that proposals that have caused such heartache and pain were put forward by a Labour-controlled council.

Of equal concern is the fact that staff and residents of the care homes have been told by Lancashire county council that the closures were being forced upon it by the Government because the homes do not meet best value criteria. They have been told that the homes have to close, and that if the county council will not do it, the Government will step in and do it. I ask the Minister to confirm whether that is true.

I am sure that all hon. Members know that the provision of good quality care such as that provided by Lancashire county council is not cheap, but that care is what the elderly in our communities need and deserve. We should ensure that care in the private sector is raised to the standard of that provided by the county council, not try to round it down to the lowest common denominator. It must be clearly understood that the proposal entails the mass relocation of frail, elderly people. It is our duty to ensure that their interests come first and that they are considered before any decisions are made.

When considering future provision of residential care homes in Lancashire, I am aware that we need to improve and expand other areas of care and support as well as residential care. Yes, people prefer to stay in their own homes if possible, but it is not always an option if they are too frail or require a great deal of care. Regardless of the success of other measures, there will be an ever-increasing need for residential care. People are living much longer and, even though they stay longer in their homes, they still need to go into residential care later in life.

My hon. Friend the Minister will know that Lancashire county council is also cutting back on the number of private sector placements. If we accept its policy and fail to ensure that sufficient residential care places, both public and private, are available to those who want and need them, we will not only fail the elderly in Lancashire, but put an intolerable strain on the health service by causing massive bed blocking.

10.30 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I congratulate the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on securing the debate, and all those who have taken part. They succinctly stated the serious concerns that hon. Members on both sides of the House have about the proposals for the reduction in public sector care home capacity in Lancashire. I shall address some of the concerns that have been raised in the debate and ask the Minister some questions.

As I listened to the debate, three phrases came to mind: "piecemeal", "ill conceived" and "lacking in vision". That is what strikes me about the proposals about care homes controlled by Lancashire county council that are out for consultation. The fact that the consultation continues until 14 June is no comfort to the residents of the care homes that have been nominated for closure, or to their relatives and friends, or to the staff who are affected. I am aware of the trauma and difficulties that accompany the closure of care homes, whether they are in the private, independent or public sectors. It is a sad fact that poorly managed closures can increase the possibility of death among residents who are transferred. That fact must fuel the anxiety of relatives and staff.

Members made several important points that go to the heart of the wider debate about the provision of residential and nursing care in institutional settings. I shall comment on them, but I was very struck by the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) pointing out the feeling of ownership that residents in care homes have. When a well run home is established and doing a good job, it ceases to be an institution and becomes a home. When a resident describes it as "My home," we should listen and take it as a serious sign of that person's feelings about the place.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) referred to the overall context of the community care legislation that set local authorities' responsibilities for managing care home places. That is a fair point, but it is worth bearing in mind that the same legislation placed on local authorities a fairly onerous and difficult gatekeeping role. There is a tension in being both the gatekeeper and the person that commissions care provision for residents on their behalf. That does not sit well in many cases, and I suspect that in Lancashire it has resulted in the introduction of a poor set of options.

I am strongly of the view that although a spectrum of different types of care in different settings—ranging from low intensity domiciliary care packages that enable people to stay independent in their own homes, through to the most intensive home care and residential sector—should be available in this country, and Lancashire in particular, it must not become a matter of dogma that people must stay at home. Any vision must always be built around the needs of the individual and proper analysis of them.

The debate has highlighted an apparent lack of analysis or serious engagement with the other partners and players in the provision of care in the community and residential care. I am shocked to learn from today's debate that Lancashire county council has failed to engage seriously with the NHS about the impact of the proposed reduction in capacity, and that it has also failed to have that dialogue with the independent sector. To remove up to a third of bed capacity simply by removing places from the public sector fails to acknowledge what is happening in the private sector.

All hon. Members know from their mailbags and conversations with care home owners about the pressure in the private and independent sectors in terms of the costs and new standards and how they are making many contemplate leaving the sector altogether. In some parts of the country, many people have already left the sector: they have decided that they could no longer do a decent form of business because they were not getting any return.

As the hon. Member for Pendle said, when the Care Standards Act was passed, Members on both sides of the House were committed to national minimum standards to drive up quality in all sectors. It is important to recognise that although there is no straightforward relationship, there is undoubtedly a cost attached to that compliance. I emphasised that several times during the passage of that Act. Today's debate has proved that some statements made in the regulatory impact assessment failed to provide an accurate estimate of the cost of complying with the new standards. That is why local authorities—not only Lancashire—are saying that they plan to close homes: they cannot find the capital to fund the changes. The hon. Gentleman was right to set his remarks in the context of the budgetary pressures that fall on local authorities, particularly social services authorities, when trying to manage such issues.

Physical standards—lifts, doorways and room sizes—present problems: they often carry the greatest capital costs, but they are not the best proxies for quality. That point has been made by hon. Members and was acknowledged by the Government in a letter sent by the Minister to Anne Parker, the chair of the National Care Standards Commission. In it, the Government recognised that the standards in respect of room sizes that are due to come into effect from 2007 must be interpreted flexibly. It would appear that Lancashire county council has ignored that in its calculations and proposals.

I hope that hon. Members will continue to challenge the council about that, and that the Minister can confirm what she wrote to the chair of the NCSC. The letter makes the specific point that

> "For example if it were harmful for a resident to be moved, it would be open to the Commission to decide that a room which falls below the standard nevertheless suits the persons' needs."

That is as clear as possible, and Lancashire county council should take the point into account.

The hon. Member for Pendle mentioned the social policy on ageing information network report. Research into the funding available for social services was conducted by charities and private sector interests. He referred also to the £1 billion above standard spending assessment that social services authorities throughout England spend on providing services for the elderly and children. Interestingly, just two weeks ago, a new survey was published by the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services. It examined current, not historical, budget pressures and, unsurprisingly, confirmed that there has been no change. In the coming year, councils throughout the country expect to overspend their budgets by more than £218 million. They are already spending dramatically more than the Government think that they need to spend, as reflected in SSAs. Nine of out 10 will overspend their budgets in the coming year, and many forecast further pressures looming in later years.

Everything boils down to capacity and whether it is being planned. In Lancashire, it is not. The Minister should ask the county council, through the social services inspectorate and others, what it is doing to improve its understanding of the knock-on consequences of its proposals on care for the elderly throughout the county. There is no doubt that the proposals will reduce choice and increase pressures elsewhere in the care system.

Hon. Members said that a lack of capacity in the care home sector had a knock-on effect on the NHS in the form of delayed discharges and more people waiting longer to leave hospital, with all the attendant consequences for their health. That effect works its way through the system, and ends in people waiting longer on trolleys because there are no beds to which they can be admitted. All that is happening and will continue to happen if there is not a proper dialogue between all the players in Lancashire to address the problem.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) mentioned the loss of private sector capacity, and other important points were made, to which I hope the Minister will respond today.

10.40 am

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): This has been a passionate debate, and rightly so. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) described the proposals as piecemeal, misconceived and showing a lack of vision. Many hon. Members might have gone further and said that the proposals are heartless and cynical in the way that they strip assets from the public sector and shunt costs, and that the county council has been arrogant in not listening to the views of elected Members of Parliament. As the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) said, he and his colleagues approached the county council but it simply did not listen.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on instigating this important debate, because it is clear that the proposals are not acceptable. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said, the idea that the problem can be solved by spending £50,000 on a couple of spin doctors shows the values of Lancashire county council. There is no doubt that this is a tragedy in the making.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) touched on what is happening in the private sector as well as the public sector. The Lancashire Care Association was told before Christmas by Lancashire county council that it planned to reduce residential care home placements in the private sector for the frail elderly by two thirds between now and 2007—a decrease of 1,200 places, from 1,880 to 600 a year. At the same time, the council plans to close 35 of the 48 county homes—a loss of 700 places. Two thousand places for frail elderly people in Lancashire are to be stripped out within a very short period.

That is a tragedy for the individuals concerned. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) spoke to a resident who said, "This is my home." The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) said that people involved are in their 80s and 90s, and the hon. Member for Pendle spoke about people being fearful. The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale spoke about wartime medals on their walls, and the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) said that this treatment was being meted out to some of the most vulnerable people in Lancashire.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley said that some of the most frail residents were living in fear of the proposals, and pointed out that day centres were important to people if they were not to be imprisoned in their own home. The hon. Member for Hyndburn said that people were being treated like animals, and the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) pointed out the loss of respite care places. There is no doubt that the effect on individuals who live in homes is dramatic and that the policy is heartless.

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

The hon. Member for Burnley also talked about the staff. We should not forget that there are 600 jobs in care homes in the public sector in Lancashire. In an intervention, the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood referred to the standard of care that is so appreciated by residents. That is not an accident: the staff are committed to providing excellent care. Given what all the expert evidence and research shows, it is odd to put their jobs and those of all the caring people in the private sector at risk.

The leading institute that considers demography and projections for the future is the personal social services research unit. Its latest research, published in *Health Statistics Quarterly*, shows that there will be a huge rise in the number of over-65s in the next 30 years. The Government Actuary's projections show that that number will rise by 60 per cent and that the number of over-85s will increase by almost 90 per cent. It is projected that the number of residential places throughout the country needs to rise by 65 per cent. to meet that demand—in addition to what is needed in domiciliary care, where it is estimated that a 48 per cent. increase will be needed in home care hours provision.

Against that background and the fact that all the evidence is that we need more places and more capacity—the Government say that, too—why on earth is Lancashire county council stripping out places? That goes back to the point made by the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow): the council simply has not done the analysis. This is a national issue because getting rid of places in care homes makes the NHS inefficient. The Government are spending much more money on the NHS but are not getting much more activity out of it, because although elderly people in NHS beds throughout the country want to move into a nursing or residential home, places are not available. Making the situation worse, which is what Lancashire county council suggests, is wrong.

We have to wonder about the reason behind the proposals, and I think it is that the council has problems—indeed, special measures have been mentioned. If it does not provide care home places in the public or private sector, it does not have to pay for them, and other authorities have to pick up the tab. Housing is the district council's responsibility, so it will have to provide more sheltered housing, and the NHS will have to do more work on intermediate care to provide places. The financial burden is thereby shifted from the county council to the district council and the NHS. That may be a good accounting trick, but it takes no account of the costs to the individuals involved—people who will lose their home and be treated like animals. Nor does it pay attention to the loyal staff who have worked for the county council for years.

What is so stupid is that the council has not even troubled itself to consult the NHS or the independent sector before going down this route. I join in the pleas made by hon. Members on both sides of the House for the consultation to end and for the proposals to be taken away and reconsidered. The Minister is reported in the local press in Lancashire as saying that she is "ordering a probe". What does that mean and what action will she take? The situation is intolerable.

10.48 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I join in the congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on securing a debate on a matter of considerable importance to Lancashire. I commend all hon. Members who have spoken: they have made good use of their role as constituency Members of Parliament to raise a significant local issue. Even before today's debate, I was well aware of those concerns. The decision is clearly one for Lancashire county council, but as we have heard it has wider implications. I shall state the reality of the Government's policy and its relationship to the activities of Lancashire county council.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) pointed out, Lancashire county council has had a relatively high number of admissions into residential and nursing care. In 1999-2000, it made 182 admissions to residential and nursing care per 1,000 people aged over 65. By 2000-01, that had dropped to 146 per 1,000, but even so, it was still 45 per cent. higher than the average for shire counties.

It is right that Lancashire considers its commissioning strategy. It should assess whether it offers the right balance of care for older people in the county. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) made clear, it is crucial for this type of consideration and planning to take place in the context of consultation with older people themselves, with partners in care provision in both the statutory and independent sector, with other local authorities, with the NHS and with other local representatives, including those who have spoken so ably today.

It is important to understand, as noted by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) and the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), that the proposals could lead to 700 older people having to move from their care homes. Our debate is not merely a theoretical discussion about the design of a system. Many could have lived in their existing homes for many years and the move could entail significant disruption. Any changes should be contemplated only after thorough consultation, up-to-date care assessments and detailed discussions with residents and their families.

A central aim of Government policy is to reduce reliance on long-term institutional solutions to the needs of older people and to encourage the development of services to promote their independence. As right hon. and hon. Members have made clear, provision of services for older people is complex, so we need a range of alternatives to provide an opportunity for older people to exercise choice.

Complex objectives can be achieved only if they are well planned and if change is well managed and accompanied by investment. That has been the Government's national approach to achieving the reconfiguration of services that we all want in the longer term. It is a testament to those measures that we now support more people living at home than in the past: in 1998-99, of every 1,000 older people 82 were supported to live at home; by 2000-01, that number had risen to 84. All sorts of support—home care, community equipment, home adaptations and repairs—are included.

Also central to the Government's plans to reform the care system is the development of intermediate care services, so that we can prevent avoidable admissions into hospital and allow patients—especially older people—the time and care necessary for rehabilitation. Such services will enable older people to live independently for longer. The NHS plans investment of an extra £900 million to be made available by 2003-04 for new intermediate care and related services. It is already bringing benefits and will be part of the overall reconfiguration of older people's services.

The Government have already provided significant extra support to local authorities engaged in the reconfiguration to ensure that we avoid the problems associated with delayed discharge, to which some hon. Members have referred. From the £300 million made available by the Government last autumn, Lancashire county council received £1.6 million in 2001-02 and will receive a further £3.4 million in 2002-03. That funding will be available for the purchase of nursing home placements, intensive home care packages and disability equipment, and for the expansion of existing intermediate care and rehabilitation schemes.

We need to offer our older people a range of services. Generally, people want to live in their homes as long as they can, but in some cases residential care is the best option and we must provide the necessary capacity to cater for it—either in the statutory or independent sector. My hon. Friends the Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) mentioned their concerns about private sector capacity in Lancashire. On that account, last week I met representatives of Lancashire Care Association in a delegation led by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood. They expressed the association's desire to work with Lancashire county council to ensure that residential and other provision is made available to Lancashire people in a planned and strategically managed way.

The Government are committed to working in partnership with the independent sector to use its capacity and resources to achieve the best possible outcome. That is why we established a strategic commissioning group—initially chaired by my fellow Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), and now by me—which published an agreement setting out the responsibilities and expectations for central Government, local government, the NHS and independent providers.

The agreement focuses on councils and the independent sector entering into long-term agreements about placing people into care homes or providing other forms of support. It also highlights the need for fees to reflect the costs incurred. I expect all local authorities to follow the agreement; otherwise we shall be unable to achieve the necessary changes in capacity and the sort of planning which, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) and others pointed out, is missing in Lancashire.

Several hon. Members mentioned national care standards. We are all agreed on the need for uniform standards to cover not just environmental issues, but quality of care, training and the rights of residents. Those standards are being introduced sensibly. The Government have issued statutory guidance to the National Care Standards Commission to ensure that the application of new standards does not lead to the closure of good quality homes. The guidance states that the commission should assess whether care homes can fulfil the needs of service users without making environmental changes to meet the standards. It especially covers issues surrounding room sizes, lifts, baths and shared rooms. To respond to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley, existing homes are not required to provide en-suite bathrooms in future.

Care home representatives have welcomed the guidance. Some people, including hon. Members here today, have raised questions about the public statements made by Lancashire county council about the cost of bringing its in-house provision up to the level of the new care standards. I understand that the publicly stated figure of £14 million is inaccurate and that the real one is nearer to £4 million. Any higher sum would include expenditure on routine maintenance.

I understand the significant concerns expressed in today's debate. The social services inspectorate is already closely monitoring the council in several respects, because it was placed under special measures in February 2000. I also understand the concern about the intention to decrease dramatically the number of nursing and residential placements. That is why the social services inspectorate is following closely the work undertaken by Lancashire county council to assess its current care provision. Consultation on future strategies is taking place with the NHS, local people and other interested parties.

Concerns have been expressed that the local authority is not communicating properly. The social services inspectorate is actively seeking to open lines of constructive communication between the two parties. Today the SSI is holding a regional workshop attended by representatives of the local council and the Lancashire Care Association, and further meetings will follow. I have instructed the SSI to monitor closely the outcome of those discussions. I have also asked to be kept up to date with crucial research on capacity in Lancashire. I shall regularly examine SSI reports to ensure that progress is being made in the areas about which hon. Members have voiced concern today.

The Government's reforms are intended to lead to an evolutionary change in the care sector—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. It is time for the next debate.

MMR Vaccine

11 am

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): May I start by saying how grateful I am—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. Will right hon. and hon. Members please leave the Chamber quietly so that we may proceed with our business in proper order?

Miss Kirkbride: I am grateful to the Speaker for agreeing to this morning's one-and-a-half-hour debate on a topical issue that has become heated during the past few months. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say not just on my campaign for single vaccines to be provided by the national health service but on related issues on which the House would like more clarification. No doubt we shall hear a variety of voices from around the Chamber, but the principal point of the debate is to impress on Ministers why they should introduce the right to single vaccinations on the national health service.

Single vaccinations were available under the national health service until the Government came to power in 1997 when the Department of Health changed the guidance and MMR became the only vaccination available against dangerous childhood diseases. It was a fatal mistake to withdraw the right to single vaccinations. The purpose of the exercise is to ensure that the maximum number of children receive important vaccinations against damaging diseases. My purpose in pursuing the campaign is to increase the level of herd immunity, which has fallen to the dangerous level of 85 per cent. and possibly lower. That is not good enough to ensure that we do not have a worrying measles outbreak.

Whatever the Minister says today about restoring public confidence, advertising campaigns and bullying tactics in doctors' surgeries—if we can believe the press—will not persuade parents to do something against their gut instinct. The only way to restore public confidence is to respond to what parents want and 85 per cent. want the right to single vaccinations on the national health service. The Government would be acting in the best interests of children and public health—pregnant women as well as children need to be protected from rubella—if the right to single vaccinations were re-introduced on the NHS.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): If the hon. Lady's campaign reduced the level of herd immunity because people abandoned immunisation altogether, would she change her view? Is there anything to be learned from the whooping cough vaccination scare, which led to reduced coverage, higher incidence of the illness and deaths?

Miss Kirkbride: We cannot compare different scares. There is worrying evidence concerning the MMR vaccine. It does not prove a link between MMR and autism, but it gives parents cause for concern. I speak as a parent and for many parents who make difficult decisions on behalf of their children. I examined the evidence and did not feel entirely comfortable about giving my child the MMR jab. We know from the newspapers that I am not alone in that view and I could name many public figures who agree with me. The uncertainties about whooping cough and MMR vaccinations are not the same. The way to increase the number of children who are vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella is to give parents the choice they want.

Dr. Harris: I know that the hon. Lady wants to make progress, but this is a key point. If she were persuaded that a change in policy to the one she wants would lead to fewer children being vaccinated—not among the group that may choose single vaccinations, but among those who would simply give up on the whole idea—would she change her view because of the risk of lower coverage resulting in more disease and deaths?

Miss Kirkbride: I do not agree with that hypothesis, so it is difficult to give the hon. Gentleman a relevant answer to his question. If he had been listening, he would know that I believe that the way to boost immunisation levels is to give parents the choice that they want. That is the tenet of my debate so I cannot give him a better answer.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The hon. Lady is right to say that measles, mumps and rubella are dangerous. I feel strongly about this because I almost died as a baby from pneumonia associated with a measles infection. The hon. Lady is raising the matter in an irresponsible way. Of course parents are worried—parents are always worried about possible harm to their children—but while a negative can never be proved, the risks associated with not having the MMR vaccination are far greater than the risks of having it.

Miss Kirkbride: The hon. Lady speaks from bitter personal experience, but as parents, we do not consider the risk in the wider context that only a few children are likely to be damaged by the MMR vaccination; we ask whether our child might be damaged. We know that some people believe—and we do not know whether they are right or wrong—that their children were damaged by the MMR vaccine and we ask ourselves whether we could bear it if our child were damaged in the same way. That makes the point for allowing parents the choice of single vaccinations. If they were allowed that choice and if the door had not been closed in 1997-98, the position today would be different because we would not have the present crisis in herd immunity.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Kirkbride: I would like to make some progress, but I shall then give way.

One of the Government's reasons for not allowing single vaccinations is that they involve six jabs. However, the manufacturers' packets state that single vaccinations provide 98 per cent. effectiveness, while the MMR jab provides up to 90 per cent. effectiveness, so children have to be inoculated twice for MMR, first when they are just over a year old and again just before they are four. The 10 per cent. difference is not sufficient to provide herd immunity.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): Is the hon. Lady aware that the Medicines Control Agency has specifically disputed the claim of 98 per cent. coverage, which is wrong?

Miss Kirkbride: I am aware of what the Medicines Control Agency said and of what the manufacturers state on the packets. Someone is not telling the truth and we must establish who is telling the truth. I am well aware of the point made by the Minister, but we need more clarity instead of the muddled facts that are available at the moment.

Another of the Government's arguments against single vaccinations is the time between each vaccination—it must be at least three months. They say that that is dangerous because more children are liable to get measles in the meantime. That may be true in essence, except that some children are not being vaccinated at all. Given the choice of MMR or nothing, too many parents are choosing nothing. If we compare reality with the Government's comments, we are banging our heads against a brick wall. Parents are told, "If you are not prepared to have MMR, you will have nothing." Ergo, parents are choosing to have nothing, and the risks to the wider community are that much greater. The Minister must let a little daylight into those considerations by accepting life as it is, rather than as she would like it to be.

The Government's rules are one reason why it is more dangerous to proceed on the basis of the single vaccine. Parents can access single vaccinations for their children by having the rubella vaccination, which is licensed in Britain, first. Children are entitled to have it in order to protect unborn children, who may contract rubella.

If the Government changed the rules so that children could have the measles vaccination first, the most dangerous childhood disease would be tackled first. That would mean a longer period of exposure to mumps and rubella, but we must live with life as it really is. Changing the rules would remove a large part of the Government's objections.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): The hon. Lady raised the issue of rubella and talked about pandering to people's perceptions. Does she realise that one perception in the community is that boys do not need to be immunised against rubella? Given that that is, as she puts it, the reality in the world, how does she expect to get herd immunity to rubella if we provide single vaccines?

Miss Kirkbride: It is a patronising argument used by Labour Members—and it remains to be seen whether it is used by Opposition Members—to claim that parents will not take their children back for the other two inoculations. Parents who want single vaccinations are by definition responsible because they have clearly been thinking about whether that inoculation is right for their children; of course they will go back. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has children, but if he does he will remember that they go for a series of inoculations when they are three, six and nine months old. It is wonderful to say that most people take up those inoculations. Of course parents will have their children inoculated against those dangerous diseases, and it is outrageous that people who oppose my point of view suggest otherwise.

Ms Drown: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. She talked earlier about her difficulty, which I understand, as a parent thinking about whether her child might be exposed to a possible side effect of the vaccine. As a parent, however, does she not also consider the risk of her child being exposed to one of those diseases? Is that not a difficult choice that all parents have to make?

I should like to hear the hon. Lady's policy on when the single vaccines, which include not only rubella, but mumps, should be given. Has she taken medical advice on the gap between vaccinations? Why does she think that her particular view is different from that of the stream of medical organisations that have looked at the evidence in detail?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions must be brief and to the point.

Miss Kirkbride: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the hon. Lady catches your eye she will be able to expand on those points.

The hon. Lady raised a number of questions, and I have several concerns that the Government should take seriously. Returning to my previous point, I believe the vaccines to be largely safe. Let me put on record that I believe in the childhood immunisation programme, which has done wonders for childhood mortality in the past 10, 20, 30 and 40 years. It has been a fantastic achievement, and I pay tribute to the medical establishment for having achieved wonderful progress. However, the fact that it has achieved wonderful progress in the past does not make it right about absolutely everything. It does not necessarily make it right about MMR and whether there is a problem in a small spectrum of children. The problem for parents is that they do not know whether their child might be susceptible.

On a wider point, the hon. Lady asked about the gap between vaccinations. Private clinics, which offer those vaccinations, start with the rubella vaccine and give the measles vaccine three months later. I think that there is a longer gap after that to the mumps vaccine. The hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) seems surprised, but if she knew more about the subject she would know that the measles vaccine is the most virulent, and therefore the one with which we must be most cautious.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Kirkbride: I have been generous in giving way, and I should like to make my own points rather than dealing with barracking from Labour Members.

The fact is that 2,000 parents are taking the Government to court because, rightly or wrongly—and this will be tested in court—they believe that the MMR

[Miss Kirkbride]

vaccine has damaged their children. Whatever our views about MMR, our hearts go out to those parents because, according to their stories, their children were developing completely normally until the day on which they had their MMR jab. Those children's personalities changed as they developed regressive autism, which stripped from them the functions that they had previously acquired. Those parents face difficult lives because they have to deal with what has happened to their children. We do not know whether it was caused by MMR, but those parents believe that it was. We all know how intimately we know and understand our children. Those parents' stories deserve a more careful approach than the dismissive attitude we presently have from the Department of Health.

Peter Bradley: I do not want to barrack the hon. Lady, but she seeks certainty; I am not sure that there is certainty in life or, for that matter, in science. Can she be certain that the active measles ingredient in the single measles vaccine, rather than MMR in combination, could not be construed or suggested as a cause of autism?

Miss Kirkbride: The simple answer is no. No medical science can be proved absolutely, and that is why we have to offer parents choice. We have to offer them choice because there is no certainty. At the moment, we cannot prove or disprove any of those things. One cannot disprove a negative.

Parents want choice because they believe that as a result of the three live vaccines, which are stronger, more virulent vaccines in MMR—all other childhood inoculations are not live vaccines—children who have a predisposition to be unable to cope with an attack on their immune systems suffer damage to their guts and bowels, which leads to toxins leaking out and damaging their brains. If that is true, and those parents cannot prove it, it is likely that the measles vaccine is responsible. We know that toxins in the brain are a likely cause of autism, but we do not know how and why it occurs.

The Government know that environmental factors are likely to cause autism. I was pleased to learn that there is going to be more research into the causes of autism because we need to know why we appear to be having an epidemic. I would not suggest that MMR is the reason why there has been a massive increase in autism, but the evidence needs to be examined as it raises fears among parents about whether MMR is a contributory factor.

I draw Members' attention to the work of Dr. Andrew Wakefield, and the more recent research by Professor John O'Leary in Dublin. They looked at cases and examined the parents' story. They brought in parents who believe that their child changed on the day on which they had the MMR vaccine. They investigated whether there could be any truth in the parent's belief that having the MMR vaccine caused their child a problem. They examined 91 children whose parents all told the same story that their children had the MMR vaccine, developed an irritable bowel problem and then showed signs of regressive autism, which is such a dreadful thing to see in one's child. They found measles virus in the gut of 75 of the 91 children whom they examined, as compared with a normal cohort of children in which only 6 per cent. had traces of measles virus left in their gut.

That does not prove anything, but it does give me, as a parent, cause for concern. The Minister and the medical establishment seem to have closed ears when it comes to that subject. They want to discredit Dr. Andrew Wakefield, who has been driven out of the Royal Free hospital and is now working in America. Other people have raised the same concerns, and we need to look at the matter.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Before my hon. Friend concludes, will she consider scientific studies that have examined each hypothesis presented by Andrew Wakefield, and have found no evidence to support them? Will she consider the Finnish study, which is a randomised, placebo-controlled, double-blind study that provides no evidence to support his conclusions? Has she spoken to those on the Medical Research Council panel, as I have done in my constituency, who listened to Andrew Wakefield, but who found no evidence to support his hypotheses?

Miss Kirkbride: I am sorry to disagree with my hon. Friend in answering his concerns. Andrew Wakefield is not alone in raising the matter; doctors in America and Dublin have questioned whether there is a cause for concern. I have not spoken to the MRC panel, but I would be interested to hear my hon. Friend's remarks should he be lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend raised the Finnish study, which looked at 1 million children and claimed that there was no link between MMR and autism. The problem is that it found not a single case of autism, which, in 1 million children, is statistically inconceivable. I am greatly concerned about the veracity of the study and its conclusions. The affliction of autism is so great in our society that to find not a single case is most unlikely; according to the most recent figures the incidence is six in 10,000, so there is likely to be a case of autism in 1 million children.

Another problem with the Government's statistics relates to the Japanese experience, which the Prime Minister raised on the Floor of the House. I am sad to say that when Ministers refer to such a case, it makes one wonder what they have to hide. The Japanese experience is wholly different from that portrayed by Ministers. Japan had a genuine problem with the mumps component—the urabe strain—of MMR, which was causing encephalitis and killing children. That rogue strain was not used elsewhere, so there is no comparison to be made with the strains of MMR used elsewhere in the world. The Japanese Government covered up the problem for a long time, and then introduced single vaccines having withdrawn the MMR vaccine. In those circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the Japanese public said that they would not accept any vaccine because they no longer trusted the Government.

The British Government say that Japan has single vaccinations, some 80-odd children have died of measles there, ergo single vaccines cause a problem for children and are dangerous. That is a completely fallacious conclusion. Children are dying of measles in Japan because they are not being vaccinated at all, which has become part of the problem here. When Ministers use that example, I am concerned that they feel the need to misinterpret data. That causes great concern for all of us.

There is a case to be made for single vaccinations. I was grateful to learn a few weeks ago that the Government are to spend more money—an extra £2.5 million—on looking at the causes of autism. That money is welcome. Will the Minister clarify whether any of the money will be used to consider the findings of Dr. Andrew Wakefield and Professor John O'Leary, and to address the issue that is causing public concern? Speculation in the newspapers has been that the ostracism of Dr. Andrew Wakefield will not continue and that greater dialogue may be achieved between him and the Department of Health. That would be welcome, and would give parents less reason for concern.

I would be grateful if the Minister would clarify, openly and honestly, Government plans for the MMRV—measles, mumps, rubella and chicken pox—vaccine to be included in a quadruple jab. When I asked recently, I was told that there were no such plans, but I have seen newspaper speculation that scope may exist for introducing a quadruple jab. If we are to deal straight with parents, we should know whether the Department of Health genuinely has such plans. We need clarity and certainty about what is being considered and what has been ruled out.

Will the Minister comment on allegations in newspapers—I do not know whether they are true—that the reason for the removal of the availability of single vaccinations on the national health service and the introduction of the MMR jab was that the patent on single vaccines was running out? Does the same reason apply to the prospect of introducing MMRV, and the MMR patent? Is that why the new quadruple jab is being introduced? I hope that that is not true, but it has surfaced in newspapers so people would like clarification.

Another allegation that has surfaced in newspapers is that doctors are dropping children from their lists if parents refuse to let them have the MMR jab. Does the Minister have any reason to believe that? If it is true, can she clarify the attitude of the Department of Health towards such doctors, who would be behaving disgracefully by not allowing parents the right to choose what is best for their children?

Lynne Jones: Does the hon. Lady think that parents would conclude that separate jabs would be best for their children if equal prominence were given to the adverse effects associated with not having the triple vaccine as that given to the unquantified and probably unassociated effects of autism?

Miss Kirkbride: The hon. Lady makes a relevant point. However, hon. Members who disagree with me have a problem with the difference between the desirability of achieving wider public health goals and the inevitable feelings that parents have towards their children; they want to do the best for them, and are not as worried about the wider public health consequences. That is the inevitable conclusion that most parents rationally reach.

Lynne Jones: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Kirkbride: No. If parents believe that MMR is a problem, but do not have access to single vaccinations, they will make a choice between having MMR with its potential link to autism, or not having it and accepting that their child may get measles. The hon. Lady's experience may be different, but I had measles, as did my brother, sister, mother and father. We have all had it, and for most people the experience is not life-threatening. However, it is for some children, which is why the public health argument is more important. We need to protect those children who are likely to be damaged by measles, which is why we want more parents to give their children measles mumps and rubella vaccinations. However, when one considers one's own child, the considerations are slightly different from those surrounding the wider public health. Labour Members must bear in mind that difference in attitude.

I shall comment on the Prime Minister's refusal to say whether his young child has had the MMR vaccine. It was not an issue of privacy. All parents talk about whether their child is having the MMR vaccine; it is no big deal and much like asking which school a child will attend—it is part of the common currency of conversation between parents. It is also relevant to point out that when there was concern about the whooping cough vaccine, Prince Charles made it known that his children had had the DPT—diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus—vaccine to prevent whooping cough. The Queen also let it be known that Prince Charles and Princess Anne had had the polio vaccine when concern arose about that. The Prime Minister therefore stands somewhat accused of causing the problem.

If we are to believe the story in *The Independent* at the beginning of February, the Prime Minister had not given his child the MMR vaccine when I asked my question. That is surprising because children are called for vaccination after they are a year old; little Leo was a good 18 months, if not older, by that time. I do not believe that this is a privacy issue, and it is a shame that the Prime Minister sought to make it one. That has not helped his Government's policy on the matter. I know that the Minister and other hon. Members will accuse me of undermining public confidence, but such accusations are wrong and false. The Minister has undermined public confidence by not allowing public choice. Choice is fundamental to people's lives and they are entitled to have it.

We pay for the national health service. Research has left queries in some people's minds about MMR, and rightly or wrongly—we all hope that the research is wrong—they will be swayed by it. No amount of bullying by the Minister's Department and officials will make any difference to public attitude. People want choice and it is about time that the Government gave it them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is an important issue. We normally commence winding-up speeches

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

30 minutes before the end of the debate, which would mean that they would start at 12 noon. The three Front-Bench spokespeople have sent me semaphores by various means to say that they want 39 minutes in total. That means that, to get the official responses to a serious issue, it shall be very difficult to fit in everyone. At least six hon. Members indicate that they want to participate, some of whom have not taken the trouble to inform the Chair beforehand, which makes it difficult for the Chair. I appeal to all hon. Members to bear in mind the paucity of the time available to us, make their points pertinent and clear and accept as few interventions as possible. So far, there have been far too many.

11.31 am

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall do my best to be brief. It is my susceptibility not to measles but to high blood pressure that has put me at risk in recent weeks. Nothing has enraged me more—the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) has done nothing to diminish my outrage—among what passes for news in this place than the so-called controversy about MMR.

What makes this issue different from others, and the reason that I am angry not just as a politician, a Government supporter and a Member of Parliament trying to represent the best interests of my constituents, but above all as a parent desperate to protect my children and those of others from killer diseases, is that this is a matter not so much about choice—as the hon. Lady suggested—as about public health. I believe that, in this important case, some elements of the press and some Opposition Members have lost sight of their responsibilities as shapers of public opinion and the public agenda. They ought to know, if they do not already, that their actions and words in this place and elsewhere have consequences. It is a shame that others might be asked to pay the price for their irresponsibility.

I understand parents' anxieties. We live in an age in which we demand certainty but cannot have it; in which we want to live risk-free lives but cannot do so; in which we expect definitive advice from the experts whom we then distrust, and against whom we reserve the right to litigate when they get it wrong; and in which we are too often unprepared to take decisions for ourselves, or to take responsibility for those decisions when we do. In such circumstances, it is crucial that information on life-and-death issues—that is what we are discussing—such as MMR should be objective, balanced and, far as possible, politics-free.

That has not been the case in the debate. In the face of overwhelming evidence that MMR is safe and that the alternatives are less so, some papers have sensationalised the largely refuted research of just one doctor, and some Opposition Members, I regret to say, have jumped on the bandwagon. Together, they have sought to make political capital out of a public health issue. By design or default, they have collectively undermined confidence in MMR, contributed to a reduction in its uptake and thereby placed children at risk from the diseases that MMR had all but eradicated since its introduction into this country in 1988. The Public Health Laboratory Service now warns of an epidemic among four-year-olds beginning school, as mine will be after Easter.

What are the facts? I shall abridge them because I am sure that others better qualified will spend more time on them in the debate, but 90 countries, 35 of them in Europe, pursue a policy of MMR vaccination. They include all members of the European Union, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, where some states do not accept admissions to schools of children who have not had MMR and other vaccinations. No country recommends three single vaccines in preference to MMR and 500 million doses have been issued since 1972.

The studies that have been referred to in the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden and Finland have found no proven link between MMR and autism or Crohn's disease. The British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association, the Faculty of Public Health Medicine, the Royal College of Midwives, Unison, Sense, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, the Public Health Laboratory Service, the Medicines Control Agency and the Department of Health have all advised that MMR is safe.

Where, then, did this controversy come from? There was no new research at the beginning of December, no new evidence to launch the story into the headlines. Someone in a newsroom on a slow day just decided to turn up the heat under a trusted old potboiler—this is not the first time that the controversy has hit the newspapers. There is nothing like a health scare story to bide the press over a slack couple of weeks, not least because, as the hon. Lady conceded, there is no certainty in science. We can spend days, if not weeks, wringing our hands and agonising over what is true and what is not true, what is fact and what is not fact, what is trustworthy advice and what is a conspiracy of silence.

I make one crucial point about press responsibility. It was not what was said about MMR that caused the problem. The fact that the issue had been raised at all precipitated the controversy and, inevitably, parents' anxiety. A *Daily Mail* headline on 13 December said, "High rate of autism increases fears about jab". There was no report of new evidence, new research or a new study but simply "fears about jab". No attempt was made to link MMR with autism or the identification of autism. Three days later, Lauren Booth, writing in the same newspaper, said that

> "the weekly flood of speculation on the subject is making us wary",

thus adding her own bucketful. Nothing was substantiated. The celebrities and influential people to whom the hon. Lady referred—*[Interruption]*.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Peter Bradley: Some newspapers had an almost dismissive attitude to truth, facts and standards of objective reporting. *The Sunday Telegraph* on 9 December, referring to a Department of Health report not yet published, headlined its story, "Studies fail to disprove autism link to MMR jab". Three days later, the headline in its sister paper *The Daily Telegraph* was, "Autism and MMR link not proven, say experts". By that time, the damage was done.

We then had, as the hon. Lady mentioned, the case of Leo and the relentless crusade of the *Daily Mail* and other newspapers against an 18-month-old infant. It is as if all the medical evidence to which I have referred should be put aside and the only authority in this crucial public health issue be the man whom the *Daily Mail* most despises—the Prime Minister. On 23 December, Amanda Craig headlined her article in *The Sunday Times*, "Privacy be damned, Mr. Blair, parents are afraid."

Who is responsible for that fear and anxiety, and the risk under which they place parents and their children? I suggest that some elements of the press and some hon. Members search their consciences. There have been so many scoops about the incidence of Leo's jabs—the hon. Lady referred to some of them—that the poor child must feel like a pin cushion, if not a political football.

The press has not been the only example of the exercise of freedom without responsibility. The story has been politicised by the press and by some Opposition Members alike. I tabled an early-day motion on MMR on 13 February, which I hoped would be an all-party one. The first signatory was a Conservative, the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor). I pay tribute to his courage because so far he is the only Conservative MP to have signed it.

On 30 December, the shadow Health Secretary said that

"all the evidence suggests that it"—

that is, MMR—

"is the safest thing to do."

Unfortunately, by 6 February, he found it expedient to say:

"In the circumstances, I think that reluctantly we have to accept that single jabs may be the only way of giving children protection",

irrespective of the evidence that we have about pertussis, about what happens when children do not have their jabs and about the difficulties of administering six jabs instead of two.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove said much about choice, which is one of her party's favourite issues. The issue is not about choice but about public health. We have responsibilities to each other in our communities, and the issue goes beyond party political doctrine. We know the risks of single jabs, and we know that we must balance the relative risks of MMR, such as they may be, with the known risks of improper immunisation. Some influential people in the newspapers and in this place have exercised their choice, but they have put children at risk thereby. I deplore that and find it deeply depressing.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Bradley: No, I will not.

I shall finish with an anecdote. A researcher for one of the more influential Radio 4 news programmes phoned me not long ago and asked me to comment on a Standards and Privileges Committee report that I had not seen—nor had the researcher—about my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). When I declined, the researcher asked me whether I knew of anyone who "hated Keith Vaz" and who would comment. The question was chillingly but refreshingly frank, in an ironic way. I then said that I thought I had been phoned about the early-day motion on MMR that I had tabled the day before, and the researcher said that that was yesterday's story. Yesterday's story—until the next time that it is convenient to raise a scare in the media and in this place. I sincerely hope that we can find a way of immunising ourselves against a recklessly irresponsible press and a cynically opportunist Opposition.

11.42 am

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I shall be briefer than the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley). I should hate to be seen as sharing any of his views. I shall make my own arguments and not share any of his, which will ring hollow with the pharmaceutical industry, given the occasions on which he has attacked it.

I understand the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride). However, I have considerable concern about one of them. I believe that previously she had not argued against the effectiveness of the MMR vaccine but had accepted that it was effective for its purpose. I am glad to see that she is nodding, because I would like to put that question to one side. The vaccine is effective: one has only to consider the reduction in measles, mumps and rubella in the population as a consequence of the introduction of the vaccine in 1998 to agree that it is effective for its purpose. The question that all hon. Members and I wrestle with is, what should be our response to concerns that are expressed by parents in our constituencies? What response should we give, not as scientists but as Members of Parliament?

I come from a constituency in which the worth of science is taken to heart, and I have the opportunity to speak to people in my own constituency who have undertaken research in precisely the area that we are discussing. I am convinced that the situation is not like others in which people have doubted the value of science. If one includes the word "Government" as an adjective to describe the scientists, it is even worse. Government scientists and medical advisers are not operating on the basis of supposition or presenting a hypothesis about the effectiveness of MMR or even a hypothesis about the lack of a link between MMR, inflammatory bowel disease and autism. They are working on the basis of substantiated trials and research that sought specifically to identify such a link but did not find one. As such, my conclusion is that a responsible public policy would proceed with, and sustain, MMR as a safe vaccine without proven side effects that question its safety.

The issue that the Government must contend with—perhaps the Minister might consider this briefly, even if he does not refer to it in detail—is that there must come a point at which parents' concerns about MMR reduce compliance with it to the extent that it is not a viable policy. I do not think that we have reached that point in my area, and I shall certainly continue to do everything that I can to sustain the take-up of MMR.

However, the hon. Member for The Wrekin is wrong: the issue is raised with me, as a Member of Parliament, expressly on the basis of choice. Although the great majority are opting for MMR, a small number of

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

parents exercise their choice—privately, at present—to opt for the single vaccine. In effect, their children are protected in the intervals between vaccines by the herd immunity that is the result of parents opting for MMR.

That raises a serious issue. How ethical is one's choice if others, by virtue of the choices that they make, provide protection for one's children? The Government would move to difficult ground if they were to decide that, as a matter of public policy, we should make choice available. Such choice may mean that some people gain protection because of the right choices of others or, alternatively, it may lead to a much worse public health outcome. It has been clearly proven many times around the world—it is not a matter of patronising people—that asking parents to comply with six rather than two inoculations for three separate diseases leads to lower compliance than has been the case with the MMR.

There must come a point at which it would be right to make the single vaccine available, but we have not yet reached it. It is responsible of the Government to sustain MMR, and it is responsible of me, as a Member of Parliament, to encourage parents in my constituency to accept it. It is incumbent on all of us to debate these concerns; however, if science points to a conclusive position in support of the MMR vaccine, we have a responsibility to reflect that in what we say and do.

11.47 am

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I will also try to be brief. I believe that I can safely say that, during my work for the all-party parliamentary group on autism, I have met, and discussed the issue with, all the leading experts in this country, corresponded with many of the leading experts around the world, read the vast majority of the research on the subject and given the matter considerable thought. We are not dealing with an open-and-shut case. I would not pretend for one second that we are, because that is not the nature of science. However, I could take hon. Members through the list of evidence that indicates that MMR is the right policy but, as it would probably take much longer than a one-and-a-half-hour Adjournment debate to do so, I shall touch briefly on only a few studies, ones at which hon. Members who have raised the question should take a long, hard look.

One is the Finnish study, rightly challenged by the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride). It is only a small piece of the picture, but it provides strong evidence that MMR is safe. There are other studies, such as the one by James Kaye, which was reported in the *British Medical Journal* last year. It included a time trend analysis that looked for a correlation between the increase in autism and immunisation rates. It found that the levels of autism increased four times in the population during a period when the levels of immunisation with MMR were constant; there was no correlation between MMR and autism. In 1999, *The Lancet* published a study by Brent Taylor et al, which showed no evidence of temporal clustering in the north-east Thames region.

Each study in itself is not a complete answer. They are not proof positive, but they comprise very strong evidence supporting the case for MMR. Each can be taken apart by those campaigning against MMR because such people fundamentally misunderstand the process of science.

The process of science is to set up a hypothesis and test it. It is like building a big jigsaw puzzle: one has a small piece of the jigsaw in the corner and tries to find another piece that will fit. The question that one tries to answer is whether the pieces fit together. Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes it is no. One cannot predict the shape of the next piece, the piece after that, or the full picture, simply because the answer is occasionally yes. Each study is only a small part of the total package. One cannot criticise individual studies for not being a total answer to the question.

I bring the attention of Opposition Members to two types of study that have produced strong evidence against MMR being the causal agent for most cases of autism. Research was carried out on thalidomide, examining the relationship between thalidomide damage and autism. A strong correlation was shown during the tragic experience of thalidomide. We know that thalidomide acted in the first three months of embryological development. There is strong circumstantial evidence that whatever causes autism happens during those first three months.

Other scientists have been looking for metabolic markers of autism. In the United States, several scientists believe that they have identified potential chemical markers that are present in babies shortly after birth and are a strong indication that that baby is going to develop autism later in life. Those scientists have described the chemical markers as the smoking gun that points to the development of autism. If the chemical markers are there immediately after birth, that child will have autism. Nothing will happen later in that child's life to trigger autism: he or she already has it, but it will take time to develop.

Those are important parts of the total evidence, but no one part is the complete picture. I acknowledge that, based on the evidence of Wakefield and others, a very, very small sub-group of children may get autism as a result of MMR. That cannot be disproved, but it is a long way from being proven. That sub-group consists of a tiny proportion, which did not show up even in the large studies that have been undertaken.

Ms Drown: Will my hon. Friend clarify whether it is the measles component or the MMR that is responsible for the effect on that group?

Dr. Ladyman: Based on Andrew Wakefield's research, if the effect is there at all, it is caused by the measles component. There is no reason to say that a measles vaccination would be any more or less safe than MMR.

However, Andrew Wakefield's research can be explained by other means. The findings of measles virus markers can be explained in some children on the basis of the immunological memory that one would expect immunised children to have. I can tell the hon. Member for Bromsgrove that many of Andrew Wakefield's co-workers do not agree that there is a link with MMR. I have discussed that with them, and they believe that there are other, equally valid, explanations for his findings, distinct from the one the hon. Lady advances.

Even if we accepted that there was, in a small number of cases, a risk of a link between MMR and autism, I put to the hon. Lady the argument of herd immunity. Herd immunity is, as she knows, the phenomenon whereby one creates resistance to an epidemic throughout a whole community. If an infectious agent of a disease passes it on to another person who is susceptible to that disease, the level of the infection in the community is maintained. If the disease is passed on to more than one person, the level of infection increases towards epidemic proportions. If a high proportion of people are immunised against a disease, the whole population is partially protected. The 10 per cent. of the child population who have an injection but do not develop immunity are protected by herd immunity. When the hon. Member for Bromsgrove makes the choice not to immunise her child, she does not make it just for herself, but for my child also. She is taking away my choice in the matter: my child will lose herd immunity because she made a personal choice. *[Interruption.]* I shall not give way: the Deputy Speaker has ordered against it.

There is no such thing as choice in matters of public health. Whether we like it or not, we have to weigh the balance of the risks, consider the evidence and take a public health decision for the whole population. On that basis, I say that the Government have struck the right balance and made the right decision. It is inappropriate for the hon. Lady to suggest that we would maintain herd immunity with a single choice immunisation programme. She still questions my analysis, but most parents of boys do not believe that they need the rubella injection, so boys would not receive it under a single choice system. Most parents of daughters do not believe that they need the mumps injection, so girls would not receive it under a single choice system. In both cases, we would lose herd immunity if the single vaccination approach were adopted.

We have the experience of the pertussis events, where we exchanged a multiple injection for a single choice system. We found that the level of immunisation went from 80 to 30 per cent. That is the reality we shall have to deal with if we adopt single vaccines. We would lose herd immunity, and the hon. Member for Bromsgrove, by making a choice for her child, would damage the children of everybody else in this country.

11.56 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Let me start by saying that I do not think that the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) is being irresponsible. If she were open-minded, that would be a responsible attitude: I hope that she is. I do not think one should blame Back-Bench politicians for raising concerns on behalf of themselves and their constituents. That is, after all, what this place is for. It is more consistent for her to express doubts about the safety or effectiveness of MMR than for people to profess that they have no doubts about the safety of MMR and call for single vaccination. Conservative Front Benchers have done that, despite knowing that the evidence suggests that that would damage public health. There are people in my party, whom I respect, who take the view of the hon. Lady. I do not think that her scepticism about MMR is unique to her party, but the position of Conservative Front Benchers is harder to sustain.

Our approach is based on several principles. We believe in sceptical scrutiny of the Government. I am dubious about almost all Government policies, including those in the arena of public health. They have failed on tobacco advertising and delayed and dallied on sexual health strategy. However, after careful scrutiny, we are prepared to back the Government's policy on childhood vaccinations. An approach that we commend to other parties is one of evidence-based policy making. It is hard for an Opposition party to sustain a position that Government should take a view contrary to that recommended by its expert medical and scientific advice. The Conservative party has to defend its view.

One must avoid bandwagon politics while being sensitive to parental concerns, which Conservative Front Benchers have not managed. I recognise that there are genuine parental concerns: I have never told any of my concerned constituents to have the MMR because I say so. I have always told them to talk to their GPs: it is more sensible for people to have a discussion with a doctor or health care professional than with a newspaper editor or a politician. We must be realistic about media behaviour. I agree in broad terms with the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley). Sadly, a story titled "MMR Proved Safe" would merit fewer column inches than "Health Scare on Immunisation". We therefore have to be careful about that.

On reading the evidence—I initially considered it with scepticism—my position is that MMR is safe and the most effective way to protect children from serious diseases. I criticise those who take a different view on some of the issues for being blasé about those diseases. Dr. Carol Vorderman, whom I had previously respected and, dare I say, admired, stated in *The Independent* that the vaccination

> "was introduced only 10 years ago; what happened before? We didn't all die—we had a mumps inoculation, rubella and you just got the measles."

Dead children do not tell anecdotes. Such an approach is highly irresponsible for someone who is perceived to be an oracle on scientific issues, however rightly or wrongly.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove said that we were concerned about such a full-frontal attack on the immune system, and that we knew or suspected that toxins in the brain were responsible for autism. I would be interested to know whom she meant by "we". Such an approach, with a pseudo-scientific justification for genuine concerns, takes people down an unhelpful avenue. It is almost certain to be a blind avenue unless the approach is based on scientific evidence. It does a disservice to autism, which is a devastating illness that is worrying in its incidence and prevalence. I am concerned that the focus on MMR will detract from other more fruitful and long overdue research into the disease.

Issues have been raised about general practitioners suspending patients from their lists to achieve immunisation targets. Will the Minister now abandon the immunisation target payments for GPs? They corrupt the system, are a conspiracy theorist's paradise and pollute the doctor-patient relationship. How can one have an open approach—how can patients believe that they are to be given independent advice from their GPs—when the spectre of financial incentive hangs over consultations? The Government did not introduce the policy, and they would do well to remove it.

[Dr. Evan Harris]

Similarly, it is wholly unacceptable for GPs to remove or suspend patients from their lists to gain immunisation target payments. While those payments exist, there will always be worry about that. I urge the General Medical Council and primary care trusts, the bodies that control the conduct and contracts of GPs, to clamp down severely on any suggestion that even temporary suspensions with no treatment implications have taken place to remove patients from lists.

It is appropriate to speak about the Prime Minister and his son. I have absolute sympathy with Leo Blair and limited sympathy with the Prime Minister. Politicians must be careful about parading their children in any circumstances and then claiming privacy. I urge all hon. Members to withdraw the subject of their children from the debate, and to stick to the facts and their opinions. Where would it end if practice in relation to our children were to become important in terms of the subject of public health? If there were a contraceptive pill scare, would people be asked what their spouses or young daughters used? I do not think that we want to go down such a path, and I cannot see the ethical difference between the two subjects.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he is being a little hysterical, and that it is incumbent on the Prime Minister to show leadership in this country, as abroad? Had the Prime Minister done so on whether his son had been immunised, we might not face a measles epidemic on the scale that we do.

Dr. Harris: I asked people who are concerned about MMR whether their views would change if they knew that Leo Blair had had the vaccination, and the answer was that they would not. A change is worth making only if it will change one's practice, as I learned from my work in medicine. There is a fatal flaw. When Leo Blair was rumoured to have been vaccinated, the shadow Health Secretary said:

> "If the reports are true, it is an astonishingly cynical move designed to deflect criticism from the Government's abject failure of policy".

In some people's eyes, it seems that the Prime Minister cannot win.

The Government have some difficulty on single vaccines and choice, but my view on the subject echoes that of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). They are right to accept that if MMR is the safest and most effective way to protect people from serious diseases in childhood, it is not appropriate to offer on the national health service something that is known to be less effective and could be less safe. Would that be appropriate in the name of choice? I hope that the NHS does not generally offer treatments that we know are dangerous to children simply because patients want the choice. Indeed, we should not offer a treatment that we know is in the worst interests of patients simply because they want it, and there is no ethical duty to do so.

If one knows that the rates of coverage will drop below their already low rates if the policy is changed, one also knows that it will mean more outbreaks of serious diseases and more deaths. The hon. Member for Bromsgrove did not have an answer on that. A change in Government policy would make that likely because there would be a loss of confidence in vaccination in general. People who would currently use MMR would abandon vaccination altogether.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Harris: In a moment.

When I suggested that to the hon. Member for Bromsgrove, she said that the situation was hypothetical. Her whole case is predicated merely on the hypothesis of a link between MMR and autism. At best, it seems inconsistent for her to refuse to engage with hypothetical questions when challenged.

The hon. Lady said that one could not apply the lessons of one vaccination to another when I pointed out that coverage fell by a further 30 per cent. when single vaccinations were offered during a whooping cough scare, and that there were thousands of cases and more than 70 deaths from the disease. However, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) stated in a Conservative press release on 3 March 2001:

> "It is therefore vital that we apply the conclusions drawn from the meningitis campaign to boost our MMR programme before unnecessary tragedies occur".

Many of the hon. Lady's colleagues do not seem to be unwilling to accept my proposition.

Mr. Wiggin: I was concerned by the hon. Gentleman's comment that coverage had already fallen. In my constituency in Herefordshire, there has been a 6 per cent. fall in coverage, from 93 to 87 per cent. We are debating not whether MMR is good or bad, but whether we can give people a choice. While coverage continues to fall, lives will be put at risk.

Dr. Harris: That is a fair point, and one that I can answer. The lessons of history advise us that to switch to something that the Government know to be less effective and possibly less safe—there is less evidence of its safety—would make levels fall further. That would expose more children. It would affect not only the children of parents who would currently give their children MMR, as they would lose faith and not vaccinate, but put at risk the babies of parents who still supported MMR but whose children were too young to be vaccinated.

I would not go so far as the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), who said that there was no free choice in public health. It is more reasonable to say that there are limits on choice in public health, and that we should strike a balance. Those on the Conservative Front Bench must explain how the Opposition can be the first in history to urge the Government not only to ignore all their medical and scientific advice, but to go against it. If the then Government had done so on BSE, we would be in an even worse situation than we are in relation to that disease.

12.8 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) on raising the subject, which is topical and heated, as she said. The strength of feeling is clear from the number of hon. Members present. She is well known for her personal interest in the subject, as a Back Bencher representing her constituents and as a mother of young children. I disagreed with some of her points, although I respected her for making many of them and agreed with many others. She is right to say that the key issue is one of public confidence, or rather lack of it, and specifically diminishing public confidence in the immunisation programme.

We are short of time today because the Government have not had a debate on MMR in their own time. If they are keen to reassure people, perhaps they should give up some of their own time rather than dealing with the matter at the fag-end of a debate initiated by a private Member.

The comments made by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) were, as usual, extraordinary. I am sure that the Government will be enormously relieved that the Liberals are supporting them on MMR, although, apparently, half the hon. Gentleman's party are not—but that is the usual situation. This is nothing to do with bandwagons. There has been more jumping on bandwagons in Liberal party circles than at the OK corral. It is a matter of public confidence and that is what we should be concerned with. We are all concerned with our children's health and we have a dual responsibility both as parents and as representatives of our constituents.

Let me repeat that the Conservative party remains absolutely confident that MMR is the safest form of vaccination available. It is not 100 per cent. safe—nothing is—but we think that it is the most effective way of vaccinating and protecting our children. However, we are not the ones who need convincing. People have lost confidence and in parts of London, in particular, the vaccination rates have fallen below 70 per cent.

I ask the Minister to give us the latest, up-to-date figures. She keeps telling us that the figure is only 84, 85 or 86 per cent. In a written answer to me yesterday she was unable to give the last quarter figures for 2001. The Government are basing their pronouncements on last September's figures, and a lot has happened since then.

I welcome the study performed by the Royal Free and University College medical school in London, with the Public Health Laboratory Service, which has been publicised by the *British Medical Journal*. The study followed 473 children with autism born between 1979 and 1998 and found that the proportion who showed decline in intellectual performance at the onset of autism was no higher after the introduction of MMR in 1988 than before. The study concluded:

> "These findings provide no support for an MMR associated "new variant" form of autism with developmental regression and bowel problems, and further evidence against involvement of MMR vaccine in the initiation of autism."

As hon. Members have said, the royal colleges, GP organisations and all the other major medical bodies have given their vote of confidence to MMR. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), in a very intelligent and useful contribution, mentioned the Finnish study, which started in 1982. Finland is the only country in the world to be documented as free of indigenous measles, mumps and rubella. The United States has been giving MMR vaccines since 1972 and before MMR was introduced in this country in 1988 some 30 different studies took place.

I welcome the extra £2.5 million going into autism research. I speak as vice-chairman of the all-party group on autism, of which the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) is chairman. He made some interesting comments about chemical markers that may affect the onset of autism before birth. However, we do not know for sure, and the public are increasingly sceptical about pronouncements from Ministers and from medical officers acting under instructions from Ministers. The vaccination rate has been falling and continues to fall.

This debate is about choice. The choice between MMR and no vaccine at all is not a choice. It is certainly not a choice that I recommend to any of my constituents, because measles is not a soft option—it is a killer. Getting rubella during pregnancy can lead to deafness, blindness and heart defects. We need more publicity about the deadly effects of catching those diseases, as well as mumps. The lack of confidence has been growing for months.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) thinks that the Conservatives, in cahoots with Lauren Booth, the sister-in-law of the Prime Minister, have cooked up the controversy, as if people had not lost confidence until the Conservatives and Lauren Booth started saying things. Coming from a Labour Member, the suggestion that the Conservatives are using Leo as a political football really takes the biscuit.

For all those reasons my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), the shadow Secretary of State for Health, took the right decision earlier this month in saying that, because of the alarming fall in vaccination rates, the Government should now make the choice of single jabs available to those parents who refused MMR for their children.

Ms Drown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: I do not have time to give way—I was very generous in giving way in a previous debate.

People have been losing confidence. We have all heard anecdotes. We have all been rung up by constituents who say that they are scared stiff about the prospect of MMR. One of my constituents—Mrs. Lewis from Worthing—was quoted in the local paper two weeks ago. She said:

> "I think parents should be given the choice".

Her older children were vaccinated 10 years ago. She went on to say:

> "At the time, we were just told the vaccines had been combined. As mums we thought it was great because we didn't have to put our kids through three injections. But there has been a lot of data since then."

She criticised the lack of information available to parents about MMR and the possible side effects, and went on to say:

> "There will be some parents who don't have their children vaccinated but the majority of parents—99.9 per cent. of parents—just want their kids immunised. That's the most important thing."

[Tim Loughton]

The bottom line is that, if the rate of vaccination falls across the country from the 95 per cent. required to 70 per cent., as it has in parts of London, that could leave 148,000 children without immunisation, out of a total of 591,000. That would have the makings of a grave epidemic. The loss of confidence is desperate. The Minister herself said a week ago in *The Guardian*:

> "The public no longer accepts Government reassurances about health risks."

She is dead right and she must take some of the blame for that. A poll conducted by ICM for *The Guardian* two weeks ago showed that 75 per cent. of people want the Government to provide free separate jabs. Only 73 per cent. of those with young children would choose MMR and 19 per cent. were so worried that they were prepared to pay for separate injections themselves. Only 20 per cent. said that they trust advice from politicians and officials "a lot". Some 47 per cent. trust such advice "a little" and 30 per cent. disregard it altogether. Unsurprisingly, only 6 per cent. trust "a lot" what journalists have to say, so the Government cannot pin all the blame on what people read in the papers.

A poll published in *The Telegraph* on 9 February said that four out of 10 parents with small children—this is contrary to the claims of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon—said that the Prime Minister's equivocation about his son's treatment had dented their confidence in MMR. What has been the Government's response? Apparently, they are going to launch an advertising campaign. We would like to see the evidence of its effectiveness, because Roger Hayward, the chairman of the Public Relations Standards Council, warned that such a campaign could backfire. He told the "Today" programme:

> "The public are very canny and they know that anyone who is advertising on an issue as significant as this is really admitting, 'I'm sorry, we can't convince the journalists, so we are going over their heads to try to reach you directly.'"

There are several important questions with which I hope the Minister will deal. People are choosing single jabs for their children and the Government are doing nothing about monitoring the effectiveness or the regulation of those jabs. One in 70 of the licences for vaccines being imported from France is for a single jab—a ten-fold increase on the previous year, according to the Medicines Control Agency. However, in a written answer to me yesterday the Government revealed that they have no idea how many people are having single jabs.

The Government need to do some research. Are they monitoring who is giving those jabs? A private clinic in Lincolnshire said that it received 10,000 calls a day inquiring about single jabs. Are the Government monitoring charges? We are now hearing stories of people paying anything from £240 to £560 for a set of three single jabs in different parts of the country. Such people are voting with their feet and paying out of their own pocket because they do not trust the advice that the Government have been giving. Are we monitoring those health authorities taking action against individual GPs who want to give single jabs?

I have also been told that the waiting time for single jabs is going up because of the lack of vaccines. Those are all questions that the Government cannot ignore, because many thousands of parents are opting for that course of action because, for them, MMR or nothing is not a choice. That is what the debate is about.

It was irresponsible of the chief medical officer to say that taking a single jab was like playing Russian roulette. That undermines enormously the confidence of those many thousands of parents who have taken the desperate action of getting single jabs for their children. The debate is not about the Prime Minister and the Government proving that they are right and that the wicked Tories are wrong. It is about treating the genuine fears of ordinary parents with respect and giving them a choice rather than no choice. Concerned parents have now been added to the ranks of "wreckers". However much the Minister may disagree with them, they have genuine fears and are exercising their power to opt out if they see fit. The Government urgently need to restore confidence; until they can take every step to increase coverage, they should offer choice.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) on securing this debate. MMR is an extremely important issue which affects the lives of our children even before they are born, and I know that she feels strongly about it. However, I deeply regret the climate in which the debate is taking place and the opportunism that has been shown by some Opposition Members in discussing something that is so important to our children's health.

In the limited time available, I want to deal as fully as possible with the serious issues that have been raised: the safety of MMR, the worth of separate vaccines and the question whether government policy should change.

Concern has been raised about whether MMR causes autism. As my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) has said, it is used in 90 countries. It is recommended not only by the Government, but by a series of independent bodies including the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of General Practitioners and many of their counterparts in other countries, as well as the World Health Organisation and independent bodies around the world. In this country, the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation have reviewed all the evidence concerning autism. The Medical Research Council has now reviewed MMR, bowel disease and autism three times. All the organisations that I have mentioned have stated their full support for the present policy and for the overwhelming conclusion that there is no link between MMR and autism.

In the United States, the American Academy of Paediatrics and the Institute of Medicine have also undertaken huge reviews of MMR and have come to the same conclusions. All the expert bodies have been very clear and their advice has been strong: plenty of evidence shows that there is no link between MMR and autism and we should continue with a programme offering MMR, not separate vaccines.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) gave examples of evidence. I should like to highlight further examples of the research that medical experts tell us is so important. For a start, a study of all children in the North Thames area found no impact on levels of autism when MMR was introduced. In 1988-89, most under-fives were vaccinated with the MMR jab. Before 1988 there was no MMR jab; after, it was almost universal. Was there a step increase in autism? No, there was not. No impact on the level of autism could be found, because it had been increasing before 1988, and it continued to do so after 1988. Other studies, both here and abroad, have found similar things.

In addition, there is evidence of regressive autism not having been affected by the introduction of MMR in 1988. Many individual cases have been studied. In 1998, the Committee on Safety of Medicines set up an independent group of experts to examine 110 cases, looking at reports from the families, the GPs, and the specialists looking after the children whose parents feared that their autism might have been brought on by MMR. The written records of nearly 40 per cent. of the children showed that health professionals had already had concerns about their development before they had MMR and nothing in those detailed investigations implicated the MMR vaccine.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove raised the issue of Dr. Wakefield's research and the recent research statements that he has made. Independent experts have serious doubts about the validity of Dr. Wakefield's methods and his results, as well as about the design of the study. For example, Dr. Bellini, head of the measles laboratory at the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta in the United States, said that there was

> "gross overstatement of the results and impossibility of interpretation of their findings."

None of the research by Dr. Wakefield implicates MMR. The latest study does not even mention whether the children studied had had an MMR jab, a single measles jab or any jab at all—or had had measles.

On Radio 5 earlier this month, Dr. Wakefield said that some of the children in his study had had the single vaccine and that the virus was present there. That is one of the key issues that the chief medical officer raised in his letter to Dr. Wakefield, in order to try to ensure that the statements made receive proper academic and public scrutiny. The evidence on MMR is clear. Experts advise us that there is plenty of research that finds no link between MMR and autism.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove is pushing the view that single jabs are somehow less risky and represent a precautionary approach. All parents want to do what is safest for their children; they want to take the fewest risks. There is no evidence that single jabs are less risky or less likely to cause autism or anything else. Parents have been misled.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): If a parent decides, however irrationally, not to give his child the MMR vaccine, would the Minister recommend that that parent arrange for the child to have three vaccinations or for it to have none at all, leaving the child unprotected?

Yvette Cooper: The clear recommendation of all medical experts in the field is that parents should arrange for the MMR jab. Parents are being misled by statements like that made by the hon. Member for Bromsgrove, about the protection afforded by single jabs, and are led to believe that the single jabs are somehow less risky. That has arisen due to the hon. Lady's confusion over technicalities, which I shall be happy to write to her about. However, she is wrong and is misleading parents as a result. There is extensive evidence about the problems and the risks that would be posed by introducing single vaccines on the NHS.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Yvette Cooper: No, I do not have time. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) clearly stated the problems involved in introducing six separate vaccines. Recent research in Chester has suggested that two thirds of children currently going for separate jabs do not complete their courses. The advice that we have received is clear: coverage would fall if we introduced separate jabs, not only because people would be less likely to complete the course but because children would be unprotected between injections—Dr. Wakefield recommended having a year between them—and because of the impact on confidence of introducing separate jabs.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon mentioned the impact of introducing separate jabs for whooping cough in response to similar anxieties. That led to substantially lower coverage and lower coverage of all other vaccines also. In that case, many thousands were admitted to hospital and around 100 died. The clear conclusion from the medical experts is that introducing separate jabs would make things worse. It would lead to lower coverage than at present, not higher, and would leave many more children exposed to deadly diseases. That would mean more cases of measles and of mumps, more pregnant women exposed to rubella and, ultimately, more children dying as a result.

I do not see how any Government could responsibly listen to all that medical advice—knowing that if we introduced separate jabs we would put the health and lives of more children at risk—and choose to ignore it because it was politically easy to do. Of course it is politically the easy thing to do, but it is morally the wrong thing to do. The advice to us is clear. I do not see how we could look those parents in the face, either. Parents are deeply concerned because they want to do the right thing for their children. Opposition Members are asking us to implement a policy that would put children across the country at risk. What do they say to the royal colleges, to the nation's top children's doctors, to all the medical experts who have told us that that would put the lives of more children at risk? It would be deeply irresponsible to do so. Those on the official Opposition Front Bench hide behind all kinds of weasel words, saying that they have only just called for single jabs and that that is only because the levels of coverage are falling.

[Yvette Cooper]

Last year, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said that his party would introduce separate jabs if coverage did not rise. At the time, a parent said, "Well, I saw that Conservative on telly saying that we should have single jabs. He's a doctor; he should know." Yes, he should know. He should know better and he should listen to the medical experts and medical bodies that are advising us that to do that would put children's lives at risk. Parents want information. They have a right to information and they want their questions answered. We must find more ways to give them answers to their questions. We do not want to put their children's lives at risk.

Redundancies (Receivership)

12.30 pm

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): Judging by the number of hon. Members who were in the Chamber, I thought that there had been a sudden outbreak of interest in the position of workers who are sacked by companies in receivership. I am sorry to see Opposition Members leaving the debate.

The Government committed themselves in their 1997 manifesto to significant measures to ensure fair treatment at work. I am delighted that, since then, those aspirations have become legislation on the minimum wage, the rights of trade union recognition and more rights for part-time workers. Those measures are an important down payment on our vision of economic renewal that is based on partnership at work.

By contrast, today's debate focuses on a group of workers for whom the burden of insecurity and risk remains unfair. I am talking about employees who are sacked by companies in receivership. I want to stand up—as do my hon. Friends—for that group of workers, draw out the Government's thinking on such an important matter and find out how such an injustice can be remedied. For reasons that I shall explain, 350 sacked workers in south Tyneside have a particular interest in the debate. They are looking to the Government for help. Their cause is just and I look forward to the Minister's comments.

In September last year, 1,150 people producing printed circuit boards for a parent company called ViaSystems Ltd., based in the United States, were told that the company that employed them had gone into receivership. A second plant located north of the river Tyne was closed. The announcement raised a host of difficult issues, not least those concerning the good faith of the parent company and its use of public funds. But that is not my main interest today. The debate is about the human misery that arises from a loophole in the law as it affects sacked workers.

For 11 weeks after the receivership was announced, there followed a tense—not to say hair-raising—period of intensive activity to save the South Shields plant. I am delighted that the management buyout team was given outstanding support by public bodies in the region and, ultimately, by Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry. The employees are highly skilled and the plant had been the subject of enormous investment, which made a new start possible. In early December, I was privileged to help launch a new company, Circatex, with the chief executive, Charles Brooks. We are hopeful that it will become Europe's leading PCB manufacturer.

However, we learn that with every silver lining comes a cloud. Within days of the announcement of the receivership in September, 350 workers had been sacked. They included people such as Selby Armstrong, a chemist with 33 years' service at the plant; Susan Feasey, a production worker with 21 years' service; Marjorie Joseph, a printer with 26 years' service, and Val Smith, a supervisor with 33 years' service. Although the launch of Circatex saved 800 jobs, I am sorry that it could not get their jobs back for them.

I do not need to explain to the Minister what it means to people to lose their jobs in an area of high unemployment. They were committed workers with precious manufacturing jobs, who had years of service and genuine skills. Expert and active support from the Employment Service has ensured that about 120 of the sacked workers have now found alternative employment, but for all the workers concerned, the original redundancy announcements were only the beginning of a longer nightmare. Most importantly, key rights—above all, to redundancy pay—lost the vast bulk of their worth.

The legal position for workers in companies that go into receivership is complex. I shall outline it briefly. Payments owed under employees' contracts are treated as unsecured claims. The Insolvency Act 1986 gives employees some preference in the restoration of those claims for back pay up to £800 and for holiday pay, but redundancy pay has never been given that degree of preference, so many employees are left with redundancy entitlements that are not worth the paper on which they are written.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I wish to bring to my hon. Friend's attention an example from my constituency that supports his argument. I refer to Zephyr Cams, a company in Lowestoft. Its 100 employees knew from the accounts department that any income that the company received was transferred immediately from it. They watched while bailiffs removed machines from its factory to pay off debts. When the company eventually went into receivership, the employees were owed wages and redundancy payments. To their horror, they found that the American owner of the company, Mr. Kenny Joseph, had taken the same action with companies in Weston-super-Mare and has now transferred the assets of Zephyr Cams to a company up the road.

Mr. Miliband: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that example to my attention. I do not know the details of the case to which he referred, but it seems that sacked workers in his constituency have been left with worthless redundancy and contractual entitlements.

The Redundancy Payments Act 1965 tried to plug the gap. Under the Act, the Government offer a safety net for employees. In respect of a maximum of 20 years' service, ex-employees are now entitled to a maximum of £240 for each year worked between the ages of 22 and 40, and £360 for each year worked between 41 and 64. The maximum statutory redundancy payment is £7,200. Thanks to the Employment Relations Act 1999, that figure is uprated annually in line with inflation.

However, the tattered nature of that safety net becomes evident when we consider the contracts that the ex-employees at ViaSystems had signed. The contracts of the most experienced workers, which dated back to when the site was owned by Plessey, guaranteed them four weeks' pay for each year worked. So, instead of my constituents receiving £7,200 from the Government, they should have been entitled to much more. According to his contract, Mr. Armstrong was entitled to £46,000 in redundancy pay, but he received £7,200. Susan Feasey could have expected £25,000, but received £6,500. Marjorie Joseph has lost out to the tune of £32,000 and Val Smith has lost £51,000. That toll of misery goes way beyond the trauma of life without work. It puts at risk a life's work.

I know of a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) who, according to his contract, should have received £170,000 in redundancy pay for a career of service. He received £7,200 instead.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) on securing this important debate. It is noticeable that the Tories and Liberal Democrats are not present and I hope that that fact is remembered. I pay my hon. Friend specific tribute for saving hundreds of jobs by launching the firm that has taken over ViaSystems. He should be praised for his great work. I am sure that he agrees that we should applaud the attitude of the work force he represents. They have endured injustice, but they bear no animosity. We have a Government who listen. We have seen that happen in cases that involved miners and in asbestosis cases. My hon. Friend will agree that the Government must listen to the redundant workers.

Mr. Miliband: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. By any standards, what has happened in south Tyneside—an area that covers both our constituencies—is worse than rough justice. Our constituents feel let down by the system. They feel battered through no fault of their own. They have paid into the national insurance fund, but then found that the insurance policy had holes in it. Now they want reform.

We must discuss two aspects of reform: first, the legal position and, secondly, the safety net. The Government recognised some of the legal dilemmas in their White Paper on insolvency entitled "Productivity and Enterprise—Insolvency: A Second Chance", which was published last year. It highlighted the sole accountability of the administrative receiver to its appointer and the desirability of creating a system under which all creditors have a duty owed to them. The White Paper also signalled a willingness to follow Germany and Austria in abolishing Crown preference—to the benefit of unsecured creditors.

However, the White Paper did not consider workers who expected redundancy pay. I hope that the Minister will set out today the Government's thinking on how to treat redundancy pay in the future. Why should it not have the same preferential status as back pay? It is anomalous that employees' rights to redundancy pay are stuck at the back of the queue while holiday entitlements are paid. It is a matter of fairness in the division of spoils from failed companies. I do not envisage public spending implications, and I believe that justice should prevail.

A second aspect goes beyond the legal position. It relates to the operation of the Government redundancy scheme. The latest Library figures, which relate to 1999, suggest a net outlay of some £150 million on the scheme—£170 million paid out, and £20 million received in return. However, if the original maximum compensation of £40, introduced by the 1965 Act, had been uprated in line with inflation since 1965, it would today be worth not £200 or £300 but £460, almost doubling the £7,200 maximum to which former employees are now entitled.

[Mr. Miliband]

Similarly, the Government payment was designed originally to equate to a weekly wage but no longer does. The average weekly wage today is slightly more than £400. The Minister may correct me, but I believe that it is about £409—much higher than the £240 currently paid.

In addition to considering increasing what is effectively a flat-rate benefit, we should consider alternative methods of proceeding, such as relating statutory redundancy pay to contractual entitlement and/or length of service. I should like the Government to consider the feasibility of a graduated scheme. Statutory redundancy pay could be linked to contractual entitlement. The fundamental unfairness of the ViaSystems case relates to the gap between expected payments under contract and actual payments under the statutory scheme. It is simply not right that someone with a contractual entitlement to £50,000 receives the same as someone with an entitlement to £10,000. The latter receives 70 per cent. of their contractual entitlement; the former not even 15 per cent. Reform is, therefore, essential.

Entitlement under the statutory scheme could be specified as a percentage of the contractual entitlement, or the state minimum, whichever is higher. That would at least mitigate the catastrophic loss that redundancy currently represents. If it were set at, for example, 50 per cent. of entitlement, my constituents would take a hit from their redundancy, but they would not lose everything, as happens at the moment.

My second idea complements the suggestion that payments should be related to expected entitlement. Redundancy pay should be linked more closely to length of service. The current approach of paying more for years served by older workers is a nod in that direction, but in other countries and parts of the private sector, it is a clear principle that long service should be rewarded. A statutory formula based on length of service is used in Austria, Portugal and Spain; in France, the Netherlands and Germany, social compacts agree payment, and length of service comes into play. The Library reports that, in the private sector, companies as diverse as Lloyds TSB, Johnson Wax and Matushita (UK) relate redundancy payments to length of service. Ideally, those two elements of graduation—relating payments to entitlement and to length of service—could be combined. For example, those with 20 years' service could be guaranteed 50 per cent. of their contractual entitlement; those with 10 years' service 30 per cent., and so on.

Obviously, those ideas need work. I do not expect the Minister to announce today that he has turned Government policy on its head. However, I am hoping for a commitment from the Government to consider the principles underlying a revised scheme, to accept that more work is needed on the subject and a willingness to work with all interested parties for reform. The matter may not be front-page news and may not affect the majority of people. However, I believe that British people have a strong sense of fair play. The scheme currently goes against fair play and should, therefore, be reviewed and reformed.

The tragedy in my constituents' case is that a change in the law would not help them. Former ViaSystems workers realise that it would not change the position. However, they believe that others should be protected in future, and that is why they came to London to present a petition to the Prime Minister two weeks ago.

The pain of redundancy is harsh enough. It should not be combined with the theft of livelihood. It is time for a change, and I look forward to the Minister's reply.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) on securing a debate on this important subject and for his efforts in pursuing the interests of his constituents who were formerly employed by ViaSystems Tyneside Ltd. I add my voice to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields on his vital role in securing the management buyout of the south Tyneside plant by Circatex Ltd., which meant the continued employment of hundreds of his constituents. For that he deserves the highest praise.

It is always regrettable when employees lose their jobs through no fault of their own, such as through an employer's insolvency. However, such circumstances are commercial matters for the parties involved and are not open to direct Government intervention. Our role is to provide help and support for business when appropriate and to ensure that employees have a framework of minimum safeguards through employment rights legislation.

The DTI has in place a toolkit to help employees of companies that are in difficulty and close. When redundancies are inevitable, we do everything possible to help people find new jobs and, if necessary, acquire new skills. The job transition service can provide an intensive and personalised response to large-scale redundancies and work with local partners, and has a good record of finding new employment for people affected by major job losses.

We actively support manufacturing jobs in the region and the creation of strong regional economies. We pledged £1.2 billion, which will rise to £1.7 billion, to regional development agencies to support innovation and enterprise, and in raising the game in every region RDAs are working in partnership with the public and private sectors, businesses, universities and local authorities.

To summarise employees' statutory entitlements on the insolvency of their employer, the Employment Rights Act 1996, which consolidates earlier legislation and implements the European Union insolvency protection directive, allows for certain debts owed to former employees of an insolvent employer to be met up to statutory limits by the Secretary of State from the national insurance fund. Such debts include not only statutory redundancy payments but arrears of pay, holiday pay, compensatory notice pay and basic awards of compensation for unfair dismissal. Claims for such payments are processed on the Secretary of State's behalf by the DTI's redundancy payments service. I understand that claims received from former employees of ViaSystems Tyneside Ltd. have been processed and paid by the redundancy payments service under those provisions.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): Matters are often not as clear as the Minister describes. I have some experience, with a knitwear company in my constituency that went into liquidation some 15 months ago. The employees are still awaiting redundancy payments, as the DTI declared, I suspect rightly, that the company re-started five days after the doors closed and was operating again. That is an issue. A safety net is provided, but the matter is never as straightforward as is sometimes portrayed.

Nigel Griffiths: Indeed. My hon. Friend fought hard to raise the issue at the time on behalf of his constituents, for which they were especially grateful.

When the Secretary of State makes payments on an insolvent employer's behalf, she becomes a creditor in the insolvency proceedings in the employees' stead, and the national insurance fund can thus recoup a portion of money paid out. The portion recouped obviously depends on factors such as the value of assets remaining in the insolvent business, the level and type of debts owed to other creditors, and the respective preferences accorded to those debts under insolvency legislation.

Although my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields did not mention it in his speech, I am aware that some comment has been made about the sale of part of the ViaSystems parent company to a new owner registered in the Cayman Islands in 2000. It may be helpful if I explain that that has no bearing on the former employees' entitlements. Their contracts of employment were with the ViaSystems subsidiary in Tyneside not the parent company. In any event, provided that former employees of an insolvent company worked in Britain, it makes no difference to their insolvency payments whether the company has a Britain-based or overseas owner.

Hon. Members may like to know that a proposal to revise [illegible] European Union insolvency protection directive is currently under negotiation in Brussels. It is designed to take account of changes in insolvency practice and law that have taken place in member states since the original directive was adopted in 1980, and other factors, such as the dynamism of the internal market and the need for consistency with other Community directives on labour law.

The Government support the Commission's proposals in principle and expect the revised directive to be adopted later this year. That will afford us an opportunity to update our domestic implementing provisions and ensure that they are operating as effectively as possible. We will, of course, carry out full public consultation before making any changes to legislation and I am sure that hon. Friends who take an interest in the issue will want to make their views known at that stage.

On employees' rights on redundancy, in cases in which employers propose to make collective redundancies—20 or more at one establishment within a 90-day period—they are required to inform and consult the affected employees through representatives and notify my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Those requirements are contained in the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, which implements the EU collective redundancies directive and applies to insolvent employers exactly as it does to solvent employers.

The main thrust of the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields concerned redundancy rights of employees, especially the amount of statutory redundancy payment for which they may qualify and which he considers inadequate. Unlike insolvency payments, statutory redundancy payments are not currently covered by European law, nor has any formal proposal yet been made that they should be. The entitlement of employees working in various member states is therefore determined by the law and practice of the country in which they work.

The purpose of the United Kingdom's statutory redundancy payments scheme is, as my hon. Friend suggested, to provide a minimum safety net for compensation for redundant employees for the loss of expected continued employment. It leaves employers and employees or their representatives free to negotiate more favourable severance terms on a contractual basis according to their priorities, needs and circumstances and what the business can afford. In many cases, that is what they do, and the Government welcome that.

My hon. Friend suggested that the amount of redundancy payment payable from the national insurance fund to former employees of an insolvent employer ought to be linked to their contractual entitlement rather than limited to the statutory redundancy payment amount. We do not agree. It would significantly increase the costs falling on the national insurance fund and, ultimately, on the taxpayer. Moreover, it would benefit the relatively well off, with generous terms and conditions, and do nothing for those on lower contractual entitlements.

My hon. Friend suggested that the calculation of statutory redundancy payments ought to take more account of length of service. However, length of service is already an important factor in the calculation. I will explain the formula used in the calculation, which may illustrate the point. The amount of the lump sum statutory redundancy payment depends on three things: how long the employee has been continuously employed by the employer; how the employee's years of continuous service relate to a particular age band; and the rate of weekly pay at the time of dismissal, up to a weekly limit.

For each complete year of continuous service between the ages of 18 and 21, former employees receive half a week's pay. For each complete year of continuous service between the ages of 22 and 40, employees receive one week's pay, and for each complete year of continuous service between the ages of 41 and 65, they receive one and a half weeks' pay. Over the age of 64, the amount is halved and is extinguished at the age of 65—the underlying aim of the scheme is to compensate for the loss of expected continuous employment and, as retirement age is reached, that expectation diminishes.

The maximum number of years' continuous service that can be counted for statutory redundancy payments is 20. The length of continuous service is counted backwards from the relevant date—generally that on which the notice of dismissal given to the employee ends.

[Nigel Griffiths]

If the employer gives less than the legal minimum notice, the extra notice that should have been given is added. If the employee is entitled to a longer period of notice under the contract of employment, and the employee received the notice but did not work it, the date up to which continuous service is counted may be later still. Certain absences such as sickness, pregnancy or temporary shortage of work can count toward continuous service even if the contract of employment is suspended during that absence.

I hope that hon. Members will agree that length of service is already accorded a great deal of importance in the calculation of statutory redundancy payments. It may also be helpful to mention the statutory limit on a week's pay used for such purposes. As my hon. Friend said, section 34 of the Employment Relations Act 1999 abolished the previous requirement to conduct an annual review of award limits and established a revised mechanism for annual changes in award limits in line with retail prices. The Secretary of State is required to change the limits accordingly by order.

To bring hon. Members up to date, the most recent uprating took place this month, when the limit on a week's pay was raised from the £240 mentioned by my hon. Friend to £250. The Government consider that the mechanism put in place in 1999 constitutes a suitable and effective means of ensuring that the limit on a week's pay remains fair and appropriate. I take my hon. Friend's point that in earlier years the levels of the limits may have been eroded in real terms, but I take no responsibility for the decisions of previous Administrations.

My hon. Friend mentioned the White Paper on insolvency, which will be followed up in our enterprise Bill. The White Paper afforded us the opportunity to undertake a wide-ranging review of corporate and personal insolvency issues. As my hon. Friend suggested, important proposals were put forward, including the abolition of Crown preference, which would leave more assets remaining in an insolvent company for distribution to other creditors, including any employees owed money.

We have it in mind to introduce a ring-fence mechanism to ensure that the benefits of abolishing Crown preference flow to unsecured creditors. That will benefit people after payments have been made to preferential creditors and for administration costs. A proportion of the money available for distribution will be ring-fenced for unsecured creditors, and employees may benefit in that capacity for the part of the debt that is not preferential.

I note my hon. Friend's suggestion that redundancy payments should be accorded the same preference as debts such as pay arrears. Although not specifically mentioned in the White Paper, I can confirm that we are giving further thought to that point. However, the preferences set out in the insolvency legislation were carefully considered when they were originally introduced and the need to examine them in the round rather than in a piecemeal way must influence the way in which we approach the issue.

I hope that I have answered my hon. Friend's key questions. I have every sympathy for former employees of ViaSystems Tyneside Ltd.—especially those who have yet to find alternative work—and for redundant employees of the other businesses. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising an important issue. I repeat that thanks are due to him for his sterling efforts to secure employment for those made redundant who are now re-employed. I commend that model to all hon. Members who might be confronted with similar circumstances with regard to companies in their constituencies that face the terrible plight of insolvency. The work of the regional development agencies, and the other mechanisms that the Department of Trade and Industry has established, place us in the forefront of the drive to ensure that employees who lose their jobs have the chance to secure comparable employment and to learn the new skills that they require. I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important matter.

RAF Lyneham

1 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I have not secured the debate to seek to discover the outcome of the study that the Ministry of Defence is undertaking, or to hasten its publication. The Department's officials hope to submit the study to their Ministers by 18 April, and the Ministers hope to produce an outcome based on that report by the summer. That timeframe is acceptable to those of us who live near RAF Lyneham and who seek ways of ensuring that the base remains open, and as profitable and active as it is at the moment.

The purpose of the debate is not to hasten the outcome of the study, but to have some input into it. Wiltshire county council, North Wiltshire district council, and local parish councils such as Calne, Lyneham and Wootton Bassett, are keen to play an active part in consultations during the preparation of the report rather than after its publication.

With regard to that matter, I take great encouragement from a written reply that I recently received from the Minister. I asked what discussions the Ministry of Defence has with other Departments when it considers the closure, partial sale or relocation of a military base. He answered:

> "Officials are fully aware of the impact of such changes on local communities and it is the MOD's policy to initiate an early and close dialogue with the local authorities and the regional government offices concerned." —[*Official Report*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 175 W.]

So far, that does not seem to have been the case with regard to Wiltshire county council and North Wiltshire district council. A recent meeting that they held at RAF Strike Command led them to form the impression that they would be consulted only after the report had been produced, merely about the effects and consequences of its recommendations.

I wish the Minister to take the opportunity to re-confirm that he will make active use of the expertise of Wiltshire county council and North Wiltshire district council—and of myself—during the remainder of the period for preparing the report, although I accept that that cannot be done with regard to strategic and secret matters. If the Minister states that that will be the case, I will pass on that glad news to my colleagues in Wiltshire.

With the intention of informing the report, an ad hoc committee in my constituency—whose members include several retired RAF officers and representatives of all the local authorities—has composed a detailed and technical report in the past few months. I handed a copy of it to the Minister before the debate. We hope that he will take it fully into consideration when he reaches conclusions on the Department's report.

The ad hoc committee's report sets out the severe economic effects that the closure of RAF Lyneham would have on my constituency; it would do, wouldn't it? There are 2,500 RAF personnel at the base, and 750 civilian employees. Assuming that most of those people have families, it is fair to estimate that about 10,000 people in my constituency owe their livelihoods directly to the RAF—and we must also remember the schools, shops, entertainments, churches and other services and organisations that cater for them.

Wiltshire county council's economic appraisal study, which is appendix 1 to the report, concludes that the local economy would lose about £75 million per annum if the base were closed. I acknowledge that, if the Hercules fleet were withdrawn, something else of greater economic benefit might replace it. However, one merely needs to glance at similar places where a large military base has closed to see that it might take several years of extreme economic hardship before the area recovers. Corsham in my constituency is a good example of that. After the Army pulled out, it suffered great social deprivation and hardship for approximately 10 years. The economy of the town is now picking up again, partly because the Defence Communications Services Agency is based there. Nobody—including the Minister's hon. Friends who represent the town of Swindon—would want the Corsham experience to be repeated around Lyneham.

We appreciate that, although the Minister wishes to take such economic consequences into account in coming to his conclusions, his role is to address the strategic issues involved in deciding where the plane should be based. The report that I handed to him this morning attempts to do that. There is no point in us simply saying, "If you close our base, it will cost us thousands of jobs," because the response would be, "Well, you would say that, wouldn't you?" Therefore, our report seeks to make a useful and dispassionate contribution to the strategic considerations of the debate.

There are several important strategic issues that the Minister should take into account. He is aware that the airmen and airwomen of RAF Lyneham play an outstanding and crucial role in the defence of the nation. The modern, manoeuvrist expeditionary type of warfare, which was highlighted in the strategic defence review, would not be possible without the unsung heroes of our military transport fleet. They are involved in conflict of every kind, and they pride themselves on being the first in and the last out. We salute them.

We are proud of the eight Hercules planes that are serving in Afghanistan, and I hope that the Minister will ensure that they always have the best possible equipment for such deployments. I am also proud that the first Lyneham airman was recently awarded the DSE for his outstanding heroism.

The new plane—the C130J—is settling in extremely well. Recently, I tried out its simulator. My constituents, including those who live directly under the flight path, are proud of the contribution that they make to the defence of the realm. Every air base is subjected to criticism from a few local people about aircraft noise, but most of my constituents would say, "We are used to the Hercules planes, we are comfortable with the noise that they make, and we are proud that our area is able to make that contribution to the defence of the realm." Remarkably little fuss is made about aircraft noise in the area—even in the village of Bradenstoke, which is directly under the flight path.

Local people would welcome it if the A400M fleet were housed at Lyneham—although that would depend on the German Government being able to sort out the current difficulties about its procurement. We hope that, by the deadline of 31 March, we will hear that we are to buy it—and that the 8,000 or so jobs in the west country that depend upon that are secured.

[Mr. James Gray]

If Lyneham were to get the A400M—or whatever might replace it—we would welcome that. We have had detailed consultations with its manufacturers, and other oganisations, and we believe that RAF Lyneham is ideally suited to accommodate the A400M.

Recently, there have been strange briefings that the runways at Lyneham are 10 m or 20 m too short for the A400M. Airbus has assured me that, not only is the main runway entirely suitable for all take-offs and landings under all conditions irrespective of how heavily the plane might be laden, but, crucially, that the second runway at Lyneham is equally strategically usable for the A400M under all circumstances. Lyneham has two runways from which the planes can take off and land, but Brize Norton has only one. Hangar space, married and single accommodation, and other aspects of the infrastructure at Lyneham are also suitable to accommodate the A400M fleet, although they could do with upgrading.

Another strategic consideration is that it would be foolish to locate all our air transport assets at one base. That would present a marvellous target to an enemy state, or to terrorists—about whom we are currently very concerned. If we house all our strategic tanker aircraft, the A400Ms, and the Hercules fleet at Brize Norton, it would become an extraordinarily attractive target. From that point of view, and that of interchangeability with regard to weather conditions, it is sensible to have two transport air bases rather than one.

We are concerned about the environmental impact that would result if Lyneham closed and the planes went to Brize Norton. In recent written answers, the Minister has acknowledged that there is no spare accommodation for either single or married people at Brize Norton. Many Brize Norton airmen are not housed in RAF accommodation. That also applies at Lyneham, where many RAF staff are housed in local private accommodation.

If Lyneham were to close and roughly 10,000 people were redeployed to Brize Norton the effect would be something like a new town being built, presumably on greenfield sites around Brize Norton. I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), who is the Member of Parliament for the area, would not be happy with that proposal. There would also be a marked increase in road traffic in the narrow lanes around Brize. Road and rail communications to Lyneham are by comparison very good; it is near not only railways but the M4. There would also be a huge increase in aircraft noise around Brize, and aircraft movements would more than double. Currently there are about 33,000 air movements a year from Brize, and about 36,000 from Lyneham. That would make a total of 69,000 air movements a year—230 take-offs and landings a day—from Brize Norton. I am certain that the inhabitants of the area would not be happy about that.

On the financial attractions, the only reason for making such a closure—I do not say that it will take place—is for the Treasury to gain financial benefits from it. The operational savings implied in concentrating two bases in one would be relatively marginal and would certainly be offset by the huge capital cost of the move. Building the 2,000 or 3,000 houses needed would cost an enormous amount of money, and it would cost a fortune to move Lyneham's five air simulators. The Army might try to take over the redundant RAF base, in which case there would be no capital gain for the Treasury anyway. There would be huge daily costs for the RAF but no gain. We believe that the financial benefits to the Treasury are largely illusory, or at least extremely marginal. The economic and social impact on my constituency would be huge.

We are as dispassionate as we can be in our report, but we believe that there are powerful strategic and environmental reasons for opposing an amalgamation of our transport fleet and the closure of RAF Lyneham. Of course, I do not expect the Minister to give us any assurances today. It would be wrong for him to do so. I am sure that he will be careful in his response and tell us that he is looking into the matter and that it is extremely interesting. That is as it should be; I do not want to force him into a premature announcement.

I hope that the Minister will reflect on our report—a detailed, careful work in which we have tried to avoid special pleading on behalf of RAF Lyneham. It is intended to be a balanced consideration of all the issues that he will have to think about in the next month or two. I hope that he will consider all my points, and take action to ensure that local people, the local councils and I are fully involved in that consideration.

We do not pretend that we do not want the Minister to conclude that the A400M should be based at RAF Lyneham. If he does not come to that conclusion, we hope that he will at the very least decide that the remaining C130J fleet should continue to be based there. We want him to agree that there is strategic importance in having two tactical transport air bases, and that having one would be a huge strategic error. We hope that he will listen to what local people have to say in the report, and that when he considers the matter in the next month or two, he will conclude that, setting aside the economic consequences for my constituency if the base were to close, there are overwhelmingly important strategic reasons for keeping both bases open and basing the A400M at Lyneham. We accept that the strategic tanker aircraft will be based at Brize. We hope that he will decide that the nation should have two transport air bases. By that means, it can avoid setting an obvious target for enemies of the state, including terrorists.

1.14 pm

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on securing a debate on a matter that is of considerable importance to the community around Lyneham. I welcome the opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the station and to set out in more detail the background to, and the way forward on, the strategic review on the future use of three airfields, RAF Lyneham, RAF Brize Norton and RAF St. Mawgan.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments about RAF Lyneham's current role and join him in paying tribute to the station. RAF Lyneham has a long and illustrious history and was established in May 1940. There is little doubt that the units at RAF Lyneham make a considerable contribution today. It is currently home to the entire RAF Hercules force, which presently comprises five squadrons, 54 aircraft and approximately 2,500 service and 760 civilian personnel. Lyneham is also the base of the Hercules reserve aircrew, No. 47 Air Despatch Squadron of the Royal Logistic Corps, the United Kingdom Mobile Air Movements Squadron, No. 4626 Aeromedical Evacuation Royal Auxiliary Squadron, and the tactical medical wing, which provides primary medical and dental care to deployed RAF units.

My colleagues and I are aware of the contribution that the station makes to the defence of the country. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence visited Lyneham last month to meet the personnel who work there. He was impressed by all that he saw. I know that the station is held in high regard by the local community and, in turn, greatly appreciates the support that it receives in the area. However, life moves on, and if we are to deliver the best defence available within our resources we must constantly review and revalidate our assumptions and change when necessary to reflect new situations. The strategic review on the future roles of RAF stations Lyneham, Brize Norton and St. Mawgan, which I announced on 9 November, is one strand of that approach.

The RAF is undergoing its most comprehensive aircraft re-equipment programme for decades. Some 25 Hercules C130J aircraft have been introduced at RAF Lyneham in recent years, and in the next 10 years the future strategic tanker aircraft, the Nimrod MRA4, the Eurofighter Typhoon, airborne stand-off radar—ASTOR—and the A400M, which has already been mentioned, will be introduced into service.

As I announced at the time, the strategic review is driven by the anticipated arrival of new aircraft for the air-to-air refuelling and air transport fleets. At the end of the decade, the VC10 and TriStar based at Brize Norton are due to be replaced by the future strategic tanker aircraft private finance initiative service. The Hercules C130K based at RAF Lyneham and the C17, also based at Brize Norton, are due to be replaced by the A400M. In both cases, the introduction of the new aircraft will result in smaller but more capable fleets, and modern best practice maintenance arrangements mean that fewer ground crew will be required. It makes sense for us to review our present arrangements, given that changing profile. St. Mawgan has been included in the review because it has spare capacity and it is appropriate for us to consider that at the same time.

Let me lay a couple of ghosts to rest. Contrary to what some people may claim, the review is not a Treasury-driven cost-cutting exercise, although I appreciate that that was not the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument; nor are we seeking to identify the most expensive base to close it down. We are ensuring that the basing arrangements for the arrival of the new aircraft make the best and most cost-effective use of available resources. The House would expect no less and all colleagues who have an interest in the delivery of the defence of the realm will recognise that that is the way forward. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman acknowledged the need for that approach.

As I said in November, the strategic review will take into account the decision that I announced earlier this month to base a future strategic tanker aircraft at RAF Brize Norton. To put that in context, both bidders for the prospective private finance initiative programme proposed the continued use of RAF Brize Norton as a main operating base for the FSTA. On this occasion, my Department accepts the industry's best commercial judgment. Brize Norton has the appropriate facilities including, uniquely, a fuel hydrant system, which is essential to run an efficient air-to-air refuelling operation, and the appropriate expertise in the field.

The strategic review has a long way to go before any final decisions are reached, probably early in the summer. In that context, it would be helpful if I set out the review's terms of reference, so that they are well understood. The review is being carried out by RAF Strike Command, which is looking at the optimum basing solution for the A400M aircraft and for the Hercules C130J that will remain in service alongside the new transport aircraft. It will examine the provision of collective training for deployed operations currently based at RAF St. Mawgan and the benefits of wider commercialisation at all three stations. It will also look at the best location to base the search and rescue force headquarters, currently sited at RAF St. Mawgan. Finally, following from that work, the review will make a recommendation on whether there is a continuing need for all three stations. I state categorically that it does not follow that RAF Lyneham's future is in doubt just because a decision has been taken to base the future strategic tanker aircraft at Brize Norton.

The review is divided into two phases. The first phase involves collecting information on the current tasks undertaken at each station and their associated costs; establishing the irreducible or other spare capacity that might exist; looking at the current planned future use for each base; identifying the potential commercial interest in each site and establishing the optimum base for the A400M.

Phase two comprises the analysis of the data gathered in phase one, taking into account the decision taken to base the future strategic tanker aircraft at RAF Brize Norton and whatever recommendation the review may reach on the basing of the A400M aircraft. Phase two will seek to identify the most cost-effective basing solution for the Hercules C130J fleet, the benefits of wider commercialisation at each station and the future roles of each unit. The study began on 15 November 2001. I hope that phase one will be completed within the next few weeks, with the final report due in early summer.

To inform the review, full economic and investment appraisals are being undertaken. They will identify the economic situation around the unit, assess, as closely as possible, the amount of income the unit provides to the local economy and, in the case of the investment appraisal, look at the current and probable future costs of the options available. Before the debate, the hon. Gentleman passed me a copy of a detailed report published by local interests, for which I am grateful, as the analysis will help the assessment that is being undertaken.

The three options before the review apply equally to any of the three stations, the first being to maximise the military use of the station. If a station is adjudged to have, or to be likely to have, spare capacity, it would involve the relocation of units from other bases with the possible disposal of all or part of another site. However,

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

there is always a case for keeping a judicious amount of spare capacity available somewhere in the defence estate to provide flexibility for contingency operations.

The second option is commercial exploitation. The irreducible spare capacity, essentially the spare capacity to which I referred, can be marketed either by direct contacts with organisations or through a strategic partnership. The aim would be to maximise revenue to the benefit of the public purse while retaining primacy over the airfield, so that civil activity could be suspended to allow full military use if necessary. The third option, which is very much last on the list, is disposal of all parts of a site. Such a move would follow only a full review of the options for the site, including the possibility of use by another service.

I know that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that what I have outlined represents a substantial piece of work. He is right to say that it would be wrong to expect me to give him an answer today; this is not the forum in which that is normally done. It would also be wrong of me to prejudge conclusions on the basis of our short examination of the subject today. However, I want to make it clear that we are a long way from making a decision to close a station. A decision has not yet been taken on where the A400M will be based, but even if that were not RAF Lyneham, it would not automatically follow that Lyneham would close. As I outlined, many other factors would have to come into play before such a conclusion was reached.

Understandably, there has been much public interest in the study that we are undertaking. The report reflects that. That is why the Department is committed to engage stakeholders in the review, including local authorities, civilian and military station personnel, and the trade unions that represent civilian personnel at a station. That consultation is well under way. In the past fortnight, personnel from RAF Strike Command who are charged with undertaking the review have visited all three units to talk to station personnel and trade union representatives. Those events were well attended.

The hon. Gentleman talked about consulting wider interests. On 29 January, review team members met local authority and regional development agency representatives from all three areas where the stations are sited. The aim of that consultation was to allow local authorities to highlight any issues or concerns about the review. If authorities have suggestions for a station's future use, including opportunities for commercial exploitation, they will be most welcome with regard to our assessment of the way forward. A further round of consultations with local councils will take place next month.

I was a little perplexed when the hon. Gentleman said that councils and other interests felt that they were out of the loop or pushed aside when it came to the early determinations. I hope that I have reassured him that we are taking a detailed consultative approach. I will take on board his concerns and ensure that what I am saying marries up with what is happening on the ground.

We do not underestimate the review's importance to communities around the stations, including Lyneham. I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that the review will take full account of the representations that have been made, not least those set out in the report that he passed to me. We plan to continue the review in a spirit of openness and in that spirit I am grateful for the opportunity that this debate has afforded me to set out the Department's position. It is a strategic review, which it is right to have at this time.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Gateshead

1.28 pm

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I welcome the opportunity to raise a matter of considerable local interest and concern in my constituency and the surrounding area. It relates to the grave failures and mistakes in the treatment of women over a long time in the gynaecology and obstetrics department of the Queen Elizabeth hospital in my constituency.

My hon. Friends from neighbouring constituencies have taken a great interest in the matter. My hon. Friends the Members for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn), for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) and for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) have represented their constituents' concerns to my hon. Friend the Minister, the hospital and the local health authority.

Before coming to the substance of my remarks, I want to make it clear that I recognise the great improvements that have been made in my local hospital in recent years. Changes in management have been beneficial and the hospital has many excellent consultants who are supported by dedicated staff. The hospital is also a centre of excellence for some women's diseases. It offers screening services and carries out work on breast cancer. There is also a regional gynaecological oncology service. The issues are serious, but I do not want previous appallingly bad practice to undermine or tarnish the excellent work that is being done in many areas, or the progress that has undoubtedly been made.

I am glad that the Minister will reply to the debate and I know that she and the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) took an interest in the petition that I presented to Parliament on behalf of my constituents. My constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow have not had full or proper answers to their many questions over the years. My principal request is for some mechanism—ideally a public inquiry—to tackle those concerns.

As the Minister knows, Dr. Janusz Wszeborowski and Mr. Peter Silverstone have been struck off. Most of my constituents' grievances related to those two consultants. She will also know that the General Medical Council considered three cases, but not those under discussion; nor did it consider the eight illustrative cases that the current management of the Queen Elizabeth hospital submitted to it. I had hoped that the need for an inquiry would be removed if the GMC could consider those cases. The women concerned understandably feel cheated and let down by the fact that the GMC took action against the main doctors concerned, but did not examine their grievances and appalling experiences.

The transcript of the proceedings of the GMC against Mr. Silverstone relates to operations that he carried out in 1995 and 1998. Those operations were not carried out at the Queen Elizabeth hospital. What strikes me about the transcript is that the criticisms about how he carried out the operations are eerily similar to the complaints that my constituents made about operations that were carried out in previous years. That prompts the obvious question: why were the earlier complaints not investigated more fully and why was appropriate disciplinary action not taken then?

The transcript refers to failures to record adequate medical histories of patients at pre-operative and post-operative stages and to arrange adequate assistance for a complicated operation. It also refers to the failure to provide appropriate medical aftercare and to recognise the limits of Mr. Silverstone's skill and professional competence and work within them. The conclusions show that those failures put patients at risk and justified his being struck off.

The Minister of State stated in a letter to me of 18 February, and in a letter of 29 October 2001 to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow, that there was a confidential inquiry into the workings of the obstetrics and gynaecology department. In April 1993, that inquiry concluded that there were no clinical issues that warranted formal action. She also stated that five complaints were received about Mr. Silverstone following the inquiry and between 1 April 1993 and 10 December 1993, that all were investigated and that none warranted formal action against him.

Some clear questions arise from those statements. Why was no formal action taken, especially since I understand that specific complaints led to compensatory out-of-court settlements in several cases? Was it not a matter for concern that, no sooner had one confidential inquiry been concluded, the hospital continued to receive similar serious complaints about the department in the months immediately following? I wonder how much compensation has been paid out over the years to women who complained about their treatment. I have a feeling that considerable sums have been involved. It would be good to have an answer to that question.

I could quote many distressing letters that I have received from the women concerned who, obviously, are very keen to ensure their anonymity, which I respect. Not all of them refer to treatment at the Queen Elizabeth hospital. Some refer to operations conducted in local private hospitals, and the concerns of those patients should also be addressed in an inquiry. One letter concerned a hysterectomy. The patient said:

> "Mr. Silverstone performed a hysterectomy on me . . . a few days later I noticed a dreadful smell which was subsequently traced to the wound . . . the contents of my bowel were oozing through the stitches . . . I had emergency surgery performed by another doctor to repair the damage to the bowel which had happened during the hysterectomy . . . The resulting scars are horrendous and caused me problems which contributed to the break up of my marriage . . . I have also had to have subsequent surgery on both my bladder and bowel".

Another extremely distressing case concerned the death of a baby, caused by cerebral birth injury. An investigation was carried out into the case in 1992, a year before the inquiry mentioned in the letters sent by the Minister of State to me and my hon. Friend. Although it declared that the standard of care had fallen short of what was required, once again, astonishingly, no question of serious professional misconduct seemed to arise.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing the debate and taking the lead on a very important subject—gross injustice to people in our area. I support her call for a public inquiry.

[Mr. Stephen Hepburn]

If the Minister put herself in the position of the people in the cases that my right hon. Friend outlines, I am sure that she, too, could do nothing but support that call.

Joyce Quin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I welcome the interest that he has shown in the matter on behalf of his constituents. Like me, he has had many female constituents affected by the problem, going back a number of years.

The numbers involved are considerable. When the trust set up a helpline in the wake of Mr. Silverstone's initial suspension by the GMC, some 85 women contacted the hospital complaining of their treatment. At about that time, several of them organised a support group and held meetings. They were surprised at the large numbers who attended. With the publicity given to the activities of the support group, the presentation of the petition and even to this debate this week, even more women have come forward and contacted me, my colleagues or the support group.

I pay tribute to the support group, its secretary, my constituent Debra Wilson, and her fellow members. Forming a group and putting forward concerns to the authorities has not always been easy. Many group members did not want to be in the public eye and were people not normally keen to complain. However, they have approached their task with purpose and determination and have been prepared to revisit experiences that they would otherwise have wanted to put behind them, to get concerns addressed.

I also recognise the efforts of the local newspaper, the *Evening Chronicle*, which has consistently backed the support group and its demands. In recent years, changes have taken place in the national health service that I hope will make a recurrence of such a situation unlikely. The culture in which doctors and consultants are perceived as gods, never to be questioned, has diminished. It is also recognised that whistleblowing is necessary in certain circumstances, and should be welcomed, not condemned. It is accepted that the performance of individual consultants must be properly monitored. The culture of the royal colleges has changed—they perceive themselves less as protectors of members of their clubs and more as protectors of the public, which is what they should be. However, I would welcome comments from the Minister about any further measures to ensure that the failure to deal with such serious issues cannot recur, as well as to explain how the remaining unanswered questions can be properly addressed.

We are talking about a huge degree of physical and emotional pain. We are discussing the cases of women who have lost babies who might otherwise have survived. Some women are unable to have normal, satisfying physical relationships with their husbands and partners because of the physical damage that they have experienced. We are considering appalling mistreatment that should never have occurred, which should have been exposed and stopped much earlier. My constituents want answers and justice. As Members of Parliament, my hon. Friends and I are determined to see justice done, however belatedly. I urge the Minister to respond positively today.

1.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) on securing the debate and raising an issue that is important not only to her constituents, although the graphic illustrations of the damage caused are hugely moving, but to everyone who wants to ensure that patients get the highest possible quality of care from the NHS. I also recognise the concern and interest shown by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on behalf of his constituents. It is important that such matters are raised in Parliament so that they are properly aired and addressed by all of us. They are important to us all.

I am aware of the petition that my right hon. Friend presented to Parliament on 18 December, which highlighted the mistreatment, negligence and misconduct of consultant Peter Silverstone and Dr. Janusz Wszeborowski and alleged a subsequent cover-up by the Queen Elizabeth hospital authorities. Those are very serious matters. I hope that I can deal with them and outline some of the improvements made in my right hon. Friend's local hospital—as she has generously acknowledged—as well as some of the national steps that the Government are taking to ensure that examples of poor practice are caught early and do not recur.

When such events occur, it is crucial that we learn lessons from them. We must ensure that systems are put in place to ensure that other people do not suffer the sort of damage that may have occurred. Although Dr. Wszeborowski was struck off the medical register by the General Medical Council in January 2001 and Mr. Silverstone was struck off in August 2001, the events that led to today's debate go back as far as 1993. The matters in question have been the subject of concern for many years.

Joyce Quin: It is true that inquiries relating to those two doctors took place in 1993, but the Minister should consider that some of the cases brought to my attention go back as far as 1979. We are actually considering a period of about 20 years.

Ms Blears: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for clarifying the matter and illustrating how long it has been causing concern to her constituents and other members of the public. I highlighted the length of time during which it has been investigated to show how long it has taken—in the past rather than now—all the regulatory authorities to deal with it. It is not satisfactory when that takes years and years. Many of our reforms of the way in which the GMC operates are designed to speed up some of the processes so that an inordinate length of time is not taken to deal with poor practice. My right hon. Friend now tells me that the matter goes back even further than 1993, which adds to our concern about the length of time such matters are allowed to drag on.

Mr. Silverstone worked at the Queen Elizabeth hospital as a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist for 17 years before retiring in 1993. While employed by the trust, he was part of a team of doctors working with Dr. Wszeborowski. The trust received five complaints about Mr. Silverstone between 1 April 1993 and 10 December 1993 when he retired and those are some of the complaints to which my right hon. Friend referred. All the complaints were investigated. Two were upheld and related to Mr. Silverstone's rudeness—he was brusque and abrupt with patients. He denied that he had been, but offered personal apologies to the women concerned and also offered to meet them. Those were the sort of complaints involved and it is important that my right hon. Friend is aware that those that were upheld related to his lack of personal skills in dealing with people and his attitude rather than to clinical incidents.

Of the three remaining complaints, two concerned Mr. Silverstone's attitude and one related to treatment he had performed, but they were not upheld. The complaints that were upheld concerned attitude and behaviour rather than treatment, which is why it was decided that none warranted formal action. Like my right hon. Friend, I was concerned that there had been five complaints and no formal action to implement disciplinary procedures. I am informed that the complaints that were upheld concerned rudeness and brusqueness in Mr. Silverstone's attitude rather than treatment.

Joyce Quin: It is true that the complaints that were upheld related to behaviour rather than clinical practice, but other complaints made by women, many of which have been settled out of court, concerned appalling clinical treatment that resulted in physical injury and sometimes the loss of a child's life. Those complaints were also dealt with much later by the GMC and there are serious question marks about the clinical treatment that was administered as well as the behavioural offences to which my hon. Friend referred.

Ms Blears: I am certainly not trying to minimise the impact of the clinical or behavioural incidents on my right hon. Friend's constituents. They are serious and if she wants to raise any matters that remain of concern to her constituents I shall be happy for her to raise them individually with my Department. She has referred to clinical issues that resulted in compensation and it would not be appropriate in this forum to go into the details of legal cases and levels of compensation, but I would be happy for her to contact me about outstanding matters of concern and to provide further information so that we may examine them again.

After the inquiry into the complaints that were made about Mr. Silverstone, he was retired in December 1993. It was only in January 2001 that the GMC's interim orders committee suspended him

"in the interests of public safety"

pending an investigation relating to the circumcision of babies. He had been carrying out that work in a private capacity after his retirement from the Queen Elizabeth hospital and it did not relate to his activities in the trust. He was struck off the medical register by the GMC on 24 August 2001. As the investigation dealt with offences that were committed during his private practice after he had retired from the trust, there was not an opportunity for matters relating to particular women patients to be fully explored and considered.

In 1996, colleagues in the trust's department of obstetrics and gynaecology raised questions about some aspects of Dr. Wszeborowski's work. The investigation that followed revealed a history of patient complaints about rough handling during examinations and deliveries. He was suspended from duty in September 1997 pending action by the trust under its disciplinary procedures. He reached retirement age and left the trust's employment in December 1998, but following a referral to the GMC's fitness to practise directorate by the trust, he was also struck off the medical register.

The time that it takes to deal with those matters in disciplinary terms and through GMC procedure is an issue because it allows people to retire from service. It is difficult to explore such people's actions because time, in a sense, overtakes events. In that case, Dr. Wszeborowski left the employment of the trust in December 1998, some years prior to being struck off by the GMC.

Following the GMC's decision to strike Dr. Wszeborowski off the medical register, the Gateshead health trust set up a telephone helpline for patients who were worried about treatment they had received from him. The line was subsequently extended to former patients of Mr. Silverstone after he was suspended by the GMC, to ensure that as many women as possible were contacted and offered support and counselling.

As my right hon. Friend said, 85 women called the helpline to discuss their concerns. After those initial calls, obstetricians, gynaecologists and senior midwives reviewed their cases and every woman was called back within three weeks. Everyone was offered an opportunity to meet with a consultant and a senior midwife, who was the trust's service manager for obstetrics and gynaecology. The consultant and senior midwife met with 36 women, a further 10 women discussed their cases with the consultant over the telephone and three received advice from him by letter. Fast-track appointments were made for 13 women who needed further treatment.

The trust also allowed those women immediate access to their medical records without having to follow the formal process and five women took up that offer. It also offered independent counselling and support to all the women, although in the event only one woman took that up. It took a number of wide-ranging steps to ensure that as soon as it was alerted to the problems that those women had experienced, they were offered not only counselling and support, but the option of further treatment and a proper review by other consultant obstetricians and gynaecologists.

As my right hon. Friend acknowledged, the trust has made substantial improvements in recent years to its obstetrics and gynaecology services. There is a new consultant, Mr. Mani Das, and five more consultants have joined him since he was appointed. A number of new services have also been introduced. Now, a multidisciplinary clinical audit process that involves all staff regularly reviews their practice to ensure that there are no further examples of poor practice. There are new guidelines and protocols for the treatment of all pregnant women, including a fast-track, one-stop service for women with menstrual problems and an early pregnancy unit to deal with any abnormalities. There is also a robust risk management structure. All clinical and non-clinical incidents are thoroughly investigated and any improvements are immediately initiated. Those innovations have been well received by patients. The

[Ms Blears]

obstetrics and gynaecology department was ranked highly when assessed last year and is an example of good practice.

Teaching and training systems in the hospital were reported to be "excellent" following a visit by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in 1999. That demonstrates that women can be assured that under the new team in the Queen Elizabeth hospital they will receive the best treatment and care during pregnancy and the delivery of their children.

The women who have been affected have been through a distressing time. The vast majority of staff in the NHS do a first-class job and this is a rare case of poor practice. It is vitally important that we have systems to pick up such cases quickly, which can act to stop them from happening. That is why on 1 April 2001 we introduced annual appraisals and work reviews for all doctors. They will ensure that doctors meet the high standards of their profession. The Government have new powers to enable the GMC to suspend doctors immediately when serious concerns arise about their performance. We are also introducing a mandatory reporting system for failures in the NHS, so that lessons are learned and mistakes not repeated.

We want to establish fast, fair and effective procedures to resolve problems of poor or unsafe practice and to avoid situations in which patients are left unprotected because no intervention is made to stop a doctor practising until a case is investigated. In the past, cases dragged on for a long time and doctors were allowed to continue practising while investigations took place. We want to ensure that that does not happen in future. We also want further to reform the way in which the GMC works to ensure that it is fast, fair and effective and puts the interests of patients first.

We have established the National Clinical Assessment Authority, which is a central element of our work on quality. It will provide advice to employers in cases in which they are concerned about the clinical practice of doctors. It will not be an employer or regulator, but will help employers to assess doctors by carrying out an objective assessment of a doctor's performance. That is an innovation to address the performance of doctors. Following such assessments, the NCAA will advise the trust or health authority on appropriate courses of action. That should speed up the system quickly to deal with poor practice.

For the first time, we are involving lay people in such procedures, which will give patients a real voice in ensuring that doctors meet the highest possible standards. We will provide support for doctors who are ill, suffering stress or whose practice has deteriorated owing to the pressures on them. We want to support them to allow them to continue to care, while also protecting the interests of patients.

We are issuing guidelines on gynaecology and obstetrics to ensure that every trust in the country provides high quality services. I acknowledge that those new improvements do not address the deep concerns of the women in the cases that were described by my right hon. and hon. Friends. Those cases, particularly those described in the extracts read by right hon. Friend, are incredibly distressing and moving and indicate her severe concerns and those of other hon. Members.

I have seen no evidence of a cover-up by the trust, however, and have been informed that detailed investigations of complaints and subsequent determinations were made. Steps were taken to ensure that all the women who had been involved in allegedly poor treatment had access to a helpline, counselling and further treatment. If my right hon. and hon. Friends remain concerned, I would welcome further details being sent to my Department, so that we can take another look at the matter. I recognise that the cases are of extreme concern to the women involved.

I emphasise that we are ensuring that doctors provide good quality services throughout the country to all patients. We are determined that the procedures and systems will be fast, fair and effective for everyone. Patients must be protected and I welcome further information from my right hon. Friend.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 27 February 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Meat Imports

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to draw attention to the safety of meat imports. It could not have come at a more appropriate time given that we are celebrating—if that is the right word—the anniversary of the appalling outbreak of foot and mouth disease, which started at a pig farm in Heddon-on-the-Wall in my constituency. Coincidentally, the outbreak almost finished in my constituency. It did untold damage to farming there and throughout the north of England, Scotland and the south-west and caused devastation to the tourist industry.

On Monday, I visited the farm adjacent to Burnside farm where the first outbreak occurred. It was the anniversary of when the first pyre was lit at Burnside farm. Pictures of the blazing carcases of cattle, sheep and pigs were shown throughout the world and were a wonderful invitation to those in America to visit Britain. If we had wanted to put off tourists, we could not have done more. As a result of the disease, 6.5 million animals have been slaughtered. We have lost untold millions in tourism revenue—all because of imported meat. The cause of the outbreak must be linked to the illegal importation of infected meat.

The story was the same in 1967. The cause of that outbreak was never traced but again suspicion fell on lamb that was imported from Argentina. Furthermore, there was uncertainty about the cause of the outbreak of classical swine fever in 2000, but veterinary evidence tracked it down to a pork product. Fancifully, it was said that a pig was fed a ham sandwich in a pig unit. Whether that was true is not clear, but the three outbreaks can be linked to imported food.

The victims of the outbreak cannot understand why, 12 months on, stricter controls on the importation of meat products are not in place. All we have seen so far is posters at Heathrow airport advising people not to bring meat products into the country. We have been promised a forum to discuss the issue next month. The matter is urgent. People are staggered when they discover that, at Heathrow airport—one of the biggest cargo handling ports in the United Kingdom—the front line against such imports is manned by 10 environmental health officers employed by the London borough of Hillingdon who have 10 assistants to help them.

Those who read last night's *Evening Standard* will know the extent of what is brought into the country through Heathrow airport. The BBC alleged that, from May 2001 until a few weeks ago, no checks were made on meat at the airport. However, a spot check was made last week and, according to reports, that produced more than 300 kg of meat products.

The imported goods are not regular meat products. Many of them are endangered species that have been brought into the country by airline passengers. One aircraft from Nigeria had a vast quantity of chicken, fish and meat in passengers' luggage. I was told that one suitcase in the cargo hold was leaking blood. The list of imports is fantastic. Live crabs, chimps, goats, anteaters, rats, antelopes, monkeys, snakes, different types of dried meat, fish, even tiger parts from Sri Lanka, India and Japan and bear parts from Russia have been brought in through Heathrow airport. All such meat carries considerable risk of disease, and not only for animals. As Professor Joe Brownlie of the Royal Veterinary College said, it could pose a risk to humans through the spread of tuberculosis or other diseases imported from Africa. This is a serious matter.

The real problem is not so much the products that make headlines, but the importation of large quantities of illegal meat. We legally import large quantities of meat from countries in which foot and mouth is endemic. In the other place, Lord Vincent questioned the Minister about the amount of meat imported from such countries. We import 81,000 tonnes of meat from Brazil, 11,000 tonnes from Botswana and 8,000 tonnes from Namibia. In all, we import more than 100,000 tonnes of meat products from countries that have endemic foot and mouth disease.

The problem of illegal meat is, of course, much more complicated because we cannot tell how much comes in—much of the evidence is anecdotal. However, I believe that several thousand tonnes of illegal meat are imported every year, some of which come in directly and some of which are illegally imported into other European countries, re-boxed and re-labelled in false boxes, or simply put into freezers and sent here.

The National Farmers Union has carried out research in the port of Hull, for which I am grateful. Before 1992, when the port authorities were allowed to inspect all meat products, the port of Hull inspected 35,000 tonnes of meat. In 1993, after a European directive declared it illegal to inspect meat previously inspected by another member state, the port inspected 5 tonnes. So, 30,000 tonnes went through the port of Hull uninspected.

To ensure that food is safe, we rely on the good offices of other European Union countries. Although the majority no doubt enforce regulations well, some do not, and with enlargement the problem could get worse. Customs or health inspectors in countries where heavy lorries are in transit for only a few hours may not bother to carry out the inspections necessary to ensure that meat arriving at its destination is safe.

In the port of Hull inspections, considerable quantities of illegally imported meat were found such as spare ribs and pork scraps of different types. A considerable amount has also been found in Middlesborough, including chicken stock cubes, corned beef and fish products that had been transported in container lorries carrying other products—the classic method is to hide food behind a pile of vegetables. A substantial amount of illegal products is coming into this country.

What shall we do about the problem? We must end the confusion surrounding what imports are allowable. No one is suggesting that we should not be allowed to bring home shopping bought in French supermarkets—

[Mr. Peter Atkinson]

that would be nonsense. However, I am told that a personal allowance of 1 kg of meat products can be legally brought in from a country that has endemic foot and mouth disease, which is ridiculous and defies any sense of responsibility.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Before my hon. Friend leaves French supermarkets, does he agree that much of the meat sold in such places is produced under conditions that would not be allowed by law in this country?

Mr. Atkinson: In terms of certain support products, that may be the case. My hon. Friend has a strong interest in this issue. I do not agree wholeheartedly that the way in which meat is produced in European countries is much worse than the way in which it is produced here, with the exception of pork, where producers are still allowed to use stalls and tethers. I take my hon. Friend's point. I agree about meat products that come into Europe from non-European Union countries. Certainly, some of the conditions in which animals are brought up are way behind what we and our consumers expect. I also agree that some of the products that we buy in this country contain imported meat, particularly chicken, from countries about which there are suspicions that rearing is not up to our standards.

Perhaps the Minister would explain what has happened since May 2001, when we were promised a co-ordinated approach to improving checks at ports. We have not had an update since. It would be helpful if hon. Members heard what has happened since then. It is vital that the EU works more effectively. It is not enough to leave the matter simply to the good efforts of other European countries.

I should point out a potentially alarming development that I have noticed recently. Veterinary scientists have been considering the question of the transmission of BSE from mother to calf. I understand that transmission from one generation to the next is now ruled out. The 11 calves that developed BSE since the meat and bonemeal ban seem to have been fed contaminated food. How could that happen? As I understand it, in the EU, pigs can still be fed meat and bonemeal. That suggests that somehow there has been cross-contamination of animal feeds imported from Europe.

Meat and bonemeal may be carried in the same containers and stored in the same feed mills as other feed coming into the country. Policing that is a real problem. It is vital that we have the right to inspect food containers coming into the country much more regularly. I accept that such a right should not be used as a restraint on trade. The object of the European regulations is to stop unfair competition. I believe that, on health grounds, we need a European agreement that allows us to check our imported foodstuffs much more readily.

We should take the issue out of the hands of local authorities. It is nonsensical that the London borough of Hillingdon—I am sure that it is an efficient borough, although I know nothing about it—has responsibility to deal with Heathrow airport. What intelligence is shared between Heathrow airport environmental health officers and those in, for example, Southampton, Scotland, Hull or Newcastle? None. We need a centralised system, because intelligence is vital.

We will not be able to catch all the illegal foodstuffs coming into the country; that is impossible. However, we can concentrate on the people who are likely to use them. That is where intelligence should come in. The technology for checking passengers is not rocket science. In Australia, a little spaniel comes up and sniffs passengers as they wait to show their passports. That is extremely effective, but we can also get machines that test for the presence of meat products in cargos.

Those measures should be taken urgently. We cannot wait for another outbreak of foot and mouth or some other disease to strike us again. The cost was too great last time, and it will be too great if it happens again. Travel and trade enrich us both as a society and as individuals, but not if they bring with them devastation and disease, as has happened in the past.

9.43 am

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on securing the debate. It seems that there is good news about the suspected new outbreak at Thirsk. The initial results appear to be negative. We all hope that the next two or three days will confirm that they are negative and that we do not experience what we did in the past 12 months.

As many hon. Members know, Dumfries and Galloway was one of the worst affected areas in Scotland. It is a rural area, and was decimated by the outbreak. Agriculture plays a significantly greater role in the economy of the community than in many other parts of the UK. It provides approximately 24 per cent. of the region's gross domestic product.

There were 176 confirmed cases of foot and mouth disease in Dumfries and Galloway, and as a result 1,300 farm businesses were directly affected by the cull policy. That led to the destruction of 18 per cent. of the cattle population and more than 30 per cent. of the sheep population. I declared from an early stage that it would take us many years to recover. Thankfully, my area is on the road to recovery, but many difficulties lie ahead.

As the hon. Member for Hexham noted, the first anniversary of the start of the outbreak was 20 February in England. It is 1 March in Scotland. The NFU on both sides of the border has been effective in raising awareness of illegal meat imports, and is justified in doing so. Issues also surround legal meat imports. There is little doubt that we should minimise as best we can the risk of diseases such as foot and mouth entering the country. We must place that high on the agenda of lessons to be learned from last year's outbreak. I am sure that the inquiries into the outbreak will consider the matter and in a time scale that will lead to those lessons being learned sooner rather than later, unlike with a lengthy public inquiry.

The Government have not been idle. I welcome the action that they have already taken to restrict illegal meat imports following the outbreak. Regrettably, much of that work has been done behind the scenes. Illegal importing is like any other smuggling operation. Control depends on effective intelligence. Government action not only strengthens the information-gathering procedures of enforcement bodies such as local authorities and Customs and Excise, but improves the sharing of that information between them. I hope that the Minister will outline how successful that action has been in improving the effectiveness of enforcement activity, and how it has led to improved targeting of resources to where the problem is greatest. As the hon. Member for Hexham noted, some of our busiest airports are the most suspicious locations.

One of the biggest criticisms has been that there is not enough publicity about food imports at ports and airports. Notices are not the only effective way of drawing people's attention to what they should and should not do. I therefore welcome the action that is being taken to improve the situation, as well as the work that is being done to get the message across to visitors through travel agents and our embassies overseas before they embark on their journey.

I also welcome the commissioning of a full risk assessment, which the Veterinary Laboratories Agency will carry out, and the illegal imports forum that will be held next month to consider what can be done to intensify action on illegal imports. The Government have clearly strengthened the import controls that they inherited from the previous Government.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) have made a compelling case, and I hope that the Government will consider the amendment to the Animal Health Bill. We must also consider the other aspect of the issue. Who is demanding and buying this meat? The retailer and the catering trade use it for personal consumption.

Mr. Brown: I agree. The process is about consumers and end-users. Regrettably, other people are profiting from this whole game, if I can put it in those terms. However, no one would dispute that, if more needs to be done, more should be done. The hon. Member for Hexham gave some examples, and many lessons can be learned from other countries.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister knows that each international airport in faraway New Zealand recently introduced a regime of 100 per cent. baggage search or X-ray for all arriving passengers. It would be a mammoth task here, but that does not mean that we should ignore it. We must seriously consider every opportunity that comes our way. The new X-ray machines detect any organic material, whether plant or animal, inside baggage. That is supplemented by sniffer dog teams.

I would appreciate the Minister's comments on the progress being made in the Department to consider similar action in the United Kingdom. I recognise that much hard work is being done behind the scenes to control illegal imports, but I want to give the Minister one message from the farmers in my constituency: the Government must be seen to be taking action, and that action must be seen to be effective, if we are to continue to build confidence in the agricultural industry.

There is some confusion about the divisions of responsibility for food import checks, which I hope the Minister will clarify. A number of bodies are involved in controlling imports, including the Food Standards Agency, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Trade and Industry, port health authorities, the plant health and seeds inspectorate, and, as expected, Customs and Excise. Surely there is a case for a more co-ordinated approach or for bringing together many of those bodies.

There is a case for strengthening the role of the FSA so that it can be more active in checking meat imports. The repeated discovery of specified risk material in carcases of beef from Germany underlines the need for the FSA to maintain vigilance over imports.

Fifty-two weeks ago last Friday, I met representatives of my local branch of the NFU. A variety of issues were on the agenda, but the issue of legal meat imports containing SRMs, particularly beef from Germany, was raised repeatedly. I told my local farmers that it was no good telling me at a late stage, "This meat arrived and is now in the food chain." We must act early to warn people about what is happening. In fact, two or three weeks later, we saw the first indications of foot and mouth in the area. One morning, I received a telephone call from a distraught farmer whom I see regularly. He complained about SRMs in carcases from Spain and Italy.

The hon. Member for Hexham talked about end-users and consumers, and we must consider what can be done. Where will we be in a few years' time if there is a major outbreak of new variant CJD? We will all wonder where on earth it has come from. We have tightened up the way in which we conduct business in the UK, but meat imports with SRMs in carcases are clearly still entering the country.

We must consider whether the FSA can carry out far more stringent and random checks. I would even be so hard as to say that if we come across material infected with SRMs, we should have the power to close the relevant premises immediately. That should also apply to all the major supermarket chains, because they are by no means innocent in all this. A supplier must meet customer demand, but we need to tighten up the system. If supermarket chains and everyone else understand that the penalty could be immediate closure, they may be more mindful of what they bring on to their premises.

The most disconcerting aspect of last year's outbreak of foot and mouth disease was that it was not possible to establish its cause. As the hon. Member for Hexham said, there are strong suspicions that illegal meat coming into this country may have been one cause of the outbreak. The meat potentially found its way into pigswill that did not go through the proper process before it was fed to pigs.

Even if we could pin down exactly how the infected meat came into the country in the first place, zero risk from imported disease cannot be achieved, however much we wish for it. Listening to the comments of Opposition Members, one could be forgiven for thinking that the only issue we face is preventing the disease at the point of entry. The idea that import controls are a magic wand that can prevent a foot and mouth outbreak for ever is misleading. I fear that it is a cover for some hon. Members who would like to stop all meat coming from abroad.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: The hon. Gentleman referred to Opposition Members, but I am the only one who has spoken. I was not making the point that the hon. Gentleman claims; I do not want to stop all food coming into this country. I said that intelligence was necessary to find out who was using the meat, as well as to catch it. I accept that we will not catch all the meat coming into the country.

Mr. Brown: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I apologise if I gave the wrong impression. My point is that there have been previous debates on the issue. Some hon. Members in my party would dearly love to see more severe restrictions on imports.

Two miles from where I live is a major employer, 98 per cent. of whose business is centred around lamb and sheepmeat exports. Any action to ban imports would affect export markets and thus my constituent, and would do no one any good.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that this country has the right to restrict imports under article 30—the renumbered article 36 of the treaty of Rome—for the protection of the health and life of humans, animals or plants? It is on that basis—he himself has made the case—that hon. Members on both sides of the House believe action should be taken. Does he agree that that measure could be instigated at certain times?

Mr. Brown: I cannot disagree with the hon. Lady. We need to operate within the rules, directives and regulations laid down, but, regrettably, as she and other hon. Members know, some wish to take things much further.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Hexham on securing the debate and look forward to the Minister's response to it.

9.57 am

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Illegal imports were discussed at length during the passage of the Animal Health Bill. The hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) mentioned the amendments tabled by Labour Members. A striking aspect of the Second Reading debate was that Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative Members and those from the smaller parties all said that more must be done about illegal imports. One of the most memorable speeches in that debate was a veteran rant by the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks).

There is evidence that the Government have been complacent about the matter. The Curry report and that of Devon county council flagged up the issue of illegal imports. I quoted on Report what the Minister said on Second Reading:

> "DEFRA has been leading interdepartmental discussions."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 666.]

I do not know whether it is a coincidence that the column number is also the sign of the beast. I quoted that comment again just over a month later on 13 December. It did not seem that much had happened, certainly considering the Minister's answers. It is now 27 February, nearly four months later, and I have received a letter from the National Farmers Union, for which I am grateful, that says that it welcomes

> "the Government's announcement that it will convene a high level forum on this issue, probably taking place next month."

Thank God for that. We have gone from interdepartmental discussions to a putative high-level forum. Presumably, if the NFU had known when the high-level forum was going to take place, it would not have used the word "probably". In other words, the Government had not even set a date, although if they have now, I would be grateful if the Minister told us today. The Government do not seem to be taking the issue seriously enough.

I have a letter, which was copied to me, from a constituent, Mr. Rod Tuck, of Diss in Norfolk to the Speaker of the House of Commons. In it he complains about the Minister. The letter says:

> "Having read in Hansard details of the parliamentary debate on the Animal Health Bill on Thursday 13th December, 2001, I would like to register an official complaint against Elliot Morley MP, who seriously misled the House as detailed on Page 1025 at 1.45pm when answering a question from Mrs Winterton. With reference to the UK import controls on meat/meat products compared to those of Australia and America he states there is no significant difference between theirs and our custom controls on meat/meat products."

For the benefit of the Chamber, I have the exact quotation. The Minister said:

> "On the claims that are being made about measures taken in America and Australia, I have been to those countries comparatively recently and I must say that I have not noticed any particular differences from the checks and security in our country."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 1025.]

Mr. Tuck kindly sent me a copy of his correspondence with the US Department of the Treasury Customs Services, which contains a helpful list of the differences between the approaches of the UK and of Australia and the United States, but I will not try the Chamber's patience by listing them all.

Mr. Tuck also enclosed an e-mail that he had received from Mr. Jim Dewhirst, who had recently been to Australia. Mr. Dewhirst wrote:

> "The details of the precautions that the Australians and New Zealanders take are as follows:-
>
> "1) You receive a warning about 20 minutes before the plane lands that it is illegal to take into the country any product of animal or plant origin. If you are in doubt about anything that you are carrying you should declare it on arrival. You are warned that contravention of the rules will automatically lead to a hefty fine, or worse.
>
> "2) On the flight you are given 'visitor cards' to complete. One of the questions asked is:- 'Have you been on a farm in the last 48 hrs?' Another is:- 'Do you possess any spiked shoes?' We had golf shoes with us, so we had to declare them.
>
> "3) When we arrived at the terminal building all our hand luggage had to go through X-Ray machines."

This is in on arrival, not departure.

> "They were looking for any illegal products, including food products and drugs.
>
> "4) After the X-Ray machines we were then confronted by sniffer dogs. These were more in evidence in New Zealand than in Australia. We were even selected out of the crowd to help test a trainee dog: some contraband was hidden on our luggage trolley about 30 metres before we passed the dog. The dog did not fail to apprehend me!"

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): This is all very interesting, and I should say that I was in Canada two weeks ago and the procedures were no different from those at Heathrow. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that a recent report in the *Scientific and Technical Review* of the OIE, which is in the public domain, calculates that illegal meat imports into the USA each year vary between 450,000 kg and 4 million kg. That is not a criticism of the USA; it just demonstrates that people should not think other parts of the world have a panacea.

The hon. Gentleman should also remember that when we had an outbreak of foot and mouth, other countries rightly introduced procedures because of the risk. My final point is that New Zealand has 3.5 million visitors a year, while Britain has 48 million. There is the issue of managing these things at airports.

Mr. Bacon: I am grateful, and indeed honoured, that I managed to provoke the Minister into intervening so early in the debate. I accept that there is no panacea; no Opposition Member believes that there is. The problems are plainly serious. The United States is a much larger country than ours with huge land borders and five times our population. I would be interested to hear comparative tonnages if the Minister has the figures. The Minister referred to New Zealand and the United States, but I was talking about Australia.

I should like to finish dealing with Mr. Dewhirst's fifth point. He states:

> "When we arrived at Passport Control we were again given the third degree about illegal imports—particularly so when we arrived in Australia. It was at this stage that we handed over the cards that we had completed . . . Our golf shoes were taken away and disinfected, being returned in sealed plastic bags. When we arrived in Australia from New Zealand we had with us some sea shells and some enormous pine cones that Kate"—

Mr. Dewhirst's wife—

> "had collected. After inspection of these we were told that we could keep most of the shells but definitely not the pine cones. It's rather ironic that if we had not gone to Australia, but returned straight home to the UK, we would have had no problems whatsoever keeping the pine cones, in fact we would not have even needed to declare them. If I'd had a mind to do it, I could no doubt have waltzed through Customs with half a dead alligator in my luggage, without anyone even bothering to challenge me."

Mr. Dewhirst may be exaggerating, but such checks on arrival—X-ray checks, sniffer dogs, taking items away in plastic bags and disinfecting them—do take place. The story shows how seriously the problem is taken there. Such measures would illustrate to people going through the system the Government's perception that travellers should take the matter more seriously. As the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) said, it is a question not just of doing things behind closed doors with curtains drawn, but of getting the message across to people that it is a serious issue. The Government say that they have put up posters and are trying to do more.

Last Friday I returned to the United Kingdom after a long-haul transatlantic flight. I landed at a Royal Air Force base at which no checks of any sort took place. Signs on the plane reminded armed forces personnel about the dangers of criminal activity with drugs, but no mention was made of animal imports. When we landed at the airport, I saw no posters, no customs officers and no checks. I could indeed have waltzed through with half a dead alligator.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I have written to the Minister about a leaflet that I picked up in Detroit airport, which asked me if I had visited the UK and been on a farm. It specified the UK, which doubtless does untold damage to our tourist industry. On my return to the UK, I went through the airport and searched high and low for any signs asking me whether I was bringing meat into the country. I found one, but I would not have done so had I not been pushing a pram, because it was next to the lift; disabled people may also have seen it.

Mr. Bacon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As for writing to the Minister, I wish him luck. Many of us know that the chances of receiving a reply of any sort from DEFRA within three or four months are extremely slim. I recently wrote to a DEFRA official in Bristol in the hope that he might be able to help my constituent. I explained in the letter that there was no point in writing to Ministers. I had explained to my constituent beforehand that that was what I intended to do because I knew that at least two months would pass before I received an apology for not receiving a reply. I certainly wish my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) luck.

My hon. Friend makes a good point—the problem is not being flagged up openly enough. As a letter from the National Farmers Union makes clear:

> "The admission that no further resources have been allocated to scrutinising personal imports at Heathrow airport since February last year underlines the need for no more delay in a firm grip being taken of this vital issue."

Customs and Excise collects £102,000 million in various duties. Its primary function is obviously collecting revenue, not necessarily deciding how that revenue is spent. It is important to recognise that the resources are there if the political will is there too. There is increasing consensus across all parties about the need to do something about this matter. The political will should be there to take a firm grip on this issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. It is always a pleasure to see a debate being enjoyed with such enthusiasm and vigour, but there is only 20 minutes left before Front Benchers begin their winding-up speeches. Seven hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. I hope that all hon. Members will bear that in mind and make their comments concise, clear and pertinent.

10.10 am

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I shall be brief as I have spoken on this subject before, and bring in some new information. The Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs visited Brussels recently and we spoke to those in the European Commission who lead consideration of the issue of meat imports. We have to recognise that we are in a common market and their approach to this governs much of ours. It was an interesting conversation that was reassuring in at least one respect: those who were concerned that disruption in Zimbabwe had not been identified by the European Commission and had not led to a different

[Mr. Mark Todd]

approach to meat imports from that country were reassured that prompt action had been taken to prevent further imports of beef from Zimbabwe in view of the risks inherent in its control systems.

Less reassuring, however, was that when the discussion moved to illegal imports, the view was firmly expressed that that was a matter for member states to pursue individually and that the European Union, while conscious of the need for robust controls, did not feel that it had any further role to play. One of the arguments that has been advanced in this debate, and that may be advanced again, is that we must act in partnership with our European neighbours on this matter. That certainly does not imply leaving the matter to Europe. The Commission clearly does not intend to take robust measures itself.

The issue of exactly what kinds of risk we are talking about has already been explored: legal imports from risky countries, the concealment of meat within shipments that are otherwise legal and the personal baggage issue. We must recognise that all we can do is limit risk. We will not eliminate it. The Minister was right to point out that even the supposedly robust controls in the United States are relatively easily circumvented by those who are determined to do so or are so ignorant that they do not notice the key pieces of information that are given to them. However, the controls in other countries are of a much higher profile and are therefore much more likely to be noticed by those who are quite innocent in the matter and have simply not grasped that they may be doing something that carries a risk to animal and possibly human health in this country.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that however many notices are put up in seaports and airports, they will not make much difference while it is still legal for individuals to bring 1 kg of meat into this country and into the European Union? We should be pressing the Minister to get the EU to abolish the rights of individuals to bring in 1 kg of meat.

Mr. Todd: I disagree. Sensibly managed personal imports are an important part of the liberty of free passage in the European Union. I do not believe that we should seek a total ban on that movement, but we should try to ensure that we police it better. Most travellers are responsible individuals who can work out the risks.

I have been through that process. I brought some salami back from Italy, which was within the weight limit. My wife questioned me about whether it was the right thing to do, but I believed that my decision was legitimate. It did not taste very nice, it made me think that I had made the wrong decision for other reasons. Most travellers are like me. We must consider the issue carefully, understand what the risks are, and be prepared to abide by sensible rules. However, we must recognise that some are ignorant of the rules or are determined to circumvent them.

It has already been shown that the regime of controls is confused. There are too many agencies. Some are ill resourced, and others lack the legislative teeth to do anything about the people who are caught. We have had illustrations of gross breaches of the law, for which some perpetrators have not been prosecuted. Powers do not exist to prosecute efficiently, and changes to the law are clearly required. We also need to examine resourcing. The point has been made that additional resources have not been put into Heathrow, which is a major port of entry into the country.

It is not just about money but about co-ordination and the use of information technology. I am struck by the fact that other European Union states are tackling the issue in a more co-ordinated way and making better use of the information held by the various agencies involved. I do not know of another European Union state that tackles the problem in the same diffuse way as we do. Those who use more than one agency ensure that the data is co-ordinated between the agencies so that people know what others are discovering and where the risks are. That seems to be a sensible investment of resources.

With regard to the politics of the issue, the Animal Health Bill demands that farmers take certain steps, as I said on Second Reading. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) correctly identified critical issues of control in this country, which we must deal with regardless of what we do about imports. It is sensible to listen carefully to the stakeholders in these issues. The Bill in general asks farmers to co-operate, and some parts of it compel them to do so. They expect clear controls to be put in place as a quid pro quo, to some extent, for the co-operation that is being expected of them. Their expectation is legitimate. We must take a balanced approach. No one is claiming that tougher import controls make us risk free. They are part of a package that can be supported scientifically, practically and politically to achieve our objectives to make the country less at risk of animal-borne disease.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal again to hon. Members for brevity. That includes resisting interventions, if at all possible.

10.17 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) mentioned that I had more than a passing interest in animal welfare. I share that interest with the Minister.

I want to reinforce some issues. It has already been mentioned several times that much bush meat is smuggled illegally into this country, often by hand. It is no great secret that it is for personal use. More significantly, it is also on sale in shops, and is used in restaurants in London and elsewhere. Many of the animals are endangered and protected species. The trade is undesirable and unnecessary, and I ask the Minister to discuss with Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials and the Home Office the possibility of seeking the right to revoke the visa of anyone who brings in quantities of that sort of meat. It would be a considerable deterrent if people were warned when they went to entry clearance offices in any of our embassies or high commissions around the world, that the penalty for seeking to smuggle meat was the revocation of the visa and their immediate return to the country from whence they came. They probably would not do it.

Animal husbandry and animal welfare are directly connected with the quality and safety of meat imports. The Minister and I have campaigned long, often and hard to raise standards of farm animal welfare in this country. I believe that we have been right to do that and will be right to continue, but we must recognise that enhanced levels of animal welfare place a considerable cost on the British farmer. If we are to require the farming community in the United Kingdom to pay greater attention to animal welfare and seek to breed calves, pigs and chickens under the highest possible standards, it is nonsense for us to allow at the same time fowl, pigmeat and beef produced under far less safe conditions to be imported into the country.

We shall not enhance animal welfare worldwide if we allow that practice to continue, but simply damage domestic trade. I urge the Minister not to seek a prohibition on imports per se, but to drive towards prohibiting the import of goods not produced under the circumstances that we have in this country. If the Minister can address those issues, particularly in the context of the Animal Health Bill, I believe that we shall make considerable progress.

10.21 am

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): We are all fully aware of the devastation that would be caused to our rural economy should foot and mouth disease enter the country once more. All the suggestions that I was going to make in my speech have already been made during the debate, so I will confine myself to emphasising to the Minister the importance of that issue. A tremendous amount of money was spent stopping the spread of foot and mouth from one part of the country to another, but we must also spend money to try to stop it coming into the country, and do all that we reasonably can to stop infected meat coming in.

The Animal Health Bill imposes various measures on farmers, but the Government must do their bit. I hope that the high-level forum will take place quickly and that there will be action soon. We need a commitment from the Government to act against the importation of infected meat.

10.22 am

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on obtaining this debate. It is timely, especially with the foot and mouth disease scare reported in Yorkshire yesterday.

In January this year, Professor Gareth Edwards-Jones of the university of Wales, Bangor warned that we could face another outbreak of foot and mouth disease this year unless there were a clampdown on illegal imports. I recently read the NFU report entitled, "Veterinary, Plant Health and Public Health Controls on Imports", which notes that

> "the main threats to the UK are from illegal imports",

and that although

> "the existing body of legislation and regulations is—on paper—adequate to control illegal imports, we have serious concerns about the rigour with which existing controls are enforced."

That report makes 17 recommendations. I shall not trouble hon. Members with them all this morning, but note only that it calls for a comprehensive review of the framework and resourcing of the UK's system of import controls, including an evaluation of the funding for UK import controls and clear country of origin labelling. We in Plaid Cymru, and the Scottish National party support that.

Only a few days ago, DEFRA reported the seizure of 315 kg of prohibited food at Heathrow. Apart from that, as has been noted, the deliberate importing and retailing of illegal and suspect meat is carried out by organised gangs. Hon. Members will welcome DEFRA's new striking poster. Its stark slogan is, "Keep out disease" and it notes that there are penalties of up to two years in prison and a fine of £5,000. However, that will act as a deterrent only if culprits are caught. One must note that passengers from outside the EU are still allowed to import 1 kg of meat hermetically sealed, 1 kg of fish, 1 kg of milk powder and so on. Those may be relatively small amounts, but the cumulative effect over a year would be considerable. I welcome the forum being held next month to agree further action. This is a matter of urgency.

Farmers are flexible people who can adapt; they need to be to survive the conditions of the industry at the moment. However, being flexible and adaptable does not mean closing one's eyes to an obvious source of danger. The first line of defence for animal and plant health must be an effective screen against imported disease. We need to have better co-ordination of efforts to control illegal meat imports, and more rigorous enforcement of personal imports and commercial shipments. The NFU report states that

> "if personal import controls do not prove to be effective, serious consideration should be given to their complete prohibition across the EU.".

We are looking for clear evidence that the situation is improving quickly, and I look forward to the Minister's assurance that that is the case.

10.25 am

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) for securing the debate, and share the gladness of other hon. Members that the latest potential outbreak of foot and mouth does not seem to be genuine. My constituents work for Sun Valley in Hereford city, which imports animals to a high standard from Brazil and Thailand. It is those who do not meet that standard who concern me , particularly as I am secretary of the all-party group on endangered species.

In this country, we suffer from large numbers of live animals being imported. I have considered the case at Heathrow. There are 5,500 flights a week into Heathrow airport. In 2000, only 14 of those were checked and 5.5 tonnes of illegal bush meat were found; in 2001, only 10 were checked. That is of enormous concern, not only from an animal health but a human health point of view because viruses such as ebola are very "importable". We must connect animal with human health. A criticism that the National Pig Association has drawn to my attention is that too many agencies police the import of meat into this country. We should consider tightening that up. I suggest that one regulatory body would ensure gaps did not appear.

[Mr. Bill Wiggin]

I looked at the potential for a bio X-ray machine. Some 25 such machines at Heathrow airport, and the staff to run them, would cost about £8 million, which is a bargain compared with the £2 billion to £4 billion that our country has spent on foot and mouth. It would cost approximately 10p per passenger coming through the airports.

I urge the Minister to think again about the 1 kg that is allowed to be imported as a personal allowance. If he did so local producers could be supported and the risk to human life reduced. I urge him to set up a commission to assess the risks of countries from which we import food, not only for our health but for a future for our farmers.

10.28 am

Matthew Green (Ludlow): I have two quick questions for the Minister. First, in an answer to a parliamentary question, he stated:

> "We have taken action to improve publicity to travellers about import rules, to improve the collection and analysis of information about illegal imports and to use that information to better target enforcement activity. We are keeping these measures under constant review".—[*Official Report*, 11 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 850.]

Today, I hope that he will let us know about the details of that review, and about the effect of those measures. To date, we have had no information about the effect of any of the Government measures.

My second point relates to the full risk assessment carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. On 4 January, the Minister said that results would be published as soon as they were available. Can he tell us when that will be? I hope that it is soon, because such information is essential if hon. Members are to make a reasoned judgment on the effectiveness of controls that are being put in place.

10.29 am

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): May I make three quick points? First, in intervening on the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on the 1 kg personal allowance, I intended to make the important point that that concerns travellers coming in from third countries rather than people who move around the European Union.

Secondly, and this point has been made already, there is as much danger from legal imports as there is from illegal imports. At the moment, the chaotic state of our labelling policies allows people to re-label meat after it has been processed, which enables illegal imports into this country to be traded more easily.

Thirdly, when legal imports into this country are examined for problems, what types of tests are available? Are tests available to check meat for diseases such as foot and mouth and diseases that can affect human beings? How long do those tests take to be analysed? Can we detain meat during the time in which those tests are analysed?

10.30 am

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I would be failing in my duty if I were not to call the attention of the Chamber to the House's decision that four senior members of the Speaker's Panel should be addressed as "Deputy Speaker" in conducting proceedings in the Chamber.

Mr. Breed: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In appreciation of your calling so many hon. Members, I shall be very brief.

I want to consider two aspects of the Government's approach to the foot and mouth crisis. First, they acted urgently on certain aspects of the crisis when we learnt that there was a possible outbreak. One year ago, regulation was introduced quickly to prevent animal movements, to close footpaths, to put up notices everywhere and even to prosecute people who took their dog for a walk on the beach. Clear, prompt action was taken almost immediately and emergency procedures were put in place very quickly, although there was inevitably criticism that they were not quick enough. Most fair-minded people, however, would say that they were quickly put into action.

Secondly, on imports, we have not seen massive emergency procedures. A total ban on personal imports of meat, which could have relapsed after a period, was not considered. No significant emergency advice along the lines of that mentioned this morning was provided for travellers, and there were no prosecutions. In effect, there have been no emergency procedures for the control of imports into the country.

One year ago, at the beginning of the crisis, there was inevitably confusion about demarcation among the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, local authorities, the NFU and, eventually, the Army. In the end, however, clear lines of demarcation were established for those bodies.

Except for co-operation that takes place on a friendly basis, port authorities, Customs and Excise and trading standards report to different places. There is co-operation on the ground, but co-ordination is not laid down. Consideration clearly needs to be given to providing a regulatory system that encompassed those bodies in one co-ordinated section.

I was surprised to learn from a written answer to a parliamentary question about Zimbabwe that imports are

> "banned from the whole country except the veterinary regions of"—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 263WW.]

and it lists a huge number of different places. I have not the foggiest idea how the ban is policed, and many of the people who attempt to police it will have no idea where those provinces are. I have severe reservations about whether it can be policed properly.

Finally, I shall mention regulation and legislation. Many of us have been through the Animal Health Bill and it is clear that the provisions are draconian, particularly for farmers. The hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) recognised the Government's responsibility to respond to that. Has any consideration been given to amending the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996? Evidence suggests that they should be reinforced, but there is no sign of that being done. Instead of reciprocal arrangements on imports, the Animal Health Bill was introduced to plug the gaps and clobber farmers again.

Other than those directly involved, the general public want uniformed security staff at ports. We are an island nation and should be able to control imports better than countries with land borders. We need a combined security force that recognises the importance of not allowing the import of drugs and other products, including meat and plants.

We all have our own experience of the USA and I shall explain mine. I was behind a fairly elderly lady who had not filled in her form properly. She was caught with something—I do not know what—and whisked off. The Customs officer next to me said that it was sad because it was unlikely that she would be allowed back into the country to visit relatives, even if she had inadvertently filled in the form wrongly. The provision is severe: she may be refused entry because she made an illegal statement. That is draconian and I do not suggest that we go down that road, but it emphasises that other countries treat the problem more urgently and seriously than we have apparently done in the past year.

10.36 am

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for guiding us through this debate and for calling 11 hon. Members, which is excellent during a one-and-a-half-hour debate. I only wish that our debate could continue all morning because many hon. Members wanted to speak for longer and some have not been called.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on securing a debate on this important issue. In his comprehensive speech, he set the tone for the contributions that followed and pointed out that we have had two damaging incidents of animal disease: classical swine fever and then foot and mouth disease. The foot and mouth epidemic started in his constituency but we are crossing our fingers and hoping that it ended in his constituency some time ago. The news this morning is hopeful; the case in the Ryedale constituency may not be positive.

There are two sets of imports. Illegal imports can introduce disease that threatens animals and humans. I do not want to introduce barriers to trade, but it is ridiculous that in this country we place on our producers responsibilities and high standards that are not always followed in other countries from which we import produce. That important issue should be addressed.

To return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) and another hon. Member, if we had honesty in labelling we could market United Kingdom-produced food more positively. The two sectors that sin most are the catering sector and the processing sector, which sells it products mainly through the four great supermarkets in this country, which control 80 per cent. of food sales.

Although those points may not be absolutely relevant, they are worth making. However, the illegal import of meat causes the greatest concern. Many hon. Members have referred to the large amount of bush meat that is imported illegally. Two London traders have been prosecuted for selling it. Last May a trader in Dalston, north-east London and his girlfriend were jailed for selling the meat of an endangered African monkey species. He boasted that he could import chimpanzee meat or even a whole lion carcase from Nigeria for £5,000. He was sentenced to four months' imprisonment for selling parts of a tantulus monkey. He told the court that many African shops in Britain sell bush meat.

In September another London trader was given a conditional discharge after being found with the carcases of 11 monkeys and two anteaters. Although it is not the Minister's responsibility, such sentencing is utterly inadequate. I could make many suggestions that would ensure that people who undertook that trade were severely punished and, if necessary, deported.

Border inspections are critical. It has been pointed out that as an island nation we should be better placed to protect our people and animals from the importation of disease. Border inspections are lamentable, both at airports and seaports. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham referred to Heathrow and I have an interest in Manchester airport as it is close to my constituency. Few hon. Members mentioned seaports, where there is a huge opportunity to smuggle illegal meats and other products in containers. We cannot quantify that problem at this stage. We have a vague idea of what is entering in personal baggage through the main airports, but I believe that a gigantic amount is coming in through seaports. What is being discovered is merely the tip of the iceberg.

The Government must introduce effective measures. We accept that we will not catch everything, but we must try to be effective. We must use scanning equipment where appropriate and low technology in the form of sniffer dogs. I went behind the scenes at Heathrow last week, with permission of course, and saw luggage being unloaded and brought into the passenger halls. There is ample opportunity for scanning equipment to be used at that point before the passengers pick up their luggage.

Scanning machines cost about £180,000. I understand that they can be fixed to test for drugs, meat or other products. *[Interruption.]* The Minister does not believe that that is so but I believe that it could be done. Rather like speed cameras, especially those in Staffordshire, the county next to mine, they would act as a deterrent. They are mobile. We all naturally obey the speed limit because we do not know when we will be caught. Scanning equipment should be moved. There does not have to be one on every single luggage—

Mr. Russell Brown: Carousel.

Mrs. Winterton: Carousel. I thank the hon. Gentleman. The scanning equipment could be behind the scenes and used before the luggage reaches the carousel. The machines could be moved about. One would not need to invest vast amounts of money to be much more effective. Sniffer dogs are probably more cost effective. They should circulate with their handlers in the passenger halls to act as a deterrent and a reminder.

I am ashamed to tell the Minister, but when I entered the customs hall at the very end to watch customs officers check baggage I did not notice the two posters. I was not a passenger and I was there for a different purpose, but I did not notice them. That is not much of a deterrent. Surely, as in other countries, we should get passengers entering this country to sign a declaration. That concentrates the mind.

[Mrs. Winterton]

When I go to America, I am careful to ensure that I fill in and sign the form properly. That reminds me each time that if I have an apple in my overnight baggage, I should dispose of it or eat it quickly. We need more deterrence to ensure that people are aware of the dangers of importing meat and other products.

When the customs hall at Heathrow emptied, I could see how big it was. It was full of packages from a recent raid, to which other hon. Members have referred. Some packages were seeping blood. It is disgusting that that practice is allowed to continue and that customs officers and others have to handle such material, with all the dangers of contamination and so on.

A major issue is the need to co-ordinate the regulatory authorities and have one body in overall control. The Government must tackle the problem robustly—just posters will not do. However, we have not seen what else the Government have done in the year since the first outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham. We know that risk can only be limited, but the subject does not have the high profile that it needs.

As I said, the penalties for organised crime must be severe. An import for personal consumption of salami from Italy is not as risky as the same amount of bush meat, which threatens human and animal health. That point was well made.

In the year since the outbreak of the foot and mouth epidemic, very little action has been taken or is perceived, particularly by hard-hit farming and rural communities. I make no apology for repeating that we need a full and independent public inquiry to build trust between the Government and rural communities. The three inquiries that the Government set up, one of which has reported, will not fit the bill. Time is of the essence in one way, but we must get to the truth, and people must be able to have confidence that we have got to the truth. We need to know the cause of the disease and what went wrong in the handling of it.

People are feeling vulnerable again because of the news that we heard yesterday, although today's is relatively good. They need to know what contingency plan is in place to deal with any further outbreak. Will it be more effective than the last one? We were assured that there was a contingency plan, but it did not seem to be a meaningful one to anyone in the farming community.

Will the testing be quicker and more accurate? What consideration have the Government given to the use of vaccine in any future outbreak? Slaughter on the scale that we have witnessed will never be tolerated again. Is sufficient vaccine available in the United Kingdom? Has a contingency plan been drawn up for its use if the Government have decided to use it? What action can they take to reassure British consumers of the truth, which is that milk and meat from vaccinated stock are perfectly wholesome and safe to consume?

What action are the Government taking with partner states in the European Union to ensure that, in the event of another outbreak, barriers do not come down against our exports if we use vaccines? The example that stands out is the French ban on our beef because of BSE, which is on going and causing damage. Again, if there were honesty in labelling, some of these issues might be covered.

The debate is taking place because, for the second time since the second world war, we have imported animal disease in the form of foot and mouth. It has caused devastation not only of the farming community but of rural businesses, including bed-and-breakfast establishments, pubs, post offices, shops, equestrian facilities and many others.

It must be stressed that the illegal importation of meat puts at risk not only animal but human health. We have not yet seen one of those incidents and, frankly, I hope that I do not live long enough to see one. If we view foot and mouth as devastating for animals, how much worse would it be if a disease outbreak affected the human population? I beg the Government to act quickly.

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on securing the debate. He delivered his points extremely well. It is important to pay careful attention to our border posts, to measures for protecting consumers, and to preserving animal, plant and indeed human health.

We must keep matters in perspective. It is perfectly legitimate for the National Farmers Union to campaign on the issue of illegal imports and I make no criticism of any contributions to today's debate, which have all been perfectly reasonable and legitimate. However, the issue of keeping matters in proportion remains.

The Government believe that the measures in place in the UK are comparable with those of any other country. That is not to say that we should be complacent or that we cannot improve them. I shall soon outline the contributions that we have made over the past year. I was surprised to hear that some hon. Members were unaware of those measures, which may partly be the Government's fault. It is particularly useful to have an imports forum to discuss what measures are in place, what further measures we may be able to take, and what measures are or will prove effective.

A risk assessment is crucial, which is why we commissioned the Veterinary Laboratories Agency to conduct a proper assessment, which will take about six months. It will examine the probability of undetected illegal imports coming into this country and estimate the scale—

Mr. Bacon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: In a moment. It will assess the probability of infections with a class A animal disease.

It is right to confront the issue of illegal imports, but we cannot use it as a diversion from other disease control measures. No hon. Member speaking in the debate has tried to do that, but some in the wider community always look for simplistic answers or a scapegoat—and the favourite scapegoat is illegal imports.

We know where the disease started, but I cannot say too much about a particular farm, which, as the hon. Member for Hexham is aware, is subject to criminal proceedings. I cannot comment specifically, but if regulations had been followed on the farm, we may never have had the outbreak in the first place. That should also be taken into account. We should also reflect on how the disease spread and the measures needed to stop it. As all hon. Members who have spoken acknowledge, when dealing with illegal activities, it is never possible to provide a 100 per cent. guarantee of stopping disease. That is why we need contingency plans on how best to prevent disease spread.

I say in all seriousness to all hon. Members present, including my hon. Friends, that it would be easy to spend an awful lot of extra money and resources on import controls without significantly reducing risk. We must assess the risks carefully and establish where best to apply our resources. We must think that through. I am sure that hon. Members would not disagree.

I must correct the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on standards of imports. Legal imports, even from countries with endemic foot and mouth disease, have never been associated with disease spread of any sort because they have to pass through strict controls—deboning of beef, for example—and only certain regions are accepted. We utilised provisions under the OIE regulations to get our exports going again in certain parts of the country that were effectively foot and mouth free, even though some regions were officially under control. We were confident that our exports were safe, secure, properly regulated and measured. That should also be taken into account.

In respect of imports, I do not disagree with the point made by the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) about standards, but there are common EU standards for meat production, slaughterhouses and cutting plants, which apply to everyone and which the EU enforces. It is true that some of our standards of production are higher than those of the EU, which is right. We need to explore issues such as labelling and consumer choice.

Hon. Members acknowledged that we have increased publicity in ports of entry. There are new posters and leaflets, and travellers who apply to British embassies for a visa are given information explaining the regulations. There is an argument that we should make the posters bigger and bolder to increase awareness. A point was made about perception—being seen to do things—which is important. We are planning a pilot scheme with dogs trained to sniff out meat. A handler is undertaking training at present. Given the number of passengers going through Heathrow, we do not know how effective the scheme will be, but it is not unreasonable to try it out. The biggest benefit may be the visual impact, which I do not underestimate.

The law has been changed to strengthen enforcement powers to make it easier for local authorities to take action on meat that may have been illegally imported. Environmental health officers' powers have also been strengthened, which will affect inland catering outlets. We are considering whether we can strengthen the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996 and make them more effective; work is being done on the matter now.

Seizures have increased. In the year to 31 March 2001, 2.7 tonnes of illegal meat were seized. Since April 2001, there have been 1,076 seizures of illegal animal products—an estimated 46 tonnes of illegal meat. More checking is being carried out, and there have been more seizures. We are not complacent about the work that needs to be done.

We are considering the issue of personal imports. Some serious matters were raised, including the point about baby food, which people may need when they travel. Baby food is processed and sealed and it is not a problem.

The regulations state that the 1 kg allowance should be cooked meat, hermetically sealed. That is the EU standard, which minimises the risk. As the risk is largely from other illegal products, it would not necessarily be reduced if we did not have that EU standard. It is a serious matter, which we are discussing with the Commission.

We are talking to airlines about producing in-flight videos that can be shown to people travelling to this country telling them what they can and cannot bring into the UK. Landing and boarding cards have been amended in respect of declarations.

As I said earlier, a scheme that uses sniffer dogs is being considered. We are also considering using X-rays, but although some are quite sophisticated and can detect organic matter, X-rays are designed to show bones, not meat. There is thus a genuine doubt about whether X-ray machines are effective. However, there may be a role for a skilled operator with a more sophisticated machine; we do not rule it out.

We accept that we cannot entirely reduce the risk of illegal activity, but we are strengthening the regulations. As the hon. Member for Congleton said, there have been two prosecutions of people who imported bush meat, one of which resulted in jail sentences. They are the first prosecutions for that offence. I accept the point that was made by the hon. Member for North Thanet about the environmental impact and the undesirability of the trade. I will certainly bear in mind his point about visas and whether we can strengthen enforcement.

Time does not allow me to continue with all the points, but I want to emphasise that we are taking the issue seriously. We have taken a great deal of action, we intend to strengthen the law and we will ensure that what we do is public. We should perhaps do more to make public what we have already done, but it must be borne in mind that border controls are just one aspect of disease control. We must examine disease control in the round to ensure that we minimise risk in our country. I believe that we are doing that.

Flood Protection (Yorkshire)

11 am

Mr. Harold Best (Leeds, North-West): I rise to speak on flooding in my constituency. I am mindful that there may be hon. Members present who have had experiences in places such as York, Selby and some parts of central Leeds that are similar to, and in some cases much worse than, those in my constituency. The effect of the damage on the people concerned is no different whether it is on a large or, as in my constituency, small scale, and the shared pain unites all such victims. It does not matter whether an individual victim or a community of interests is affected. The same painful and damaging effect must be managed and minimised.

It is the Environment Agency's responsibility to warn of impending floods, but none of us can escape the common knowledge that exists and has arisen out of shared experience of recent years. Flooding is a more common experience now, and the increasing severity of the flooding provides a growing consensus of scientific opinion. I refer to the view increasingly expressed in the scientific community that changes in our shared climate will produce more extreme weather, and that what we now call the extreme may become the new norm. The 1990s were the hottest years in Europe since records began, and rainfall was up by at least 10 per cent. and perhaps much more in certain parts.

The UK Climate Impacts Programme has produced models that speculate—I acknowledge that this is speculation—on a 3 deg increase in the world's average temperature, with a consequence of a roughly 20 per cent. rise in precipitation. Such evidence may still be less than convincing to those who always want further and better detail. I understand that view, although it is perhaps the same view that was encountered by Noah when he explained his anxieties about impending floods.

What is certain is that my constituency is experiencing hard evidence of change, whether that is long or short-term change. In the past few years, the River Wharfe has overflowed its banks more times that I can remember happening in my 64 years of living in close proximity. It has happened three times in the past year or so alone. That has affected people living close by the river—for example, in the market town of Otley—although it is perhaps nothing on the scale of the events that we saw on television that took place in York and further down river. However, I would not want to get into a meaningless competition about who suffers the most.

One young family who bought their house just more than a year ago—an older stone-built house about 100 years old—knew that their position close to the River Wharfe meant that they might experience flooding "once in 100 years", which was the professional advice that they received. So far, they have experienced the "once in 100 years" flooding three times. Their house does not become swamped by vast quantities of water; their experience is different. When flooding occurs, the road outside the home of the Floods—the name of the family—is under 250 mm of water, or about 10 in. Passing vehicles push that water across into their curtilage. It then enters the house through the ventilation points underneath the floorboards. People may say that that is no great disaster, but it is, to say the least, a disturbing experience for a young family. It can also be alarming if young children are involved and the parents have to think about the possible consequences of the flooding becoming dramatically worse.

The effect of flooding in Otley town centre is not catastrophic, but with only one road bridge in the centre and adjacent roads under 250 mm of water, even though the bridge is passable, traffic can come to a halt and that tends to choke the town centre. Inevitably, flooding damages the commercial life of the town. Anyone who knows about town-centre traffic is aware that a hold-up of two or three minutes has knock-on effects on the whole system.

Flooding is both debilitating and corrosive to a community and individuals. It is a serious problem. The inhabitants of town and village regard the River Wharfe as beautiful, as are the villages of Pool—an interesting name—and Arlington, and the market town of Otley alongside its banks that fall within my constituency boundaries. The countryside of Lower Wharfedale is very attractive. The river is a major asset to the town and villages. It is one of the cleanest in England. However, when it overflows its banks, the local sewage works downstream from Otley experiences problems. Such flooding is not a threat to public health, but no one would choose to manage the additional problems that it causes when the floods are fairly severe. The local anglers who, in many cases, are the watchdogs of water purity have drawn to my attention the fact that the sewage works have problems on non-flooding occasions. Because of that difficulty, some time ago before the last flood I arranged a meeting in my office this Friday with both Yorkshire Water and the Environment Agency, at which I also intend to pursue matters to which I have referred today.

What is to be done? So far, the answer has been that plans must be made to manage the expected. That is fair enough. It is difficult to plan for the unexpected. However, the problems that we may have expected a few years ago now have led to different expectations in the public mind. We must consider ways in which to plan differently. My constituents ask for the existing plan to be revised, a matter that we are taking up with the appropriate authorities. The plan is inadequate and it means that measures that should be taken quickly to manage the change in speed of flooding, for example, are not happening as they would like.

My constituents know that we cannot reverse overnight, or even in the next century, the abuse of our environment and the damage done by humankind in the past two hundred years or so. However, that is being tackled—somewhat slowly in my opinion—by the world's nations, some of whom are more enthusiastic than others. I am pleased that our Government are taking a leading role in improving the disastrous situation. My constituents do not want a miracle; they want a fresh consideration of what can be done locally. They would also like further and better help from the Government. That is not a new cry. I do not know how many times Ministers have heard that. Unexpected events place additional costs on local services. I hope that the Under-Secretary will give some thought to that.

No one expects our good Under-Secretary to turn back the tide, unless he is in the business of miracles, but I hope that he can help in developing a better, more sensitive and efficient planning process for the now inevitable overflow of the rivers in the Leeds City metropolitan district council area, which has the River Aire at its centre. My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon), who cannot be here this morning, has faced similar problems. He has worked hard with his constituents to do what he can. He, too, would like the Under-Secretary to give the problem further consideration.

The Under-Secretary will respond with straightforward honest realism. He has a reputation for that, and I approve of it. It is not only appropriate but necessary to deal with those matters honestly and fairly. My constituents are hoping for an acknowledgement of the changing circumstances in which they live, and they hope for further Government help not in curing, but in ameliorating the problems that arise from—I was going to say "flow from"—the damage done by the growing menace of unexpected flooding.

11.12 am

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) on securing the debate. I know his constituency well, and if I were not to represent Selby, the constituency I would most like to represent in the world would be Leeds, North-West, not least because of the River Wharfe. His constituency also contains Headingley cricket ground, which is one of the Meccas of Yorkshire. I feel great sympathy for what he has said about the recent effects of flooding on his constituency. Selby and many villages in my constituency have suffered flooding in the past 18 months.

I want to begin on an optimistic note. We have had debates both in the main Chamber and in Westminster Hall about flooding. The most recent one was held just before Christmas. Organisation and funding have improved in Yorkshire. It is little more than a year ago that, to many people's shock, it was announced that Yorkshire's flood defences were the worst in the country as measured by the Environment Agency for England and Wales. A backlog of works had built up. Many people remember the unseemly row that we had on the regional flood defence committee some 12 months ago about flood defence funding.

It is worthy of note that the capital programme in Yorkshire for flood defence funding in the next 10 years has doubled. In April 2000, about £93 million was going to be spent in the next 10 years on Yorkshire's flood defences. In April 2001, after the Selby, York and other floods of last winter, the flood defence committee adopted a budget for the next 10 years of about £208 million. That is a significant increase, funded by central and local government.

The good news is that since April 2001, the budget for the forthcoming year has been passed. The local authorities and the Environment Agency agreed on a budget that provides an increase in the local authority levy of 10 per cent. That means that the 10-year programme can begin to be funded. It will require two or three additional commitments from the local authorities—a sustained increase in funding over several years. The 10 per cent. increase will be needed for the next five years if the capital programme is to be implemented. There is a real need to deliver on that programme in Yorkshire. We must stick to the timetable outlined in it as far as possible and, year-by-year, show local authorities and the regional flood defence committee that we are delivering.

We should congratulate some of the individuals and organisations involved, such as Professor Roy Ward, who chairs Yorkshire's flood defence committee, and Peter Holmes, the Environment Agency officer responsible for flood defences in my area. I congratulate also the Under-Secretary's officials, who have worked hard to deliver the capital programme and ensure that we are back on track. By 2010, flood defences throughout Yorkshire should be up to national standards.

An appendix was added to the regional flood defence committee's papers, listing approximately 200 schemes throughout Yorkshire to be developed over that period. In my own constituency, Selby has £4.5 million for that purpose. The computer modelling will be finished in the next few months and the schemes will be built in the next three years. It is intended that the start dates for Riccall Ings, which will defend approximately 100 properties, and Tadcaster, which will defend another 100 will be in the financial year 2003-04, as will Cawood. Ulleskelf will follow in 2004-05. Incidentally, Otley is also in for a scheme in 2004-05. That progress should be acknowledged.

Next year's budget includes an additional £100,000 for the maintenance of existing flood banks because it is no good having expensive capital programmes if they are allowed to deteriorate. My constituency has existing flood defences that will hopefully receive a share of that maintenance budget in the next year.

Since flooding was last discussed in the House, an important report, "The flood and coastal defence funding review" has been published for consultation. The report has implications for Yorkshire. It is comprehensive and requires careful reading of the proposals. I endorse one such proposal that would help flood defences and planning in Yorkshire. The Environment Agency, or the single operating authority, should take responsibility for flood defences not only on main rivers, but water courses with significant flood risk. As hon. Members will be aware, several bodies have a role in flood defences, such as local authorities and internal drainage boards.

There have been occasions during the past year in my constituency—which has 88 villages—when I have been on a water course with all the agencies involved and asked, "Who is in charge?" Several people have shrugged their shoulders and, with the best will in the world, it is not always entirely clear who should take responsibility. It would obviously be beneficial to have one authority clearly in charge in areas that have significant flood risk, whether that is the Environment Agency, which is currently under its quinquennial review, or a separate authority with the power to co-ordinate activities and subcontract work to local authorities or drainage boards.

Several interesting proposals concern the raising of revenue to pay for flood defences. The question of a flood plain levy has been in the news. The Oxford Research Associates report lists the many disadvantages of such a levy. I shall bring a couple of them to the House's attention, and I share the view that the disadvantages are significant. The report says:

> "Such a charge as an exclusive source of funding would not recognise the wider community benefits."

[Mr. John Grogan]

Flood defences in Selby protect not just the people of Selby but the traffic that goes through it and the commerce that uses it as a link to other areas.

The report also says:

> "There could be challenges to the definition of flood risk area."

That could certainly happen. It goes on to say:

> "Such a charge could be socially divisive as it takes no account of ability to pay."

It is concerned that the

> "funds raised will not necessarily be used locally"

and that the charge could be seen to duplicate existing drainage board charges. That is quite a long list of disadvantages. In the words of "Yes, Minister", it would be a particularly brave Minister who took the proposal much further.

There has been some discussion of whether those who develop in flood plains should pay a development charge. That is a more interesting idea. The recently changed planning guidance discusses the fact that local authorities, as part of development gain, could already charge developers in flood risk areas for improvements in flood defences. That is worthy of consideration.

I have a parochial point about Selby and how matters have improved. The impact of mining on flood defences is an important local issue. I commend the Environment Agency, which has, during the past year, taken a robust attitude with UK Coal, which has to fund any additional flood defences to take account of mining. There should be a tension in that relationship. That has brought about flood defences on the B122 south of the village of Naburn, near York, which was flooded and completely cut off at the end of 2001. In the recent heavy rainfall, the village maintained access to Stillingfleet and thereby to York, which was appreciated. That is evidence of the Environment Agency taking strong, positive action in Yorkshire.

In any discussion of flood defences and prevention, it is worth remembering that what happens in the flood risk areas is not the only important thing. What happens in the uplands and dales is also important—such as attempts to improve retention of water in the uplands—as is the use of imaginative schemes such as flood management of washlands. South of Selby, Heck Ings and Gowdall Ings washland system has been developed and used to take water from the River Aire when it has been swollen. The development of washlands will be an important part of flood management in Yorkshire.

I am beginning to have discussions with local farmers. There is a change in emphasis in support for farming in, for example, the recently published White Paper. In the future, there may be a case for considering payments to farmers whose land is being used as a washland on an extensive basis, so that they are basically filling a role of environmental management. That might be in the spirit of the new White Paper.

Flood management not only in Yorkshire but nationally should have a higher profile in Parliament. In the last Westminster Hall debate on the subject, I mentioned the possibility of creating an all-party flood prevention group. A little progress has been made on that. I have had some discussions with colleagues in other areas and written to the Under-Secretary, inviting him to help us to launch that group at an appropriate time. We shall probably make it an associate group. As I understand it, that would mean that bodies such as the Association of Drainage Authorities and insurance companies could be involved and come to meetings. Groups with a wider interest in flood prevention and management, together with interested Members of Parliament could then take the debate forward. As we hit the peak of the comprehensive spending review, there is a real case for those of us who have seen the devastation that flooding causes, not just in Yorkshire but elsewhere, to follow the lead of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West and continue to argue the importance of sustained funding for flood defences.

11.24 am

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I should begin by declaring an interest. I live beside the River Ouse in York and, in November 2000, we moved all our furniture upstairs, sandbagged and boarded up the front door, blocked the air bricks and had an anxious time as the water lapped the front door step for several days. It did not come inside but was one inch below the floor level. The difference between one inch below and one inch above the floor is all the difference in the world.

I cannot overstate the human cost of flooding. Many people in York have told me what they went through in November 2000. Homes that people had created over a lifetime were destroyed overnight. Many people were out of their homes for six months and some for even longer while they were repaired, which illustrates the extent of the damage that occurs when homes are flooded. The Under-Secretary understands that very well because he visited people in my constituency and elsewhere.

The response to the flood in York in November 2000 was magnificent and involved the City of York council, the emergency services—police, fire and ambulance—the Environment Agency and the Army. The Deputy Prime Minister came to the constituency twice. We ran out of sandbags and, within 20 minutes, he answered my desperate call for more and arranged for the Army to fly 50,000 sandbags in from Salisbury plain. The Under-Secretary also visited the constituency with the Prime Minister. The response involved utilities such as Yorkshire Water, the electricity companies and BBC Radio York, which provided a vital lifeline for people who wanted to know, hour-by-hour, how vulnerable they were. In Selby, the power went down and the only communication for many people in the middle of dark nights when water was lapping at their doors was the information on Radio York. It became a true public service broadcaster.

Perhaps most of all I should pay tribute to the response of the citizens of York who turned schools into dormitories and provided food for people who could no longer cook. Hundreds of people turned out and worked overnight to build a mile-long wall of sandbags to protect the Leeman road area. The response at the time was excellent; it was a model of how to respond. In their assessment of those floods, the Government took on board the response in York, which provided a good information service and a 24-hour helpline for the public and responded early to clean-up problems. The Government are using that response as a model for other authorities.

However, the response since the floods has been slower and not as good. New flood defences are being built in Malton and Norton. Existing flood defences have been repaired, but new defences have not been built in York and are not likely to be built for several years. There is a problem with a lack of transparency of how the flood defence system works. New flood defences in Malton and Norton are being built sooner than in York because they faced devastating floods two years earlier—some people have forgotten that—and it takes some years to design flood defence solutions, to consult with the public and to obtain planning permission and approval from the communities involved. That needs to be explained to people, and I have organised public meetings for the communities that were affected in York.

The Environment Agency has sent representatives to them, and once people understand what is happening and that much work is being done, they are considerably reassured. I particularly pay tribute to Craig McGarvey, the area manager of the Environment Agency's office in York. When he has attended meetings, he has explained how much work he and his staff are doing.

Generally, the Environment Agency's public relations has not been as good as it should have been. Improvements need to be made, and the agency needs to get out and meet communities affected to explain what they are doing and what can be done.

I was pleased to see the "Learning to Live with Rivers" report from the Institute of Civil Engineers. It concluded that:

> "There is evidence of the significant impact which climate change is having on rainfall, evaporation, storage and runoff within catchments. The Commission is of a view that best practice in flood estimation must have the effects of climate change designed into it."

I have never before seen a statement about the palpable effects of climate change on flooding in the UK expressed so clearly and unequivocally in an official report. I congratulate its authors.

I am convinced that climate change is part of the problem, but only a part; there are other man-made causes of flooding that must be addressed. Building is one, which the Government responded to in the consultation document. The building of houses, workplaces, shopping centres and roads makes the ground less permeable so that water does not soak in, but runs off more quickly to rivers, which are more quickly filled.

Trees and hedgerows can soak up trillions of gallons of water. If we lose trees or if farmers dig up hedgerows, the land loses some storage capacity and, again, water runs off more quickly. The problem with a flood is not the quantity of water, but the speed at which it comes together. If the run-off from moorlands, hills, fields, shopping centres, and roads were slowed, the period over which the water ran down the river would be spread out, and the height of a flood would be lower. A two-day flood that is 6 ft lower than a 12-hour flood allows many properties to escape damage.

The Department needs to address the practice of ploughing downhill. It is easier to plough up and down a hill because the tractor does not fall over; if it goes around the hill, it can fall down, but ploughing downhill creates a channel down which water runs; ploughing across a hill retains water in the fields.

During the second world war—when it was so important to boost domestic food production—and since then, we have provided considerable flood defences for fields that used to be water meadows, but which are now used by farmers to grow winter crops. In the past, water meadows would retain water during a flood, so flooding downstream was less severe. Given that we face the necessity of putting farmland out of use through set-aside—as part of the common agricultural policy—the Under-Secretary should consider using the CAP and set-aside to convert some water meadows back to their natural state of flood protection. Flood banks could be knocked down and water meadows created once again. Farmers will still be able to get hay from the meadows in the summer, but winter crops would not be planted. If some farmland goes out of use because of set-aside, it would make sense for it to be farmland that can be usefully set to some other purpose.

The Government's consultation document contains a lot of good proposals, and I congratulate the Under-Secretary on the work that he and his team of officials have done. It includes, however, one truly dreadful proposal, which was put forward by consultants employed by the Department. They propose what would be, in effect, a poll tax on flood victims. That proposal deserves to sink as soon as possible. It is clear that we need to spend more money on flood defences, and I shall not duck away from the difficult question of how to raise the money. We have got to raise more money, and the public will have to pay. However, the burden must be shared equitably. The idea of a poll tax on victims is simply unacceptable.

I do not say that because I represent an area that is prone to flooding. A river is a drainage system. By draining water, it reduces the risk of flooding for people who live within the catchment from the source high in the hills right down to the sea. As one moves downstream, the river naturally gathers more water. It is absurd and unjust to suggest that a river will provide free drainage for people who live upstream, but that when it is full of water—as a result of providing drainage—and overflows, the victims of flooding downstream, who are also the victims of good drainage upstream, should pick up the cost. That is just not acceptable. It is a potty proposal, and the consultants have not earned their money.

We cannot and must not play off one community against another. I want the people living around the Ouse upstream of York to have good drainage. I want people downstream from York, in Selby and Barlby, to have good drainage. I do not want them to be flooded because York has good drainage. Drainage is a common good because it is something from which we all benefit. Because we share it, we must share the cost of providing it.

There are some things that one cannot buy as an individual or small community. Protection from environmental risks, such as air pollution or communicable diseases, is one such thing. The free marketeers who talk about Adam Smith should read "The Wealth of Nations". He recognised that things such as sewers in cities needed to be provided collectively by the public sector. Drainage is one such thing. It is not something that should be or can be bought by communities because that would lead to one

[Hugh Bayley]

community protecting itself at the expense of another. That can never work in the public interest or the public good.

There are some good ideas in the document, and I should like to comment on one or two of them. There is a suggestion that specific flood defence costs attributable to individual flood plain developments could be borne by a charge on the developer. That is good economics. It means that a person who creates a potential cost for other people has to share that cost himself. It is also good social justice. I hope that that idea will be explored, although there will need to be consultation on it.

I approve of the consultation document's recognition that social and environmental concerns have been given too little weight in the past. The idea that flood protection bodies—regional customer bodies is the suggested new name—should be able to set a precept on local authorities is a bold move, and I congratulate the Under-Secretary on putting it forward. It is something that I lobbied him to do, and I am glad that he has decided to consult on it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) talked about the absurdity that we faced in Yorkshire after the big flood in November 2000, when the local authorities in the areas that flooded said that they would add an extra element to their council tax to ensure that they received all the possible grant available from the Government in order to maximise the money that was available for strengthening and improving flood defences. However, Yorkshire local authorities in areas that had not been prone to floods blocked the proposal. That cannot be an acceptable way to deal with a problem that causes immense hardship to a small number of people, and costs them immense sums of money. Those costs must be shared. Moving from a levy that has to be agreed to a precept increase creates transparency and accountability, and would make the system fairer.

The document sets out the Government's five key principles in the new system of funding, on which they are consulting: efficiency and effectiveness; simplicity and transparency; accountability; local democratic input; and autonomy. I approve of all those principles. However, two important principles are left out: timeliness and equitable cost sharing.

On timeliness, people expect to hear reasonably soon what flood defence is technically possible if they have experienced huge damage and disruption to their lives or to their livelihoods or if their businesses have been flooded. Once a form of defence has been identified as technically possible, there should be a reasonable time scale for putting the protection into practice. Under the current system, that does not happen. It is 15 months since the flood that hit York and neighbouring communities. In April—18 months after the event—the Environment Agency will publish the result of its audit of what happened along the River Ouse, and its outline proposals for what improvements can be made to flood defences. It will take another considerable amount of time—two or three years—to look for funding and to design schemes to address the flood defence deficiencies that the report will identify. The public do not believe that that time scale is acceptable, and nor do I. A quicker response must be a principle of the report.

I talked about equitable cost sharing in relation to the poll tax proposal. I was pleased to see from the Under-Secretary's demeanour that he was not as convinced of the merits of that as his consultants.

I return to issues brought to my attention by constituents who faced considerable losses; in particular the South Esplanade area of York and the King's Arms pub on the King's Staith, which gets photographed and filmed by television every time there is a flood. The pictures make it look as if the whole of York has been deluged, which is absurd, as the pub is 20 ft below the street on what used to be the Roman wharf. The images go round the world, so tourists do not come and investors do not invest. The pub trades on the fact that beer is sold by bar staff in chest-high waders, but it misrepresents York.

Several businesses in that area, including the King's Arms, restaurants and warehouses, suffered losses that ranged from £90,000 to £400,000 as a result of the November 2000 flood. Around 20 houses in the South Esplanade and Friar's terrace area suffered losses of around £50,000 per house. That was the cost of putting right the damage done. The fire station and magistrates courts, which were flooded, cost £200,000 to put right. I do not know what the police station cost, but it was also flooded out.

The Environment Agency's predecessor, the National Rivers Authority, estimated in the 1990s the potential losses of a flood of the November 2000 proportions. Its estimate was a fraction of the real losses, which is significant because the decision about whether to build flood defences depends on the Environment Agency's estimates of the potential cost of not building them. One reason—there were others—that flood defences were not built for the King's Staith and South Esplanade area is that it was judged not to be cost effective. The cost of building the flood defences would have been disproportionate to the potential losses, and yet the estimate of potential losses was a substantial underestimate. I do not expect my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to comment on that, but I will give way if he wants to speak about representations that have been made.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): It may not be that specific group of houses, but I know that one group in York turned down a scheme on amenity grounds.

Hugh Bayley: It is precisely that one, but that was not the only reason why the scheme failed. Several different schemes were proposed. Some were favoured more by local residents than others, and the favoured ones tended to be more expensive. Had the estimate of the potential damage been more accurate, the cost of the more expensive but environmentally more acceptable defence schemes might have been judged to be cost effective. I will certainly send the Under-Secretary the papers that local residents put together on the issue, and I am sure that he and his technical advisers will examine them.

I am not trying to return to a decision that was made 10 years ago. That is history, and the decision was made, as the Under-Secretary rightly points out, with the agreement of a majority of local residents that a flood protection scheme should not go ahead. However, I believe that we should examine the mechanism by which costs are calculated. Cost-effectiveness is important, because however much money we have for flood defences, it will never be enough. Whatever sum we have must be used in a way that protects the maximum number of people.

To illustrate that point, preliminary costings for improving flood defences in York have been produced by the city council. One example concerns 118 houses in Rawcliffe that were flooded. The cost of providing temporary protection, which would protect up to the level of the November 2000 flood, has been provided, but it is metal sheeting covered with a temporary bank of earth.

Mr. Morley: I just wanted to make a point about temporary defences, because we have had a problem in Selby. Metal sheeting is not a temporary defence. The Environment Agency refers to it as temporary because it is not fully landscaped and complete, but the defence itself is very robust.

Hugh Bayley: I accept that the defence is robust, and that is why I say that it will provide protection. I am glad that the Under-Secretary reassured people who live in the Rawcliffe area that that is the case.

The cost of providing the current protection scheme—I now hesitate to describe it as temporary—is about £150,000. Full landscaping would bring the cost up to something like £500,000 to protect 118 houses. That would be a really good buy, given the losses experience by the people in those houses. More than 40 houses in Clementhorpe, including River street—which featured in photographs and national newspaper and television coverage—were flooded, and the cost of protecting those houses would be about £500,000 according to City of York council estimates. That is approximately £10,000 per house; much less expensive than doing the repairs. The 28 houses in South Esplanade and Tower street could be protected—on the basis of another back of the envelope costing by the council—for between £1 million and £2 million. In the outskirts of York, however, are two isolated houses that could be protected, but at a cost of £750,000. One has to ask whether it is worth protecting a house worth considerably less than the cost of protection; the answer is no.

The consultation document discusses whether all houses in a particular community should have the same level of protection, but doing so would mean abandoning the cost-effectiveness principle, which would not be wise. We would end up protecting fewer protectable people—not a sensible policy.

I have detained the Chamber for longer than I should. I am grateful to the Chairman for not calling me to order. With that, I shall finish and sit down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I would be remiss in my duty if I failed to remind the Chamber that the House took the decision—in its wisdom or otherwise—that the four senior members of the Speaker's Panel should be addressed as Mr. Deputy Speaker.

11.51 am

Andrew George (St. Ives): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) on securing the debate. I am not from Yorkshire, but I have visited it on many occasions. The hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) provided graphic descriptions of the floods suffered in the city and other parts of Yorkshire. We must learn lessons from what happened. The Under-Secretary will want to comment on the fact that 18 months have elapsed—as the hon. Member for City of York pointed out—before action was taken in response to those lessons.

Debate so far has focused on putting adequate defences in place in the areas most prone to flooding. I want to emphasise the wider context, as did the hon. Member for City of York towards his conclusion. We can no longer continue playing King Canute with water. Archival and cartographic evidence indicates that Yorkshire's East Riding has suffered from continual loss of land to the sea, and will continue to do so.

I was honoured to serve on the Select Committee on Agriculture—as it was then called—some three years ago when we examined flood defences. The Ministry viewed its recommendations positively and some resulted in the consultation paper on funding, which we are also debating today. A truism that we identified and which simply cannot be ignored is that, over the next 50 years, climate change is likely to contribute to continuing rises in eastern sea levels of about 6 mm a year. That does not sound much on a yearly basis, but it means many centimetres—or inches, as I prefer to say—over the next 50 years. Yorkshire is estimated to face a 0.5 cm increase every year. We cannot go on denying that it is happening, turning our backs on it or pretending that we can continually put up defences to stop that happening. The situation needs to be reviewed. That is only an estimate of sea level rises; it is exacerbated by the natural downward tilt of some land. As a Cornishman, I am always proud to point out that, perhaps symbolically, as England sinks, Cornwall rises. Either way, we are talking about a serious problem that cannot be ignored or avoided.

In evidence to the Select Committee, the Met Office identified the fact that, by 2050, winter days will be typically four or five times more common, in the sense that very heavy rainfall will be more regular during winter. In recent years, we have experienced more excessive rainfall in short periods, and the Met Office says that the flooding problems that we suffer as a result of that intense rainfall are likely to increase. Indeed, the problems that we have experienced in the last few years are likely to increase significantly in years to come.

We cannot simply put our heads in the sand and think that that will not happen, nor can we play King Canute and respond by building ever-higher defences. We must have a more strategic view of how to address the problems. As hon. Members have identified, the additional rainfall is affecting an increasingly urban environment, in which there is much faster run-off and rain collects in water basins more rapidly. That is exacerbating the problems.

[Andrew George]

To be fair to the Government, the UK strategy is the legacy of 70 or 80 years of believing that we can play King Canute and take on the sea and the natural elements. Development on flood plains—more than 2 million properties have been built in the last 10 years—has reduced their natural ability to contain and hold back floodwater as it rushes off hard surfaces faster than ever.

As the hon. Member for City of York said, an additional problem is the intensification of agriculture. Extensive drainage means that water runs off farmland faster than before. That intensification has led to overgrazing, soil compaction and the formation of surface crusts or soil capping, which reduce the land's natural ability to soak up water. Reports that flooding is occurring because catchments are saturated are not always accurate. Without soil compaction, supposedly saturated areas would be able to absorb more rainfall.

In addition, we are filling in flood plain wetlands. In the last 25 years, we have drained and filled 60 per cent. of our flood plain water meadows. These once acted as a natural safety valve, holding back floodwater and so reducing the flooding risk downstream.

All those problems show the fundamental contradiction between our long-term high principles about what we should be doing in response to global warming, rising sea levels and the climatic changes that we have described, and the commercial reality of the day-to-day financial pressures on us all.

Two examples show that contradiction. One is the planning system, which of course was artificially created by man. The planning system says that one cannot develop unless one completes a planning application form and gets permission. As we all know well—particularly those of us who have served on local authorities—planning committees, in effect, hand out rather large cheques to people who undertake very little work to secure their planning permission for a new development, every time they give planning permission.

The inexorable commercial pressure to seek housing and other types of development, whether on flood plains or anywhere else, is ever-present. The pressure for development will always be there. We have created a system that encourages us to develop in lower land and on flood plains where communities are based. We are creating commercial pressures that drive the desire to secure planning permission for developments in some of the most inappropriate areas from the point of view of flood defence. We need to recognise that.

Secondly, we have created artificial systems to encourage agricultural intensification, which has resulted in a desire to produce more and more to maximise the benefits of production supports. That has reduced our ability to allow for the saturation of land appropriately to avoid flooding. The difficulties that we experience are largely created by human systems of intervention. We need to recognise that and adapt some of the processes in response.

I congratulate the Government on introducing the consultation paper on funding. It goes in the right direction, but it raises a load of other questions. The structures of delivery of funding and strategy within areas where there are special problems need to be looked at closely. I should be interested to know what the Under-Secretary considers to be the appropriate response to the plethora of agencies and bodies that either have a responsibility to deliver flood defence or cause flooding through excessive development or agricultural intensification. Should not the Environment Agency play a greater strategic and pivotal role in overseeing that? No other agency is in a more appropriate position to do that but, in many areas, it is unable to intervene.

What assessment has the Under-Secretary and the Department made of proposals for managed retreat in coastal areas? That has been on the agenda for some time. We had natural retreat in East Yorkshire many centuries ago. It happens naturally. Certainly the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Select Committee, wildlife trusts and others have indicated that, in certain areas, managed retreat is the most sensible option. It provides a far better barrier for the areas behind those in which we are retreating than putting that barrier up in the first place.

Should we move from a system of production support, of which Liberal Democrats are in favour, towards other direct payments to farmers as suggested by the Curry commission? For example, should we pay farmers to create rural flood plain wetlands, which are the countryside management payments that we can, within green box subsidies, encourage or allow farmers to receive?

Do we need to establish a more appropriate format for the strategic delivery of flood defence planning? Much flood defence is piecemeal planning. It ignores the downstream impacts of building concrete flood defence structures on urban areas. A catchment-based approach may be more appropriate. I know that the Government are considering that, and I should be interested to hear the Under-Secretary's comments about it.

An important aspect, and one that we are all looking towards, is the methods to restrict development in flood plain areas. Have the Government considered that objections from the Environment Agency to development in flood plain areas should be adopted as a mandatory instruction to planning authorities in certain circumstances? Should certain zones become areas of mandatory objection where planning cannot be permitted?

If that it not acceptable, would it be appropriate to oblige owners of property in areas prone to flooding—or developments that have gone ahead to which the Environment Agency has outlined strong objections—to disclose, at the point of sale, those objections? That may assist the process of discouraging development in flood plain areas. The debate has concentrated appropriately on efforts to reduce the impact of flooding, particularly in certain communities and urban areas. I want to encourage the Under-Secretary to examine a wider strategy.

12.7 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): There cannot be many constituencies further apart than St. Ives and Leeds, North-West. Bedfordshire is in the middle; nevertheless, all three have suffered from the effects of flooding. I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) on securing the debate.

He made some pertinent points. The hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) asked the important question: "Who is in charge?" In his good, if somewhat lengthy, speech, the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) spoke movingly about the effects of flooding, particularly in human terms. That is something that we all understand yet never seem to take into account in our calculations. He also made a legitimate point about the need for new flood defences—not just shoring up the old—and suggested some simple, practical solutions that he would like the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to encourage. The hon. Gentleman is to be commended for his suggestions.

I cannot help but feel sorry for the Government's Environment Ministers. In recent weeks, they have rightly faced a barrage of criticism directed both at DEFRA's continuing failure to implement an effective waste management strategy—something about which the Under-Secretary and I have spoken in the past—and its handling of the European Union fridge disposal legislation. The World Economic Forum has criticised Britain's environmental policies as being among the most dismal in the developed world. It highlighted a lack of recycling initiatives, as well as the levels of air pollution.

To make matters worse, in a somewhat cruel twist of fate, a vast fridge mountain has sprung up in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), the Minister for the Environment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's introduction. However, I am not sure whether fridge mountains have anything to do with flood defences.

Mr. Sayeed: If I might explain, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They do because they have an effect on climate change. That acre of rusting, CFC-emitting white bears humiliating testament to the Government's incompetence and indolence.

For the sake of DEFRA Ministers, as well as that of home owners and businesses across the UK, let us be thankful that the floods of autumn 2000 have not been repeated on a similar scale. The figures associated with those floods are all too familiar. Inundation of land throughout England and Wales during that period resulted in insurance claims totalling more than £750 million and the evacuation of some 11,000 people. A complete financial impact assessment is impossible, as some of the properties affected were uninsured. The total cost of the damage, including loss of earnings, is estimated to be £1.5 billion to £2 billion.

The problem will not simply go away. Indeed, Environment Agency figures indicate that the dual spectres of coastal and inland flooding will loom increasingly large in the future. They project a tenfold increase in flood risk in the next century. So how can we in the political sphere set about managing that risk? I intend to touch briefly on three subjects that I hope will put some of what has been said today in a broader political context: first, the provision of funding for coping with the flood threat; secondly, the structuring of the institutional framework to deal with flooding; and finally, the redefining of planning guidelines so that developers are discouraged from embarking on projects that are likely to increase the risk of flooding.

Funding for flood protection has certainly increased since 1998, and looks set to increase further in coming years, and we should all acknowledge that. The Environment Agency, local authorities and the internal drainage boards spent a combined total of more than £330 million on flood defence last year, compared with £302.5 million during 1998-99 and the £316.4 million in 1999-2000.

The Government's spending review conducted in 2000 provided for a £10 million increase in DEFRA flood grants for 2002-03, and for a further £20 million for 2003-04. In total, Government spending on prevention and early warning looks set to reach £377 million this year, £394 million in 2002-03 and about £414 in 2003-04. We should all acknowledge that.

I am aware that it is easy to criticise Governments for not spending enough money. However, the inescapable fact remains that the Government's financial commitment to flood defence has failed to match the commitment to investment in preventative solutions that they announced in last year's Labour manifesto. In July 2001, a DEFRA report entitled "National Appraisal of Assets at Risk from Flooding and Coastal Erosion in England and Wales" explicitly recommended that capital expenditure in flood defence infrastructure should increase by a minimum of 100 per cent., with a parallel increase in expenditure on operation and maintenance.

The Association of British Insurers has called for a similar financial commitment on new flood defences, particularly targeted at the inland, fluvial flood threat. In its report to DEFRA last year, it concluded that budgeted spending remained

"significantly below the levels necessary to meet DEFRA's own standards".

It then called for an increase of at least £145 million in annual capital spending on improving flood defences in England and Wales.

The inescapable fact is that unless the Government can convince insurers that they are committed to capital outlay on improving and increasing actual flood defences—not administration—those insurers will either increase domestic and commercial premiums in high-risk areas to unaffordable levels or will simply refuse to insure at all against flood damage.

We all recognise the particular problems with an institutional framework that can deal effectively and consistently with the challenges of flood defence. Throughout the last century, Governments failed to ensure that the administrative framework could be reformed to keep pace with a growing flood threat. Apart from the devolving of Executive responsibility to national bodies in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, little has changed since a royal commission in the 1920s recognised the need for a national response to flood risk.

In England, DEFRA sets criteria for investment priorities. It pays capital grants to operating authorities, funds research programmes and ensures dissemination of best practice guidelines. Policy is then implemented by the operating authorities. In England and Wales, the Environment Agency is responsible for managing the flood risk from designated main rivers and the sea. Internal drainage boards deal with rivers not designated as "main", but which run through specified districts with

[Mr. Sayeed]

special drainage needs. Local authorities are involved because they manage the risk from non-main rivers outside internal drainage board areas. If they happen to be maritime district councils, local authorities also deal with coastal erosion.

Arrangements then become more complicated. There are problems with not only the backing up of sewers, but the remit of the water companies, private owners, riparian owners, city councils, district councils, county councils, parish councils and landowners with a direct interest. Such measures have all the makings of a managerial quagmire. However, such extraordinarily heterogeneous arrangements have advantages. They offer considerable scope for solutions that are sensitive to local circumstances, but the fundamental problem is too obvious. The framework suffers from exceptional bureaucratic complexity and makes the provision of a consistent national flood defence service well nigh impossible. Gaining approval for new flood prevention schemes is the bureaucratic nightmare. Even when there is money, plans tend to disappear.

The Under-Secretary may consider that there could be a better way in which to deal with the problem. For example, he may have in mind a financially non-interested body with emergency powers of coercion and arbitration, such as Ofwat, which can push other parties to do what is necessary. It could tell them first to sort out the problem and the question of who is responsible for it could be dealt with at a later stage.

I am short of time and must complete my remarks quickly because I want to hear what the Under-Secretary has to say. I will finish by saying that it is obvious that the current arrangements are not acceptable. We have problems that will continue to get worse, and we need a lead by Government to sort them out.

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) on the way in which he opened the debate and on raising important issues on behalf of his constituents, especially the concerns of victims in flood-hit areas.

I am glad that, as hon. Members have mentioned, the recent floods have been nothing like those in 2000. That was partly because of the weather, although in some parts of the country it was almost as severe as in 2000. It was also because there has been considerable investment in and uprating of flood defences and, in particular, flood warning systems. About 320,000 extra people have been added to the Environment Agency's flood warning arrangements since last year, in one year alone.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) comment that where there has been an incidence of flooding, the reaction from local authorities, the agency and the police has been excellent. It has been quick and efficient. I recently spoke to the severe weather sub-committee of the Local Government Association, which was very complimentary about the way things have improved, particularly since the Northampton floods of 1998. We have made huge progress on floods.

I shall touch upon some of the points made by my hon. Friends and by the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) in a moment, but I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West will want me to comment in particular on the schemes that he mentioned. I can give him an update on where we are with them. As he will appreciate, schemes take time because of planning, planning permission, engineering and design. My hon. Friend the Member for City of York mentioned speediness. Unfortunately, big engineering schemes are not always speedy because there can be challenging technical issues to overcome. The agency and engineers from my Department do a good job at looking at the options on that.

A scheme to protect properties in Castley lane, Pool, Wharfedale is scheduled to commence in 2002-03, this financial year, subject to obtaining the necessary planning and other approvals. I understand that, just as in York, a scheme in that area has already been rejected on planning grounds because people did not like the look of it. That is not unusual. In my travels round the country, I have found several areas that have rejected flood defence schemes that have been offered on the grounds of amenity.

How schemes look and their environmental impact is a consideration that must be taken into account. Sometimes, people want to go far beyond the engineering of a scheme designed to deliver flood defence, and then we come to the whole issue of cost-effectiveness. There can be ways of overcoming such problems, sometimes involving a combination of funding, in which a local authority or regional development agency puts money into environmental enhancement. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West mentioned Ilkley.

Mr. Best: Otley.

Mr. Morley: Otley, was it? I shall come to that in a minute. My hon. Friend might like to hear about Ilkley first. The scheme there was rejected on the grounds to which I referred; one example of several so rejected.

The scheme in Otley has been identified as part of the Environment Agency's long-term plan and is due to commence in 2004, again depending on the necessary approval and planning conditions. I shall make a point of talking to the agency about progress on that scheme because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West is anxious for such improvements in his constituency. He made a powerful case in his speech today, which I accept.

There are other issues, such as consequential costs and the cost to local authorities. We are currently reviewing the Bellwin formula, although that is not always triggered, as it depends on the size of the flooding. We are talking to the LGA about it, and in my discussions with its severe weather sub-committee yesterday, all parties in the LGA were pleased with progress.

I turn to other comments that were made, particularly by my hon. Friends the Members for Selby (Mr. Grogan) and for City of York, who made similar points. Both represent areas that have been severely affected by floods and I am pleased that during the recent severe weather, York's defences, which have been repaired and reinstated since the floods of 2000—as my hon. Friend the Member for City of York said—were not severely challenged during the recent high water. I agree that it is probably not helpful to focus on York as having suffered a dreadful flood when very few properties were affected and the defences operated well within their capability. As the Ouse fell after the peak the agency did not even issue flood warnings in Selby and Gowdall because the new defences were not severely challenged and were in good shape. The people of York can be confident that, by and large, they enjoy good defences, as do the people of Selby now.

I understand the point about funding made by the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire. We are not ducking that issue. Although I say so myself, we are open and transparent about flood defence. My Department commissioned an independent report on what future commitments should be. The report asked for a 100 per cent. increase in capital funding; during 2002-03, the projected increase in council funding in the Department's allocation for flooding and coastal defence is 70 per cent. That is not insignificant.

There is an on-going and legitimate debate on what is appropriate, but we must bear in mind how the money is spent and not just pluck figures out of the air. Large engineering projects must be programmed and only so many can be carried out during a year. People may argue for extra money, but they may be unable to spend it within a financial year. We are almost at that stage now with the amount of additional money that we have made available. It is challenging to many regional flood defence committees to include it in their immediate programmes.

Flood and coastal defences are a long-term gain and I am pleased that the Yorkshire regional flood defence committee and local councils have been more realistic about the levies that have been raised. With those levies, they can access additional capital funding that the Government have made available to them. In Yorkshire, a plethora of schemes is being planned and constructed. I was pleased to visit Malton and Norton and see progress with the work there. A lot of work is taking place and Yorkshire received a big chunk of the additional £16 million for repairs and reinstatement. The Foss barrier needed an extensive overhaul after its sterling service during the 2000 floods. It has had that overhaul and the money has been made available. We are delivering and improving and I genuinely believe that matters are getting better and that risks are being reduced.

There is an on-going debate. The consultants' report examined funding mechanisms, institutional arrangements and matters to which the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) referred, such as flood plains and reinstatement. We have introduced an environmental impact assessment on grassland, which covers ploughing on slopes, and I accept that soil management is an issue. That is covered in DEFRA's soil codes, which are available free to landowners and farmers and cover run-off, soil erosion and the impact of flooding. We have addressed the matter.

I am enthusiastic about the approach to flood plain reinstatement and managed retreat because they are sustainable flood defences that provide environmental benefits. The recent review of funding suggests several radical ideas and I accept that some are more attractive than others. I heard what my hon. Friends said about the flood plain levy, but that is one idea about which I am less enthusiastic. It is right that we have an open debate about the best way in which to raise funds, and the consultant's report is a useful contribution to that. I welcome contributions from the public, local authorities and interested parties.

We have no fixed position on those proposals. We are waiting for the responses, we will listen to them carefully and we will respond in due course. I assure my hon. Friends that I have listened carefully to what they have said today.

NHS and Social Services (Oxfordshire)

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), I should advise the House that the hon. Members for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and for Henley (Mr. Johnson) have obtained the permission of the Minister, the owner of the debate, the hon. Member for Witney, and myself to make brief contributions.

12.30 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak about the problems in the national health service and social services in Oxfordshire. I am pleased to be joined by my hon. Friends the Members for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and for Henley (Mr. Johnson).

I have put in for the same Adjournment debate every week for one simple reason: the state of our health and social services is the subject that dominates both my postbag and my surgeries. We are poorly served in Oxfordshire, and it seems to be getting worse. However, the debate is not about point scoring; it is about asking the Minister what can be done to make things better. Having said that, I praise the magnificent staff in our hospitals and all those who work for social services. I spent a lot of time with them in the John Radcliffe hospital and the Witney community hospital last week. They struggle, often against the odds, to deliver their services. What I am about to run through may sound like a shopping list of problems, but I make no apologies for that because the shelves are bare in Oxfordshire.

I shall start with the most urgent problem, which is the buildings of Burford community hospital. The Government closed it in November 1999, but from the ashes of that dreadful decision came a group called the Phoenix trust. It had the excellent idea of saving the buildings to provide health services for the people of Burford. It put together a great plan involving voluntary bodies, charities and educational organisations, all of which are concerned with health and healthy living. It won the support of local people and the local council, and it won public funding as part of the leader plus bid.

The Phoenix trust won priority purchaser status from the South West Oxfordshire primary care trust, the body which owns the buildings, and it was offered a chance to acquire them for £500,000. Its plans fitted in with the Government's strategy of backing such healthy living centres. It raised the money, and after some negotiation it was ready to go. Last week, however, it heard that the district valuer had upped the value of the building to £700,000, and the health authority has said that its hands are tied.

Without any consultation, the primary care trust put out a press release stating that the buildings would go on the open market, in which they are likely to be snapped up by a property developer. I beg the Minister to intervene, even at this late hour, to put a stop to that nonsense. The goalposts have been moved at the last minute wholly unfairly against the Phoenix trust. People in Burford rightly feel that those are their buildings: the remains of their hospital that they backed and for which they raised money for decades. They should not be treated in that way. The original decision to close the hospital was wholly wrong because we should be trying to deliver health care, and particularly respite care, closer to people.

The next problem on my shopping list is blocked hospital beds, which is directly related to such delivery of health care. Managers at the John Radcliffe hospital told me last week that typically between 100 and 150 beds are blocked across the county at any one time, and I had that figure confirmed this morning. The social services department at Oxfordshire county council explained at a recent meeting in Woodstock that half its care homes are going to shut before 2007, when the new standards will come in. Without rapid and positive action that problem will get much worse.

I recently wrote to every general practitioner in my constituency, and their answers came back thick and fast. Sandy Scott from the Wychwood surgery stated:

> "Residential homes are closing at a rate of knots; funding for beds via social services provides no profit to the operators. The problem will only get worse unless addressed immediately."

I could quote from many similar letters. What actions will the Government take to ease that problem and ensure adequate care home places in Oxfordshire?

As well as a queue to get out of hospital, there is a queue to get in. Three related problems are the breakdown in the accident and emergency department of the John Radcliffe, the long waits for operations and out-patient appointments and the high number of cancelled operations. I have written to Ministers about individual cases. The overwhelming cause of those problems seems to be staff shortages. Before dealing with that, I shall explain what those symptoms mean for my constituents in west Oxfordshire. In A&E, the John Radcliffe has failed to meet the target for cutting 12-hour waits for admission to hospital; it has trolley waits. Such cases arise in my surgery and postbag weekly, and, as a doctor from the Woodstock surgery wrote in December:

> "The JR has on several occasions been closed to admissions . . . Patients have been diverted as far as Northampton and Stoke Mandeville."

As for waits for out-patient appointments, a doctor from Charlbury wrote to explain that the waiting times for some clinics are more than a year.

For cancelled operations, the official figures are that same-day cancellations were 5.7 per cent. of last year's total. That is a bald statistic, but it means one out of every 20 planned operations is cancelled on the day it was supposed to happen. I know that the Minister will agree that that is a dreadful way in which to treat people. The record has improved considerably since then, but the long term problem remains, and 80 beds across the trust are still closed. There is a clear connection between A&E problems, cancelled operations and long waiting times.

Mr. Bowman of Shipton-under-Wychwood received a letter from a consultant urologist from the John Radcliffe, who explained:

> "We are working presently at 100 per cent. capacity on the wards and our operating lists. This has two effects. Firstly, if we have emergency patients on the wards or we are unable to discharge patients following surgery . . . the inevitable consequence is that patients awaiting operations will have to be cancelled. Once the cancellation has been made, there then comes the second problem namely that all our operating slots are booked up for at least 2-3 months in advance."

The individual has the great disappointment of a cancelled operation, then is told that nothing can be done for two to three months, or sometimes longer.

That difficulty is caused by capacity constraints more than anything else, the most obvious of which is staff shortages. During a recent visit to the John Radcliffe, I was told that there were more than 300 nursing vacancies. All told, some 14 per cent. of positions are unfilled. The problem is caused by national pay rates combined with the high cost of living and housing in Oxfordshire. We cannot recruit enough staff, and we cannot retain those we have. I heard from doctors that some 80 nurses are coming from the Philippines. They will be warmly welcomed in Oxfordshire, but they are not the long-term answer. Our nurses should be paid at least the same as those in London, where London weighting provides more than £3,000 extra. In the longer term, we want to see an end to national pay rates.

Next on the shopping list is the star system for judging hospitals. Unsurprisingly, the John Radcliffe got no stars under the Government scheme. However, is that the right way to manage? The problem in the John Radcliffe is capacity: it is constrained, and cannot hire enough staff. So what have the Government done? They have hung a sign that says "failure" on the hospital's door. We were told at the meeting that a total of 21 indicators have to be met, but they are being reviewed, so the hospital's management is not sure of the targets it is trying to hit this year. Will the Minister provide some clarity on those indicators?

I shall address social services. To put the problem in a sound bite—I must because time is running short, and my hon. Friends must have their bites too—we have a funding crisis in social services with cuts being made, charges going up and services being cut back. Again, we have the critical problem of hiring staff. The director of social services at Oxfordshire county council described the situation as

"a social care economy on the point of collapse".

The long-term situation is worrying. People who care for loved ones at home are heroes and heroines, and they deserve our support. There are 67,000 of them in Oxfordshire. The institutional system will collapse if they cease to work their current wonders, and urgent action is needed to prevent that from happening. Oxfordshire spends over 15 per cent. more than its standard spending assessment. Its SSA is profoundly unfair, and is the sixth lowest in the country per head of population. Cuts are now reducing the overspend. Eligibility criteria determine who will and will not be assisted. I shall give the Minister a copy of the document that states that no assistance will be given for

"severe illness or disability and likelihood of deterioration".

Nor will assistance be given if there is a

"possible risk that an individual or carer is unable to maintain a safe environment".

This is a brutal document, and I sent a copy of it to the Secretary of State. I have not received a response.

The new charging policy is a direct consequence of the dire financial situation. Mrs. Roberts of North Leigh copied me the letter that she sent to social services. Her husband, who has Parkinson's disease, receives help from two care workers. He was being charged £409 a month, and that will increase to £952 a month—a 140 per cent. increase. The two care assistants do a great job, but they help for only eight and three quarter hours a week. If the Minister does the mathematics, she will realise that that is an expensive charge. The staffing problem underpins that. Mrs. Tussie Myerson is a brave mother who struggles to cope looking after Emmy, her severely disabled daughter. When I took up her case, the reply from the social services could have been written by the NHS. They told me that they were having

"extreme difficulty recruiting care staff for children".

The problem is the same.

We have high house prices and a high cost of living in our area, but we must stick to national rates. I e-mailed the Minister about some of those issues, as I want her to engage with the problems. The bald statistics back up the anecdotal evidence. In the Oxfordshire health authority, fewer operations were carried out in the last financial year than in the financial year before. The number of in-patients treated has gone down by 3,000. Oxfordshire health authority is soon to be no more, so that is the final element on my shopping list. Will the Minister guarantee that consistent figures will be published, so that we can keep taking the temperature of the health and social services in Oxfordshire on behalf of our constituents, and see what progress is being made? My constituents and I look forward to her reassurance about the difficult problems that we face in Oxfordshire.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I make a plea to the two hon. Gentlemen whom I intend to call to be succinct, to allow the Minister time to reply.

12.43 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I promise to be succinct, as my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) made all the points clearly.

I have had the Minister's responsibility, and I know that one can get frustrated at what may seem like an inordinate amount of special pleading from different parts of the country. We are not making any special pleading about social services, and I ask the Minister to visit Oxfordshire on behalf of hon. Members who have Oxfordshire constituencies. We are all concerned about the John Radcliffe hospital and its persistent nurse shortages. It would be helpful if the Minister could talk to the managers and staff, as there is a growing problem.

In its recent annual review of the performance of Oxfordshire social services, the social services inspectorate found that Oxfordshire has maintained a creditable level and quality of service provision despite significant budget difficulties. My hon. Friend talked about eligibility criteria. In Oxfordshire, many elderly and frail people no longer receive support from the county council and social services. Many people living at home on their own have no contact or social support. I spent time before Christmas visiting elderly people in their homes, at the suggestion of Age Concern. I was genuinely disturbed at how little support many of those people receive. They are often unnoticed, but they are in considerable need. As my hon. Friend said, we do not want to score political points; there is a problem and we would welcome the Minister spending some time with us. It would help to reinforce her argument that social services provision needs more money when she and her hon. Friends see the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and others who hold the purse strings.

12.45 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I, too, will be brief, as many of my points have already been made.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) for securing the debate. I echo everything that he said, especially about the shortfall in social services spending in Oxfordshire, which is having an adverse effect on some of the most vulnerable people in society. Week in and week out, hon. Members meet people in their surgeries who are at the end of their tether. They deal with severely disabled and elderly people who are being kicked out of nursing homes that are on the point of closure.

My hon. Friend elucidated the problems facing those nursing homes, such as the minimum wage and the additional standards imposed on them, and the problems faced by hospitals in the area, especially the John Radcliffe hospital, in recruiting and retaining nurses. I shall be interested to hear the Minister's response to the point about national pay scales for nurses. Is there any prospect of that rigid system being made more flexible? It is at the heart of the problem.

Bed blocking is a huge problem in my constituency. My hon. Friend quoted some statistics, and there are others. Last year, on any given day, there were 22 cases of bed blocking in Oxfordshire. People have to be over 75 even to be mentioned in the statistics. Sometimes, people are driven to try to rectify matters themselves, as they did in the case of the Watlington hospital, which was closed by the Labour Government. Local people decided to rebuild it by public petition and public subscription, and I hope that the Minister will congratulate them on their success.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has not made many notable decisions in his tenure of office, but he did one good thing: he did not call in the Watlington hospital for approval and did not object to it. I congratulate him at least on that decision, and I hope that the Minister will, too.

Local people should not be expected to rebuild their own hospitals to rectify the problems that the Government are causing social services in Oxfordshire. I hope that the Minister will give some comfort and succour to many of my constituents who are suffering grievously.

12.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) on securing the debate; his persistence finally paid off. I agree with him that the matters he raised are extremely important to his constituents and to people throughout the country. I acknowledge that health and social services in Oxfordshire are operating under tremendous pressure. I was pleased that the hon. Gentleman paid tribute to staff in social services and the NHS who manage to do a first-class job for many of their patients and clients, sometimes in very trying circumstances.

I am grateful for the contribution of the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and a little less grateful for the partisan way in which the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) put his case. However, I am delighted to join him in congratulating the people in Watlington on the work they have done. I hope that there will be a successful outcome to the proposals for Burford, which I shall mention in due course. It is an important matter for the hon. Member for Witney.

First, I shall deal with issues relating to social services. The standard spending assessment for social services in Oxford and the eligibility and charging criteria are matters of great concern. The Government take the work of social services very seriously. We are beginning to see much closer working between the NHS and social care in local communities. Our constituents are not bothered whether the NHS or social services provide their care: they want a seamless transition to meet their needs.

Nationally, resources for social services have increased in real terms by 3.1 per cent. a year over the past few years. That contrasts markedly with the 0.1 per cent. per annum increase between 1992 and 1997. I do not want to make partisan remarks, but recent increases have been considerably higher than in the past. That does not mean for a moment that all the pressures have been met and that services are not under any strain. I fully recognise that.

Oxfordshire has benefited from increased investment. It received a 9.3 per cent. increase this year, including a 6.5 per cent. increase in the personal social services SSA. That will increase by a further 5.6 per cent. next year. It will also receive significant increases in grants paid directly by the Department. The children's grant will increase by 11 per cent., the carers' grant by 22 per cent. and the building care capacity and deferred payments grants will double. Significant additional investment is therefore going into social services in the area.

I recognise that Oxfordshire faces local budget problems. It has an overspend from last year carried forward to this year. The new chief executive has appointed a specific person to examine the budgeting processes within the county to ensure that its expenditure leads to best value and effectiveness. I commend that robust approach to financial management at local level.

I acknowledge that funding for the national health service is significantly more generous than funding increases for social services. Under the joined-up system, the extra money invested in the NHS may sometimes have a more marked effect on social services in that the more people treated in hospitals, the more people need care on discharge and in the community. We have to try to match the two parts of the jigsaw for future funding.

I understand hon. Members' concern about eligibility criteria and charges, particularly when, as a result of changes, people previously eligible for free care suddenly find that they have to pay. I would like to highlight one forthcoming change that will improve the position of many constituents. Under the council's current charging regime, residents start to pay if they possess £12,000 of resources, excluding the value of their home. From October this year, that will be changed in line with national policy and the threshold will be increased from £12,000 to £19,000 before charges are payable. Many more people in Oxfordshire will then be able to access services without charge.

Supporting carers in the home is also important. Sometimes the whole debate about caring for elderly people is focused on residential care and nursing home places. I understand the reasons for that, but we must also understand that many people want to be cared for in their own homes for as long as possible. That often depends on the good will, energy and stamina of people who are often elderly themselves and care for their elderly partners. We sometimes forget that many carers are not young, fit and full of energy, but are people in their 60s, 70s or even older who have to provide care 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with all the commensurate strains that that puts on them and their families.

The Government view that problem as a priority. That is why we increased carers' grants for Oxfordshire by 40 per cent. last year. In 2002-03 the grant will be worth £85 million nationally, and Oxfordshire should receive £680,000. I am delighted that Oxfordshire is using its grant in several innovative ways, including extending the relief to carers to all client groups.

Carers often feel that they do not have the prospect of a break or a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. They may want just a couple of hours off to do their shopping or to be by themselves. Carers hugely appreciate that, so making sure that respite and relief care are available is very important. Most carers desperately want to give the best care possible to the people who depend on them. The relatively small investment that we make in giving carers a short break is repaid tenfold in the extra energy that they bring back to the task that faces them.

There will be more respite care. More short-term breaks will be offered to carers of people with physical or learning disabilities, who are important clients and a demanding group of people to care for. There will also be breaks for carers of people with mental health problems. We tend to think of carers as people who help people physically to dress, wash and look after themselves, yet caring for someone with a mental health problem is probably one of the most intense jobs that anyone can do.

Three new care managers will carry out assessments throughout Oxfordshire. The Government introduced the right to assessment by carers themselves, rather than just the people being cared for. Carers are considered in their own right as individuals with needs.

This year, the promoting independence grant has replaced the previous set of grants. The new money has been spent on promoting independence through new patterns of service, which try to provide care close to home and help to prevent re-admission to hospital or residential care. Many authorities now provide outreach teams, and many places have fall clinics. One of the main reasons for the admission of elderly people to hospital in the first place is that they have had a fall because they are unsteady on their feet. They are also more likely to suffer a severe fracture that takes longer to heal. They go into hospital, lose their independence and have to stay in residential care. Elderly people do not want to enter that vicious circle of decline. The simple action of analysing the reasons why elderly people have falls in the first place can prevent tragedies, so we need to put more resources into the front end of the system. The medication taken by elderly people often makes them more likely to lose their balance and have a fall, so that is also important.

Pay issues have been raised. Pay rates are a matter for local negotiation, but since April Oxfordshire has had a cost-of-living supplement of £600 for qualified nurses of grade C and above. A great deal of work has been done on child care facilities, returning to work, family-friendly policies and flexible working. I am acutely conscious of the recruitment and retention problems in the south-east. The cost of housing is high, and people find it difficult to survive on the wages that are paid in this area. That problem affects not only the health service, but teachers, police officers and the whole public sector. There are innovative schemes to provide people with access to housing. I believe that Oxfordshire is at the forefront of providing low-cost housing. The John Radcliffe is leading a scheme that will result in some 130 housing units becoming available.

Mr. Boris Johnson: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Blears: I shall press on, because there are only two minutes left and I want to deal with the Burford issue. I know that a group of local people has raised a great deal of money, which is welcome, and wants to provide a healthy living centre. There is an issue concerning how much information they have provided about what services would be on offer in the centre. It is important that that information be fully available so that the primary care trust can decide whether it wants to support the development and whether it would be of value to the community. I urge the group to be as open as possible. I will certainly urge the region to continue negotiating and to be fully engaged in the process.

I understand that the rise in the valuation that occurred quite recently resulted from a proposal by the Phoenix trust for part of the site to be used for residential development. Clearly, in an area with high land prices, such as Oxfordshire, the introduction of the residential element has been the trigger for an increase in the valuation. If the centre is to provide a service that is of great value to the NHS, there is a basis for further discussion about how local people can share the benefit. I ask all parties involved, including the officials in the region, to get together and ensure that we make progress as fast as possible. They are bound by public probity issues and must ensure that they act in accordance with proper rules for public funds.

Mr. Cameron: I should be grateful if the Minister would ensure that the officials do not put the building on the market until they have had the conversations to which she referred.

Ms Blears: I told my officials this morning that this is an important project and that they should have discussions and get information so that they can make a proper assessment of what will be put on the site. That is very important.

Finally on the health service, I recognise that local people will be concerned about the fact that their local trust has a zero star rating. However, it is beginning to improve and do a good job, and I will be visiting because I want to talk to the staff and everyone involved.

Care of the Elderly (Crawley)

1 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I am delighted to be able to raise this particular issue. I know that, like the hon. Members who spoke in the previous debate, we all feel deeply about it. Many Members say how different the problems are and how important their constituency is, and I shall do the same.

Crawley is a new town and was formed just after the war. People from south London came within five years of each other to settle together with their young families. There was good employment and the town prospered. Few people would deny that Crawley is one of the most successful new towns. Yesterday, I entertained a GP from my constituency, Dr. Roy, who has just completed 40 years working in the health service. He said that he now sees the children of the children of the first generation, so Crawley is a town that has thrived and prospered.

The difference for Crawley, and other new towns, is that everyone came to the town at the same age. They have grown older together and are growing old together. We know that there will be a 51 per cent. increase in the number of over-85s in Crawley by 2011. This debate was designed to examine how we can address that challenge and ensure that we have a decent society. It is a national problem of course, not just one for the south-east and Crawley. People are living longer, and we should applaud that. In 1950, men were not expected to live beyond 67 years old and women not beyond 72 years. In 2002, men are expected to reach the age of 72 and women the age of 81. An average of five years longer in that short time is fantastic, and I hope we improve on that.

There are many reasons for those increased expectations. Ageism is being eliminated from the national health service. I remember when I was a nurse and people over 75 came into hospital requiring complex treatments or expensive drugs. Age was a real issue, but now if people can have a good outcome and are expected to do well from treatments, they are given them. People are treated as individuals, not just as someone who is growing older.

However, that brings huge challenges. A recent article in the *Health Statistics Quarterly*, produced by the Office for National Statistics, predicted that over the next 30 years 65 per cent. more nursing homes places and a 148 per cent. real-term rise in expenditure on long-term care will be needed. That is scary stuff, and we must face the challenge.

I have spoken a little about the problem in the south-east, but I want to expand on that. Land can be sold in my area and throughout West Sussex for between £500,000 and £1 million an acre—those figures come from West Sussex county council. The value of a terrace property in Crawley is more than £100,000, so hon. Members can imagine how pleased we were when the key workers scheme was introduced to enable people who worked in the care sector, teaching and police to move into our area. We want that scheme to be expanded because it has been enormously successful. However, high land prices have led to nursing home owners being able to make more money from the sale of the land to a developer than they could ever make running the property as a going concern, and that problem must be dealt with.

West Sussex county council has a particular and interesting problem. Other boroughs can outbid it for nursing home placements. London boroughs can pay up to £100 a week more, and Kent and Surrey can pay up to £50 a week more. Cash for change made a huge and welcome difference to West Sussex—we received the fifth highest allocation. There was no question that it was needed, and the money was well used. However, we used the money differently from other boroughs by ensuring that everybody placed in a nursing or residential care home had an uprate in the amount being paid. Authorities such as Kent, Surrey and the London boroughs kept the existing price for those in nursing home places and bumped up the new places money, so they can now outbid West Sussex.

Authorities should work together to avoid running into such ludicrous problems. As a result of the outbidding, places are taken by people from London—4.5 per cent. of places in Crawley, for example. That may be good news because people are moving closer to their families, or it may be that there is a shortage of places where they come from. A further 9.7 per cent. of places are taken by people from Kent, Surrey and East Sussex, resulting in a 15 per cent. shortage of what is already a scarce resource. People from London and Kent are coming to Crawley, and Crawley residents are offered nursing home places on the coast. We must do something about that. We have only seven nursing homes in the whole town, in stark contrast to the coastal towns that often have many more.

We must use scarce resources more effectively. It is vital to deal with problems such as delayed discharge. I cannot bear people talking about bed blocking—it is insulting. If I had a loved one in hospital who had a delayed transfer of care and was accused of being a bed blocker, I would be very angry. It used to make me very angry when I was a nurse. We must remember that such language can be insulting to patients.

The problem will be with us for some time, but there is much that we can do to help. Yesterday, in my local hospitals in Crawley and Horsham, 44 patients had a delayed transfer of care. That may sound bad, but it is an enormous improvement on the 70-plus that we suffered for weeks. The cash for change money made a huge difference to the problem, with people working together in better networks and ensuring that people are moved on. Although it seems dire, the situation has greatly improved and I congratulate everyone who worked hard to make that happen.

We must find a no-blame solution. We should get round the table with all those involved in the care of the elderly who deal with delayed discharges and ensure that people have the correct support in their own homes. Before Christmas, I called a seminar at the House of Commons for all those involved—patients, their friends and family, representatives of borough and district councils, social services and the voluntary sector, and general practioners from the primary care trust. We had a useful and productive afternoon looking into better ways of working.

Without doubt, we all call for more money—that may be the long-term answer because we need to plan. However, it will not produce a single extra space in a couple of weeks, unlike some of the solutions offered by our conference on long-term care. We were delighted that the Minister of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) was able to visit and give the Government's view on the issue. It was helpful to our deliberations.

I shall describe some of the solutions that we came up with, because we felt that there was much that we could do. There is a lot going on, but we could work much more cohesively to ensure that people have better care. The main recommendation was for improved joint health and social service working. At the conference, a lot of work was explained to us, and it was good that we were all there to share the information. However, there was so much more that could have been done.

As the conference developed, people thought of new ways to work with each other, and they put a face to each other's names. They had usually spoken on telephones but had never seen each other face to face. It was heartening to hear people finding ways of working more cohesively. Of course the issue of increased capacity in the sector came up, but we did not state merely that there should be more nursing home and residential care places. Members of the borough council said that perhaps they had a role to play and could propose parcels of land that could be used for extra care homes.

In one care home in town, which has been superbly successful, elderly people can lock their doors but still have the extra care that keeps them in care places much longer and makes them much happier. We could expand plans for such homes, which prevent people from having to take up nursing home places too soon when they can be maintained in a different setting. That is one of the ways that we would like to pursue our aims locally, and we are actively considering it.

The issue of supporting people in their homes is vital. The fact that people want to stay in their homes tends to get lost in the debate. They want to be with their loved ones, if they have them, and their friends and families. That is why it is unacceptable to take people to the south coast to be put in nursing homes. They need to be in their communities. Crawley borough council should be applauded for its work to develop elderly care homes in the neighbourhood and to encourage people out of their three and four-bedroom houses to allow families to move in. That work is ongoing but could be expanded.

We want more intermediate care packages and greater clarity about the care that people can expect in their homes from local authorities. There was huge support for that, particularly from Age Concern.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing up the subject, which is important to hon. Members representing West Sussex. We do not want her problem to be transferred to my part of West Sussex on the coast. We should keep more people in their homes and provide packages for domiciliary care. Does she agree that West Sussex social services and social services departments in the rest of the country have to tighten their criteria because of the shortage of funds, so fewer and fewer people are qualifying for the care at home that they so desperately need and that she and I favour?

Laura Moffatt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I understand his point, but I do not agree with the route he takes. West Sussex social services has had a sizeable increase in funds; it is the increase in the numbers of the elderly that is making the problem more acute. The social services department, which was well represented at the meeting, accepts that it has to target its funds much more, and it can think of ways of using them more effectively to keep people in their homes. There is a huge budget for that, which is very important. Of course, funding was an issue, so I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

Recognition of the problems of living and working in the south-east was to the fore. There were further recommendations to improve discharge planning—simple work that needs to be done—and communication with other organisations that assist with the care of the elderly. Improved care and medication for the elderly was also raised. I can well remember elderly people coming into hospital when there was nothing wrong with them other than the fact that they had been on the same medication for too long and had fallen over, or gone off their feet as it is known in the acute sector, and had to be rehabilitated. All that could be avoided.

More respite provision was much welcomed by the caring organisations and the voluntary sector. They said that if more respite care was provided they could care for the elderly at home and would not have to take up the nursing home or residential care option. West Sussex county council is working on that. It is ensuring that information to relatives and friends about supporting the elderly is improved. We are now developing better rehabilitation provisions at Crawley hospital for people who have suffered strokes to enable them to get back to the community as quickly as can be expected. Such good and reasonable options can make a difference. All the money in the world would not improve matters for us over the next few weeks, but changing the way in which we work could make a real difference to the people whom we care about so much.

I am not just shouting for more money. Of course, there is a need for extra resources, but I am talking about working together. The seminar brought people together to work out solutions. No one blamed the Government and said how dreadful they had been. No one said that social services were awful. Members of the seminar genuinely wanted to make a difference. Not only did such discussions improve the relationships of those within the organisations, they made people examine the provision of care in a different way. I hope that the report will make a difference.

1.16 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on securing the debate and raising such important issues, and on the way that she has dealt with such significant challenges that face our society as we look to improving

[Mr. John Hutton]

the health and social care services that are available to elderly people in her constituency and throughout the country.

My hon. Friend was right to draw attention to the significant demographic changes in West Sussex and other parts of England. Meeting the needs of our elderly citizens is one of the biggest health and social care challenges that our country will face in the years ahead. I particularly welcome what she said about the long-term care conference, which she had a leading role in organising in the House before Christmas. If further evidence were needed, the conference confirmed the strong and positive relationships that exist between health and social care organisations in her constituency. She should be congratulated on the work that she has undertaken. I wish to place on record my appreciation of the tremendous efforts of staff in the NHS and West Sussex social services, and those in the voluntary and independent sectors. They are working together to deal with the challenges that she rightly identified.

My hon. Friend was right to say that we should tackle the problem at two different levels. There is a need for the joined-up local working that she described, and we must search for innovation, new solutions and greater efficiency in the use of the available resources. I want to focus the main drift of my remarks on the need for the Government to support the local and better working partnership that she described. There are four particular areas in which we must continue to develop policy and to make further improvements.

My hon. Friend was right to say that resources are important, because they will determine the shape and size of the local services that are available. That point was touched on by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). That is why the Government are investing significantly more money in social services. Funding for social services increased nationally by more than 20 per cent. in real terms between 1996-97 and 2002-03. That equates to an average real terms increase of more than 3 per cent. per annum, and compares favourably with real terms growth of only 0.1 per cent. in social services spending between 1992 and 1997.

West Sussex has benefited from the extra investment. Central Government support for social services spending in West Sussex is ahead of the national average growth in social services spending. This is the third year in a row that the West Sussex personal social services standard spending assessment has increased by more than the national average. In 1998, West Sussex county council received £106 million from central Government towards the cost of providing social services in the county. By next year, that figure will have risen to £123 million. Those figures do not include the extra special grants that local authorities receive from central Government.

We have been able to do that because we have recognised the real and genuine cost pressures in the south of England, such as land, property, wages and others to which my hon. Friend referred, which differ from those in other parts of the country, such as my area. Those higher costs put extra pressures on social services, and it is right to reflect that in funding arrangements when possible.

We are committed to further improving methods of funding local councils with social services responsibilities, in particular to ensure that the allocation system is fair and transparent. My hon. Friend will be aware, as will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your interest in such matters, that we have announced a review of all existing SSA formulas and aim to have an improved system in place for the financial year 2003-04.

I agree with my hon. Friend that we should continue to ensure that investment is maintained, but she acknowledged that that is only one part of the equation. It is not in itself the sufficient and ultimate criterion by which we should judge the success or otherwise of the reforms. It is fundamental, but other things must happen as well.

It was therefore very important that my hon. Friend dwelt on the need to build up capacity in the care system as a whole, in both health and social care services. The Government have an important role to play in supporting local change and development. Central to our plans to reform the care system is the development of new intermediate care services. Those services, which my hon. Friend described, are designed to prevent avoidable admissions to hospital and to allow patients, especially older people, the necessary time and care for rehabilitation. That should enable people to live independently in their own homes for longer when they need care and support from social care services.

I am aware of the need for further development of those services in my hon. Friend's constituency, as she has explained. The NHS plan announced that an additional investment of £900 million would be available annually by 2003-04 for new intermediate care and related services. We have already seen signs of progress in that area. An extra 2,000 intermediate care beds are now available, and 127,000 patients are being helped in their recovery after treatment by specialist intermediate care-related packages.

In Crawley, health and social services are working on a joint intermediate care strategy comprising extra community rehabilitation, supported early discharge schemes, a reablement scheme using beds at Horsham hospital, the use of low dependency nursing home beds and the development of a specialist home care dementia service. Those will be important additions to the services on offer locally. I understand that those and further plans for expansion in intermediate care services in my hon. Friend's constituency are currently under active consideration.

The development of those care packages should not be seen in isolation. The Government have introduced several measures specifically aimed at promoting greater independence, to which my hon. Friend referred and I strongly agree with her views. I think that we would all, were our opinions canvassed, want to remain in our own homes for as long as possible. That is the right place—close to friends and family in an environment with which we are familiar and that we have played an important part in shaping. Of course, there will always be those for whom residential care is the appropriate answer, but our overall aim is to enable more people to be helped to live at home supported by home care services, such as the packages to which my hon. Friend referred.

We are providing West Sussex county council with additional resources to make further improvements in services. Schemes are available to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, provide rehabilitation after hospital treatment and offer non-intensive services to help people to maintain or regain an independent life in the community, such as help with maintaining or entering employment, training or education through the development of seamless services between the NHS, social services and housing. That is the right way forward.

My hon. Friend dealt reasonably and accurately with the problems of delayed transfers of care. The issue of delayed discharges must be addressed, and we must continue to devote additional resources and effort to resolving the problem. It is in everyone's interests to ensure that people do not remain in hospital unnecessarily when they are ready to be discharged.

My hon. Friend was right to draw attention to the slow but steady reduction in delayed discharges from hospital during the past five years. We have made a commitment to reduce delayed transfers of care by a minimum of 20 per cent. by the end of March this year, which equates to freeing 1,000 acute beds by the end of the financial year. To that end, we are giving local councils an additional £300 million over this year and next year to help them tackle those problems. The money has been distributed to every social services department in England, but was targeted specifically on 55 councils that most needed additional resources. West Sussex was one of those and received £2.3 million in the current financial year, with a further £4.8 million in the next financial year. That money has been used to buy an additional 113 residential placements, and for increased expenditure on disability-related equipment and more spot purchasing of care home places by locality planning groups. My hon. Friend was right to say that it has also been used to increase fee rates where supply is particularly short.

The money is already having an effect and the number of blocked beds in West Sussex has fallen steadily from 142 delayed transfers in early September to 71, which is an improvement of 50 per cent. The figure is still too high and there is room for more progress, but we have in place the resources and some of the mechanisms to make a real difference.

We must also make a continuing contribution in our investment in service capacity and staff. We must continue to invest significantly in the training and education of the health and social care work force. A high-quality work force is crucial to ensuring that the country's most vulnerable people receive the best standard of care. Social care workers are a key part of delivering the Government's modernisation agenda as they are at the sharp end of many vital public services. We have been investing significantly in the training of social care workers for several years through the training support programme grant. That grant stands at more than £57 million this year, and West Sussex has been allocated almost £540,000 of the grant so far and is entitled to bid for further funds from one of the sub-programmes within the grant.

As my hon. Friend is probably aware, last week my hon. Friend the Minister of State announced further investment in the training and development of the social care work force. That money will help to provide training and development opportunities for a further 26,500 social care staff. It will be used to fund a range of initiatives, including the induction training programme for 6,000 staff and the strengthening of the framework of NVQ qualifications. Investment in capacity and in the work force is being made, and we must find ways of ensuring improvements.

It is important that local authorities such as West Sussex, providers of care and those receiving care packages tackle the problems together and work in the spirit of partnership that my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley described. I believe that what matters most in a modern care system is the quality of care provided, not who owns or operates the individual services. In social care, there has always been a mix of private, voluntary and public sector provision, and that is absolutely right.

We must improve partnerships across the various sectors to ensure that sufficient capacity is available to meet local requirements. The Government are committed to working in partnership with the independent sector and to using capacity and resources to achieve the best possible outcome for users and their carers. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has recently established a new strategic commissioning group to work at national level to give greater direction to the commissioning of care services for adults. We must consider how we can pool resources, staff, land and premises to stabilise and build up capacity. There is a need to consider the role of care trusts and closer partnership working. We have made a good start, but a great deal more needs to be done.

I hope that I have been able to reassure my hon. Friend that the Government are doing everything possible to provide the NHS and social services in her constituency and elsewhere with the necessary resources and opportunities to allow them to do their jobs effectively. The Government will continue to invest more in both the NHS and social services in every part of the country. I hope very much that she will continue to give her support to all those efforts, and that together we can look forward to further improvements in the care provided to her constituents.

Graffiti

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): We now move on to the final debate, which has been initiated by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). I advise the Chamber that one hon. Member has sought my permission, and that of both the Minister and the owner of debate, to take part, and I will be happy to call him.

1.30 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): As you indicated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) would like to contribute.

The first question is whether graffiti is really an issue. Some people outside London consider it to be a minor distraction. However, again and again in local anecdotal evidence, from a large number of street surveys that we did recently, it came up as an issue about which people are worried. There is no doubt that it is a quality of life issue which people want to see addressed.

I did not want simply to rely on anecdotal evidence. I therefore asked my staff to do a ring-around to find out the scale of the problem across different boroughs. We received responses from 22 of the 33 London boroughs. The amount spent on the problem varies from one borough to the next. Wandsworth council, which runs a free service, spends £650,000 a year on removing graffiti. Croydon spends £250,000 a year, and a number of boroughs spend more than £100,000 a year on trying to address the issue. Graffiti is clearly a problem for the boroughs.

I also made contact with transport providers. Railtrack has a budget of £0.5 million to deal with the issue, but it went over that by £160,000, which means that the total cost to its southern region was £660,000. Graffiti is a significant problem, and although Railtrack has teams working around the clock, that has little, if any, impact on the issue. Hon. Members who travel by train know that they just have to glance out of the window to see evidence that graffiti on railway infrastructure is a problem that is not under control. Railtrack tries to remove any racist or obscene graffiti within a 24-hour period.

London Underground also has a significant problem, and it is spending £2.5 million a year on removal, prevention and security costs. Presumably, not all that is to do with tackling graffiti, because some of the security expenditure must be for other purposes, but the Underground is clearly spending a significant sum. I know from conversations with my local train operating company, GoVia, that graffiti is a significant issue. I am sure that it is a problem on other suburban commuter services in London such as Connex South Eastern.

We did not have time to go further afield in our survey. I am sure that if we had asked local NHS trusts, businesses and private individuals, they would also have revealed significant costs. Roughly speaking, the cost to the boroughs is £3.5 million a year. A quick calculation suggests that with that £3.5 million the boroughs could recruit between 100 and 150 teachers.

The boroughs, working with the Government, need to work hard on the issue of truancy and education. The Minister may be aware that there was a successful anti-truancy project involving the police and local council in York. It succeeded in cutting by one third the number of recorded crimes committed by school-age children, who are the people principally involved in graffiti, and it had a significant impact on graffiti in that area.

We must establish that this is a real problem, and the figures demonstrate that it is. We need to ensure that the people responsible for it understand that it is not a joke or art, it is not cool or clever, and it costs Londoners dear. We must then establish that every organisation with responsibility for the matter takes action. Most local authorities are aware of it, and are taking action to address it. However, the extent to which they prosecute seems to vary significantly. There have been some 117 arrests in Bexley, but none in other boroughs. Action is being taken, but the scale varies from one place to another.

Other organisations are unwilling to tackle the issue. The cable company in my constituency allowed the local authority—very generously—to paint over its graffitied boxes, which it had placed willy-nilly around the borough, and then complained that the council was not using the right coloured paint. It does not seem to want to tackle the problem; nor does it believe that getting on top of it is its responsibility. Others, too, contribute negatively. The last time I looked, *Graffitism* advertised products that graffiti vandals use and promoted them with pictures of Connex trains that had been ruined by graffiti—there was a small disclaimer at the bottom stating that the magazine did not condone the activity. Arriva buses have drawn it to my attention that there is a shop in Croydon, which sells, alongside all the necessaries for carrying out graffiti vandalism, balaclavas. That does not seem positive or community-spirited.

We must establish that the problem is everyone's, and that it should be tackled through partnership. Local authorities that responded to our survey said that the availability of graffiti products, and access to them, needed to be examined. There must also be education through, for example, programmes that are not necessarily about sending those responsible to prison, but about actively involving them in cleaning up the mess for which they are responsible and, if necessary, making them pay the cost. Having more police officers, neighbourhood wardens and officers of the Royal Parks Constabulary would clearly assist, but, however many officers patrol, we will not get on top of the problem until the availability of products is examined.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Is my hon. Friend aware that graffiti vandalism remains a major problem in my borough? Kingston's Conservative-run council was dragged kicking and screaming into drawing up an action plan on graffiti, but it has failed to tackle the environmental hazard. Does he agree that councils can do more? He is right to say that the Government need to provide more powers, including those to which he referred and those that would make it legally easier for councils to clean up graffiti on private property.

Tom Brake: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I confirm that when we spoke to people in Kingston, they believed that the problem was significant in their borough. My hon. Friend makes a good point about allowing local authorities to act. We would prefer partnership, but if private owners are not willing to address the issue, perhaps other action should be open to local authorities.

I finish by asking the Minister to consider how glue sniffing, and the availability of solvent products, has been addressed. Could similar action be taken on the availability of products used for graffiti? Are the Government willing to support initiatives, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam may refer, relating to voluntary codes of practice for retailers?

In a response to a parliamentary question on 16 January, the Government said:

> "There are no plans at present to restrict the sale of spray paints to juveniles: this would penalise young people who have a legitimate reason for their purchase."—[*Official Report*, 16 January 2001; Vol. 361, c. 206W.]

The same could apply to solvent abuse. People could purchase solvents for the best reasons; nevertheless, the Government decided to take action. Can the Minister explain why the Government are not willing to investigate measures, perhaps targeted at the youngest age group, that would help to address the problem?

Graffiti is not a joke, and it is not clever. It is not a badge of honour, and should not be considered as such by those responsible. It harms communities and, if left unchecked, creates a climate of despair and depression. We need a partnership approach, and the Government must play their part. I will listen with interest to the Minister to hear how he thinks the Government could help.

1.41 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on his initiative in securing an important debate on a serious subject. I am also grateful to the Minister for the opportunity to take part in the debate.

As my hon. Friend said, graffiti is neither cool nor clever. It is purely and simply a crime, which stokes up the fear of more generalised crime in our communities. Steps that serve to eradicate it do much to reduce the general fear of crime that imprisons many people in their homes.

I shall talk about initiatives in the London borough of Sutton, which is in my constituency, and that of my hon. Friend. Things being done there provide a useful template, which others should follow. I hope that the Minister endorses them, and finds ways in which they can be further supported. In Sutton, the police, the council and other players in the community take the issue of graffiti and tagging seriously. They treat them as a crime, and as part of the wider agenda of tackling environmental crime. It is important that we recognise tagging and graffiti as crimes and treat them as such. The cost of the damage is immense and, as my hon. Friend outlined, substantial costs arise for the public and private sectors, and for private householders who find their properties vandalised.

I hope that the Minister agrees that the problem is not something to be laid at the door of local authorities, as if the appearance of graffiti is its fault. Often, the impression is given, at least in my community, that graffiti is the responsibility and fault of the local authority, when it should involve a wider community interest and sense of responsibility. It is particularly important that more is done to address the responsibility of parents. I shall flag up a couple of initiatives in Sutton that could be further developed.

The police, in conjunction with the Royal Parks Constabulary, have been running operations to gather evidence on graffiti—identifying tags and the like—to enable them to mount successful operations to arrest and prosecute graffiti vandals in the borough of Sutton. That has proved successful, and has created a profile of an area that will not tolerate such crimes.

If we are serious about tackling the crime, it is important to consider how to reduce the sources that supply materials. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that concern. Will the Minister explain what the Home Office is doing to examine ways in which more encouragement can be given to those in the private sector who are involved in the supply of such materials to enter into voluntary codes in their localities to stop such sales to young people?

I am delighted that my local authority is about to expand its popular and effective neighbourhood warden service to add more eyes and ears on the streets to deal with the problem. However, a worry of the police, the council and those concerned with the partnership scheme in the London borough of Sutton is that, when such matters are taken to the courts, they are not prosecuted with full vigour. They do not result in damages that are commensurate with the cost to the individual.

I hope that the Minister is about to tell us that further steps will be taken to ensure that the courts understand the damage and blight of graffiti and graffiti vandals. Perhaps he will talk to his colleagues in the Lord Chancellor's Department to secure their co-operation in a real drive to ensure that law enforcement measures and the courts are driving down and getting rid of graffiti in our communities.

1.45 pm

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on securing the debate. I shall respond to the points that were made by him and the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow). Graffiti is a widespread problem. Worry about it is growing and the costs of removing it are high. It is important to stress that it is not only the financial costs of cleaning and repairing damage caused by graffiti that are important. It can spoil the enjoyment of public places and add to the sense of fear and insecurity in local communities. It can feed a fear of crime, even though there may be nothing statistically to back that fear.

Graffiti is an important issue and, in addition to stressing that it is a crime, we should recognise that tackling graffiti has a part to play in dealing with the fear of crime in our communities. If it is left untouched for lengthy periods, it can send out a message that no one cares about the area and that, in itself, can bring its own decline to the detriment of rundown neighbourhoods.

The same is true of the impact that graffiti can have on the confidence of those who wish to travel by public transport. We must tackle head-on the idea that

[Mr. John Denham]

criminal damage in a public place can represent a legitimate art form which people can celebrate. The spread of tagging is a great public nuisance. It is a crime. The use of graffiti for offensive words and racist abuse is completely unacceptable.

Action against graffiti should form part of the local strategies for public reassurance and for tackling antisocial behaviour that we expect crime and disorder reduction partnerships to lead at local level. As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington will know, the objective was that from December last year every local authority should appoint an antisocial behaviour co-ordinator. Hon. Members may wish to check with their own boroughs that that has been done. Part of the remit of the co-ordinator should be to develop effective strategies for dealing with graffiti.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said that graffiti is not the responsibility of local authorities. I accept that, but local authorities are not responsible for people who drive their cars too fast in residential areas or for people who play their music loudly. However, we look to them to lead in traffic calming and environmental health matters. The leadership that local authorities must play in tackling graffiti in local communities is coherent.

The Government must ensure that we have in place measures that can support people at local level in tackling the problem. That means having in place appropriate sanctions and legal mechanisms to deal with those who write graffiti. It means encouraging best practice by design and the use of graffiti-resistant materials. It means supporting people in education and diversionary activities. Implementation of those measures will largely lie at local level.

Let us consider sanctions. First, graffiti is criminal damage for which there are appropriate penalties. Under the Criminal Damage Act 1971, damage in excess of £5,000 carries a maximum 10-year sentence for those aged 18 or over. Those aged 12 to 17 can receive a training order of up to 24 months. Lower levels of damage—less than £5,000—can result in a maximum of three months' imprisonment or a fine of up to £2,500 for a person aged 18 or over. For 12 to 17-year-olds, there is no custodial provision, but a range of measures is available, such as reparation orders, final warnings, local child curfews and antisocial behaviour orders. I accept that reparation orders can be an appropriate way of requiring offenders to put right the damage that they have caused.

It is important that appropriate use is made of antisocial behaviour orders, which we will amend during the passage of the Police Reform Bill and make simpler and more flexible and immediate in their application. They have already been used effectively in different parts of the country to tackle those using graffiti and causing criminal damage. Together with acceptable behaviour contracts, they should be part of local strategies to tackle graffiti.

It is also important to make full use of closed circuit television and, in some places, the initiative whereby databanks are kept of the tags that people put on property, so that their tags can be tracked back to them. Those elements of strategies are up and running and are under development.

Mr. Burstow: The London borough of Sutton uses CCTV to gather evidence that is presented to courts, but the courts do not use the penalties to give effect to the community's anger at the damage that has been done. Could not more be done about that?

Mr. Denham: As the hon. Gentleman recognises, sentencing policy lies in the realm of the Lord Chancellor's Department.

On antisocial behaviour, constructive discussions at local level between crime reduction partnerships and area criminal justice committees or the magistracy, which generally deals with those cases, can be effective in building up an understanding of the scale of the problem and the impact on lives in local communities. That type of discussion at local level has proved to be effective and useful, and the hon. Gentleman may wish to pursue that. I shall raise the issue with the Lord Chancellor's Department and get back to him.

Mr. Edward Davey: I can confirm to the Minister and to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam that magistrates are prepared to use the powers that the Government have given them when they are engaged in the process. The bench at Kingston upon Thames magistrates court has been using the powers, although the Government now wish to close that court. Some local police who are trying to focus on graffiti are frustrated because, even when they suspect that a vandal has spray-paint cans in his bag and has sprayed graffiti in a nearby street, they are not able to search that bag for the spray-paint can. Will the Minister comment?

Mr. Denham: Perhaps I can come to that point in a moment. Powers are normally available to police under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 code of conduct, which governs their powers to search when they think that a crime has been committed. That is slightly different from searching people randomly in case they have an aerosol can in their pocket. The operational distinction may seem fine, but the legal one is very important. If police saw someone coming away from an area of freshly painted graffiti, I do not think that they would be constrained in their ability to identify whether someone was carrying the tools of the trade. If I am wrong about that, I shall get back to the hon. Gentleman.

Much reference was made to the initiatives taken by the Government to support the spread of neighbourhood and street wardens. The extended police family that we described in the police White Paper is very important. The presence of more visible authority figures in the street, whether working for the police service as community support officers or working for local authorities and other agencies as street wardens, is particularly important. I am grateful for the support for the Government's initiatives that hon. Members have given. We hope that the measures that we are taking through the Police Reform Bill and the implementation of the police reform White Paper will enable us to extend that local presence of additional people who can assist in tackling antisocial behaviour, disorder and graffiti.

The supply of aerosol paints and indelible marker pens has been mentioned. Historically, Governments of all shades have been resistant to measures to tackle that trade. There is an obvious balance to be struck between denying access to spray paints and marker pens to those who want to cause damage and granting it to those who have a legitimate use for them. We could all sensibly recognise that glues that have killed large numbers of people over the years are of a different order of magnitude. The balance is easier to strike there.

It is worth noting, and it is particularly relevant to the debate's London focus, that the London Local Authorities Bill, which had its Second Reading in the House of Lords yesterday, includes measures that would make it an offence to supply aerosol paints or indelible marker pens to any person apparently under the age of 18. That would apply to the areas covered by the London borough councils. If the Bill reaches the statute book the measures in it could provide a useful pilot in determining the effectiveness of the approach and whether we should seek to extend it.

Tom Brake *rose—*

Mr. Denham: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make a little more progress and then we can return to that point.

I want to stress the importance of effective clean-up as part of the response, which the hon. Gentleman also mentioned. Clean-up is a deterrent to taggers, particularly if there is a sense that no one will be around to see their handiwork. Adding to the list of best practice that we have had, I hope that no one will mind my mentioning my local authority in Southampton. Its best value review of the city's parks and cleansing services highlighted public dissatisfaction with the problem of graffiti. The council set aside resources to tackle the problem. It identified environmentally friendly products that are effective and easy to use and a full-time graffiti removal team backs up its commitment to remove obscene or racist graffiti within 24 hours.

In an interesting initiative launched in the last few weeks, which I shall watch carefully, the council has begun to supply graffiti removal kits free of charge to local community organisations. They comprise about £50-worth of different non-toxic water-soluble materials. Having been out one Sunday recently, cleaning graffiti off some shop fronts, I know that the stuff is remarkably easy to use. It will be an interesting experiment to see whether volunteers from local communities can be used to take control of their areas, although not as an alternative to the council providing its own service.

Tom Brake: I just want to return briefly to the London Local Authorities Bill. Does the Minister support that measure and will he give it Government support to enable it to proceed?

Mr. Denham: The Government are considering a range of measures in the Bill, so I cannot give a specific position on that or other measures at this stage. The hon. Gentleman will understand from what I have said that I am following its passage with some interest. Were it to be passed, it would be useful to see how it worked.

I support the comments made about education, which is important. We need to look at ways of persuading young people that graffiti is criminal damage and that there is a serious cost to the wider community. The Youth Justice Board has been funding a number of pilot initiatives, particularly one operated by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders in Brighton and Hove, Crawley and Worthing. It is intended to see what can be done by engaging young offenders in activities that tackle graffiti issues. We need to see what are the most successful and cost-effective forms of education of young people. Other schemes supported by the YJB focus on reparation, which has been mentioned, and using young people to clean off graffiti.

Railtrack has an initiative called "Track off", which was launched in April 2000 and is aimed at schools. It covers graffiti, but it is also aimed at stressing the dangers to young people of trespassing, particularly on what I still regard as the southern region three rail system, and of going on to electrified lines—which also applies to the underground. Similarly, through a number of Home Office and Department for Education and Skills initiatives we are investing in diversionary activities for young people in general, some of which are aimed specifically at graffiti, while others aim at tackling a wider range of vandalism and criminal damage problems.

Having laid—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 28 February 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Humanitarian Crisis (Afghanistan)

[Relevant documents: First Report from the International Development Committee, Session 2001-02, HC 300, and the Government's response thereto, HC 633.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

2.30 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): When the Select Committee on International Development, including my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and the hon. Members for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) were in Peshawar in the north-west frontier province of Pakistan in December, we visited the main depot of the World Food Programme where food aid was being transported from Pakistan through the Khyber pass to Afghanistan. Considerable quantities of food aid were being shifted and an impressive fleet of white-painted United Nations trucks was lined up at the depot. However, those trucks were not being used to transport food aid to Afghanistan because the UN authorities took the view that the security situation there was so unpredictable that they were unwilling to risk their personnel and, by inference, trucks to shift the aid. That was being done by local contract drivers in their trucks.

That starkly emphasises the Select Committee's concern about security, which was central to our report. We said:

> "We remain to be convinced that the food delivered into Afghanistan can be distributed to all those in need, primarily because of poor security".

We went on to say:

> "Everyone we spoke to, whether in London or Pakistan, stressed to us that the most serious barrier to humanitarian assistance has been, and remains, poor security . . . Security needs to extend to the secondary distribution network as well as to the supply route into Afghanistan. Delivering food into the country is not enough—it must be distributed as well".

We concluded that security is not simply a symptom of the recent conflict. The war may be over, but the risks remain.

When the non-governmental organisations gave evidence to the Select Committee on Tuesday—we had a single evidence-taking session to update us—Sakandar Ali, the country representative of Islamic Relief, observed that he had received reports as recently as 19 February from its Kabul office where international aid workers were being targeted. Mr. Roseveare, acting director of Oxfam's humanitarian department, observed:

> "The delivery of operations and food assistance to remote locations is much less certain and that there is plenty of evidence that local forces do not have a sense of looking to the centre for their lead."

Oliver Burch of Christian Aid commented:

> "In practice, the local people, they have to relate to their gentleman in their valley or the next valley who can command 50 or 100 rifles. This is still the situation . . . there appears to have been no disarmament. Armed groups in the countryside are as prevalent as ever. There seems to be in general increased inter-tribal tension. This is something new."

The security situation looks uncertain and the working team on food security, which produced a report on food security in Afghanistan five months before 11 September, raised similar concerns to those of the Select Committee.

When the NGOs gave evidence to the Select Committee on Tuesday, Elizabeth Winters, special adviser to the British Agencies Afghanistan group, said:

> "It is worth reporting back to you what every single Afghan has ever said to any of us—I checked this with my colleagues before coming in—which is: 'please bring in more security Forces, because without security and stability we cannot rebuild our country'."

She went on to say:

> "The economy improved 25 % in the six months when there were no hostilities in 1995. Entrepreneurs are waiting to come back in. Hey, they ring you up and say 'we want to invest, as long as the security is OK, we are ready to get this country back on its feet' but we do need more Forces, and not just in Kabul. We need them elsewhere."

Sakandar Ali, to whom I have already referred, observed:

> "More troops are required to support the central government."

Security is essential for food distribution in Afghanistan, but who is responsible for providing such security? Who pays? Under what authority is such security to be provided? The issue is relevant not only to Afghanistan. The Committee expressed a general concern that more should be done to track what is happening in failing states. The United Nations Children's Fund told us in evidence that it currently classifies some 31 states as being in a state of emergency or crisis, with an additional 35 on a watch list. All of those are either failed or failing states. We expressed the hope that the Government's response to our report would

> "address the issue of failing states, how they are monitored, and what level of preparedness the international system can maintain to respond to problems in these failing states."

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): May I take my hon. Friend back to the issue of security? The non-governmental organisations that we met on Tuesday expressed the view that the Afghans want more British and foreign troops. Does my hon. Friend agree that a useful means of delivering aid might be to train the native Afghan police and armed forces? I know that both the British and the Americans are doing that in some way or other, but I understand from newspaper reports that American and British troops are training different forms of forces. Would my hon. Friend like to comment on that?

Tony Baldry: I was going to come to that, because there are disturbing reports that police training is insufficient and not enough members of the previous military forces in Afghanistan are being demobilised.

[Tony Baldry]

Chris Patten, the European Commission's External Relations Commissioner, commented in a recent article that

> "if we are to deny Al-Quaeda and other networks the territory from which to plan future atrocities, we have to do all we can to bolster weak or failing states and prevent them falling into the clutches of the Bin Ladens of this world".

Earlier this month, the Prime Minister, when in Freetown in Sierra Leone, said that he felt very proud of the role that British soldiers had played in Sierra Leone, and went on to observe that he knew that they had

> "been joined by soldiers of many, many other countries, and they have been joined in particular in the endeavours that they have had to carry out as Armed Forces by a strong sense of will in the international community that Sierra Leone was not going to be allowed to descend into chaos and conflict, but had to be rescued and helped for the future."

I do not think that any of us are under the illusion that Sierra Leone would have been rescued if the international community, led by the United Kingdom, had not intervened by force of arms. In their response to our report, the Government describe that as

> "demonstrable security; in Sierra Leone this was provided for by a large and effective international UN-led peace-keeping force working closely with the National Security Force to give confidence to both refugees and international aid workers to return."

Some of us were fortunate to have a briefing from the editor of Africa Confidential. He commented that, even in Sierra Leone, with the help of UK forces, the situation is still fragile and is still threatened by Liberia, another failing state. One of the features of failing states is that they not only fail their own people, but invariably risk the security of neighbouring countries. No one is under any illusions that, had it not been for UN and UK intervention in Sierra Leone, the situation would not have improved; nor is anyone under the illusion that, had it not been for the coalition intervening in Afghanistan by force of arms, the Taliban would not have been defeated and Afghanistan would not be, as it is now, taking steps towards reconstruction and democracy.

However, as demonstrated by the recent murder at Kabul airport of a member of the Afghan Cabinet, security in Afghanistan is still pretty notional. Kabul is the only part of the country where the international security assistance force is helping to maintain security. Even there, the concept of security still seems fairly illusory. I turn to the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby. In *The Sunday Telegraph* of last week, Robert Fox, who recently spent a week with the UK forces in Kabul, reported that

> "crime politics and peacekeeping are inextricably linked in Kabul. A spate of robberies and looting plaguing the city is believed to involve the local Police Force, gangster warlords, and the political parties...There are 100,000 or so men of the Northern Alliance still armed on the streets. They are supposed to be disarmed under the Bonn and Tokyo Future of Afghanistan Agreement to be replaced by June by a trained army of up to 60,000 but the transition is turning into a typical Afghan shambles...At the heart of the difficulties is the fact that so far not a cent of the US$2 billion reconstruction funding, voted by the Tokyo agreement, has found its way to Kabul...nobody is prepared to pay the police and there is no scheme for demobilising the armies."

The consequence of what appears to be some UN procrastination is the high possibility that Turkey will not assume the lead role for the international security force on the premise that it cannot see a clear mandate. UK forces will then become stuck there, and the Prime Minister's commitment that British troops will be in Afghanistan for only 90 days seems overly optimistic. That is all the more surprising because, when President Karzai of Afghanistan was in London recently, he asked the Prime Minister whether the United Kingdom would commit a larger number of troops for a longer time to peacekeeping in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister declined. I do not think that that was an unreasonable response by the Government.

Setting aside our own security needs in Northern Ireland, UK troops are currently involved in peacekeeping in 37 countries throughout the world, many of which will at times have appeared terminally conflict ridden, such as Sierra Leone, East Timor and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In recent years, there have been few occasions when UK troops have not been part of UN peacekeeping operations. Unlike Turkey, the Foreign Secretary can see a clear mandate for the United Kingdom Government and asserts that the international security force will give the United Kingdom an international role with which it is comfortable.

However, those who had hoped that the end of the cold war would bring an enduring peace dividend must now recognise the position. In the foreword to the slightly bizarre recent Green Paper on private military companies, the Foreign Secretary said:

> "we find ourselves in a world of small wars, and weak states. Many of these states need outside help to maintain security at home. There may also be an increasing need for intervention by the International community."

Sixty-three countries currently contribute peacekeeping troops to the UN but, as the Green Paper further observes,

> "it is clear that at least some countries that contribute to UN peacekeeping do so largely for financial reasons. Forces that are supplied are often of poor quality and badly equipped, but since the UN is dealing with a sovereign state and since it has great difficulty in recruiting forces for peacekeeping operations in the first place, it is rarely able to hold the providing states to account."

Some countries, including even members of the Security Council of the United Nations such as China, make little or no contribution to UN peacekeeping. China, which, after all, has approximately a quarter of the world's population, has just one—yes, one—troop person committed to UN peacekeeping, although I am not sure where he or she is.

There is little point in the international community getting food aid to Afghanistan or other countries if we cannot be confident that it will be distributed for want of security. As the Select Committee observed,

> "secondary distribution has been inadequate because of the lack of security over large parts of Afghanistan. The collapse of the Taleban did not bring the safe humanitarian space which had been hoped for. It often substitutes one security concern for another."

It was that concern about the potential failure of secondary distribution that caused us to observe:

> "We believe that food should not be counted as distributed until NGOs and local partners contracted to carry out the distribution have confirmed that the food has been distributed."

If sustained food security is symbiotic with conflict resolution, when the World Bank's reconstruction paper claims that

"the time is right to prepare for Afghanistan's post-conflict reconstruction"

and that

"political development, humanitarian relief and reconstruction are likely to overlap",

enhanced security will surely be the ratchet for successful reconstruction.

The international community must collectively give such issues urgent thought. For example, when is it right for the international community to intervene in the affairs of member states? In Freetown, the Prime Minister said that there was

"a strong sense of will in the international community that Sierra Leone was not going to be allowed to descend into chaos and conflict, but had to be rescued and helped for the future."

Is there now a principle of international law that, having regard to factors such as levels of conflict and violence that are sometimes aggravated by natural disasters such as floods, a country can effectively be deemed to be a failed state, and the United Nations is entitled to intervene in whatever way it feels appropriate to rescue the people of that country? If there is to be such a definition in international law, the international community must will the UN the means to ensure security in the countries concerned. That means far more countries being willing to commit peacekeeping forces more generally and readily to the UN Secretary-General.

Incidentally, I do not believe that there is any role for mercenaries in UN peacekeeping, as was suggested in the Foreign Secretary's Green Paper. For example, Frederick Forsyth observed of the mercenaries involved in the Biafra conflict that

"most of them were little more than thugs in uniform".

The Foreign Secretary's suggestion that

"A strong and reputable private military sector might have a role in enabling the UN to respond more rapidly and more effectively in a crisis"

is a complete non-starter. Other hon. Members may have a different view.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does my hon. Friend agree that the comment by the distinguished journalist and novelist Frederick Forsyth is based on a great deal more understanding of the sharp end of conflicts than the rather banal and jejune views expressed by the Foreign Secretary, and that we should listen carefully to that distinguished Reuters correspondent, who has witnessed what happens in such places?

Tony Baldry: My hon. Friend makes his own point.

This is not intended to be a partisan comment, but I genuinely do not understand the purpose of the Foreign Secretary's Green Paper. I do not suggest, and I would be surprised if any hon. Member were to do so, that the lack of international security and peacekeepers could be met by the UN employing mercenaries. I make that point for the avoidance of doubt. To whom would such troops be accountable? Surely, armed forces should have a direct line of command and be subject to political control. Ultimately, when a national Government guarantee a country's security, they must also recruit and maintain that country's armed forces. In the long term, to delegate that function is to abdicate an essential responsibility of government as a concept.

The murder of the Afghan Cabinet Minister has been rightly interpreted as a political murder and a treachery against the Afghan Government. It was, however, also treachery against the Afghan people. That clearly raises concerns about the unity of the Government and the country as a whole. One day, however, they will need to rely on the security provided by a homogeneous armed force—an Afghan force, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby observed. Only then will reconstruction flourish and Afghan civil society start to gel.

More countries must be willing to commit peacekeeping forces more generally and more readily to the UN Secretary-General at a time when the most powerful country in the world, the United States, is preparing to redefine its international relationships and to focus on hostile countries, which it believes pose an immediate threat to its national security, sponsor terrorism and develop nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Its concern is not primarily failing or failed states, but regimes or countries that it sees as a threat. The projection of US military power alone will not, however, ensure global security. The lesson of 11 September is surely that the world welcomes United States leadership and commitment, but that it must be exercised in partnership. There is a need for international co-operation on an unprecedented scale. The coalition would not have achieved what it did in Afghanistan had it not been for the constructive support and co-operation of President Musharraf and the Government of Pakistan.

Recent events have surely demonstrated the interconnectedness of our world and perhaps reinforced the clear correlation between countries in which United Nations and NGO workers are attacked and those that we deem a security threat to ourselves. I alluded earlier to one such country, Sierra Leone, where the sale of diamonds is inextricably linked to conflict. Opium is to Afghanistan what diamonds are to Sierra Leone, and farmers grow poppies because they offer the prospect of being the most profitable crop. Those poppies are almost certainly the source of the opium that becomes the heroin that is conveyed across Asia to the street corners of Europe, where it will threaten our children.

The world must reflect on the fact that its interdependence makes us all dependent on the resolution of conflicts. The world does not want, at worst, ever-increasing armies of mercenaries or, at best, the United States using its military power to intervene only when it feels threatened. The world needs a strong United Nations, with member states that are willing to commit the necessary means to the Secretary-General. Otherwise, the world will simply stumble from crisis to crisis.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I was struck by the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the United States. Does he agree that US targeting of Iran will very likely have a significant impact on the future of Afghanistan?

Tony Baldry: I was fortunate enough to visit Iran two years ago, and it was clear that many people were

[Tony Baldry]

desperately trying to modernise the country. I am not sure that describing Iran as part of an "axis of evil" will help the modernisers; indeed, it will reinforce the position of the hardliners. The point that I am trying to make is that we must think about failing and failed states, not simply about countries that we feel are a security threat. That is a personal view, and colleagues may take a different view. The world must, however, accept its interconnectedness, and we must ensure that the United Nations has the means and the will to act.

We must also recognise that electorates in countries such as the UK will become increasingly weary of committing troops and taking on what increasingly seems to be an unreasonable burden of peacekeeping duties. I have not checked the figures, but I suspect that few other countries have committed proportionally as many troops to UN peacekeeping operations as we have. That raises considerable concerns about overstretch.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I fully share the hon. Gentleman's view about the importance of trying to persuade other countries to join in the peacekeeping operation. I also accept how overstretched this country could become and may already be. Given the possibility that Turkey will not assume its proposed responsibilities at the end of our period of peacekeeping, does the hon. Gentleman think that the British Government should maintain their peacekeeping operation in Kabul and Afghanistan beyond that date?

Tony Baldry: I suspect that the UK Government will have little choice other than to stay in Kabul. The question is, for how long? It would be a great tragedy if the international security assistance force were to be withdrawn now. It looks as though we shall have to stay there for the foreseeable future, at least until the UN Secretary-General can find another country that is willing to accept the burden, but it is an unreasonable burden for the UK to bear alone. The Prime Minister was right to decline when the President of Afghanistan asked for more forces. We are already doing more than play our role in UN peacekeeping around the world.

I hope that the Select Committee report paid sufficient tribute to those who are working for UN agencies and NGOs in Afghanistan, because we have been impressed by their professionalism and commitment. We have also been grateful to them for the evidence that they have given us and for updating us, even as recently as last Tuesday. Frequent tribute has been paid, both by witnesses giving evidence to the Select Committee and by those whom we met in Pakistan, to the Department for International Development and the UK Government, who have often been first to come up with funds and have frequently been first on the scene. However, we should never underestimate the cost of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Somewhat worryingly, when the Select Committee was in Brussels talking to EU commissioners and officials, it was made clear to us that, in order to meet the EU contribution to the Afghanistan reconstruction programme, every single metaphorical cupboard had been stripped bare and the EU had no further funds for any other Afghan-type humanitarian disaster. I do not want to spend time now discussing the priorities of EU aid—that will be included in our forthcoming report—

Mr. Robathan: And the Moroccan fisheries.

Tony Baldry: Indeed. As my hon. Friend says, one of the budgets raided was that which provided support for Moroccan fisheries. I am unsure why the EU requires a Moroccan fisheries support programme but, again, we shall return to that in our next report.

The Commission made it clear that it simply had no further funds for any subsequent Afghan-type crisis. We can never underestimate the long-term costs of failed states, and we must give more thought to what we can do to help failing and failed states. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) are shortly going to Sudan, a country that has been in conflict for almost 40 years.

The Select Committee is committed to undertaking a further inquiry into the reconstruction needs of Afghanistan, so I am sure that we shall return to this issue time and time again during the lifetime of this Parliament. Likewise, we shall have to return to the issue of peacekeeping in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world, especially to consider who authorises and pays the peacekeepers, and to whom the peacekeepers are accountable. I suspect that the House will have to return to the whole question of security in Afghanistan and the need for security to guarantee humanitarian food distribution.

2.58 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Mr. Chidgey, you will notice that I am forgoing the annual debate on Welsh affairs in the Chamber. Tomorrow is St. David's day, which is why I am sporting a daffodil. If I leave shortly after speaking to hear our new by-election winner make his maiden speech, I am sure that hon. Members will understand.

The Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), has already raised many of the points on which the Committee agreed. Our interest in Afghanistan will be ongoing. We went to Pakistan, as hon. Members know, in November. We hoped to enter Afghanistan, but it was not a convenient time at which to do so. We were, however, able to talk to a large number of people who were going to and from that country and to get a good idea of the problems that they faced.

I want to deal with two issues. First, I want to lend support to the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the need for the deployment of more troops to strengthen security in the country. Secondly, I want to talk about the treatment of al-Qaeda and Taliban suspects in detention in Afghanistan and in Guantanamo Bay. I have bored many of my hon. Friends on that issue during the past few months, but I feel strongly about it, and a lot of confusion remains. We still do not have some of the answers, and the status of the prisoners is very unsatisfactory.

Mr. Hawkins: It may not be directly germane to the main purpose of the debate, but it might be helpful if

I mention something that relates to prisoners from Afghanistan. The hon. Members for Edmonton (Mr. Love) and for Putney (Mr. Colman) and I met several US Congressmen at the end of last week, two of whom had been to Guantanamo Bay to see the prisoners there. If the hon. Lady were to talk to her hon. Friends and hear about our conversations with those Congressmen, she would be much reassured by their observations.

Ann Clwyd: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I am aware that that visit took place, but I am not reassured by the Congressmen's remarks. They have been afforded an opportunity that British Members of Parliament have not. Five British prisoners, who are constituents of some of my hon. Friends are involved. If US Congressmen have been given the opportunity to go to Guantanamo Bay, Members of Parliament should also have been given that opportunity.

I think that we are agreed that the civilian population of Afghanistan has been plagued by war, destabilisation, economic ruin and extreme repression. Unfortunately, addressing the needs of Afghans has not, up to now, been high on the international agenda. We must seize the opportunity to remedy an oversight. The people of Afghanistan must be given adequate assistance to rebuild their shattered lives.

I applaud the initial steps taken by the international community in rebuilding the country and the measures taken by international aid agencies to avert the humanitarian catastrophe that was undoubtedly looming last year. The British Government were one of the first—if not the first—to ensure that their pledge was translated into hard cash, as some of the NGOs to whom we spoke earlier this week pointed out. That cash has been put into programmes on the ground.

The international aid community must be commended for the action that it took to ensure that the predicted mass starvation did not become a reality. That action was taken in circumstances that were difficult and threatening for all those involved; there was often great personal risk both to local staff who stayed behind to assist their fellow countrymen and women, and to those who came in from the outside. As the Select Committee Chairman said, we saw at first hand the commitment of such staff when we visited the World Food Programme depot near Peshawar during our November fact-finding mission.

Everybody recognises that further effort is needed to ensure that the programmes meet the immediate needs of those whose distress is most acute. We have stressed that from the beginning. We must help those whose status in society is most marginalized—children, war widows, the disabled and other women who have, for various reasons, to fend for themselves. The demands of powerful warlords cannot be allowed to drown out the pleas and needs of the dispossessed.

Mr. Robathan: I want to build on the comments of the hon. Lady—my Select Committee colleague—about local people employed by non-governmental organisations that stay behind. The HALO Trust, with which I am involved, has 1,200 employees in Afghanistan. It managed to hide all its equipment and keep its staff on. As a result and notwithstanding the bad weather—weather obviously plays a part—it was able to start clearing mines in Afghanistan straight away, and I understand that it is still doing so.

Ann Clwyd: I gladly pay tribute to the work of those involved in mine clearance. It is unfortunate that they now have even more mines to clear than they had before the war started. It is important to clear the land, so that people who work mainly in agriculture can return and work that land. We all agree on that.

As our Select Committee Chairman said, stability is important. The current situation is characterised by the absence of a national armed force or of central command over armed elements. That is of some concern, as is the fact that there is not yet a programme for disarmament or demobilisation. The prevalence of weaponry in individual hands must be a priority for the international community. As we know, the Afghan President has called for Afghans to

"end the culture of the knife and the gun".

Many people in Afghanistan—civilians, aid workers and members of the interim Administration—are concerned about the deterioration in security. Elizabeth Winter, who came to talk to the Select Committee earlier in the week, conveyed the strength of feeling of ordinary Afghans that the presence of more troops in the country is a priority. It would reassure them and act as a deterrent. The British Government have taken the right steps in leading the international security assistance force, but that force must be extended to the rest of the country, or at least to those areas in which unrest continues.

Without security in the country, all reconstruction efforts may be ultimately doomed to failure. We can consider examples from recent events. On 7 February, *The Washington Times* stated that the Central Intelligence Agency had paid $7 million to 35 Afghan warlords to switch sides—basically, to ditch the Taliban—at $200,000 apiece. It is tragic that apparently we still have to purchase peace. We talked to Afghans in camps in Pakistan and what they most yearn for is peace. They need to be sure that peace has been established before they go back to Afghanistan.

It must also be remembered that the previous lawlessness and anarchy opened the door to the Taliban in the first place, and then to the international menace of the al-Qaeda insurgents. Securing peace in Afghanistan must be a worthwhile investment for every one of us, as the world would also be much more secure. As I have heard the Prime Minister argue, we must be at the forefront of the extension of the security forces. We must do that as soon as possible.

We have all been given cause for concern by an armed attack on 16 February, again by unidentified gunmen, on the ISAF post at Kabul. The most significant event in that week of violence was the tragic murder on 14 February of Afghanistan's new Minister for transport and tourism.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) made a sensible comment about the axis of evil. The Interim Afghan Administration have not repeated those allegations, realising that belligerence between Tehran and Washington cannot augur well for the stability of Afghanistan.

[Ann Clwyd]

The fate of the Taliban and al-Qaeda prisoners continues to concern me. Theirs is not necessarily a popular cause. I know that from my postbag—particularly from the large number of e-mails that I have received from the United States. I have also received many letters, some pleasant, some not so pleasant. My opponents have stated, often forcefully and in colourful language, that the men being held are getting their just desserts, that, if anything, their treatment is too good and that I should get the same kind of treatment.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the hon. Lady agree that the difficulty is that we do not know what the men are being held for and that there appears to be no evidence that they are being held justly? Will she comment on that?

Ann Clwyd: I am pleased to do so. The treatment of those men raises a number of important issues that need to be addressed urgently. Like most people, I was horrified by the events of 11 September and I supported military action in Afghanistan to end the training of al-Qaeda operatives in camps. The fall of the Taliban regime, which had actively supported the activities of al-Qaeda as well as terrorising its own population, might have been unintended but it was certainly a welcome consequence of that intervention.

However, from the beginning, my support has not been unequivocal. I have had concerns about the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the use of cluster bombs and the lack of clarity surrounding the events at Mazar-i-Sharif and during other battles. I still believe that there needs to be an inquiry into those events.

The treatment of the prisoners continues to demand considered discussion, partly because of the apparent disregard for international law, partly because of the confusion surrounding the matter and also because of the seeming lack of influence being exerted by the coalition partners on the United States Administration. The treatment of our enemies in times of conflict and afterwards must serve as a benchmark of our commitment to those civilised values for which we are prepared to take military action in the first place.

First, the conditions in the camps in which the prisoners—many of whom could be categorised as Taliban foot soldiers—are held in Afghanistan, are appalling, according to the reports that I have read and some of the evidence that we took during the week. The fact that many of those forced into the Taliban army now seem to be dying of starvation and disease is a matter that calls for action by western Governments, whether that is their official responsibility or not.

Within its current budgetary restraints, it is difficult for the Interim Afghan Authority to improve the conditions in which the Taliban prisoners are held. The families of those prisoners, and of the al-Qaeda suspects who live in Afghanistan, are extremely vulnerable. They have limited access to food or shelter and are in constant fear of retribution and persecution. It seems that those with little influence—the foot soldiers who might have joined up in the first place in order to be able to feed their families—are suffering, while the pro-Taliban warlords—those who took an active part in the conflict over the years and who have been the real cause of both the conflict and the instability—are, as I mentioned, being paid significant sums by outside forces to switch sides yet again.

It is also doubtful that the facilities at Guantanamo bay, set up and controlled by United States forces, are in line with the requirements of the Geneva conventions or constitute humane treatment. The hooding, the shackling and the use of open-air cages does not show much of a commitment to civilised values. If British or American soldiers were being held in chain-link cages, exposed to the elements, sensorily deprived and constantly interrogated, it is almost certain that the American and British Governments would have decried that treatment as being against the Geneva conventions.

Furthermore, there has been no compelling explanation from the US Administration as to why the Geneva conventions, in so far as they relate to the determination of prisoner of war status, have not been upheld in respect of those captured in Afghanistan.

Mr. David Chidgey (in the Chair): Order. I ask the hon. Lady to bring her remarks more closely to the debate on the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Ann Clwyd: Thank you, Mr. Chidgey. I was making the point that the way in which prisoners are held in detention elsewhere may have an impact on the way people behave in Afghanistan. If we are trying to change the mindset of those people, who have been so debased by 23 years of war, we will be judged by the way in which we treat them when they are our prisoners. If we want to achieve change in Afghanistan, it is important to show that we want our values to be upheld there and in many other countries. I am trying to link the two subjects because it could have a considerable impact on the situation in Afghanistan.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Does my hon. Friend agree that the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan both preceded and followed the conflict there, which was correctly described by the American President and the Prime Minister as a war on terrorism? If it was a war, would not it be correct for the prisoners to be treated as prisoners of war?

Ann Clwyd: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. It is true that one would have expected them to have been treated as prisoners of war and I think that our Government expected that that would be the case. Indeed, when I asked that question in the Chamber on 10 January, the Secretary of Sate for Defence replied:

> "I would expect all prisoners held in Afghanistan to be subject to the Geneva convention and we would expect that, ultimately, the ICRC will have access to them."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 695.]

It was expected that the Geneva conventions would apply to all prisoners taken during the war in Afghanistan, but we have witnessed considerable confusion as to whether those people are prisoners of war. Indeed, the argument continues. Today, the Prime Minister made a point about the situation of the prisoners. Again, there seems to be a misunderstanding about precisely what their status is.

There is a disturbing aspect as regards prisoners who were taken captive in Afghanistan: the presumption of guilt and the lack of legal representation being afforded to those being held, in contravention of international human rights law. The presumption of innocence, with the right to legal representation, should apply to all, even to those suspected of the most heinous crimes, including the worst terrorist atrocities. Some of those prisoners, whether in Afghanistan or Cuba, may be innocent of involvement in the activities of al-Qaeda or of any other terrorist activities.

Mr. Love: It cannot be right that American prisoners are afforded rights under the law in the United States, while all other prisoners seem not to be afforded any legal rights. Does my h F agree?

Ann Clwyd: Certainly. It is wrong. The lack of evidence from the American authorities against Lofti Raissi, who was recently released on bail from a British jail after being held for five months, has done little to dispel my disquiet on that point, and if the American, John Philip Walker Lindh, qualifies for protection under the American justice system, so should all the other suspects. The British Government should act to ensure that that is so.

Mr. Hawkins: Does the hon. Lady recognise that not only many of my constituents but also the American Congressmen, whose hosts the hon. Member for Edmonton, the hon. Member for Putney and I—among others—were, take the view that American or British people unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of the Taliban would not have been afforded the privileges or protection of the Geneva convention or anything like it? Does she recognise that many people in Britain and America are angry that the treatment of prisoners is being seen in a false perspective?

It must be recognised that we are trying to introduce a concept of civilised western values. We know perfectly well that our opponents in al-Qaeda and the Taliban would never have given our troops the privileges in question if they had captured them.

Ann Clwyd: The whole point is that we are trying to introduce civilised values to a country where they have not prevailed. We have always upheld the Geneva conventions and I hope that we shall continue to uphold them. It disturbs me that in the United States certain people are suggesting that the Geneva conventions are out of date and should be set aside.

Mr. David Chidgey (in the Chair): Order. I think that I have been very sympathetic in allowing the debate to stray on to the issue of prisoners of war and whether there are prisoners of war in this context. I ask the hon. Lady and other hon. Members to stick to the issue for debate, which is the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Ann Clwyd: You have been extremely patient, Mr. Chidgey, but the treatment of the prisoners is part of our report. We made the point early on that the treatment of those prisoners concerned us.

Mr. David Chidgey (in the Chair): Order. The point has been well made and I ask the hon. Lady to move on.

Ann Clwyd: Thank you, Mr. Chidgey.

I should mention, with respect to indefinite detention without trial in Afghanistan of people captured during the Afghan war, that we have in the past criticised other countries for that practice. It would be unfortunate if we supported indefinite detention now.

Despite many written parliamentary questions, I have found it difficult to determine whether the British Government have been kept fully aware of developments in Afghanistan throughout the war. It is important that they should be kept aware of such matters. If we are fighting a war shoulder to shoulder with another country, I assume that we are partners, but where does that partnership end? Information from the US authorities has been lacking at various times and it is right for us to say that we expect to be treated as equal partners. It is important to establish that in relation to this war, as it will be in any future military action wherever that may take place. The observance of international and human rights law by our allies throughout the course of any military action that we undertake together is extremely important.

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): Was my hon. Friend pleased to hear during our discussions with the visiting US Congressmen that they were unaware that protocols 1 and 2 of the 1977 amendment of the Geneva convention had not been ratified by the US Congress? The protocols would cover participants in Afghanistan who are not members of the armies of either country and, if they were ratified, would sort out the basis on which prisoners held in such a war could be designated prisoners of war.

Ann Clwyd: I am glad that my hon. Friend was also at the meeting with the US Congressmen. I have attended several meetings at the US embassy at which some of my hon. Friends were able to discuss the issues.

Finally, I want to speak about the repatriation of refugees. Those of us who had previously visited Pakistan were made aware of the huge numbers of refugees from Afghanistan who were in camps in Pakistan. We first met them two years ago and were able to meet them again in November. Some of those people had been in the camps for more than 20 years. The world tends to forget that refugees may stay in what is described as a temporary camp for as long as 23 years. We must remind the world that refugees do not necessarily go home after a conflict; many remain. All the people we spoke to in the camp that we visited said that they wanted to return home as soon as possible. They did not want to be beggars in another country or dependent on another country; they wanted to go home.

Obviously, as the situation in Afghanistan improves, many countries in which there are Afghan refugees are considering their repatriation. Given the security issues that must still be addressed, that repatriation, although desirable, should not be premature. The expansion of the presence and mandate of the ISAF would be a useful measure to ensure the safety of returning refugees. In addition, repatriation must be voluntary and programmes properly funded. One of the most interesting discussions that my colleagues and I held in Pakistan was with the new Minister responsible for refugees, who kept stressing that the world must remember what an enormous burden on Pakistan the refugees had been for many years and called on us to

[Ann Clwyd]

show greater recognition of the problems. I know that the Department for International Development has already made a considerable contribution to the Government of Pakistan in recognition of that.

Dr. Tonge: Does the hon. Lady agree that Iran has also taken many refugees and funded them over many years and that we should perhaps consider helping Iran in the same way?

Ann Clwyd: I agree. Over the years, I have had many occasions to visit Iran and see what people there were doing for the Kurdish refugees. Many of those refugees remain in camps in Iran after 11 or 12 years. Iran has played an enormous part in helping refugees. When Turkey shut its borders to the Kurds, Iran kept its borders open, as I have said in the House on several occasions. I agree that Iran should be assisted. The British Government will, I hope, continue to offer support in the refugee camps on the borders, where life for many people is so difficult.

The international community must continue its recent focus on the reconstruction of Afghanistan and on global security. Long-term commitment to the legitimately constructed Government in Afghanistan and to the rule of law within the country and throughout the world is required to achieve those objectives. We must be magnanimous in winning the war, which means treating people—both inside Afghanistan and elsewhere—according to the Geneva conventions.

3.30 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): You will be relieved to hear, Mr. Chidgey, that I have already dealt with some points that I wanted to raise in my interventions on the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), so I shall not pursue them further.

I should like to thank you, Mr. Chidgey, and the Minister for understanding that, because of a commitment in my constituency—the hon. Member for Cynon Valley has to attend a Welsh affairs debate—I shall have to leave the Opposition Front Bench in the capable hands of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). Although I cannot be here until the end of the debate, I shall certainly read it carefully in *Hansard* and discuss any issues that arise.

I also apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who also speaks on international development. She would have liked to take part in the debate, particularly given her recent visit to Pakistan, but she has a commitment this afternoon in the constituency where her mother-in-law lives. I understand that her mother-in-law will be part of the audience and I am sure that Mr. Chidgey and the Minister will understand that it is a commitment that my hon. Friend would be unwise to miss.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), not only for his powerful speech today, but for his chairmanship of the Select Committee. Once again, I am sure that all hon. Members throughout the House—not just those present in the Chamber for this afternoon's debate—would want to tell my hon. Friend that we hugely respect the work that he and other members of his Committee do. My hon. Friend had a difficult act to follow. He would agree that his predecessor as Chairman of the International Development Committee, Bowen Wells, our former hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford, was also a tremendously effective parliamentarian and successful Select Committee Chairman. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury is carrying on the work of our former colleague with his usual energy. The report is a tribute not only to my hon. Friend, but to all members of the Committee.

Debates on this subject often attract considerable interest, and hon. Members from all sides of the Chamber have already intervened. As both the Minister and I had cause to observe when winding up for our respective parties in the recent debate on the International Development Bill, the House is often at its best when debating serious subjects such as international development.

The UK has a proud record of support for countries in need around the world. The Minister recognises that MPs of all parties care deeply about the preservation and continuation of the UK's reputation. Other hon. Members as well as myself have already referred to the visit by United States Congressmen to the NATO committee during our recent short recess. Several Congressmen told me afterwards how much they appreciated the Minister giving up his time to welcome them in the Lord Chancellor's private chambers in the Palace of Westminster. He not only entertained the Congressmen with his American family links and his support for the Cincinnati Reds, but he made some powerful comments about the views of the current Secretary of State for International Development on the continuing process from Doha. The Congressmen listened carefully to those views, and greatly appreciated them. The Minister may find it difficult to believe, but no less a person than Lord Lamont paid public tribute to him in a later meeting with the Congressmen, which the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) will confirm. I do not know if the Minister will be embarrassed that someone whose political views are so different from his and those of his distinguished father should have publicly paid tribute to him. That may be the first time that that has happened to the Minister, but it shows how carefully everyone listened to everything that he said about Doha and international development issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury has already discussed some of the most important issues with regard to Afghanistan and the Select Committee's report. However, I want to speak about two or three matters that concern me, my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden and Opposition Front Benchers. I also want to consider issues that arise from the Government's helpful and thorough response to the Committee's excellent recommendations.

I strongly agree with the Select Committee's recommendation (b):

> "The UK is one of a small number of donors with a good record of turning promises quickly into cash."

The Minister and I have said before that so often what recipient countries and NGOs in those countries most need is quick cash, not promises. Throughout her adult life, my mother has been involved with several charities such as the Children's Society and, as a former member of a diocesan synod, with Church of England charities and their work overseas. She has constantly stressed in all her work the need for any aid to be given quickly and in cash. Promises and words are cheap, but cash is often important in failed states and needy countries. Recommendation (b) also states:

> "We encourage DFID to work with those donor countries which also responded rapidly to encourage other donors to ensure that their pledges are converted into real commitments and actual money."

My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden recently worked with the charity Islamic Relief on raising money for ambulances for Afghanistan where they are badly needed. I am sure that all hon. Members welcome and support that work. A couple of weeks ago, my hon. Friend and I watched the launch of the appeal in New Palace Yard with other colleagues. It was heartwarming to see that Islamic Relief could secure an instant donation so that the first ambulance could go immediately to Afghanistan. That is real action, and the sort of thing that reputable charities and people in the UK can deliver, and deliver quickly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury rightly stressed recommendation (k), which concluded:

> "We remain to be convinced that the food delivered into Afghanistan can be distributed to all those in need, primarily because of poor security".

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) has detailed knowledge of the security issues. Security is crucial after an armed conflict. There is also the problem of weather conditions, although happily on this occasion one feels that a higher power may have had something to do with it. When the humanitarian crisis was first reported in the news media, it was feared that food aid would not get through once the snows came, but, fortunately for the people, winter came late to Afghanistan this year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden has been to the Afghan border with Pakistan and the contacts she made there have recently been in touch with her. My hon. Friend commented:

> "So what is the situation like in Afghanistan now? Is the much-vaunted reconstruction programme taking place? The International Development Select Committee was briefed by NGOs involved in the area. Let us start with the good news, the Taliban was defeated relatively quickly. Winter came very late this year so food aid reached many of the places where it was so urgently needed. Aid agencies are hoping to restart many of their long-term programmes in the new few months and international troops are trying to maintain stability, especially in the cities. The prospects for women are now much brighter...refugee Afghan women are returning from Iran fired up by the greater freedom they experienced in that country."

She continued:

> "The new Interim Authority and its leader Hamid Kharzai, is struggling to retain power over these warring ethnic groups."

On the downside, my hon. Friend said that, sadly, ethnic tensions have flared up again. The new Afghan Minister for tourism has been murdered, a matter to which the hon. Member for Cynon Valley referred. My hon. Friend went on:

> "Hamid Kharzai is canvassing the world for support to enable the much-needed reconstruction and reforms to go through . . . There are also worrying reports of new poppy crops being planted. Local farmers say that they need financial incentives to stop growing them. Poppies grow on poor land, don't need much water and have a financial yield per hectare of 10 times that of other crops.".

That is unfortunate for the international community and for our constituents who may suffer from the scourge of drugs.

Speaking with my other hat on as shadow Minister for drugs and security, I am confident of the Minister's support when I say that all parliamentarians must address the difficult issue of financial incentives for people in countries such as Afghanistan to turn from the cultivation of drugs and destructive, rather than constructive, crops.

The United States has promised $300 million in aid. Hon. Members who are quick to criticise that country must recognise that it is far and away the biggest donor of aid in the world. There is a delicate balance between what is practical and what one would love to have in an ideal world. Now that the snow has come to Afghanistan, some remote areas in the central highlands are so cut off that the NGOs report that people are trying to live on boiled grass in order to survive. Three million people still have to live in camps outside Afghanistan and, according to Human Rights Watch, many people are too frightened to return home because of the fear of violence.

Even though the direct conflict may have finished, more people may leave Afghanistan because of a lack of food and water, never mind the fear of ethnic violence. There is bound to be more tension in the surrounding countries, which cannot cope with the numbers of refugees there already. As the hon. Member for Putney will confirm, the US Congressmen—there were 10 Republicans and five Democrats, all of whom had a special interest in NATO—who had an international outlook, were at pains to stress that one of the countries that will need the most support from the developed west in the next few years is Pakistan, because of the stress and strains imposed on it by the conflict in Afghanistan. There is a great danger of extremist parties threatening the stability of Pakistan. After the successful resolution of the destruction of the Taliban and the dismantling of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, which we hope will be maintained, the last thing we want is to see a Muslim extremist party come to power in Pakistan. That should concern us all.

The UN mine action programme in Afghanistan seeks to get rid of 25,000 land mines. My hon. Friends the Members for Banbury and for Blaby referred to that. When one turns on one's television, as I did early this morning, it is heartwarming to see that one of the first things that is being reported is the valiant work of the Army and the RAF in mine clearance in Afghanistan. I am sure that many hon. Members saw those film reports this morning.

I have a particular constituency interest. The Royal Logistic Corps has its headquarters in my constituency and many of the people who work for it are based at the mine clearance headquarters in Minley just outside my constituency in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). Those people are at the sharp end. They are involved in mine clearance, as are the RAF's mine clearance officers and the men we saw on television this morning. The British forces can make a substantial contribution because of our experience of mine clearance.

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

Happily for the future of Afghanistan, there is speculation that recent rains might mean an end to the previous three years of drought. As my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden stressed, we hope that those rains will symbolise a new beginning. In one of the twists of irony that so often occur through history, the atrocity of 11 September may turn out to be a chance for change for countries like Afghanistan, and for progress in that area of the world. The developed west must not let that opportunity pass by.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby pointed out, security needs to extend to the secondary distribution food network as well as to the supply route into Afghanistan. That was recommendation (s) in the Select Committee report. Delivering food into the country is not enough. It must be distributed too. The Select Committee has put many thoughts to the Department for International Development and I shall read carefully what the Minister has to say to supplement his Department's thorough response to the report. We recognise that we cannot ask for the moon. It is incredibly difficult for even a combination of developed western countries to provide complete security after a war. Nevertheless, we hope that with good will there will be an opportunity for greater security for the delivery of food and other aid.

Norman Lamb: Can the hon. Gentleman confirm whether, given his emphasis on the importance of security, he supports the current British deployment of peacekeeping troops? Does he see a case for extending it beyond Kabul, which has significant implications on numbers? As I asked the hon. Member for Banbury, what does he think the British Government should do if the Turkish Government do not introduce their peacekeeping forces?

Mr. Hawkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The Conservative Front Bench has always supported the deployment of British troops. The Minister will confirm that there has been cross-party agreement on that. We recognise that it was vital to stand shoulder to shoulder with the US in our response to the atrocity of 11 September. One of the things that has concerned Labour and Conservative Members, both Front and Back Bench, has been the difference of opinion so vividly exhibited in the latter stages of the debate on the International Development Bill by different Liberal Democrat spokesmen. There has been strong support for the United States of America from the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), but the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) gave the Minister, me and other hon. Members a 20-minute anti-American rant. In talking about what should happen on the deployment of British troops, the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) should bear in mind what my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury said about overstretch.

Dr. Tonge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: I will give way to the hon. Lady in a moment.

On further deployment, we need to bear in mind not only what my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury said about overstretch, but the delicate balance of the deployment of other forces. We want the international community to stand together, but before we start putting out soundbites about countries such as Turkey, we must bear in mind that it is unwise for a Government or a responsible and loyal Opposition to pre-judge the issues, which are delicate. There are many implications for Turkey as a NATO member and for fellow NATO members, and there are all sorts of delicacies involved in, for example, the deployment of Turkish troops in Cyprus and the application of Greek Cyprus for accession to the EU. The hon. Member for North Norfolk is new to the House and I warn him to be careful before making statements about Turkey's involvement.

Dr. Tonge: I just wanted to point out to the hon. Gentleman that my "rant" lasted only two minutes, my entire speech lasting only 15 minutes.

Mr. Hawkins: All I can say to the hon. Lady is that it sounded like 20 to me. However, I am glad that she accepts that it was a rant. As I said, it did her and her party no credit.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): On subsequent deployments, does my hon. Friend agree that, given that the United Kingdom is one of the few NATO states other than America that has been ready to come forward rapidly when fighting has to be done, we should look to other European NATO states, which might for very good reason—

Mr. David Chidgey (in the Chair): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are debating the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, not the deployment of troops around the world.

Dr. Lewis: May I complete my point, Mr. Chidgey, to show its relevance?

Mr. David Chidgey (in the Chair): I advise the hon. Gentleman to choose his words carefully.

Dr. Lewis: Choosing my words extremely carefully, we should look to other countries to supply troops in supporting humanitarian relief operations over a longer period. I hope that that point is relevant.

Mr. Hawkins: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East for his skill in choosing his words carefully. I agree with him. It is in the interests of the western world for the developed world to work together, through organisations such as NATO, in difficult international circumstances. That is how we can operate effectively.

You kindly called me early in the debate, Mr. Chidgey, and I want to allow other hon. Members plenty of opportunity to contribute. It has been a worthwhile debate on a significant report. Few issues are more important to the world than the future of Afghanistan and we will all be judged by the response of the west to that issue. I am sure that the Minister, whose remarks I shall read carefully in *Hansard*, will welcome the report as I have. I hope that the Government continue to take on board the valuable conclusions and recommendations of the International Development Committee.

3.53 pm

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I shall not stray from the subject of our debate. I feel bereft: I have no mother or mother-in-law to refer to in the debate and no excuse for leaving it. None the less, having declared my inadequacy, I shall get on to the subject matter.

Hon. Members who have spoken have dwelt on the problems of Afghanistan, saying how appalling and difficult things are. However, we should pay tribute to those who have achieved so much in the months since the Select Committee report was published. When we were taking evidence, the prevailing opinion was that military activity would not work. In metaphorical terms, hundreds of journalists were complaining because the war had not been won between the breakfast news and "News at Ten". However, the steadfastness of the alliance paid off in a remarkable way. Others said that, even if we won the war, Afghanistan was a basket case that could not be helped and that, faced with the scale of the problems, we would simply flee the area. We are not doing that. I pay tribute to those who proved that viewpoint wrong. Obviously, that includes the alliance, within which the British Government played an important role by providing military support and through the assistance provided by the Department for International Development.

I pay particular tribute to the United Nations, its Secretary-General and the rest of the UN family for their superb contribution. Organisations such as the World Food Programme, the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF—the United Nations Children's Fund—and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Ironically, UNICEF managed to immunise more children against measles in the past few months than we did in this country. There have been remarkable achievements by agencies that the Committee has strongly criticised in the past. Their performance on this occasion was superb.

Above all, I want to praise Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN Secretary-General's special representative in Afghanistan, who picked up the pieces after the war and led that country's leaders to an agreement in Bonn. He led the way to the creation of the international security assistance force and an Interim Administration under Mr. Karzai, and then went on to a relatively successful donors' conference in Tokyo.

Given the problems that confronted us in September and October, to have reached this position is a remarkable achievement. I pay tribute to the part played by DFID. Whomever one speaks to is full of praise for what the Department has done. We promised that Afghanistan would not be forgotten, and Mr. Brahimi and his team have provided a framework within which we can be held to that promise. If we are looking for the next winner of the Nobel peace prize, we need look no further than Mr. Brahimi, especially when we take into account the Brahimi report on UN peacekeeping operations. For one man to have achieved so much in a relatively short time is remarkable.

I shall now consider some of the points that arise from the Select Committee report and the current situation. Other hon. Members mentioned security and military involvement. We say that our involvement is to last until only the end of April and then we shall hand over to the Turks. I see the desirability of that from the viewpoint of reassuring the British public, but I also see a great clash with the need successfully to complete the mission. That pattern of short-term involvement follows what we said about Sierra Leone, where an initially non-feasible commitment of 30 days has been followed by an unfinished but highly successful long-term commitment.

In Afghanistan, two medium-term missions should be developed. First, the mission of ISAF must be enlarged beyond Kabul. It is not credible for it simply to stay in Kabul and its surrounds and not to extend the mission to the rest of the country.

Secondly, as in Sierra Leone, there is a need to train a national army, and we are likely to be asked to play a part. The parallels with Sierra Leone are interesting, but we should not push them too far. Hon. Members have talked about the need for disarmament, following the parallel of Sierra Leone. However, many people in Afghanistan are not seen as equivalent to the forces of the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone; some Afghani forces are seen as heroic figures, who played their part in resisting the Russians for many years, for example. It would be naive simply to say that they must disarm. We must concentrate on ensuring that those armed men are provided with an alternative lifestyle, through farming or other productive work, so that they are not dependent on the warlords for their sustenance, or on the proceeds of poppies—and so that they do not return to ethnic conflict.

I turn to the relationship between international agencies and the Afghani Administration. That country does not have functioning ministries. Aid and development must be understood in terms of the construction of a state. Obviously, food aid is crucially important, but many other kinds of aid should also be provided.

The initial programme for Afghanistan states that senior officials of the Interim Authority have been briefed and consulted to as great an extent as possible, and Mr. Brahimi has expressed his support for the concept that the United Nations' presence in the country should be akin to a small footprint—that it must be seen to be small, and that much of the leadership must be provided by Afghans themselves, so that as few expatriates as possible are involved.

That is a noble goal, but we must think the matter through, because some of the tasks that need to be done are so great that they require immediate action. For example, 1.5 million children must return to school by 31 March, and a lot of outside assistance will be needed if that is to be achieved. It is also important that, in many circumstances, development money is used to provide Afghanis with a legitimate income.

However, there is great tension between the need to do things quickly and the need to organise things from the bottom up. I offer an example. The fertile areas and their water systems have been destroyed during the war, as a result of a scorched-earth policy. It would be highly desirable if Afghanistan could feed itself: 85 per cent. of

[Tony Worthington]

the population are wholly or partially dependent on agriculture, and those people must be kept away from poppy growing, as several hon. Members have said. However, in rural areas, only 19 per cent. of people have access to clean, safe water. It is estimated that Afghanistan needs 80,000 to 100,000 new wells. That is a staggering figure, and the task cannot be achieved simply by saying, "This must be Afghan led and dug"—although Afghan labour will be needed. It is a staggering logistical task, but it must be achieved if Afghanistan is to start, once again, to produce its own food. If the Afghan people start growing food again, big steps forward can be taken.

Another area of concern is the fact that only 7 per cent. of the country is linked to electricity, and that is said to be the lowest per capita figure in the world. Afghanistan has never had a national grid, and there is a great dependence on electricity imports. Most people's concepts of aid focus on helping with the provision of food, education, health and so forth, but do not include addressing such problems as the electricity infrastructure. However, if Afghanistan is to succeed as a country, and if its people are to experience a rapid improvement in their lives, the technology of the developed world must be swiftly employed in accordance with national priorities. That would help to produce a real peace dividend.

In such circumstances, it is inevitable that western companies will queue up to secure contracts in a way that appears to be similar to the tied aid that we are against. I want to hear the Minister's views about the tension between the need for the rapid improvement that can be achieved only with our technology and the need for Afghan-led work.

Dr. Tonge: This may be a mischievous point, but does the hon. Gentleman believe that the Commonwealth Development Corporation might step in and fund some projects?

Tony Worthington: That is a mischievous point. Of course I do. The CDC, like other organisations, should consider the contribution that it can make. However, I do not want to be dragged down that side road. I would rather stick to what I want to say than consider what the hon. Lady might say if she catches your eye, Mr. Chidgey.

I hope that the Minister will reassure me about the importance of reproductive health services in Afghanistan. The issues that most appalled people when they heard about life in Afghanistan were the number of women who die in childbirth and the number of children who die in the first year of their lives. To have 16,000 women a year dying in childbirth at this point in time is shameful, and an infant mortality rate of 165 per 1,000 is unforgivable. It is extremely important to draw attention to the issue of women's health and the health of young children.

I emphasise what other hon. Members said about the need for our approach to be viewed in a regional context. We must consider the impact on Pakistan and Iran, and their contribution. It is absolutely crucial that neighbours such as Iran and Pakistan are kept on side so that they do not promote their own sides in Afghanistan as they have done in the past.

Like other hon. Members, I should like to comment on the utter folly of the United States describing Iran as part of the "axis of evil". Iran had been on side with the coalition and had contributed to it. It had looked after 1.5 million refugees; it attended the Tokyo conference; and it became a major donor. Then, when we had all made our contribution to bringing Iran back into the family of nations, along came George W. Bush to undermine all that. I hope that we can recover the situation, but he does make things difficult at times.

Norman Lamb: The hon. Gentleman refers to security in the region as a whole. What thought has he given to the countries that seem increasingly to be known as the "stans" and their need for support? One non-governmental organisation suggested that there had been a period of demodernisation in the past decade or so in those countries. There is clearly a growing extreme Islamic threat in those countries and problems with drugs.

Tony Worthington: I very much welcome that intervention. For several years I have bored the hon. Members who share with me the privilege of serving on the Select Committee with comments about the importance of central and eastern Europe, which includes the "stans". Although substantial European and British assistance goes to the area, if there are places on earth that are least known to the British public, it is those that we have been talking about. We should have an early investigation into those areas so that we know more about them.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Before the hon. Gentleman gets too hot under the collar about Iran, does he not accept that that country has an appalling record of support for organisations, such as Islamic Jihad? Only recently it rejected the proposed British ambassador because it falsely alleges that he is Jewish. He is not, but the fact that Iran chooses to reject him on those grounds shows that there is still something seriously amiss in that country.

Tony Worthington: I have never spoken a word in my life that suggests that Iran is a wonderful and idyllic place whose human rights record needs praising. I merely suggest that, when we have made substantial progress in a very difficult situation, it is folly for us basically to kick in the teeth the progressives in Iran who are seeking to move the country forward. I was not getting hot under the collar, but pointing out what was a foolish move. Almost everyone who observed it was appalled that Iraq and Iran were linked in the way that they were.

Another difficulty is that much aid money has to go into work that does not match our expectations of aid. If one asked the British public what they see as aid, they would probably say humanitarian aid for food and basic health and education services. However, for the system to work, we must pay the salaries of the civil servants and police who have been unpaid for months. If we do not, the whole edifice may be brought down without the pit props of police, civil service, judges and other key elements of the modern state. I am therefore pleased that a trust fund has been established to meet the initial recurrent costs of establishing ministries, including the salary and equipment costs. The justice system, the security system, the civil service and planning and aid co-ordination are crucial to success.

We could focus on many other matters. Many people have mentioned the need to improve the security situation, and I fully agree. What the world must face up to is that the issue is not about troops, but about good troops. For example in Bosnia, although 2 million troops were being trained in Europe, we could not scrape together a few tens of thousands adequate for the purpose there.

I have visited countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone where the peacekeepers became part of the problem rather than the solution to it. It is no use sending troops who are not paid, or who, as I saw in Liberia, regard it as part of their job to loot the country as part of their reward for bringing peace to it. The sending of people who have not been trained and who do not know the skills involved in what the international security assistance force is doing is a major issue. I suspect that our troops will be there for a considerable length of time, I hope, doing work such as that they have successfully done in Sierra Leone. In effect, they will be a training a new Afghan national army and I cannot think of any troops better than ours to do that.

In conclusion, if any of us had said in November that we would now be as far ahead as we are, we would have been dismissed as starry-eyed idealists who ought to be locked up for our own safety. What we have done so far is to achieve one small miracle. We must now move on to the bigger miracles. I hope that the Committee's work and report will help us to do that. We must maintain our interest in the area.

4.13 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): As the visit of the United States Congressmen has been mentioned, it perhaps behoves me to put a different slant on it. I refer to recommendation (e) in our report and to the target of 0.7 per cent.of gross domestic product. The discussions that we had last weekend were held behind closed doors and off the record, and were frank and open in terms of each side understanding the other's point of view. Many similar points of view have been expressed in this debate.

It is important to reflect that the United States does not have an equivalent to the International Development Committee. We met representatives from its Committee on International Relations, and several Congressmen welcomed the speech that my hon. Friend the Minister gave. Much of the information that he provided was new. There is a view in the United States that the aid budget is about 20 per cent. of GDP; in fact, it is 0.1 per cent. of GDP. That astonishing fact surprised many Congressmen.

I add to the praise from all hon. Members for the tremendous work that the Americans have done to bring humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and the surrounding regions. It is important to recognise that while realising that work is in progress on both sides; they are trying to understand one other and work together. Many countries, but particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, have created a remarkable coalition. I welcome that, but it is important to reflect that we still have much to learn from each other.

I shall briefly address the Select Committee's report and the future. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) in saying that we have seen a success a story. It is important that constituents who pay their taxes—which are spent by the Department for International Development, aid agencies, the EU and the UN—recognise that a job has been well done even though it is still in progress.

When we visited the area, we saw how UNHCR and the World Food Programme worked. Their work was fully funded. I particularly pay tribute to the work of Catherine Bettini, the chief executive of the World Food Programme, and the marvellous teams of Afghan lorry drivers who kept the aid flowing into Afghanistan for months. I took pride in seeing a list on a board in her office displaying how much each country had contributed—the United Kingdom was well up there—and it included a column called "private donors." They were not multinational donors, but ordinary men, women and children of the United Kingdom who, through the United Nations Association in the United Kingdom, contributed a total of £72,000 with their pennies and pounds. I witnessed that in Putney, and pay tribute to Jo Stocks, the secretary of the Putney UNA, and to the other members, including Ade and Walt Hain, for their work in raising funds for humanitarian aid. This month, a further £18,000 is going over from the people of Britain. I stress that because, as usual, the UNA in the UK has done good by stealth.

Our report commented on the money in the form of cash that went to the World Food Programme. It was important that the programme could buy food and products that were needed locally in Afghanistan. There was a good harvest in Pakistan last year so cash was important; DFID aid was also given as cash. Aid from the United States, however, was largely in kind, such as food. In the report, we were critical of the fact that food had been expensively trucked around the world. Although I understand that it is good to distribute food surpluses from the United States to places where there is need for them, it is also important to look forward and examine how there could be a rebalancing of the amount given in kind and cash by all the countries contributing to the success of the World Food Programme.

The organisation of the effort was impressive. It was the first operation of its type and lessons had been learned from Rwanda and Bosnia. The operation was taken forward in an extremely good way. The UN handled taking food aid into Afghanistan, where there were local contractors who were often in UK or European-badged non-governmental organisations. I put it like that because 138 of the 140 people working for Oxfam in Afghanistan were Afghanis, and many other NGOs made similar arrangements.

It was important that a viable civil society could be contacted by the UN to deliver aid locally. I am pleased to say that many of the dire warnings given by expatriate representatives of the NGOs were not fulfilled. I do not blame those expatriate members of NGOs because they had lost contact with what was happening inside Afghanistan. It is important that we recognise the tremendous work that has been done by the Afghan NGOs.

[Mr. Tony Colman]

My second point, which has been made by other hon. Members, concerns the support from countries in the surrounding regions. We have already mentioned Iran, but I shall discuss Pakistan in particular. Both countries have had refugee camps for the 22 years since 1979. There are 3 million refugees in Pakistan, where there was a crisis before 11 September. Those refugees had been forgotten by the world.

When I visited Kashmir in April 2000, I met a Voluntary Service Overseas teacher, Joan Atkinson, who told me quite movingly about the way in which women were treated in Kabul, which she had visited when it was under the control of the Taliban. Women could not access education, and she asked me to do all that I could to make sure that women's rights were dealt with in Afghanistan. I am sure that she did not believe that the dreadful events of 11 September would happen, but there has been a dramatic change since then. It is important to recognise that much of what happened could not have occurred without the help of President Musharraf and his surrounding team, who, having seen evidence of al-Qaeda's involvement, gave very strong leadership in the region in supporting the coalition.

In recent days, I have received intimations that the Pakistan Government are keen for the UK to remain involved with the assistance forces in Afghanistan. That brings us back to the opening remarks of the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), in which he mentioned the importance of security. In the Minister's wind-up speech, I hope that he will be able to answer some questions that have been asked again and again. What are the plans, if any, for extending the International Security and Assistance Force beyond Kabul? What is the Government's view of the role of the Loya Jirga in the political development of Afghanistan? Will it be possible to form a properly representative Government?

That brings us to reconstruction, for which $4.5 billion has been promised for 27 million people. That is a small amount compared with the money that has been allocated to East Timor in the past two years. As hon. Members have said, what is extraordinary is that much of that money has not yet arrived.

I have received information that 30 Ministers are operating in Kabul at the moment. The majority work in buildings that are in an extremely poor state of repair. The buildings do not have windowpanes, there is little furniture and some Ministers make do with chairs that one would take on a picnic while other offices have no paper. The priority is to ensure that money is made available to the Interim Authority. The UK Government have made their contribution to the Interim Authority fund, but other Governments have not. The question is which countries have not contributed out of those who promised to do so in Tokyo. I would be particularly interested if any of them are European Union member states or the United States. It is important that the money flows now.

The money that flows through the Interim Government should utilise the Afghan NGO matrix that I have already mentioned. Elizabeth Winter—a constituent of mine in Putney—is the special adviser to the British Agencies Afghanistan group and gave evidence on Tuesday. She said that people in Kabul were asking us to stop sending hyperactive expatriates because they have the expertise locally. She said:

> "Above all make sure that the reconstruction process is led by Afghans themselves. I would recommend that we do not just pay lip-service to this, it is not good enough to say that Afghans must be in the driving seat when some people have not even allowed them in the car and with the same breath are saying there is no time to consult... Build on what is already known and has been achieved, and develop civil society."

She added:

> "The diaspora, with its valuable skills, should be facilitated to return."

We all have Afghan experts in our constituencies. Last October, an Afghan water engineer came to my surgery in Roehampton library to urge me to support what the Government were doing. I told him that the best thing that he could do when peace came would be to return to Afghanistan. I hope that he is now there, starting on the huge number of boreholes referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie.

Another issue relating to reconstruction was raised last Tuesday in questions asked by the Islamic Relief spokesperson. Are we forcing people to return too soon? He was concerned about the delicate eco-structure in south Afghanistan. There is also a concern that pharmaceuticals that are unsuitable or had not been checked were being dumped. A mechanism must be set up to ensure that we are not passing on pharmaceuticals that we would not accept for our own treatment or that of our families.

Support is needed for future training and a unified curriculum, which is something that the American Congressmen were particularly keen on. I would be interested to know if the Minister could outline what support exists for that. The Islamic Relief spokesperson also raised a concern about seed verification. He did not want the seeds provided to the Afghan people to be unsuitable.

Afghanistan was once an extremely sophisticated country, and it can be again. We look forward to what will be announced by its Ministry of Planning. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie talked about the long-term sustainability of Afghanistan, and how it can progress: clearly, not by growing poppies. He talked about the need for the community to be able to feed itself, and restore its water channels. It is important to recognise that there is a strong entrepreneurial class in Afghanistan. It was interesting that the markets continued trading all the way through the war. Now that the electricity has been restored, we must help business to start working again. We must see what we can do by helping financial services.

There has been an attempt to block the flow of terrorist finance, which means that the way in which Islamic banking was working cannot continue. It is important to examine how we can move forward. As a Government, we should consider a new classification. We mentioned the everything-but-arms initiatives for exports from developing countries to the European Union. Perhaps we should make that everything but poppies and arms.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge)—I would call her a friend—mentioned the need for the Commonwealth Development Corporation to get involved. I would suggest that it would be more suitable for the Export Credits Guarantee Department—the export credit agency, which is taking a more active role in considering issues of sustainable development and has learned lessons in Tanzania—to get involved. It could underpin the rebuilding of infrastructure and involve those companies that we have talked about before. They will need help and encouragement. I urge the Minister to talk to his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry about the creation of credit lines for Afghanistan.

I wish to make a final point about the importance of education. I mentioned earlier the strong plea from the VSO teacher in Kashmir. When we went to schools in the refugee camps, we saw evidence of a tremendous thirst for learning. We were disappointed by the number of schools for girls compared with the number for boys, and I hope that the Minister will confirm that DFID funding will be used in a way that ensures total equality for girls' and boys' education in the Afghanistan of the future.

The schools must be of the highest standards. Yesterday, I attended the launch of the Kashmir Education Foundation, which runs the Pearl valley school and teacher training institute in Rawalakot in Azzad Kashmir. The standards at the school are higher than those at virtually every school in the UK; Afghan children want the highest standards. I commend the support of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for the millennium targets for providing free education to children of primary school age. That is the key to the future of Afghanistan.

I held a surgery yesterday at the Alton school in Roehampton. I was using the office of Ann de Bono, the head teacher—she was away for the day—and saw this posted on the wall:

> "Education is an important element in the struggle for human rights. It is the means to help our children and people rediscover their identity and thereby increase self-respect. It is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today."

That is so apposite to Afghanistan. We must help the Afghan people who dearly want to prepare today for their future.

4.31 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I should like to speak briefly and in less detail than I would have during my membership of the Select Committee on International Development throughout the previous Parliament, not least because I now spend my mornings in the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee discussing planning guidance and speed humps, on which I am now expert.

I begin with the most fundamental point, which is raised in the characteristically excellent report of the Select Committee on International Development: the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan began long before 11 September. It began in the nucleus of a failed state, and it will end only with the creation of a functioning state that has the capacity to serve its citizens and uphold the rule of law. The rule of law—in particular, international humanitarian law—is key to addressing the humanitarian disaster, not just in Afghanistan, but beyond its borders.

In assessing the current situation in the country, the Select Committee report states in paragraph 65:

> "Everyone we spoke to, whether in London or Pakistan, stressed to us that the most serious barrier to humanitarian assistance has been and remains poor security."

That is pertinent. First, it is clear that more troops are necessary and that an effective security network must be established beyond Kabul.

Secondly, if Afghanistan is to be rebuilt, the west must keep its promises. We have to put our money where our mouth is. I commend the Labour Government on their support for long-term development in Afghanistan, which consists of £20 million for the new Afghanistan Interim Authority, as well as £200 million over the next five years, on top of the £40 million already given, to address the humanitarian crisis.

However, if we are discussing money and payment of what is due, we must consider the position of the United States. I should declare an interest, in that I am an American citizen. I proudly hold an American passport and I spent Christmas with my family in New York. I have the greatest sympathy with the people of New York, Washington and America and feel nothing but horror at the violence that was wreaked upon the American public and at the motives of those who were responsible.

However, the American Government's resistance to paying their way in international development is short-sighted, to put it charitably. I live in hope that 11 September may change that, not because the American Government might become converted to the soft end of security—we in the European Union take that to be our forte, as was recently outlined by Commissioner Chris Patten—but because of realpolitik. We took little notice of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan before 11 September, but realised afterwards that it was relevant to us.

DFID has identified more than 39 failed states with a couple of dozen on the urgent list or to be watched. If we are to prevent failed states from harbouring terrorist networks and imposing all manner of indecent treatment on their population, we must move urgently towards the 0.7 per cent. target of gross national product that can be directed to rebuilding those failed states and dealing with humanitarian crises such as that in Afghanistan.

It has been said before in this debate and never ceases to take my breath away that America spends only 0.1 per cent. of its GNP on overseas development assistance. In Britain, the Labour Government have made it a priority to increase our spending on overseas development assistance and we are currently spending 0.31 per cent. of GNP. However, I agree with the Select Committee's report that we should set a timetable to reach the 0.7 per cent. target. Several European countries have reached that target and it is high time that we were at the forefront of that effort, particularly as we take a leading role in responding to humanitarian

[Ms Oona King]

crises and are rightly renowned around the world for having what many people believe is the best international development Department.

Norman Lamb: Does the hon. Lady agree that 10 years would be a sensible period within which to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent.?

Ms Oona King: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Ten years is certainly a reasonable time scale. The latest it could feasibly be is the date for reaching the target of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee—2015. That must be our timetable and we cannot expect people to take us seriously if we do aim for that. We certainly cannot expect the most powerful and important country in the world—the United States—to take us seriously if we do not aim for that. We must argue strongly with our American colleagues that that target must be achieved for reasons of need and self-interest.

Many people said that the world changed after 11 September. During our first debate on that subject I said that the world had certainly changed and for the first time in my life I used the word "respect" in connection with President Bush. Unfortunately, I now find that I was premature in lavishing a certain amount of respect on him. As the most powerful leader in the world—and the leader of the free world—I am devastated about such irresponsible remarks. If we are to resolve the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, it is important that we direct our efforts to that country and not towards any other axis that may be on someone else's mind.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I am old enough to remember—as, I suspect, is the hon. Lady—when President Reagan used the phrase "empire of evil". Much disrespect was shown to him at that time, but, subsequently, he was proved to be right. The same may yet be true of President Bush.

Ms King: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We have already touched on whether hurling abuse through the international megaphone at Iran is helping or hindering our efforts to bring it around to how we want it to behave. We must take a regional approach. I certainly hope that the American Administration continue to edge slightly more towards the Colin Powell position, as opposed to the Rumsfeld position.

I refer now to women in Afghanistan. I remember, as I am sure do all members of the Select Committee, that the Department for International Development and the Secretary of State said repeatedly that, if we are to have development, we must reach the girls. If a woman is educated, a family is educated. We need to act quickly and to use short cuts. Happily for women in the world, they are now a short cut to development. I hope that the Minister addresses some of his remarks to the efforts to include women both in society through education and in the Interim Administration. It is in all our interests that the crisis in Afghanistan is resolved, and resolved quickly.

4.42 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I have not spoken before in a debate that you have chaired, Mr. Chidgey, and I am delighted to welcome you to our proceedings. I also welcome the report of the International Development Committee of which I used to be a member. I congratulate the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on his excellent speech. His independence of thought was refreshing and welcome. He made the first of many contributions about the security situation in Afghanistan, which was also taken up by the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) and others.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) rightly connected the treatment of prisoners in Cuba with the situation in Afghanistan. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) made much mention of the mother-in-law of the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and his own mother, but he did not say much else, except in an interesting intervention about the treatment of prisoners. It occurred to me that, if the human race had done what he advocated, we would not have progressed very far out of the caves. Perhaps it is a good job that they were not listening to him.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) said how much has been achieved. When discussing such problems, it is refreshing to realise that a lot has been achieved. He paid tribute to all those involved. He also made some interesting and important points about water security and reproductive health care—which is dear to my heart—and maternal and child health.

The hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) emphasised the importance of sending cash in such situations so that food can be brought locally. That is so important. It is much better than carrying food all over the world. He also paid tribute to General Musharraf and the contribution of Pakistan. Several hon. Members agreed with my intervention about Iran. We must not forget the contribution that Iran has made, both in the refugee crisis and on previous occasions. The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow emphasised the 0.7 per cent. target. I am glad that she agrees that it should be achieved in about 10 years, as that is my party's policy.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan before 11 September was dire, and not many people have mentioned that today. It was the poorest country in Asia and had experienced 25 years of war and three years of fierce drought, which affected not only Afghanistan, but the countries around it. A quarter of the population was dependent on food aid probably as early as this time last year, long before any of the action started. We were told that 6 million people were at risk and that many millions were flooding out to Pakistan and Iran in those years. The country was in terrible circumstances. Thanks to huge pressure from non-governmental organisations and hon. Members of all parties, after 11 September the humanitarian aspects of the crisis were kept to the fore at all times.

Thankfully, the winter was not as severe and the Taliban Government collapsed far more quickly than anyone expected. The World Food Programme, the non-governmental organisations and, as we heard from the hon. Member for Banbury, the people of

Afghanistan, such as those who drove the trucks, are among the great heroes of the world. The latter are the bravest of all and never gave up forcing through food, despite the difficulties.

There are still difficulties. We do not know how many people are starving or dead—information is hard to glean—but we hope that there are not nearly as many as was anticipated when military action commenced. It would have been much better if the international community had listened to the calls and fed the people before 11 September. When giving evidence to the Select Committee, the Secretary of State for International Development said that

> "there was deafening silence before September 11. We had a potential humanitarian catastrophe of very large proportions before September 11 and the media, and most other people, were not in the least bit interested".

The consolidated appeal in 2000 received only 48 per cent. of the funding that it requested—half of what was needed. I wonder whether that was due to compassion fatigue. The appeal called for $662 million in November 2001. Three months later, the United Nations is still 25 per cent. short of that requirement, even given the events of 11 September. I wonder what is going on in the world.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I sympathise with the hon. Lady's point about the fact that aid was not given before 11 September, but does she acknowledge that it is hard to see what the west could have done to aid people until the Taliban were removed from power? It took the impetus of the terrible events of 11 September to justify and precipitate the military action that enabled aid to be given.

Dr. Tonge: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but I understood that aid was getting through before 11 September. The NGOs said so to the Select Committee and, indeed, to me. It was only after 11 September that the borders were closed, and the subsequent military action made matters even more difficult. I believe that the west had some culpability even before then for allowing the Taliban to take control of the country in the first place. Afghanistan was abandoned for a while—I hope that that will not happen this time—so the Taliban took over the Government.

I note with great pride, although I am not a member of the Government, that of the donors who pledged humanitarian aid since 11 September, the United Kingdom and Germany are the only countries to have met and, indeed, exceeded their pledges. That is good news, and the Government are to be congratulated.

Nigel Fisher, the newly appointed special representative for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, said this month that it was terribly important that pledges were turned into the actual commitment of resources. A month on from the conference on reconstruction, very little cash has been contributed. The USA has pledged $298 million, but has it arrived? Is the money in the bank, and, indeed, is there a bank? It is important that the Minister tells us.

I have said before, and I repeat, that it is outrageous that the £200 million that DFID will provide over the next five years will come out of its own budget and not from the Treasury. The Treasury made £100 million available to the Ministry of Defence to pursue military action, so why can it not make money available to the DFID to clear up the mess? I cannot believe that it does not regard humanitarian aid so highly, having seen the actions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in recent months.

I understand from people who have been to Afghanistan that the Interim Authority has great difficulty paying policemen and others in Kabul. I heard that, in one instance, notes were flown in to pay policemen to stay in Kabul. That is disgraceful, and action must be taken if there is to be any sort of security. While Afghanistan remains insecure and there is no money to pay what few policemen or soldiers there are, the country will drift towards chaos and back to the warlords. We must not let that happen, and it is essential that we get money to Kabul.

Hon. Members have mentioned that UK troops are likely to have to stay longer, particularly if Turkey does not take over in April. When he visited the UK, Hamid Karzai said that his country was like a patient that had just come out of a major operation and entered intensive care. My medical experience tells me that the days in intensive care are the most crucial time after a big operation. Please let us not abandon Afghanistan, but see it through to a full recovery. We must see it through convalescence, just as we are doing in Sierra Leone. I was recently in that country and it was heart-warming to see how much better things were and how much people appreciated the British Army and wanted it to stay on to train the troops.

I want to deal briefly with the issue of drought. Sue Lautze, the director of the livelihoods initiative programme at Tufts university, visited Afghanistan and reported that the drought may continue for 12 to 18 months. She emphasised all the same points about water security as the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. Further evidence to the Select Committee now suggests that there is heavy rain in Afghanistan, but that there is a lack of seeds and tools. If there is a lack of seeds to grow food, international drug dealers will make damn sure—I beg your pardon, Mr. Chidgey—very sure that there are poppy seeds to plant instead. It is important that we remember that the drugs trade that surrounds Afghanistan will swoop in pretty quickly.

In our previous debate on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, I and others stated that we should not underestimate the importance of developing the entire region, and my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) emphasised that again. Donors must focus on all of central Asia's failing economies, not just on Afghanistan. Any one of the central Asian states could fail if we do not address their problems. I note that Commissioner Patten called the events of 11 September "the dark side of globalisation", which is a good description. Since that day, many people have reminded us that development aid is an important issue for our future security. I am delighted that the International Development Committee has called for the target of 0.7 per cent. of GDP to be reached within 10 years. It is very important that we do that.

I assume that the official Opposition are still sticking to their policy of abandoning that target and going for cash amounts rather than proportion of GDP. They may defend the USA—they seem to be George Bush's [illegible]esentatives in this country at the moment—but no

[Dr. Tonge]

less an American than Bill Gates has castigated the US Government for their pathetic contribution, in terms of GDP, towards overseas aid. Perhaps they will listen to him.

Mr. Colman: Will the hon. Lady accept my assurances that the Congressmen were all quite shocked by the situation and took word of it back to the US? This is not simply the fault of Congress, but of the media in the United States, who are not explaining the situation.

Dr. Tonge: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention.

In the international development debate a few weeks ago, the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Surrey Heath, who is no longer present, criticised me for castigating the USA. He has criticised me again this afternoon for failing to act on this issue and for failing to reach out to the rest of the world in the right way. I am now joined in that by one of my constituents, who is a member of the Conservative party—the good Commissioner Patten. He gave a very good interview to *The Guardian* recently, from which we have all been quoting, in which he described himself as "a life-long Americaphile" with

> "not an ounce of Americaphobia in my body".

However, he fears that a deeper philosophical gulf between the United States and us could soon appear. The interview from *The Guardian* goes on to say:

> "While Europeans believe in tackling the root causes of terror, Washington seems too keen only to eradicate the symptoms. While Europeans believe in 'engaging' potentially hostile nations, trying to bring them into the fold, Washington brands them an 'axis of evil'. While Europeans believe in acting together, multilaterally, the US seems ever more bent on acting alone."

That paragraph contains quotations from Commissioner Patten but was written by *The Guardian*. I agree with the Commissioner very much and I hope that the Government are listening and will not follow blindly whatever the United States does.

4.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): Thank you, Mr. Chidgey. It is a pleasure to be participating in a debate under your chairmanship for the first time. The debate has been excellent—I am sorry that several hon. Members who have contributed have had to go off, for very good reasons, to other engagements. Notwithstanding that, the International Development Committee—not for the first time, and I suspect not for the last—has done the House a service in the care and attention to detail that it has brought to its report.

It has been an extremely informative and interesting debate, which was summed up with characteristic generosity by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge). In particular, the House has cause to be grateful to the Select Committee because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) said, when the inquiry was conducted there was a great deal of concern and anxiety about the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. That concern was understandable and it was right, but the Committee has been able to present a fair and balanced assessment of the position on the ground. It has also done us a service by teasing out some of the broader implications and issues, from which we can learn.

I would first like to echo the words of praise that several hon. Members have uttered for all those who have worked hard in the United Nations system and the aid agencies to deliver that outcome. I thank members of the Committee and the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), who is no longer in this Chamber, for their comments about the response of the Department for International Development to the crisis. I do so principally because it in turn gives me the opportunity to express my thanks, and I am sure the thanks of the whole House, to the many staff of DFID who have worked night and day—literally in some cases—to ensure that the response that the Committee praised became reality. Their contribution should rightly be recognised.

The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) made an excellent speech and put the humanitarian issue in Afghanistan into a wider context. He rightly highlighted some of the challenging questions that arise from the experience there and elsewhere to which he and other hon. Members referred, especially the basis on which the international community will intervene in such circumstances in future. That is extremely important. In truth, the international community has felt its way forward in recent years in trying to answer that question. I am glad that we have moved from the era when the international community said that such matters were internal and could not be intervened in. Now we discuss among ourselves when we should intervene, on what basis and, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, how we ensure the means to do so effectively.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) had a little dialogue about training. Hon. Members will probably be aware that American troops will be involved, along with others, in training the Afghan army. Germany will lead on police training. However, the process has not really begun. An effective plan must be in place for the work to be carried through.

Dr. Julian Lewis: This intervention will be similar to my initial one. Will the Minister comment on what further contributions other European countries propose to make to a continuing military presence for humanitarian purposes?

Hilary Benn: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will return to military involvement later in my speech, and I will try to pick up that point.

It is extremely difficult to describe in few words what has happened in a country that has been so damaged by conflict, drought, refugee movement, insecurity and poverty. We have to remember that it is a country where average life expectancy is roughly what it was in the United Kingdom in the 1840s, before the great improvements in infrastructure and health that allowed us to move towards the life expectancy that we enjoy today. All hon. Members have agreed today on the fact that widespread famine has been averted in Afghanistan by the effective action of the assistance community. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), among others, acknowledged that.

We have averted famine thanks largely to the efforts of the UN-led international humanitarian system, and especially the Herculean efforts of the World Food Programme, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) rightly had great praise. It showed imagination, in that it used local truckers and changed delivery routes when the Taliban seized one of the local warehouses, which ensured that it could take more of the food to the secondary distribution centres. Unseen, it produced many facts and figures about the extent to which it succeeded in bringing food into the country. That satisfied the thirst for knowledge on the part of DFID, the House and the country and enabled us to answer the question, "How is it going?" However, I take the point of the hon. Member for Banbury that what matters in the end is whether the food reaches the people for whom it is intended.

As hon. Members have said, we also need to give special recognition to the courage and determination of the Afghan national staff of the UN and of the aid agencies. They played a crucial role in keeping the supply routes open, often at great personal risk, when international staff were evacuated after 11 September. The primary distribution of food has, despite all obstacles, provided enough to avoid a catastrophe. Since October 2001, approximately 325,000 tonnes of food aid have been distributed to more than 6 million people—a record volume of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Colman: Amazing.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend uses the word "amazing". It is amazing, and it is important to pause and reflect on what the UN system, with support, has been able to achieve in the most difficult circumstances. Despite that, we cannot pause for more than a moment for self-congratulation. The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains uncertain and fragile; there will continue to be significant needs for at least the coming year in the most difficult and volatile operating conditions. Because of severe weather and continuing concern about security in some isolated areas of the country, there are still places where people are not getting enough to eat. The WFP and other humanitarian agencies are continuing to do what they can to overcome those obstacles and to deliver food and other help. The indications appear to be that in the north and the west of the country, the prospects for some remediation of the drought are better than they are in the south and the east where, unfortunately, the signs are that it might continue.

Since the beginning of February, around 4,000 tonnes of food aid has been dispatched to the worst-affected provinces of Herat, Faryab, Badghis and Ghor. Food distribution will begin in Kandahar city on 14 March. In addition, the WFP is using helicopter-borne rapid assessment teams to find the isolated people in remote areas who are hungry, to provide essential food aid and to evaluate the effectiveness of the feeding programmes that are already in place.

City-wide food distribution has now begun in Mazar-i-Sharif, following similar distribution in Kabul and Herat. Approximately 53,000 families will receive WFP food rations totalling around 2,500 tonnes of wheat. Supplies of other relief items, such as tents, blankets, and cooking equipment, continue to be provided to those who need them.

The opening of the Salang tunnel has improved the flow of supplies between the north and the south of the country. However, the recent landslide at the tunnel, due to heavy snowfall, illustrates the precarious state of the transport network. Transport infrastructure across the country is in a pretty poor condition, with a number of critical roads and bridges in need of extensive, large-scale, capital investment. Talking of bridges, the one that we now have to cross is the long and difficult process of reconstruction of a country that has suffered much.

During the debate, we have agreed that four things are needed. The first is a political commitment to peace—without sustained peace in Afghanistan, nothing else will be achievable in the long term. The second is a sense of security, the third a plan of action that is owned by the Government and people of the country and the fourth, effective support from the international community, which contributes to each of those objectives.

On the political commitment to peace, I mention the Bonn agreement. The praise for Lakhdar Brahimi's persistence and skill is richly deserved. That extraordinary achievement in very difficult circumstances has provided political commitment—although it remains to be seen whether all who have been involved in the conflicts in Afghanistan in the past 20 years have the same level of commitment to a new order in that country, as opposed to the state of disorder that there has been for almost a generation. The Interim Administration now in place faces the most daunting challenge. We might sometimes think that the job of government is difficult, but our difficulties are nothing compared to the problems faced by the Interim Administration.

The most urgent issue—it has been the dominant issue in today's debate—is security. The hon. Member for Banbury referred to it at the start of his speech. The greatest danger that Afghanistan faces is the risk of a return to disorder, criminality and faction fighting. The Interim Administration's initiative to try to demilitarise the cities has had some success, with reports that the number of weapons carried openly is now significantly reduced. With the support of ISAF, the overall security situation continues to show signs of improvement, particularly in Kabul.

The Government are well aware, because Hamid Karzai uses every opportunity to tell us, of the Interim Administration's passionate desire to extent ISAF's coverage to other parts of the country. It has been discussed, and it is being discussed as we speak, but the House will be aware that no decision has yet been taken. Major logistical, military and other challenges have to be faced while trying to achieve that objective. However, any steps that can be taken to extend security and a sense of safety to all parts of the country would be widely welcomed.

The international staff of the humanitarian agencies are now able to move freely on most major roads throughout the country, and local leaders and the Interim Administration are working to improve the security of other routes. Nevertheless, significant areas,

[Hilary Benn]

particularly in the east and the south, are still insecure because of military action or banditry, and because of the continuing danger posed by mines and unexploded ordnance referred to this afternoon. The United Nations Mine Action Service is leading and co-ordinating de-mining efforts, and the World Food Programme continues to provide immediate humanitarian help and assistance.

Two particular issues have been highlighted today—two important features of reconstruction that I want to touch on briefly. The first is education. UNICEF and the Ministry of Education are making real progress in starting the new school year next month. UNICEF's back-to-school campaign is continuing, and the procurement of education materials and equipment is under way. I was interested to hear of the event last week that involved the US Congressman and the steps that have been taken to print educational materials.

The aim of the project is simple: it is to assist 1.5 million Afghan girls and boys in to school when the school year starts on 23 March 2002. That will be a special day in the history of the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It is the next generation whom we hope will inherit the fruits of peace, and that day will mark the restoration to half of that generation—the girls—the most important gift we can give. That gift is the right to an education, as my hon. Friends the Members for Putney and for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) said.

The most important thing to be done to enable women's participation in society in the years to come is to ensure that that half of the next generation is educated. The Department is supporting a range of initiatives to try to ensure that women are involved in the reconstruction effort. We are funding UNIFEM and OHCHR, and we are giving practical support to the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs, so that it can get started. It needs basic equipment, such as materials, infrastructure, desks, chairs, tables, paper and computers, so that it can begin to carry out the work that it is being given.

The second issue that was highlighted is health. There are real concerns about measles, respiratory infection, pregnancy-related complications, maternal mortality, which has already been referred to, diarrhoea and tuberculosis. The World Health Organisation is distributing emergency kits to hospitals and clinics and there is a national drugs supply programme. The WHO is working with the Ministry of Public Health on planning for the health infrastructure of the country. The immunisation programme is continuing. Indeed, it worked incredibly successfully even while the military conflict was going on. In the meantime, the health sector voluntary organisations and the Red Cross are providing the bulk of health capacity in the country.

Several hon. Members mentioned contributions—does the money match the rhetoric? The international community has contributed more than $630 million since September 2001 compared with the $1.8 billion appealed for to aid humanitarian and recovery activities until the end of this year. At the recent Tokyo conference, more than $4.5 million was pledged over the next five years. The Select Committee was concerned about the unwillingness of donors to turn their pledges into cash in the bank and was worried about what effect that would have on practical assistance. However, our assessment is that although some donors have been slow to turn their pledges into cash, the assistance effort has not been seriously impaired. Last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I met Finance Minister Arsala, who was travelling through London on his way back to Afghanistan. We talked about several matters, but he did not express concern about any sort of major break from the kind of reconstruction that we all want to see.

The UN trust fund is disbursing money to pay civil service salaries, but as hon. Members have identified, there is a continuing problem with police salaries. Of the $20 million requested for the United Nations fund for the Interim Authority, $17 million has already been spent, so progress is being made. The Tokyo pledges are in addition to all the money that has already been provided, and we very much hope that the Tokyo pledges will be channelled through the Afghan reconstruction trust fund, which will be established shortly, rather than individual countries rushing ahead with many bilateral programmes, because we are concerned about co-ordination. We very much welcome the fact that the Interim Administration have set up an Afghan assistance co-ordination agency, which will hold the reconstruction plan for the country. We regard that as a welcome sign of Afghan ownership of the programme, and hope that it will provide a vehicle for mediating between the enthusiasm and willingness of donors to give support and the need to ensure that money is applied effectively according to priorities that are ultimately decided by the Afghan people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie gave us an outstanding description of the reconstruction challenge faced by Afghanistan and rightly drew attention to the tension between externally facilitated quick wins and the need to support the Afghan Administration in doing it for themselves.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Putney that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Food and Agriculture Organisation understand the need to provide the right seeds. We are aware of the problem of dumping pharmaceuticals, which we do not support, and we are working to ensure that the right medicines are delivered.

I completely endorse the point raised by the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) about the countries that in current parlance are termed the "stans". They have suffered the most astonishing collapse in their economies. In the great depression of 1929, which we read about but some people lived through, gross national product declined by about 28 per cent. Some of the countries we are talking about have experienced a collapse of 40, 50 or 60 per cent. in their economies in the past 10 years. The hon. Gentleman rightly said that we need to know more about what is happening. A conference took place last week at Lancaster House, arising out of an original suggestion from the Department for International Development. It was organised by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and others and brought together seven of those countries precisely to say, "Tell us how things are going. What more can we do to help?" It has helped to throw the spotlight on their circumstances.

I want also to touch briefly on repatriation and returnees. The UNHCR estimates that in January 2002, 130,000 Afghans returned home from Pakistan and Iran. It is planning for a bigger number in the coming months, not because it intends to tell people that they must return—I am happy to confirm to hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley, that it must be a voluntary return—but because more people will feel that they are able to return to their homes and communities, principally because there is security. As such, we must ensure that we can provide practical support on health care, food, water and sanitation. As the question of Iran was raised, I should say that the UK has provided £1 million through the United Nations for education and health for refugees in that country.

Norman Lamb: The Minister seemed to be moving to a close, and it appeared as if he was not going to get on to the question that I wanted to raise, which concerns food production. A brief comment was made about the importance of seeds, but there have been reports in the past few days of a considerable expansion in the number of poppies being grown. The one thing that the Taliban did correctly was to impose a ban on the planting of poppies. That has gone, and it appears that poppies are being planted in large parts of the country. As this seems to be a question of the market and the price that the farmers get for their product, what strategy is being developed to ensure that they have the right incentives to grow food rather than poppies? Sustainable development will depend on that, but we appear to be moving in the opposite direction. What assessment has been made of the extent to which the warlords of the Northern Alliance are involved in the drugs trade and thereby perpetuating the problem?

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the point, because it is topical. The poppy harvest is four to six weeks away. The honest truth is that the Taliban were successful in enforcing the ban on poppy planting in the same way as they were successful in enforcing many other things about which hon. Members would feel much less happy. In the current circumstances, and with the disappearance of the Taliban and uncertainty about the future, the poppy has returned. We have a certain amount of information about what is happening, but Afghanistan is a fractured country, and the remit of the Interim Administration does not extend throughout. The Interim Administration have said that they do not want the poppy to be planted, but they do not yet have the means to enforce that.

The hon. Gentleman made the most important point when he said that the only long-term solution will be to find alternative ways of earning a living, feeding a family and keeping body and soul together for those who plant the crops. They plant poppies not because they are interested in fuelling the drugs trade in this country or elsewhere in Europe, but because it is a way to survive. Any strategy to try to eradicate poppy production must be based on the recognition that in the long term, we must give people alternatives.

Dr. Julian Lewis: On the principle that perseverance wins, may I ask again whether the Minister is satisfied with projected plans for military protection of humanitarian aid? Is he satisfied that our European colleagues are making a sufficient contribution, and if he is not sure now, will he write to me? In any event, does he accept the main point that, as countries that have done much of the fighting, the United States and United Kingdom should be able to look to our European colleagues to supply long-term military protection for humanitarian aid, especially as a European Commissioner is so willing to speak on such questions, as the hon. Member for Richmond Park noted?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman neatly brings me to the broader question of what contribution each of us needs to make to see the process through. Several hon. Members are half American, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow and I. I am proud of being half American. My hon. Friend referred to America's role. This has been a difficult period for America. It is hard for any country, society or person to wake up suddenly and discover that not everyone sees one in the way in which one sees oneself.

We, the Americans, our European colleagues, and other countries must ask ourselves what we need to do to achieve the objectives to which the hon. Gentleman referred. What money or military support will we give, or will the contribution be in kind? We have to will the means if we meant what we said as an international community, which was that once the military action was over, we would not walk away from Afghanistan. There has been some discussion about the axis of this or that. We should be interested in an axis of reconstruction for the future of Afghanistan, and in an axis of countries that are committed to increasing their overseas development assistance. Above all, we need an axis of determination. Poverty, injustice and inequality scar the world, and we must ensure that they are less in the years to come. That is the real lesson of the events of the past six months. We have made a small but important step along the way, but much work remains to be done.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Five o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 11 February 2002

DEFENCE

Eurofighter

16. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Eurofighter. [31907]

Dr. Moonie: The Eurofighter is a highly capable, multi-role aircraft, that will replace our Tornado F3s and Jaguars. We expect the RAF to take delivery of its first Eurofighter later this year. This four nation collaborative project is an excellent example of what can be achieved by European nations working together with a common purpose.

Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty

17. **Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the US Administration on the future of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty. [31908]

Mr. Hoon: I regularly discuss missile defence and related issues with the United States Administration. The future of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty is essentially a bilateral issue for the United States and Russia. We welcome the fact that they are continuing to work together to establish a new strategic framework based on openness and mutual trust.

Army Personnel

18. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the shortfall of personnel in the Army. [31909]

Mr. Ingram: As at 1 January 2002, there was a shortfall of 6,059 personnel against the currently assessed in-year requirement for whole Army strength.

Joint Command Bases

19. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last discussed joint command bases with his United States counterpart. [31912]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has regular discussions with his United States counterpart on a wide range of subjects of mutual interest. Recent discussions have not specifically addressed the joint command of military facilities.

Central Ordnance Depot (Bicester)

20. **Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the central ordnance depot, Bicester. [31913]

Dr. Moonie: At the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency Bicester there are three sites (A, B and G) which are surplus to the long-term requirements of the agency and will no longer be required by them after 2004 or earlier. Current plans foresee the continued requirement for the remaining DSDA sites at Bicester.

NATO

22. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the Secretary-General of NATO to discuss European defence. [31915]

Mr. Hoon: I last met the Secretary-General of NATO during the NATO Defence Ministers' meetings on 18–19 December 2001 when we discussed a number of topics, including European defence.

Retention

23. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve morale and retention in the armed forces. [31916]

Mr. Ingram: High morale, as well as being important in its own right, is a vital factor in retaining personnel, which in turn improves manning levels and helps to obtain the optimum return on investment in training. Our aim is to maintain excellent levels of retention and morale through policies that reflect the priorities of our people and their families. For example, we are implementing in full the outcome of the Armed Forces Pay Review, including the proposals for aircrew remuneration.

A key outcome of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) was the "Policy for People" which addresses terms and conditions; pay and allowances; quality of training; family life; equality of opportunity and provision of better accommodation. All of these are being taken forward as part of all overarching personnel strategy that was introduced in April 2000 to place personnel issues at the centre of our policy making.

Royal Navy Amphibious Operations

24. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the future needs of the Royal Navy in order to sustain amphibious operations. [31917]

Mr. Ingram: The Strategic Defence Review concluded that we should maintain strong and well balanced maritime forces including a full Commando brigade and specialist shipping.

The Royal Navy's new landing platform docks, Albion and Bulwark, are both due to enter service in 2003. We are also building four Bay Class Alternative Landing Ship Logistics (ALSLs), which will be operated by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The ALSLs are substantially larger and more capable than the vessels they replace and on current plans will all have entered service by the end of 2005. In conjunction with the new landing platform docks and the helicopter landing platform, HMS Ocean, the ALSLs will bring a substantial increase in the UK's overall capability to conduct amphibious operations and contribute to increased global reach and flexibility.

Bosnia and Kosovo

25. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of British forces in *(a)* Bosnia and *(b)* Kosovo. [31918]

Mr. Ingram: UK forces continue to make a vital contribution to all of the tasks undertaken by SFOR and KFOR in building peace and stability in Bosnia and Kosovo. The UK currently contributes some 1,900 personnel to SFOR operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina as the co-ordinating nation in Multinational Division (South-West). As the framework nation of Multinational Brigade (Centre) in Kosovo, the UK currently contributes some 3,000 personnel to KFOR operations.

Veterans

26. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on veterans' affairs. [31919]

Dr. Moonie: Since the announcement of the veterans' initiative and my appointment as Veterans Minister in March of last year, we have been working closely with representatives of the veterans' community to improve the services we offer them. As an early step, we transferred the War Pensions Agency to the Ministry of Defence to deliver a more coherent service to war pensioners. We are committed to maintaining the agency's programme of continuous improvement to the services it provides to its customers, recognised recently in the award of the UNISYS Management Today Excellence Award. In particular, we are working closely with interested veterans' organisations to identify areas where we can bring further improvements in service through closer co-operation with their own activities in support of veterans.

We have also recognised the concern of many veterans and of people more widely that the final resting places of our war dead should be properly respected. In particular, we have moved to address the desecration of maritime war graves by some divers. We have designated 16 wrecks in UK waters as controlled sites and five in international waters as protected places. All military vessels lost in the Falklands conflict will be designated. We have made clear that we will prosecute where we have jurisdiction and are pressing for greater international protection of such wrecks.

The objective of seeking improvements in the support offered to those who have left the services, through closer partnership with the veterans' organisations, has been a key theme of the work of the ministerial task force and the forum of veterans' representatives. There have been two meetings of the Veterans Forum and, as a result, nine working groups have been formed to give practical expression to the initiative's core themes of partnership, identify recognition and care. These working groups are looking at improvements in areas such as resettlement of the most vulnerable service-leavers, communication with veterans, and the educational material available in schools with regard to the achievements of our veterans. The working groups include representatives from the veterans' organisations, as well as from other interested Government Departments and the devolved Administrations. Initial meetings have been held to agree the objectives for each working group and they will report back to me on their progress in time to give an up-date to representatives of the veterans' community at the second Plenary Forum on 17 April 2002.

Subsequently, the Veterans Forum, which includes the executive of the Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations (COBSSEO) and senior officials from across government, is due to consider the progress of the working groups when it meets on 1 May 2002. The ministerial task force will then consider the way forward, taking account of the views expressed by the veterans community, at our meeting on 15 May and, in July, I will provide a progress report through the Defence Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Royal Navy Recruitment

27. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on recruitment to the Royal Navy. [31920]

Mr. Ingram: Recruitment to the Naval Service is satisfactory. We aim to recruit about 5,000 officers, ratings and Royal Marines this year and, although we still face challenges in the recruitment of engineers, submarine operator mechanics, chefs and some medical specialisations, we are within 5 per cent. of our target in most areas.

We continue to initiate spotlight campaigns in areas of high recruitment potential throughout the UK, with a particular interest in those districts where there is the potential to increase this representation of the ethnic minority population. Our initiatives include multi-media advertising campaigns such as the new cinema advert for the Royal Marines, and attendance at multi-cultural events and exhibitions, presentation and display teams. It is important that we attract the attention and interest of young people still in full-time education and our Royal Naval and Royal Marine display and presentation teams regularly tour the UK, visiting schools and colleges, attending careers fairs and conventions and promoting EU financial assistance schemes to sixth-formers and undergraduates.

Recruitment

28. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were recruited to the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* Royal Air Force between 1 November 2001 and 31 January 2002. [31921]

Mr. Ingram: Figures for recruitment are at present available only up until the end of November 2001.

In the three months prior to that, 1,826 people were recruited to the Naval Service, 5,096 people were recruited to the Army and 1,037 people were recruited to the RAF. Figures are for intake to UK regular forces and therefore exclude Gurkhas, full time reserve service personnel, the Home Service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment and mobilised reservists.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers were recruited in South Tyneside in each year since 1996. [34559]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is as follows:

Financial years	*Regular soldiers*
1996–97	826
1997–98	880
1998–99	902
1999–2000	690
2000–01	519
2001–02	[1]420

[1] To end January 2002

Gurkha Regiments

29. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many new recruits will be introduced into the Gurkha regiments and what will be the strength of the Gurkha regiments in 2002; and if he will make a statement. [31922]

Mr. Ingram: There is a requirement to recruit 230 Gurkhas during 2002 in order to maintain the current force level of around 3,500 trained Gurkhas.

Procurement (Clyde)

30. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his procurement plans in connection with shipyards on the Clyde. [31923]

Dr. Moonie: This Government are undertaking the largest programme of new warship building in this country for decades. In the last 20 months the Ministry of Defence has placed orders or announced its intention to place orders for 15 new warships. The Clyde has already benefited from this programme. BAE Systems Marine recently signed a contract, with the MOD, for the build of two new Alternative Landing Ships Logistics at the Govan yard on the Clyde, the Clyde shipyards of BAE Systems Marine will also benefit from the Ministry of Defence's planned extension of its commitment from three to six Type 45 Destroyers, the Build of which will be shared between BAE Systems Marine and Vosper Thornycroft with the first of class assembled and launched from the Scotstoun yard.

Our future plans include two new aircraft carriers; further Astute Class submarines and Type 45 Destroyers; the new surface combatant and a number of support vessels. It is expected that this programme of warship building will create or secure several thousand jobs in UK shipyards and their ancillary industries throughout this country. We fully expect shipyards on the Clyde to have opportunities to participate in future orders.

Female Army Recruits

31. **Mr. Havard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action is planned with regard to the application of physical fitness tests for Army recruits; and if he will make a statement on the study into injuries among female army recruits, in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, volume 95. [31924]

Mr. Ingram: The Physical Selection Standards (Recruits) (PSS(R)) system of testing potential recruits to the Army has been in place since 1998. It consists of a series of tests designed to assess the level of fitness of an individual related to the specific demands of a particular trade, irrespective of gender, and aims to predict the likely chance of an individual successfully completing initial military training. The system is currently undergoing re-validation. The study reported in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine compared data associated with medical discharges among recruits trained under the policy in existence in 1997–98 with data for those trained under the PSS(R) regime in 1998–99. The results showed an increase in medical discharges of female recruits due to certain types of injury, such as stress fractures and back pain. Modifications have since been made to the selection and training process for new recruits and the position is being kept under constant review.

Kabul

32. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the cohesion of the stability force in Kabul. [31925]

Mr. Hoon: The command and control of a large multinational force like the International Security Assistance Force in a challenging environment like Kabul is a major undertaking. So far, this has gone extremely well, which is a tribute to the close co-operation that we have received from the 17 other troop contributing nations.

Pakistan

33. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his counterpart in Pakistan to discuss military developments in the region. [31926]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas).

Missile Defence

34. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that there is parliamentary approval prior to a deployment by the US of national missile defence facilities in the UK. [31927]

Mr. Hoon: President Bush has made clear that he has not yet decided what sort of missile defence system he will ultimately seek to deploy. We have received no request from the US for the use of sites in the UK for missile defence purposes, and it remains premature to indicate how we would respond to any specific request.

35. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Russia about missile defence. [31928]

Mr. Hoon: I discussed a range of issues, including missile defence, with the Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, during his visit to London on 20 December.

Strategic Defence Review

36. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the new chapter of the strategic defence review. [31929]

Mr. Hoon: We have made good progress on the new chapter to the Strategic Defence Review: this work is designed to ensure that we have the right concepts, forces and capabilities in place to deal with the kind of threats that we saw on 11 September.

We intend to publish public discussion material very shortly, outlining the areas we are examining, reflecting emerging thinking and seeking views. This will provide an important opportunity for members of the public, Parliament and other interested parties to contribute to this important work. We intend to publish some conclusions in the spring or early summer.

Procurement (Naval Ships)

37. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his procurement plans for naval ships. [31930]

Dr. Moonie: The Government are undertaking the largest programme of new warship building for many years. In the last 20 months the Ministry of Defence has placed orders or announced its intention to place orders for 15 new warships.

As to our future plans, we expect to purchase two new aircraft carriers and further Astute class submarines and type 45 destroyers. Our longer-term plans include the future surface combatant as well as a number of support vessels.

It remains our policy that all warships for the Royal Navy will be built in the United Kingdom, providing the UK shipbuilding industry with a solid platform of work opportunities.

Hawk Aircraft (India)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration his Department has given in the last two months to the impact of UK sales of Hawk aircraft to India on the stability of the region in advance of an export licence application. [34081]

Dr. Moonie: All export licence applications are considered on a case by case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, taking into account all the relevant circumstances prevailing at the time the application is received.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what he has done in the last two months to encourage the sales of Hawk aircraft to India. [34080]

Mr. Hoon: The Government continue to support BAE System's proposal to sell Hawk Advanced Jet Trainer aircraft to India. During the Indian Defence Minister's short stopover in Britain in January, I discussed a range of defence matters, including defence export opportunities.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when delivery will be taken of the first aircraft if Hawk aircraft are sold to India. [34082]

Dr. Moonie: This is a matter for BAE Systems and the Government of India and it would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment.

Qala-I-Jhangi Fort

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 964W, what inquiries are taking place into the deaths at Qala-I-Jhangi fort between 25 and 27 November 2001; and if he will make a statement. [34867]

Mr. Hoon: I see no grounds for instituting an inquiry. I am satisfied that the actions of British troops were a perfectly proper response to the situation they encountered at Qala-I-Jhangi fort.

Detainees (Afghanistan)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the US Secretary of State for Defense concerning the treatment of British hostile nationals apprehended in Afghanistan. [31895]

Mr. Hoon: I have had a number of discussions with my United States counterpart about the situation in Afghanistan and related issues. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has a permanent presence at Camp X-ray at Guantanamo Bay. The three British prisoners have been seen by British officials and have made no complaints about their conditions or treatment.

The ICRC is also being allowed access to detainees in Afghanistan. However, our extremely limited consular capacity in Afghanistan and continuing security risks to our staff travelling outside Kabul place a practical limit on what we are able to achieve there.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether detainees in Afghanistan *(a)* captured and *(b)* held by United Kingdom forces have been transferred to US forces. [33636]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* No.

Southern Helicopter Stations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the armed forces' helicopter stations south of the M4. [31911]

Mr. Ingram: There are seven armed forces helicopter stations south of the M4. These are:

Royal Air Force Odiham

Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton

Middle Wallop Airfield

Netheravon Airfield

Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose

Royal Air Force St. Mawgan

Royal Marines Base Chivenor.

Injuries (Female Personnel)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to address the number of injuries sustained by women under Army training since the introduction of the gender-free policy. [R] [31477]

Mr. Ingram: This issue has been kept under close review since the introduction of "gender-free" physical testing in 1998. A number of changes have been made to both the selection and initial training process. In May 2000, a one and a half mile run was introduced at Recruit Selection Centres, to act as a "risk reducer" by identifying those individuals who would be unlikely to be able to complete training. Remedial treatment and physiotherapy services at the Army Training Regiments have been expanded and doctors there have been given better training in sports medicine.

During 2001, a complete reprofiling of the common military syllabus for recruits at the Army Training Regiments (ATRs) was undertaken. The programming and physical development profile was reviewed and refined to provide a graduated curve of increasing physical intensity to minimise the risk of early traumatic injury. The programme is focused on the average 16 to 18-year-old physical fitness start state, and it is specifically designed to minimise lower limb traumas and soft tissue injuries in the first six weeks of training. Heart rate monitors have been introduced to optimise individual physical development profiles. Lower limb strength training and certain limitations on basic drill have been introduced. The changes were instituted in October 2001 and will be formally assessed in April 2002; first indications are that injury rates in the first nine weeks of training have fallen overall.

The Army Training and Recruiting Agency has continued to sponsor studies in injury prevention and management, remedial training, ergonomics and nutritional areas; currently there are 10 studies in progress, with the overall aim of reducing injuries and medical discharges during training, for both male and females recruits, to the lowest practicable levels while meeting standards and complying with legislation.

Foot Guards

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is *(a)* the establishment and *(b)* the current strength of each of the Regiments in the Foot Guards; and if he will list each element of company strength serving with them, indicating where each battalion has soldiers attached to it from another battalion, (i) which battalion they are from and (ii) in what numbers. [32456]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The establishment and strength of each of the Foot Guards Regiments, as at 1 January 2002, is detailed in the table. The figures include all attached arms and also detail the Public Duties Companies that serve away from the main body of the Regiment.

Establishment and strength of Footguard Regiments as at 1 January 2002

	1 Grenadier Guards		*N Coy*		*1 Coldstream Guards*	
	Establishment	*Strength*	*Establishment*	*Strength*	*Establishment*	*Strength*
Infantry	561	535	107	100	561	547
RAChD	0	0	0	0	0	0
RLC	23	19	0	1	23	22
RAMC	4	3	0	0	4	3
REME	11	11	0	1	0	1
AG CORPS (SPS)	22	23	0	0	22	22
Royal Signals	0	0	0	0	0	1
QARANC	1	0	1	0	1	0
Royal Engineers	0	0	0	0	0	1
HCAV	0	0	0	0	0	0
APTC	1	1	0	0	1	2
UKTAP	622	592	107	102	611	599
FTRS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gurkhas	0	0	0	0	0	0
Whole Army total	624	592	107	102	612	599

	7 Coy		*8 Coy*		*1 Scots Guards*	
	Establishment	*Strength*	*Establishment*	*Strength*	*Establishment*	*Strength*
Infantry	107	80	98	98	562	515
RAChD	0	0	0	0	0	1
RLC	0	0	0	0	23	17
RAMC	0	0	0	0	4	3
REME	0	1	0	0	11	9
AG CORPS (SPS)	0	0	0	0	22	21
Royal Signals	0	0	0	0	0	0
QARANC	1	0	1	0	1	0
Royal Engineers	0	0	0	0	0	0
HCAV	0	0	0	0	0	0
APTC	0	0	0	0	1	1
UKTAP	107	81	98	98	623	567
FTRS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gurkhas	0	0	0	0	0	0
Whole Army total	107	81	98	98	624	567

	F Coy		1 Irish Guards		1 Welsh Guards	
	Establishment	*Strength*	*Establishment*	*Strength*	*Establishment*	*Strength*
Infantry	107	111	621	612	590	583
RAChD	0	0	0	0	0	0
RLC	0	1	24	20	23	21
RAMC	0	0	4	4	4	3
REME	0	1	0	0	29	24
AG CORPS (SPS)	0	0	24	20	22	18
Royal Signals	0	0	0	0	0	0
QARANC	1	0	1	0	1	0
Royal Engineers	0	0	0	0	0	0
HCAV	0	0	0	3	0	0
APTC	0	0	1	1	1	1
UKTAP	107	113	674	660	669	650
FTRS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gurkhas	0	0	0	0	0	0
Whole Army total	107	113	675	660	670	650

Guards Battalions

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many trained officers and soldiers are serving in the Guards Battalions broken down by nationality. [32455]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The number of trained officers and soldiers serving in the Guards Battalions, as at 1 January 2002, broken down by nationality is shown in the table. Figures do not include companies that are serving on public duties. In order to conform to confidentiality regulations, exact numbers for nationalities where representation is less than five cannot be disclosed. The total strengths are therefore quoted in a separate table.

Regiment strengths as at 1 January 2002

Guards	*Total strength*
Grenadier	592
Coldstream	599
Scots	567
Irish	660
Welsh	650

Note:

Figures do not include FTRS and Gurkhas

Trained guards strength by regiment and nationality as at 1 January 2002—PQ2386M

Nationality	*Grenadier*	*Coldstream*	*Scots*	*Irish*	*Welsh*
Soldier					
Belize	[1]—				
Fiji/St. Vincent	[1]—		7	[1]—	[1]—
Gambia	[1]—				
Hong Kong		[1]—			
Jamaica		[1]—		[1]—	
Kenya					[1]—
New Zealand				[1]—	
Republic of Ireland	[1]—			25	[1]—
Zimbabwe	[1]—	[1]—		[1]—	
British/Commonwealth/Foreign[2]	20	17	14	17	9
England	499	518	188	391	125
Irish Republic	[1]—			5	
Isle of Man			[1]—		
Northern Ireland	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	135	[1]—
Scotland	13	10	307	33	10
South Africa	[1]—		[1]—	[1]—	
Wales	[1]—	7	5	[1]—	462
Officer					
India		[1]—			
New Zealand Islands	[1]—				
Republic of Ireland				[1]—	
Britain	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Britain/Irish Republic[2]			[1]—	[1]—	
England	37	32	25	31	29
Isle of Man/Channel Islands		[1]—			
Northern Ireland			[1]—	[1]—	
Scotland	[1]—	[1]—	8	[1]—	
Wales	[1]—			[1]—	[1]—

[1] Indicates that, in order to conform to confidentiality rules, exact numbers less than five cannot be disclosed either directly or indirectly.

[2] This category indicates those personnel who have dual nationality and class themselves as British/Irish Republic.

Scottish Infantry Battalions

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* current strength is of each of the regular Scottish infantry battalions; and if he will list each element of company strength serving in them. [32446]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The establishment and strength of the Scottish Infantry battalions, as at 1 January 2002, is detailed in the table. The figures include all attached Arms and also details the Scots Guards public duties company that serves away from the main body of the regiment.

Strength of Scottish Infantry Battalions as at 1 January 2002

	Establishment	*Strength*
1 Royal Scots		
Infantry		
Foot Guards	0	12
Scots Div	558	425
Kings Div	0	1
PoW Div	0	11
Light Div	0	0
R Irish	0	0
Gurkhas	0	0
RAChD	0	1
RLC	23	19
QARANC	1	0
RAMC	4	4
REME	11	0
AG CORPS (SPS)	22	22
SASC	0	0
APTC	1	1
Total UKTAP	620	496
Gurkhas	0	0
FTRS	0	0
Total whole Army	620	496
1 Royal Highland Fusiliers		
Infantry		
Foot Guards	0	0
Scots Div	558	476
Kings Div	0	0
PoW Div	0	0
Light Div	0	0
R Irish	0	0
Gurkhas	0	0
RAChD	0	0
RLC	23	17
QARANC	1	0
RAMC	4	4
REME	11	12
AG CORPS (SPS)	22	21
SASC	0	0
APTC	1	1
Total UKTAP	620	531
Gurkhas	0	0
FTRS	0	0
Total whole Army	620	531
1 Kings Own Scottish Borderers		
Infantry		
Foot Guards	0	0
Scots Div	558	585
Kings Div	0	0
PoW Div	0	0
Light Div	0	0
R Irish	0	0
Gurkhas	0	0
RAChD	0	0
RLC	23	18
QARANC	1	0
RAMC	4	3
REME	11	17
AG CORPS (SPS)	22	21
SASC	0	0
APTC	1	1
Total UKTAP	620	645
Gurkhas	0	0
FTRS	0	0
Total whole Army	620	645
1 Black Watch		
Infantry		
Foot Guards	0	0
Scots Div	618	530
Kings Div	0	1
PoW Div	0	0
Light Div	0	0
R Irish	0	1
Gurkhas	0	0
RAChD	0	0
RLC	23	23
QARANC	1	0
RAMC	4	4
REME	71	57
AG CORPS (SPS)	23	23
SASC	0	1
APTC	1	1
Total UKTAP	741	641
Gurkhas	0	0
FTRS	0	0
Total whole Army	741	641
1 Highlanders		
Infantry		
Foot Guards	0	0
Scots Div	587	461
Kings Div	0	2
PoW Div	0	0
Light Div	0	0
R Irish	0	0
Gurkhas	0	2
RAChD	0	0
RLC	23	16
QARANC	1	0
RAMC	4	4
REME	29	11
AG CORPS (SPS)	22	24
SASC	0	0
APTC	1	1
Total UKTAP	667	521
Gurkhas	0	103
FTRS	0	0
Total whole Army	667	624
1 Argyll and Southerland Highlanders		
Infantry		
Foot Guards	0	8
Scots Div	558	522
Kings Div	0	0
PoW Div	0	0
Light Div	0	2
R Irish	0	0
Gurkhas	0	0
RAChD	0	1
RLC	23	23
QARANC	1	0
RAMC	4	4

Strength of Scottish Infantry Battalions as at 1 January 2002

	Establishment	Strength
REME	11	0
AG CORPS (SPS)	22	22
SASC	0	0
APTC	1	0
Total UKTAP	620	582
Gurkhas	0	0
FTRS	0	0
Total whole Army	620	582
Scots Guards		
Infantry		
Foot Guards	562	513
Scots Div	0	0
Kings Div	0	1
PoW Div	0	1
Light Div	0	0
R Irish	0	0
Gurkhas	0	0
RAChD	0	1
RLC	23	17
QARANC	1	0
RAMC	4	3
REME	11	9
AG CORPS (SPS)	22	21
SASC	0	0
APTC	1	1
Total UKTAP	624	567
Gurkhas	0	0
FTRS	0	0
Total whole Army	624	567
F Coy Scots Guards		
Infantry		
Foot Guards	107	111
Scots Div	0	0
Kings Div	0	0
PoW Div	0	0
Light Div	0	0
R Irish	0	0
Gurkhas	0	0
RAChD	0	0
RLC	0	1
QARANC	0	0
RAMC	0	0
REME	0	1
AG CORPS (SPS)	0	0
SASC	0	0
APTC	0	0
Total UKTAP	107	113
Gurkhas	0	0
FTRS	0	0
Total whole Army	107	113

Sierra Leone

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the death of British soldiers in Sierre Leone on 27 January. [34411]

Mr. Ingram: Two British soldiers, Corporal Michael Phillips and Rifleman James Coman sustained fatal injuries when the Army Land Rover in which they were travelling was involved in a road traffic accident during the late evening of 27 January. Two other soldiers travelling in the vehicle sustained relatively minor injuries. All four soldiers were admitted to the United Nations hospital in Freetown but, sadly, Corporal Phillips and Rifleman Coman were pronounced dead on arrival. All the soldiers were from 1st Battalion, Royal Green Jackets. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and I extend our deep condolences to the families of the dead soldiers.

The accident occurred about 10 kilometres east of Waterloo near the Benguema Training Centre. The soldiers were on duty at the time. No other vehicle is believed to have been involved. The accident is being investigated by the Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police. A Board of Inquiry is also to be convened.

Correspondence

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 319W, on the Reconnaissance Regiment, when he will write to the hon. Member for New Forest, West. [34699]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 16 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 5W. We are re-addressing the options for the location of the 4th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment and I will therefore write to both Members as soon as the position is clear. A copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Warship Support Modernisation Project

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 961W, on the Warship Support Modernisation Project, whether an economic appraisal is being used to assess the value for money implication of the proposals; if value for money will be the overriding factor when he makes his decision; if the practice of comparing proposals on the basis of commercial implications is a new policy; and if he will make a statement. [33368]

Mr. Ingram: I confirm that an economic appraisal of the options has been carried out and that the decision on the way ahead will be made on the basis of best value for money. As part of that assessment, it is normal for all the implications of a decision, including the commercial implications, to be considered.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 961W, on the Warship Support Modernisation Project, if he will clarify what is meant by essential terms and conditions of service; whether it includes access to traditional shore-based benefits; and if he will make a statement. [33371]

Mr. Ingram: Royal Naval personnel involved in the partnering arrangements would remain Crown servants under their full current terms of service, without detriment to any applicable benefits. They would remain subject to the Naval Discipline Act and liable for operational duties, military training and other military tasks that may arise from time to time.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 961W, on the Warship Support Modernisation Project, what level of premium, on an annualised hours basis, the Warship Support Agency expects to pay the companies in return for the work undertaken by the naval personnel seconded to them; and if he will make a statement. [33369]

Mr. Ingram: The Warship Support Agency would not pay any specific premium in respect of the naval service personnel annualised hours arrangements. The companies would pay for the hours at a rate commensurate with the local market rate.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 961W, on the Warship Support Modernisation Project, whether the normal process of post tender clarification includes the Warship Support Agency officials providing the sole bidder with details of the historical expenditure on contracts with other contractors; if the companies providing contract services were informed that this information had been provided to a third party; and if he will make a statement. [33370]

Mr. Ingram: It is normal for the nature of current outsourced work and composite historical spend to form part of the disclosure of information to bidders. Disclosure was under signed confidentiality agreements and the information was released in a manner that protects third party interests.

RFA Wave Knight

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent RFA Wave Knight has been damaged in dry dock; what the estimated cost is of repairs; when she will enter service; and if he will make a statement. [33190]

Mr. Ingram: RFA Wave Knight has recently sustained minor damage in two separate incidents while in a flooded dry dock at Inchgreen, Greenock preparing for Contractor's Sea Trials. On the first occasion, on 19 January 2002, the ship listed to starboard, sustaining minor damage to her paint work in the area of the bilge keel. On the second occasion, in the gales of 28 January, the stern of the vessel made contact with the dock wall, causing scratches to the paint work and minor damage to fittings caused by movement of a gangway.

The cost of repair has not yet been determined. An indemnity scheme exists, under the contract with the shipbuilder, and it is not expected that any costs borne by the defence budget will be significant.

Wave Knight's in-service date of summer 2002 is unlikely to be affected.

Depleted Uranium (Afghanistan)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to monitor the *(a)* short, *(b)* medium and *(c)* long-term effects of depleted uranium upon service personnel in Afghanistan. [33508]

Mr. Ingram: There are at present no indications that United Kingdom personnel serving in Afghanistan are exposed to a hazard from depleted uranium. It has not been used by coalition forces in recent operations. In the event that we assess that there is a risk of exposure that might be hazardous to health, guidance will be issued on measures to protect health, and if necessary we will introduce biological monitoring on a voluntary basis for individuals who are exposed to such a risk. Short-term monitoring of individuals' health is undertaken as a matter of course.

Submarine Officers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 337W, on submarine officers, how long the training period for general naval duties is; and if he will make a statement. [33858]

Mr. Ingram: In my previous answer to the hon. Member, I explained that all Royal Navy officers undergo a period of general naval training prior to discipline-specific training.

Naval general training is undertaken at Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth over a period of 27 weeks and includes six weeks of initial sea training. It is followed by a four month period of common fleet training and specialist fleet training of between two and six months, depending on specialisation. Officers then proceed to the appropriate professional training for periods between three and 28 months, before commencing their first complement appointment on the Royal Navy's trained strength.

Chemical Warfare Specialists Deployment

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the deployment of *(a)* soldiers from the Ninth Special Chemical Weapons Unit of the Czech Republic to Kuwait over the next two months and *(b)* German chemical warfare specialists to the area at the request of the United States; whether the United Kingdom Government have responded to related requests from the US; what assessment he has made of the purpose of such requests; and if he will make a statement. [34467]

Mr. Ingram: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the deployment of forces by our NATO allies overseas since this is a matter for the Governments of the nations concerned.

However, I can confirm that we have received no request from our US allies to make similar deployments to Kuwait. Any such request would be considered on its merits and in the light of available resources.

Armed Forces Pay/Pensions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received on conditions of pay and pensions in the armed forces. [34013]

Mr. Ingram: We receive a large number of representations from individuals, as well as from veterans' organisations and professional bodies. These have mainly concerned pensions matters, including pension troughs, pensions for pre-1975 service taxation of attributable Army pensions, armed forces pension scheme discretionary awards system. There have been a small number of representations concerning pay matters, including the new Pay 2000 arrangements.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Ship Safety Standards

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent action the Government have taken to enforce minimum international safety standards on ships using British ports and waters. [32126]

Mr. Jamieson: Ships using British ports and waters are subject to a rigorous regime of inspection to check that they comply with minimum international safety standards.

Ships that are found on inspection to fall short of international safety standards are detained until the defects leading to detention are put right. Ships failing to comply with the terms of release are refused access to British and European ports until the safety standards are met.

The details of ships detained by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) are published on national and European websites and the ships are targeted for further inspection. Significant breaches of regulations are investigated and followed up by prosecution where appropriate. Details of prosecutions are also published.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action will be taken against foreign ships sailing into British ports which fall below safety standards; and if he will make a statement. [32691]

Mr. Jamieson: Foreign ships calling at British ports are subject to a rigorous regime of inspection to check that they comply with minimum international safety standards.

Ships that are found on inspection to fall short of international safety standards are detained until the defects leading to detention are put right. Ships failing to comply with the terms of release are refused access to British and European ports until the safety standards are met.

The details of ships detained by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) are published on national and European websites and the ships are targeted for further inspection. Significant breaches of regulations are investigated and followed up by prosecution where appropriate. Details of prosecutions are also published.

Two sets of international rules relating to seafarer training and certification and safety management will be introduced in 2002 and will be enforced through the inspection regime.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many foreign ships have fallen short of safety standards while in British ports in each year since 1997; what measures have been put in place to deal with these ships; how much money has been spent dealing with such ships; and if he will make a statement. [32690]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of times foreign ships have been detained for falling short of safety standards following inspection in British ports is given in the table, for each year since 1997.

	Number of detentions
1997–98	179
1998–99	155
1999–00	106
2000–01	116
2001–02	[1]—

[1] This figure is not yet available.

Ships that have been detained are not permitted to sail until the deficiencies are put right. A ship that does not comply with the conditions of release from detention may be banned from operating to ports in the UK and Europe.

Information on the results of inspections is shared with other European coastal countries and widely published. Ships with a poor inspection history are targeted for further inspection within the region, with the risk of further sanctions.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) investigates any significant breach of safety regulations and may prosecute if appropriate.The budget in 2001–02 for inspection and enforcement of international, European and national rules on safety and pollution prevention for all ships using British ports is £2,924,000. The money spent on inspection and enforcement relating to foreign ships only is not available.

Disabled Rail Passengers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 533W, on the needs of disabled passengers in train operating company franchises, on what date he expects the revised code of practice to be published; what representations *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority have received regarding the modification of this code of practice; and whether train operating companies will also be expected to modify provisions for the disabled through the franchise agreement process. [32414]

Mr. Spellar: The revised code of practice was published on 6 February. The Strategic Rail Authority consulted widely on the content of the revised code, including such bodies as DPTAC, the DRC, and the railway industry. Over 200 responses were received.

All licensed operators on the national rail network are required to review their Disabled Peoples Protection Policies (DPPPs) to reflect the revised code. Enforcement of these revised DPPPs will be through licence conditions rather than franchise agreements, though having appropriate licences is a condition precedent of entering into a franchise agreement.

Road Accidents (Mobile Phones)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the number of road accidents last year which were related to use of mobile phones by drivers. [32283]

Mr. Jamieson: The causes of road accidents can only be established through detailed investigation. Two research projects currently under way will help to establish the likely numbers of road traffic accidents involving mobile phones.

Aviation Industry

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received regarding the requirement for aircraft to carry a Mode S transponder by March 2003; and if he will make a statement. [32284]

Mr. Jamieson: Although several European states intend to implement Mode S from March 2003, it is our intention to introduce Mode S within en-route and terminal airspace from March 2005. The introduction of Mode S in all remaining UK airspace will be delayed for a further three years to March 2008 to tie in with ICAO transponder carriage rule changes resulting in a single regulatory change.

The CAA is consulting appropriate user groups and published advanced information on the Government's Mode S proposals in an Aeronautical Information Circular (Number 88/2001) in December 2001. The Mode S and transponder carriage requirements will be subject to formal consultation and submission of a Regulatory Impact Assessment in due course.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on recreational flying of requirements for aircraft to carry a Mode S transponder from March 2003. [32285]

Mr. Jamieson: In pursuing Mode S, the Government are conscious of the implications for all users and will only require Elementary Mode S Surveillance in the open Flight Information Region where the safety benefits are the prime consideration. Moreover, this requirement will not be made mandatory till 2008 to coincide with an ICAO transponder rule change, thereby resulting in a single regulatory change which will minimise the impact on recreational flying.

The CAA is consulting appropriate user groups and published advanced information on the Government's Mode S proposals in an Aeronautical Information Circular (Number 88/2001) in December 2001. The Mode S and transponder carriage requirements will be subject to formal consultation and submission of a Regulatory Impact Assessment in due course.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assistance he has given to the airline industry since the 11 September terrorist attacks. [32530]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government acted quickly to underwrite, on a temporary basis, third party war risk insurance for UK airlines and service providers to the airline industry. This is an initiative which has subsequently been widely copied elsewhere, and the UK has now extended the scheme to 20 March.

On Thursday 13 December 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced a package of up to £40 million in financial assistance designed to compensate airlines for the closure of US, Israeli and central London airspace in the period immediately following the terrorist attacks. 12 claims for assistance under this scheme have been received and these are currently being examined. We expect to make payments shortly.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures have been introduced since 11 September 2001 to improve security onboard aircraft and at airports. [32533]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the attacks on 11 September, heightened aviation security measures were introduced at all UK airports and for all airlines operating from the UK. Security still remains at an enhanced level. However, to divulge details of the measures would undermine their effectiveness.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures have been introduced since 1997 to assist United Kingdom aviation; and if he will make a statement. [32532]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are actively committed to the UK aviation industry. Since 1997 we have secured significant additional rights for UK carriers in a number of bilateral markets, such as Japan, India, South Africa and Singapore. We have also liberalised access to UK regional airports.

A number of large investment projects have been approved since 1997 at major UK airports. In addition we have provided that financially sound local authority owned airport companies can be removed from central government borrowing control. The companies operating Leeds-Bradford, Manchester, Newcastle and Norwich airports were removed from borrowing control with effect from 1 April 1999.

A public-private partnership has been established for National Air Traffic Services, to provide private sector finance and project management expertise for a major capital investment programme. The new air traffic control centre at Swanwick was successfully brought into operation on 27 January this year.

Later this year the Government are committed to issuing a White Paper on air transport, the first comprehensive policy statement in this area since the 1980s. It will be a wide-ranging document, setting out a policy framework for the future of aviation and airports in the UK, looking ahead 30 years.

Millennium Dome

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who is responsible for paying the costs of maintenance of the millennium dome until the contract with Meridian Delta has been completed. [32806]

Ms Keeble: As owner, English Partnerships is responsible for maintenance of the dome until the proposed deal with Meridian Delta Ltd. has been concluded. All related costs will be recovered from eventual sale proceeds.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the proceeds of the sale of the millennium dome and the surrounding area will be returned to the National Lottery distribution fund; and if he will make a statement. [32807]

Ms Keeble: An announcement will be made in due course on the division of proceeds from the sale of the dome and surrounding land, in the context of the deal to be concluded with Meridian Delta Ltd.

National Air Traffic Services

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the income generated by the National Air Traffic Control Services in the period September 2001 to April 2002; and what the income was in the same period in 2000–01. [33356]

Mr. Jamieson: NATS income is reported each year in the published annual accounts of the company. The accounts for financial year 2001–02 will be published in summer 2002.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of the debenture of £247,697,000 has been repaid to his Department so far in 2001–02 by National Air Traffic Services Ltd; and how much is due to be repaid by 31 March 2002. [34770]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* This debenture was repaid in full on the completion of the public private partnership for National Air Traffic Services Ltd on 26 July 2001.

Rail Provision (South Coast)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has for the provision of additional tracks on the single-line sections of the south coastal route from Portsmouth to Ashford; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [32993]

(2) what plans he has for infrastructure works on the south coastal route from Portsmouth to Ashford to increase the number of locations where fast trains can overtake the slower services; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works. [32992]

Mr. Byers: The Heads of Terms signed by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) and GoVia for the South Central franchise include a commitment to development of south coast routes—upgrading of infrastructure facilities to allow faster trains to overtake slower stopping services on the south coastway. This work is included in the SRA's Strategic Plan as a development by 2010. Negotiations between the SRA and GoVia are continuing towards the new South Central franchise agreement.

Helicopter Flights

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what limits are set on the height of helicopters flying over residential areas of south-west London. [32842]

Mr. Jamieson: Civil helicopter operators are required to adhere to the Rules of the Air Regulations 1996. These require that helicopters should not fly within 500 feet of any person, vessel, vehicle or structure (except when landing or taking off) nor below 1,500 feet over a congested area unless written permission has been obtained from the Civil Aviation Authority, or in certain other specified circumstances. Police helicopters are broadly exempted. Airspace constraints require that the 1,500 feet restriction is disapplied by the CAA, in some areas. Rule 5(1)(c) further specifies an area of London, including parts of south-west London, over which a helicopter may not without permission fly below such height as would enable it to alight clear of the area in the event of failure of a power unit.

To assist helicopter operators in complying with these rules and in maintaining safe clearance from other air traffic, the CAA has published a chart showing helicopter routes in the London Control Zone, with relevant altitudes shown. Routes H3 and H7 overfly parts of south-west London at altitudes between 1,000 feet and 2,000 feet.

Policy on military helicopters is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has made to air traffic control for Heathrow concerning helicopters in south west London. [32841]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what controls are in place to limit the numbers of helicopters flying over Kew and Chiswick. [32843]

Mr. Jamieson: No such limits are set.

Strategic Rail Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the SRA Strategic Plan will deliver additional capacity at a faster rate than projected passenger growth. [32934]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan sets out policies and major investment projects needed to address the projected growth in both passengers and freight.

Shoreham Port Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date he reappointed board members to Shoreham Port Authority and if he will name those appointed; what the reasons were for not reappointing previous board members to Shoreham Port Authority; what plans he has for further appointments to Shoreham Port Authority; and when they will be announced. [33124]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Seven members of the Shoreham Port Authority have been re-appointed to the board with effect from 1 January 2002. These are Brian Wheeler, Peter Minchin, Brian Blundell, Rod Danes, Pat Hawkes, Bob Carden and Neil Parkin.

Two existing members were not re-appointed. One of these members had recently retired and the nominating body has declined to nominate a new representative. The second member was not considered for re-appointment due to their length of service.

Both of these vacancies have been advertised and will be filled by an open and accountable appointments procedure involving the Department, Shoreham Port Authority and an independent assessor. The results of this open competition will be announced in due course.

Housing Development

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the planning applications for housing development in England involving greenfield sites which have been referred to him as departure applications since 1 January 2001 and provide details of the number of houses and area of land involved in each case; [33423]

(2) if he will list planning applications for housing development in England on greenfield sites *(a)* which he has called in and *(b)* for which he has issued a holding direction since 1 January 2001, indicating the location, number of houses and area of land involved; [33421]

(3) if he will list planning applications notified to him under the Town and Country Planning (Residential Development on Greenfield Land) (England) Directive 2000 since 1 January 2001, indicating the location, number of houses and area of land involved in each case. [33422]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The list of planning applications is based on information supplied to the Department by local authorities. Assumptions have had to be made about particular applications in order to present the information in the form sought. The information provided should not be taken as the definitive view of the Secretary of State for the purposes of decision-making.

Train Drivers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 54W, on train drivers, if he will state the locations at which information on train driver numbers is held; and if he will list the steps which the Strategic Rail Authority *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to encourage train operating companies to recruit sufficient drivers. [33964]

Mr. Spellar: The most comprehensive information on driver numbers is held by the Association of Train Operating Companies. Where train operators have experienced difficulty in maintaining sufficient driver numbers and service has deteriorated, the Strategic Rail Authority has taken enforcement action, as they did with South West Trains in 1997 and with Arriva Trains Northern at the end of last year. As part of the two-year extension recently agreed on GNER the company has committed to a programme of driver recruitment to help overcome the current shortage within the industry. The Strategic Rail Authority will be able to secure further provisions as other franchises are extended or replaced.

London Underground

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the meetings that each of his ministerial team and himself had in *(a)* December 2001 and *(b)* January 2002 with representatives of London Underground. [34103]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend and ministerial colleagues meet London Underground on both a regular and ad hoc basis, to discuss a variety of relevant matters.

Railtrack

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money the Government have *(a)* lent and *(b)* made available to Railtrack in administration since 5 October 2001; and how much more money is available for Railtrack in administration to draw down by the end of March (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003. [33998]

Mr. Spellar: To date, £1.495 billion has been drawn down from the commercial loan of £2.1 billion that the Government made available at the commencement of the administration. No formal request has been received from the administrator for additional funds.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the monthly investment spend is by Railtrack in administration; and what the monthly rate is of pre-tax loss after interest and depreciation. [33999]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the administrator.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much profit Railtrack declared shortly after being put into administration. [34429]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack Group plc's interim report and accounts for the six months to 30 September 2001 reported an accounting pre-tax profit of £292 million. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible for a company to make a profit and yet be unable to pay its debts. The evidence presented to, and accepted by, the High Court on 7 October showed that Railtrack plc was, or was likely to soon be, unable to pay its debts. It was open to Railtrack to oppose administration. They chose not to do so.

Mortgages (Public Sector Workers)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the rents to mortgages schemes for public sector workers living in London; and if he will make a statement. [34442]

Ms Keeble: "Rent to Mortgage" is one of a number of Government low-cost home ownership schemes available to a range of people, including public sector workers.

"Rent to Mortgage" allows qualifying tenants to purchase a share of their home, at a discount, with mortgage payments similar to the rent they are currently paying. The landlord retains a share in the property, but the purchaser can pay this off at a later date. Further information is contained in our free booklet "Your right to buy your home", which is available from local authorities or from my Department.

Our Starter Home initiative is helping around 4,600 key public sector workers, such as teachers, health workers and police, into home ownership in London. Most of these schemes involve equity loans or shared ownership.

Key workers can also benefit from the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme. This provides homes for rent, and for low cost home ownership through schemes such as Homebuy and shared ownership, and through Do-It-Yourself shared ownership schemes which are supported by some local authorities.

Road Traffic

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which local authorities have set targets for the overall level of road traffic in their area as part of their full local transport plans, giving the targets set in each case for traffic reduction, in each year since the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 came into force. [34547]

Ms Keeble: As part of their full local transport plans submitted in July 2000, local traffic authorities in England (outside London) submitted road traffic reduction reports as required by the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997. Copies of the reports have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. A number of authorities, shown in italics in a table which has been placed in the Libraries of the House, submitted plans containing targets for the overall level of road traffic for their area. Others set targets for part of their area or for some types of traffic. Authorities are not required to establish targets under the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 on an annual basis.

National Concessionary Coach Scheme

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will outline the mechanism by which the national concessionary coach scheme will work. [34556]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 735W.

DVLA

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how long on average it took the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to renew driving licences for those drivers who *(a)* require and *(b)* do not require associated eyesight tests in the last 12 months. [34544]

Mr. Spellar; The information requested is as follows:

The charter mark standard for dealing with applications with a medical involvement is five weeks for ordinary driving licences. If a decision cannot be made within this timescale, the applicant is advised of the reason. In this financial year, over 60 per cent. of medical applications have been completed within five weeks. Cases where eyesight tests are required will generally take longer than five weeks to complete because of the dependency on third parties to carry out the tests.

The charter mark standard for applications for the issue of ordinary driving licences with no medical involvement is 15 working days. During the last 12 months, some 99.3 per cent. of applicants received their ordinary driving licence within 11 days.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 17

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to announce his response to the consultation on the draft PPG17. [34514]

Ms Keeble: An analysis and summary of responses to the consultation draft will be made available when the final version of PPG 17 is published.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to consult national governing bodies of sport on the revised draft of PPG 17. [34507]

Ms Keeble: The views of national governing bodies of sport were received during the consultation period. While we do not intend to conduct further consultation with them specifically, my officials will be consulting further with Sport England in drafting the final version of PPG 17.

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how eligibility for funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is determined; and if he will make a statement. [34600]

Ms Keeble: The list of authorities eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund has been determined by taking those authorities that are among the 50 most deprived on any of the six measures in the Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID2000). On this basis 81 authorities are eligible. The Government also decided that there should be transitional arrangements for those authorities that were within the 50 most deprived areas on any of the four measures under the old Index of Local Deprivation, but are not in the list of 81 authorities that qualify using the ID2000. Due to this, a further seven local authority areas are eligible for the fund, making a total of 88 eligible authorities.

The sum to be allocated to each authority is based on a standard amount per head of population in those wards in the authority that are in the most deprived 10 per cent. of all wards nationally, with a minimum allocation of £200,000 for any eligible authority in 2001–02. This relates an authority's grant funding to the severity of deprivation within its area, measured by the number of their residents living in particularly deprived areas.

High Hedges

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the simplified version of the guidelines on hedge height and light loss. [34612]

Ms Keeble: We expect to launch the simplified version of these guidelines in the spring. We are working with interested parties such as local authority, professional, consumer and advice groups to make sure the guidelines are user-friendly.

Local Authority Debt (Demolished Buildings)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the level of the outstanding debt of local authorities that relates to buildings that have now been demolished. [34819]

Mr. Byers: Although local authorities borrow to fund specific projects, the outstanding debt is held and managed centrally within an authority. Directors of Finance will, as a matter of good treasury management, reschedule and refinance their debt portfolio. It is therefore not possible over time to assign individual loans to specific projects, such as the construction, repair or maintenance of dwellings that have since been demolished.

Electoral Modernisation Pilot Schemes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 720W, on electoral modernisation pilot schemes, for what reason an announcement on the successful bidders was not made at the end of January; and if he will make a statement. [34820]

Mr. Byers: The announcement was made to the House on Tuesday 5 February when we had concluded, in partnership with the Electoral Commission, the Local Government Association and the office of the e-Envoy, our consideration of the bids.

Railway Lines (Reopening)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those dismantled railway lines which have been re-opened since 1972; who the promoter was in each case; and what was the cost to public funds. [34115]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* My Department does not hold such information.

Underspending (Roads)

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the underspend was for the capital budget on roads in the past 12 months. [34017]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* In 2000–01, capital spending by the Highways Agency on the strategic road network was underspent by £14 million against a budget of £882 million which represented an underspend of 1.6 per cent. For 2001–02, the Highways Agency are forecasting to be on budget for their current capital allocation of £1069 million.

Capital funding for local roads is allocated to local authorities via the local transport plan capital settlement. Monitoring procedures do not separate out the road elements of this spend. In 2000–01 total LTP capital spending was underspent by £9 million against a final budget of £816 million, which represented an underspend of around 1.1 per cent.

For 2001–02, over £1.36 billion of transport capital spending was allocated to local authorities. We do not expect a substantial budget underspend.

Tram Lines

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to encourage new tram lines; and if he will make a statement. [34503]

Ms Keeble: Transport 2010: The 10-year plan includes as one of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets doubling light rail patronage over the decade to 2010. Our assessment is that the funding included in the plan will enable provision of up to 25 new light rail lines in major cities around the country, providing each scheme satisfies the Department's appraisal and obtains the necessary powers. The availability of such funds and the Government's positive stance towards light rail have encouraged local authorities to come forward with proposals.

My Department has already approved 11 new lines and is considering three more proposals. Several other plans for new systems or extensions to existing ones are being prepared. Light rail is also an option for at least one of the four Intermediate Mode Transit schemes which Transport for London are currently appraising.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what regulations there are to ensure that noise levels from aircraft flying over residential areas are kept to a minimum; and if he will make a statement. [34632]

Mr. Spellar: Aircraft noise "at source" is regulated according to the certification requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). Operational noise is subject to rules and procedures set by each airport. Controls available to airports include noise preferential routes for departures, departure noise limits, approach procedures, night restrictions and noise-differentiated charges.

The Secretary of State has powers to designate an airport under s.80 for the purposes of s.78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, under which noise controls can be set. At present, Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports are so designated. He may also specify an aerodrome under s.5 of the 1982 Act, requiring the CAA to have regard to environmental factors in its licensing functions; hitherto no aerodrome has been so specified.

The air transport White Paper, which we intend to publish later this year, will deal with the future direction of policy on aircraft noise regulation.

British Partnerships

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people are directly employed under the auspices of English Partnerships; and how many equivalent full-time posts this represents. [34802]

Ms Keeble: As at 31 January 2002, 372 staff were directly employed under the auspices of English Partnerships. The full-time equivalent is 367.

Rail Use

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* passenger kilometres were travelled and *(b)* freight tonnes moved on the railways in the (i) year to March 2001 and (ii) year to March 2000. [34783]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The information is available in the Strategic Rail Authority's "National Rail Trends" publication, a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the extent of vehicle excise duty evasion was in each of the last five years. [34784]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The last national roadside survey of VED evasion involving the checking of over one million vehicle numbers took place in June 1999. This estimated that the revenue lost from VED evasion was equivalent to 3.9 per cent. of the total revenue that should be raised. The previous roadside survey was carried out in June 1994 when the evasion rate was estimated at 4.1 per cent. of total revenue due. Evasion was lower in 1999 than in 1994 for all main vehicle classes.

The next roadside survey will take place in June this year.

Neighbourhood and Village Action Plans

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what resources he will make available outside neighbourhood renewal areas to support an increase in community capacity to participate in the proposed neighbourhood and village action plans and local development frameworks. [35077]

Ms Keeble: The Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" proposes that local authorities should work with Local Strategic Partnerships and other bodies to establish more effective mechanisms for community involvement in both the preparation of plans and in taking decisions on planning applications. The Green Paper acknowledges the importance of properly resourced local planning authorities to the delivery of an improved planning system. An increase in planning fees from April 2002 has been announced, and there is to be a review of that regime. The resourcing needs of the local planning service is also being considered in the context of the current spending review.

Planning Tariff System

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated to determine the developmental benefits will accrue from his proposed planning tariff system. [35072]

Ms Keeble: The Government propose that planning obligations should be refocused to deliver sustainable development and used as a mechanism to ensure that development provides social, economic and environmental benefits to the community as a whole. This proposal has not been explicitly researched.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much he projects will be raised by local authorities through the operation of his proposed planning tariff system. [35073]

Ms Keeble: The consultation document "Planning obligations: delivering a fundamental change" proposes that a tariff should replace negotiated planning obligations in most circumstances and offers a number of options about how a tariff might be levied. The value of the tariff to each local authority will depend upon the precise workings of the tariff—to be determined in the light of the consultation—a local authority's policies in respect of levying the tariff, and the volume and value of development taking place in its area.

National Park Authorities

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he has issued to regional assemblies on the involvement of national park authorities in their deliberations. [34826]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* Guidance issued in 1999 indicated that at least 30 per cent. of the membership of regional chambers should be drawn from economic, social and environmental partners (while maintaining a majority of local authority members). Subject to complying with the guidance it is for each chamber to decide on its membership.

Local Authority Housing

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the rent loss on vacant properties for each local authority with housing stock for the last year for which figures are available. [34823]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* A table showing the rent loss on vacant properties during the financial year 2000–01 for those local authorities with housing stock on 31 March 2001 has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Some of the criteria that need to be taken into account when comparing rent losses across local authorities include:

(a) Local authorities may differ in the way they count vacancies: so whereas some may include all vacancies, even of just a day or so, others may base their calculations on long-term empties only and ignore short-term, transitional vacancies.

(b) Local authorities with large stock might be expected to have higher rent losses than authorities with little stock.

(c) Rent losses in an authority with high rent levels will be higher than the rent losses due to the same number of vacant days in an authority with low rents.

(d) Local authorities in low demand areas may have longer void periods and therefore higher rent losses than those in areas of high demand.

Local authorities not shown in this table had no stock on 31 March 2001.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information on genetically modified organisms research is available on the public register; and what categories have been removed. [35075]

Dr. Whitehead: I have made a direction that the information concerning the location of and activities relating to those pathogens and toxins listed in Schedule 5 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 shall be withheld from the register maintained under section 24 of the Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) Regulations 2000.

This is a sensible precautionary step in the current situation. It is a temporary measure which will keep off the register information which is sensitive on the grounds of national security. A system of annual reviews will be put in place to consider information excluded from the register, with the aim of keeping to a minimum information which has to be excluded in the interests of national security. The measure will affect only a small number of the contained use premises and activities notified under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) Regulations 2000.

Premises where activities involving genetic modification are to be carried out and activities which are classified as having some risk to humans or the environment have to be notified to the competent authority under the regulations.

It is important to note that the action of withholding information from the register would not affect the arrangements in place to ensure the safety and security of the sites and materials concerned.

The public register was re-opened this morning. It contains all the information about notified activities except that relating to activities withdrawn from the register because of the direction. The register includes a list of these excluded pathogens and toxins but no details of the activities or their locations.

Travel Concessions (Pensioners)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer (ref. 33788), if he will list those authorities providing more generous pensioners' travel concessions than the statutory minimum. [34671]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* Based on my Department's recent survey, those local authorities with schemes that are better than the statutory minimum requirement (ie half-fares on local buses for elderly and disabled people, with no charge for the pass) are as follows:

- London
  - London boroughs
- PTAs
  - Greater Manchester
  - Merseyside
  - South Yorkshire
  - Tyne and Wear
  - West Midlands
  - West Yorkshire
- Counties
  - Derbyshire
  - Lancashire
  - Leicestershire
  - Nottinghamshire
- Unitary authorities
  - Blackpool
  - Bracknell Forest
  - Leicester City
  - Luton
  - Nottingham
  - Plymouth
  - Reading
  - Rutland
  - Southampton
- District councils
  - Bedford
  - Mid Bedfordshire
  - South Buckinghamshire
  - Chester
  - Derwentside
  - Durham City
  - Easington
  - Sedgefield
  - Wear Valley
  - Havant
  - Rushmoor
  - St. Albans
  - West Lindsay
  - Daventry
  - East Northamptonshire
  - Blyth Valley
  - Oxford
  - Vale of White Horse
  - Cannock Chase
  - Nuneaton and Bedworth
  - Warwick
  - Bromsgrove
  - Crawley
  - Redditch.

Lord Birt

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* Ministers in his Department have had with Lord Birt since his appointment to the Forward Strategy Unit last year. [34788]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Members for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) and for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on Friday 11 January 2002 *Official Report,* columns 567–68W.

Skips

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress his Department has made in relation to changing the regulations governing reflective paint on skips. [35034]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has been working with the British Standards Institution to develop a British Standard for a new generation of high-performance retroreflective materials, which will be considerably brighter than traditional products. The draft standard completed its consultation stage last month.

Publication of the new standard is a matter for BSI, once technical comments have been resolved, but we hope that this will be before the end of this year. I then intend to consult on an amendment to the current regulations which would permit local authorities to specify the use of these high performance materials for markings on skips, as an alternative to using lamps in conjunction with lower grade retroreflective markings.

Councillors' Interests

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his intention that parish councillors should be bound under the code of conduct to declare gifts and hospitality of over £25 in value only if received in connection with their official duties. [35033]

Dr. Whitehead: Yes. Paragraph 1 of the schedule to the code of conduct makes it clear that parish members will only have to declare gifts and hospitality over the value of £25, if the gifts or hospitality are received in connection with the business of the council, the office to which they have been elected or appointed, or when they are acting as representatives of the council.

Automatic Train Protection Warning System

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his Department's policy regarding the timescale for the introduction of the automatic train protection warning scheme was *(a)* in 2000 and *(b)* as of 4 February 2002; and if he will make a statement regarding changes of policy between these dates. [34371]

Mr. Spellar: The Department's policy on train protection remains as set out in the Railway Safety Regulations 1999. These regulations require the installation by the end of 2003 of equipment designed to cause the brakes of a train to be applied automatically in specified circumstances.

Council Tax

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the average Band D council tax bill in Suffolk in each year since 1993. [34440]

Dr. Whitehead: The average Band D council tax bill in Suffolk in each year since 1993 is shown in the table below.

Average Band D council tax bill[1]

	£
1993–94	511
1994–95	564
1995–96	581
1996–97	610
1997–98	651
1998–99	706
1999–2000	761
2000–01	816
2001–02	873

[1] Based on two adults in Suffolk

The average Band D council tax bill for Suffolk has been calculated by dividing the total estimated council tax income by the tax base for all local authorities in Suffolk.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30180]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 707W.

International Criminal Court

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to support the conferences on ratification of the Statute for the International Criminal Court for *(a)* Mongolia in January, *(b)* ECOWAS states in January, *(c)* Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras in February and *(d)* southern Asia in February. [31760]

Mr. MacShane: The first, third and fourth of these conferences have been organised by NGOs: respectively Forum Asia, Human Rights Watch and Parliamentarians for Global Action. All are members of the overarching "Coalition for an International Criminal Court (CICC)". CICC provides financial assistance to such conferences. HMG made a grant of $50,000 to CICC in FY 2001–02.

The ECOWAS conference was supported by the Canadian Government and the International Red Cross.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list his Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32784]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 692W.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in fair trade fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33540]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO has no plans to participate in fair trade fortnight. The Department for International Development is providing £120,000 to the Fairtrade Foundation over 2001–03 in support of its efforts to target new groups through its annual fair trade fortnight campaigns. My private office seeks to offer fair trade tea and coffee to visitors.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category *(a)*. [33678]

Mr. MacShane: The information is given in the table:

Million

Complete financial years	*Capital*	*Maintenance*
1997–98	33.9	10.1
1998–99	35.9	9.7
1999–2000	35.3	8.6
2000–01	23.0	12.0

It would occur disproportionate cost to provide exact figures for all the numbers of contracts let in each of these years.

Of the 13 contracts let by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office since 1997 in excess of £500,000, 12 were with companies whose registered offices are in England and Wales, and one has its registered office overseas. The 12 suppliers were Global Crossing, Computacentre, Cap Gemini Ernst and Young, AIT, Sytation, Logica, Integris, Cedar, Microsoft, NAI, CMG and Biomni. The overseas company was Amita, registered in Canada.

Burundi

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on *(a)* the peace process in Burundi and *(b)* the potential role of the UN in Burundi. [33929]

Mr. MacShane: We are encouraged by the steps that the transitional Government in Burundi has taken to secure peace and stability since the start of its term in November last year. The deployment of South African troops to protect returning political leaders has played a key role in this process. The security situation, however, remains unstable. Without an agreed ceasefire, the United Nations will continue to focus on the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Equal Representation

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the UK Government are taking to encourage the equal representation of women at all levels in diplomatic, humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. [30427]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has set targets to increase the proportion of women where they are under-represented in the diplomatic service. These targets and progress towards them are published in the FCO's annual report. A gender diversity adviser was appointed in 2000 to support this activity—the FCO is the only Whitehall Department to create such a role.

The UK makes very effort to put forward skilled female candidates for humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, and will continue to do so. Female military and police officers are routinely deployed into the UN missions.

Elhannan Tannenbaum

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the case of Elhannan Tannenbaum. [34063]

Mr. Bradshaw: Elhannan Tannenbaum—an Israeli businessman reservist colonel—has been held hostage by Hizbullah since 7 October 2000. On 3 May 2001 the then Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), and the then Minister of State my right hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), met Mr. Tannenbaum's family. The Government are doing all they can to help and have raised this case and those of other missing Israeli soldiers with relevant countries in the region and will continue to do so, pressing particularly for access to the hostages for the International Committee of the Red Cross. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also raised the missing Israeli soldiers during his visit to the middle east at the end of October 2001. We strongly support all efforts to secure the release of all hostages, particularly efforts led by the United Nations Secretary General.

Western Sahara

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the USA with regard to the referendum on the right to self-determination in western Sahara. [34428]

Mr. Bradshaw: Foreign Office officials in Washington and in our United Nations mission in New York remain in regular contact with their American counterparts about the referendum on the right to self-determination in western Sahara.

Like our American colleagues, we continue to support the efforts of James Baker, the Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General, in trying to find a just and durable resolution to the dispute. We look forward to James Baker's report on developments in the region before the end of the current MINURSO mandate on 28 February 2002.

Nuclear Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 185–86W, on nuclear weapons, if he will make it his policy to engage permanent members of the Security Council in negotiations on nuclear weapon reduction. [34755]

Mr. Bradshaw: All five nuclear weapons states are committed under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty to the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament, and have discussions on this and related issues in that context. The UK has made it clear that we will include our nuclear weapons in multilateral negotiations as soon as appropriate, but the circumstances do not yet exist to make starting such negotiations a practical proposition.

Iran

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States Administration on relations with Iran. [34912]

Mr. Bradshaw: During his visit to Washington on 31 January and 1 February my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed a wide range of issues, including Iran.

Council of Europe

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements he intends to put in place for briefings to members of the Council of Europe on reports prepared by rapporteurs from the UK; and if he will make a statement. [34910]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will continue to co-ordinate briefing from Whitehall Departments for members of the UK delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on all reports debated at the assembly's part-sessions, including those prepared by UK rapporteurs.

North and South Korea

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent initiatives have been taken to make progress with rapprochement between North and South Korea. [34907]

Mr. MacShane: The UK supports President Kim Dae Jung's policy of engagement toward North Korea.

President Kim Dae Jung visited the UK as a Guest of Government in December 2001 and discussed north/south relations with the Prime Minister, who reiterated UK support for the rapprochement process. This was followed by a visit by the North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Choe Su Hon, during which the Foreign Secretary and I stressed the need for North Korea's record on missile proliferation and human rights remains of great concern. I have recently written to Mr. Choe setting out UK support for north-south rapprochement and urging North Korea to abide by the international norms of diplomatic and political relations between countries.

UK Mission (Kabul)

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the personnel appointed to the UK mission in Kabul by rank and gender. [35258]

Mr. Bradshaw: FCO staff currently deployed to the British Embassy in Kabul are as follows:

1 x Head of Mission (Senior Management Structure)—male

1 x Counsellor—male

4 x First Secretary—three males, one female

1 x Second Secretary—male

1 x Support Attaché—male.

Visa Applications

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visa applications were dealt with by each overseas high commission, embassy and consulate in the last year for which information is available; and what proportion were *(a)* granted for study purposes, *(b)* granted for holiday purposes, *(c)* granted for other purposes and *(d)* denied. [35196]

Mr. Bradshaw: All entry clearance posts submit an annual statistical return. This information is collated in the Entry Clearance Annual Statistics booklet, copies of which are currently available in the House Library. The latest year for which this information is available is 2000.

The information in the booklet represents the only statistical data currently available. It does not, for example, differentiate between many of the non-settlement categories of visas.

United Kingdom Diplomats

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) in how many countries the United Kingdom was represented by *(a)* a resident (i) high commissioner and (ii) ambassador, *(b)* a non-resident (i) high commissioner and (ii) ambassador and *(c)* a consul in each year since 1997, indicating where that representation changed in that time; [35198]

(2) how many high commissions, embassies and consulates have been *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in each year since 1997. [35197]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information requested is available in the departmental reports for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which have been deposited in the Libraries of the House. The following posts have changed their category during this period:

1997–98

- Banja Luka
  - Opened as an embassy mission
- Barranquilla Post
  - Closed locally engaged staff only (LE)
- Zurich
  - Closed UK based staffed post
- Hong Kong
  - Dependent territory which became a consulate general on hand over to China

1998–99

- Kuching
  - Closed UK based post
- Chiang Mai
  - Closed UK based post
- Lome
  - Opened as LE only post

1999–2000

- Calgary
  - Opened as LE only post
- Chongqing
  - Opened as consulate general
- Bangalore
  - Changed from LE only to trade office
- Fukuoka
  - Opened as LE only post
- Nagoya
  - Changed from LE only to trade office
- Gothenburg
  - Opened as consulate general
- Cleveland
  - Closed UK based post
- Seville
  - Closed LE post

2000–01

- Conakry
  - Opened as LE only post
- Port-au-Prince
  - Opened as LE only post
- Ahmedabad
  - Opened as LE only post
- Bhopal
  - Opened as LE only post
- Goa
  - Opened as LE only post
- Hyderabad
  - Opened as LE only post
- Puna
  - Opened as LE only post
- Dili
  - Opened as an embassy mission
- Tripoli
  - Reopened as an embassy
- Bamako
  - Opened as LE only post
- Monterrey
  - Changed from LE only to trade office
- Denver
  - Opened as a consulate
- Pristina Mission
  - Opened as UK representation to the UN

2001–02

- Bamako
  - Changed from LE only to embassy
- Lahore
  - Changed from LE only to trade office
- Pyongyang
  - Opened as an embassy
- Tarawa
  - Opened as LE only post
- Kabul
  - Opened as an embassy.

We have plans to open embassies in Bishkek, Chisinau and Dushanbe before the end of the financial year.

WALES

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33688]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since it was established on 1 July 1999, the Information Technology requirements of the Wales Office have been met, by means of a service level agreement, through the PFI contract which the National Assembly for Wales holds with Siemens Business Systems. The costs are as follows:

1999–2000 (July to March)	£180,250
2000–01 (full year)	£216,300
2001–02 (April to December)	£162,220.

Prior to 1 July 1999 the cost of the Siemens Business Systems PFI contract to the former Welsh Office was:

1997–98 (full year)	£7,829,546
1998–1999 (full year)	£12,903,892.

No contracts have been let by the Secretary of State for Wales since July 1999. Before that date 14 contracts were let in the calendar year 1998 of which:

(i) 14 were companies registered in England or Wales.

(ii) 0 were companies registered in Scotland.

(iii) 0 were companies registered in Northern Ireland.

(iv) 0 were companies registered in Foreign Countries.

The companies at (i) above were:

Anite
Cable and Wireless
Cardiff University
Cathedral Consortium
Hedra
SEMA (two contracts)
ICL
Level-7 Ltd. (since renamed to ECsoft)
Lorien
Parity
W. S. Atkins (three contracts).

There is no central record of contracts entered into by the former Welsh Office prior to 1998.

Notes:

All the information above relates solely to IT systems and support. Telephone costs are not included.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the publications issued by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34196]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This information is not available in the form requested.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-Departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34277]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This information is not held in the form requested.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26980]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Office does not exercise any functions which ordinarily require it to place advertisements. Information for the former Welsh Office is not readily available.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the President of the Council what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33543]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development on 5 February 2000, *Official Report*, column 917W.

My Department is not responsible for major purchases of goods and services.

None the less, we will endeavour to use Fair Trade products for official entertaining directly provided by my Department, subject to this being good value for money.

Information about Fair Trade Fortnight will be drawn to the attention of all departmental staff.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32818]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Cabinet Office is responsible for setting the retirement age for all members of the Senior Civil Service. This is age 60. Three members of my Department fall into this category. However, Heads of Departments and Agency Chief Executives have flexibility to retain members of the Senior Civil Service beyond age 60 if they judge it in the public interest and they are satisfied about the fitness and efficiency of the individual to carry out his or her duties.

For staff in my Department below the Senior Civil Service, the normal retirement age is 60. Nineteen members of my Department fall into this category. Subject to departmental needs and the continued health and efficiency of the individual concerned, staff may be allowed to continue working to a maximum age of 65.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the President of the Council what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England

and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category *(a)*. [33673]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department placed no IT contracts during the period mentioned. IT services are provided via the Cabinet Office's IT contract. (The contractor is COMPAQ Computers Ltd., Worton Grange, Imperial Way, Reading, Berkshire, RG2 0TD.) My Department is re-charged on a per capita basis for each member of staff, plus a charge for any extra software or special services. The available information (dating from when my Department joined the Cabinet Office network) is:

Period	£
1 July 1998 to 31 March 1999	24,391
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000[1]	16,557
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001[1]	172,570

[1] The charge for 2000–01 includes £68,000 for a database used by the Business Co-ordination Unit (who have since been transferred to the Cabinet Office).

HOME DEPARTMENT

James Ashley

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received a report from the Sussex Police Authority concerning the fatal shooting of James Ashley in 1998. [35969]

Mr. Denham: I required the Sussex Police Authority to report under section 43 of the Police Act 1996 on the events surrounding the shooting and the action taken by Sussex police to ensure that they have responded appropriately. I have now received that report. I am placing a copy in the Library. The report gives an account of the circumstances leading up to the shooting, the subsequent investigations, and the action which has been taken in Sussex to improve policing and to restore public confidence. Three officers are currently facing disciplinary proceedings in connection with the shooting. The Police Authority have informed me that they have not included any material which in their view could be prejudicial to the proceedings.

Police Officers

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers below pensionable age left the police force in England and Wales in 2001, broken down by police authority area. [30453]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* There is no single set retirement age from the police service. All officers may retire upon completion of 30 years service or upon completion of 25 years service after the age of 50. Officers may continue to serve up to the age of 55, or until 60 for ranks above sergeant. Chief officers, or the Police Authority in the case of the chief officer, have discretion to extend the compulsory retirement age for any officer by up to five years.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary collect information annually about the number of officers who have left the police service. The table shows the most recent figures, which are for 2000–01.

Force	*Ordinary retirements*	*Other wastage*[1]
Avon and Somerset	67	67
Bedfordshire	13	38
Cambridgeshire	32	34
Cheshire	40	41
City of London	18	20
Cleveland	33	18
Cumbria	29	34
Derbyshire	27	25
Devon and Cornwall	94	37
Dorset	42	25
Durham	27	23
Dyfed-Powys	25	22
Essex	65	78
Gloucestershire	28	22
Greater Manchester	128	175
Gwent	27	26
Hampshire	95	91
Hertfordshire	40	72
Humberside	68	51
Kent	74	82
Lancashire	75	56
Leicestershire	29	48
Lincolnshire	41	13
Merseyside	79	80
Metropolitan Police	451	703
Norfolk	39	22
Northamptonshire	25	22
Northumbria	62	67
North Wales	32	43
North Yorkshire	27	41
Nottinghamshire	59	28
South Wales	45	105
South Yorkshire	74	60
Staffordshire	42	25
Suffolk	38	27
Surrey	34	59
Sussex	89	64
Thames Valley	71	120
Warwickshire	25	21
West Mercia	50	47
West Midlands	142	141
West Yorkshire	116	90
Wiltshire	28	24
England and Wales	2,645	2,885

[1] medical retirements, resignations, dismissals and deaths

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there are per head of population in *(a)* the West Mercia Constabulary and *(b)* on average in England and Wales. [32543]

Mr. Denham: This information is published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin in the form of police officers per 100,000 population. In West Mercia there were 173.9 police officers per 100,000 of population as at 30 September 2001 and 240.3 per 100,000 of population in England and Wales.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time police officers *(a)* are employed by East Sussex Constabulary and *(b)* were employed in 1997. [33917]

Mr. Denham: On 30 September Sussex police had 2,837 police officers. On 31 March 1997 the force had 3,085 officers. I understand that the former Chief Constable allowed police numbers to fall because he civilianised a substantial number of operational support jobs that could more effectively be undertaken by civilian support staff. The reduction was not in front-line officers.

Between March 1997 and September 2001 civilian support staff numbers increased by 357 to 1,506 full-time equivalents.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by his Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29423]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The number of parliamentary questions not answered by my Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994 are as follows:

Year	*PQs not answered*
1994–96	Nil
1997	4
1998	6
1999	6
2000	9
2001	9
Total	34

Victims of Crime

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* targets he has given to police authorities on the time within which police officers should visit victims of (i) burglary, (ii) robbery, (iii) sex crimes and (iv) other crimes of violence. [34773]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* Under the 1996 Victim's Charter the police have responsibility for ensuring that victims are put in contact with the voluntary organisation Victim Support. Once a crime has been reported, the Victim's Charter outlines the standards of service that victims can expect to receive from the criminal justice agencies. The police are responsible for keeping victims informed of subsequent developments in the case, and the outcome of any court proceedings. Guidance about this was issued in Home Office Circular 55/1998.

The police are also required to conduct user satisfaction surveys on a range of service responses, including the quality of response to a report of a burglary or of a violent crime.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of crime, broken down by main categories for reporting, is known to have been committed by persons of *(a)* European, *(b)* African, *(c)* South Asian and *(d)* other ethnic origin in the last five years. [34675]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* Information available centrally relates to the number of persons arrested by the police for notifiable offences. This information is published annually by the Home Office in 'Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System'. Information for 2000–01 will be published shortly.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those convicted of criminal offences, broken down by 10-year age bands, are of *(a)* European, *(b)* African, *(c)* south Asian and *(d)* other ethnic origins; and what proportion each group represents of each age band in the last five years. [34676]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* Currently information is only collected centrally by the Home Office on persons convicted at magistrates courts in six police force areas. This information is published annually by the Home Office in "Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System".

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Antisocial Behaviour Orders have been *(a)* sought and *(b)* granted in (i) each police authority area and (ii) each social services authority area where not coterminous with a police authority area. [34776]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) are community-based civil orders, which can be applied for by the police or local authority, in consultation with each other against an individual or several individuals whose behaviour is antisocial. Applications are to the magistrates court acting in its civil capacity.

From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000 data on the number of ASBOs issued were collected by police force area. No information on applications refused is available for this period.

From 1 June 2000 official statistics on the number of ASBOs issued are based on quarterly returns from magistrates courts committees (MCCs) which from 1 April 2001 were all aligned with police force areas. These returns are not presently designed to give figures below MCC level. A review of these statistics identified an undercount and the Home Department therefore undertook an exercise with the police to obtain more reliable figures. As a result of this reconciliation exercise the total number of ASBOs issued within England and Wales up to the end of September 2001 was 466, 184 more than previously reported. The information available by police force area/magistrates courts committees is given in the table.

Number of antisocial behaviour orders issued or refused[1] as from 1 April 1999 to 30 September 2001 by police force area/MCC

Police force area/MCC	*Issued*	*Refused[1]*
Avon and Somerset	28	—
Bedfordshire	2	—
Cambridgeshire	8	—
Cheshire	—	—
Cleveland	10	1
Cumbria	2	—
Derbyshire	12	—
Devon and Cornwall	10	—
Dorset	4	—
Durham	10	—
Essex	—	—
Gloucestershire	4	—
Greater Manchester	24	—
Hampshire	4	1
Hertfordshire	9	—
Humberside	11	—

Number of antisocial behaviour orders issued or refused[1] as from 1 April 1999 to 30 September 2001 by police force area/MCC

Police force area/MCC	*Issued*	*Refused*[1]
Kent	15	—
Lancashire	16	—
Leicestershire	5	—
Lincolnshire	4	—
Merseyside	17	—
Metropolitan police[2]/GLMCA	40	5
Norfolk	17	1
Northamptonshire	3	—
Northumbria	15	—
North Yorkshire	10	—
Nottinghamshire	16	—
South Yorkshire	6	—
Staffordshire	10	—
Suffolk	5	1
Surrey	4	—
Sussex	7	1
Thames Valley	7	—
Warwickshire	3	—
West Mercia	47	—
West Midlands	65	—
West Yorkshire	15	—
Wiltshire	—	4
Dyfed Powys	—	—
Gwent	1	—
North Wales	1	—
South Wales	2	—
England and Wales	466	14

[1] Data collected on refused applications as from 1 June 2000 only

[2] Including City of London

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the power to apply for antisocial behaviour orders to *(a)* parish and town councils, *(b)* governing bodies of schools and *(c)* other persons affected by antisocial behaviour. [34775]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary recently announced important proposals to increase the effectiveness of antisocial behaviour orders, (ASBOs) which include extending the power to apply for ASBOs to the British Transport police and registered social landlords. We would very much encourage parish and town councils governing bodies of schools, and indeed all other bodies representing the community to work for the reduction of antisocial behaviour, but we believe that where an application for an ASBO may be appropriate they should continue to work through the police and/or the local authority.

Metropolitan Police

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 232W and 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 120W, on police numbers, what proportion of the change in the number of police officers in the Metropolitan police area is attributable to the transfer of responsibility of policing some areas to the surrounding forces of Surrey, Hertfordshire and Essex in April 2000. [29506]

Mr. Denham: The effects of the Metropolitan police boundary changes on 1 April 2000 were incorporated into the police funding formula and the overall transfer between the forces was in terms of financial resources, not of officers. Where data on police numbers are used in the formula, a notional transfer of 887 from the Metropolitan police to the three county forces was applied. Because it is for police authorities and Chief Constables to decide how resources are utilised, it is not appropriate to convert the notional transfer directly into a full-time equivalent strength for the Metropolitan police as a consequence of the changes.

Between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 the strength of the Metropolitan police fell by 607, to 24,878. This will have been due to a combination of boundary change resources and the temporary secondments to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey. By 30 September 2001, the numbers of officers in the Metropolitan police had increased to 25,374—496 more than on 31 March 2000.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers in the Metropolitan Police Service have left the service in each of the last four years as a result of *(a)* reaching retirement age, *(b)* being retired sick, *(c)* being transferred to another force and *(d)* resignation. [26881]

Mr. Denham: The information set out in the table has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Year	*Normal retirement*	*Medical retirement*	*Transfer to another force*	*Resignation*	*Total*
1997–98	594	405	265	247	1,511
1998–99	592	494	229	332	1,647
1999–2000	554	285	243	361	1,443
2000–01	465	220	382	359	1,426

Firearms

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were *(a)* reported and *(b)* cleared up involving (i) licensed handguns, (ii) unlicensed handguns, (iii) licensed shotguns, (iv) unlicensed shotguns and (v) other firearms in each year since 1997. [30209]

Mr. Denham: The overall numbers of offences committed using handguns, shotguns and other firearms, over the period in question are as follows.

Numbers of firearms offences—England and Wales

	Handguns	*Shotguns*	[1]*Other firearms*
1997–98	2,636	565	1,702
1998–99[2]	2,687	642	1,880
1999–2000	3,685	693	2,465
2000–01	4,019	607	2,736

[1] 'Other firearms' includes imitation and unidentified firearms, and rifles.

[2] There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which expanded the offences covered, and placed a greater emphasis on counting crimes in terms of numbers of victims. Numbers of recorded crimes after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what expenditure has been incurred by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if he will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27937]

Mr. Blunkett: The Department conducts or commissions market or opinion research only when it is justified by the specific needs of a particular policy or programme, and when this is the most economical, efficient and effective way to achieve the purpose.

Detailed breakdowns of costs are not held centrally and would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

Market research undertaken by the Department, its agencies and non departmental public bodies (NDPBs) from 30 May 2000 to date, is as follows:

British Crime Survey—used to monitor the level of crime independent of levels of reporting and recording of crime; 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey—measures performance in delivering the Home Office's Aim 7 objectives; British Market Research Bureau—conducted a survey of all core Home Office staff and provided the Department with a report; A survey research project examined the impact of different formats of information on knowledge about, and attitudes towards crime and the criminal justice system; A postal survey of criminal justice system practitioners beliefs and opinions about sentencing philosophies and framework; A survey was commissioned for United Kingdom Passport Agency (UKPA) to determine the likely demand for their services in the coming year as part of a redevelopment of the passport demand forecasting system; Research into the attitudes of people from ethnic minority communities towards a career in the police service; An exploration of people's reactions to, and experiences of stop and search during the pilot of Macpherson recommendation 61; and the investigation more generally of views on the use of stop and search by the police; Prison Service staff attitude survey; The Youth Justice Board published a Youth Survey—undertaken with school children and young people excluded from mainstream schooling; Youth Justice Board research involving undertaking one to one interviews with non-offenders, offenders and persistent young offenders; Employee satisfaction survey for the Forensic Science Service; Police customer satisfaction surveys; Milton Keynes reassurance Project—survey of estates undertaken as part of an evaluation of interventions to reduce fear of crime; Qualitative research study into the social context of drinking among 18 to 24-year-olds; Attitudes towards and experiences of drink driving; Feasibility surveys on a strategic research objective of the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate; Qualitative and quantitative research with first stage respondents to police recruitment campaign to aid the recruitment process; Qualitative research with serving police officers to inform recruitment campaign development and police reform communications; Quantitative crime reduction campaign tracking—police recruitment and vehicle crime reduction; Quantitative research into attitudes of motorists towards car security products; Creative development research for used car security package pilot campaign; Creative development research for drugs; Pre/post campaign tracking research into drugs campaign; Strategic research with parents and young people about issues surrounding child protection on the internet (specifically chat room use); Creative development research for child protection on the internet campaign; Pre/post tracking research for child protection on the internet campaign: Desk research on existing parenting information provision; Research with parents and parenting professionals into their communications needs on parenting issues.

Community/Police Partnership

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms exist for *(a)* monitoring performance and effectiveness and *(b)* disseminating best practice in community/police partnerships; and if he will make a statement. [33378]

Mr. Denham: The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires that crime and disorder reduction strategies are kept under review to monitor their effectiveness. Proposals currently in the Police Reform Bill will require responsible authorities to publish such reviews on an annual basis. A performance template is currently under development to assist partnerships in assessing and monitoring progress. Crime reduction directors located in the Government offices in the regions and the National Assembly for Wales monitor the performance of the partnerships and the effectiveness of projects in their area under the crime reduction programme. In addition, annual recorded crime figures are published twice yearly at crime and disorder reduction partnerships' level. The crime reduction toolkits provide comprehensive web-based guidance dealing with the key areas of crime and criminality for partnerships and provide a problem-solving approach with details on research, evaluation and examples of good practice. The toolkits are available on http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits.

Child Prostitution

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidelines to police forces to treat cases of child and youth prostitution as child abuse; and if he will make a statement. [33023]

Mr. Keith Bradley: This Government accept that children involved in prostitution need to be recognised primarily as victims of abuse and has issued guidance that emphasises this.

In May 2000, the Home Office, together with the Department of Health, issued guidance entitled "Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution". This guidance flowed from the original Association for Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidelines on child prostitution, published in 1998. The guidance was drawn up in consultation with the Associations of Directors of Social Services and Chief Probation Officers, other Government Departments and other relevant agencies. It reflected both best practice and a multi- agency approach.

A key message of the guidance was that wherever possible criminal justice action should be pursued against those who abuse children through prostitution or seek to exploit them as prostitutes. It also gave guidance about how to support children and young people and help them to leave prostitution.

Child Sex Tourists

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent co-ordination of efforts has been made between countries to reduce the incidence of child sex abuse by tourists; and if he will make a statement. [32136]

Beverley Hughes: The Government abhor the sexual abuse of children, whether in a commercial or domestic context, whether committed by British citizens in the United Kingdom or abroad or by visitors to the United Kingdom and other countries. Officials attended on my behalf the second World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Yokohama, Japan, in late December 2001. Reducing the incidence of sexual abuse of children is central to the aims of the congress.

Domestically, part two of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 provides the jurisdiction for the prosecution here of British residents or citizens who commit sex offences against children abroad. We have also implemented legislation introduced by the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 requiring sex offenders subject to the requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 (the register) to notify the police if they intend to travel abroad for a period of eight days or longer. In relevant cases, the police will share this information with the authorities in other countries.

The United Kingdom is one of the strongest supporters of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention 182, on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, such as prostitution. In ratifying this instrument, the United Kingdom committed itself to assisting other members of the ILO through "enhanced international co-operation and/or assistance including support for social and economic development, poverty eradication programmes and universal education". This commitment is being taken forward through the work of the Department for International Development. We have also ratified the key international instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the United Nations (UN) Slavery Convention. We are promoting their widest possible ratification and supporting their practical implementation to achieve real change.

We are supporting the Centre for Europe's Children to maintain the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Child Welfare Initiative Resource Centre. The centre maintains a web site which aims to share best practice and stimulate international discussion and cooperation in the field of child protection.

The Government, through the Department for International Development, has also given £3 million for the International Labour Organisation's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) programme in the Greater Mekong region (parts of Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam). This involves a number of inter-linked interventions to raise awareness and prevent the trafficking of women and children, including those trafficked for sexual exploitation, and to withdraw women and children from labour exploitation and reintegrate them back into their own or new communities. And we are supporting non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with tour operators to develop a code of practice for the travel industry to eliminate child sex tourism.

More details of the United Kingdom's extensive portfolio of action to tackle the sexual abuse of children can be found in our "National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation", which was published in September 2001.

Crime (South Tyneside)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of CCTV on crime in south Tyneside. [32093]

Mr. Denham: There are currently five Home Office funded closed circuit television (CCTV) systems either in operation or in the process of being installed in the south Tyneside area. These cover, South Shields Foreshore, south Tyneside hospital, Tyne Dock Housing Estate, south Tyneside Control Room and the south Tyneside Mobile scheme.

No evaluation results for these particular schemes are yet available, but Home Office research and other evaluations show CCTV can be effective in reducing crime and helping the police detect crime and convict offenders. CCTV is most effective when used as part of a wider local crime reduction strategy.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the timescale is for the replacement of SALS for asylum applicants with identity cards; and if he will make a statement. [31945]

Angela Eagle: Applicants Registration Cards (ARC) were first issued to new asylum seekers on 31 January 2002. The ARC will replace the standard acknowledgement letter (SAL) and will be initially issued to new asylum applicants as they apply for asylum. The issuing of ARCs is to be undertaken in a range of locations throughout the country from March 2002, ensuring that all new asylum applicants receive an ARC as the technology is established.

The asylum audit, planned in the new financial year, will undertake the replacement of the SAL with a new ARC. It will be completed as soon as possible. ARC issue is just one of a number of tasks to be undertaken within the audit, for those applicants already in the asylum system.

Dangerous Driving

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many car drivers were *(a)* banned and *(b)* received points on their licence, in the last 12 months for dangerous driving, broken down by region. [32541]

Mr. Denham: The available information relates to the number of offences of dangerous driving for which disqualification, and endorsements without disqualification, were imposed in England and Wales in 2000.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Departmental Retirement Age

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32821]

Angela Eagle: The normal retirement age for non-industrial staff is 60, and for industrial staff 65. However, the Home Office's age retirement policy has recently been reviewed and from 1 April 2002 non-industrial staff up to Grade six will have the option to remain beyond the age of 60 and to retire at any point between the ages of 60 and 65. A temporary relaxation to the normal retirement age of 60 is currently in force until 31 March 2002 for grades between Administrative Assistant and Executive Officer (including equivalent grades, except certain Prison Service specific grades). Staff at Higher Executive Officer and above can also apply for extensions of service subject to business needs.

A variation to this policy is applied in the Prison Service where pre "fresh-start" Prison Officers employed before 1987 retire at 55, and Operational Support Grades retire at 65. A formal review of age retirement policy is now taking place within the Prison Service.

The number of staff affected in each of these categories is set out in the table.

Category	*Retirement age*	*Number of staff*
Non-industrial	60	32,002
Industrial	65	2,997
Operational Support Grades	65	6,475
Prison Officers	60	16,461
Prison Officers[1]	55	6,721

[1] Pre "Fresh Start"

Muslim Prisoners

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about the treatment of Muslim prisoners from Dr. Siddiqui; and if he will make a statement. [32834]

Beverley Hughes: Dr. Siddiqui wrote to the Prime Minister on 21 January 2002 raising concern about the treatment of those detained at Belmarsh prison and I have replied on the Prime Minister's behalf.

On 25 January, the detainees at Belmarsh were visited by the National Council for the Welfare of Muslim Prisoners. In a subsequent press release, the Council expressed general satisfaction with the overall provisions available to Muslim prisoners.

Brixton Police

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 355–56W, on Brixton police, for what periods during 2001 Brixton police were unable to accept reports of minor crime over the telephone. [31332]

Mr. Denham: I understand that Brixton police were unable to accept telephone reports of minor crime for various short periods in 2001. Other methods of reporting crime were not affected. The periods in question would have been no more than a couple of days at a time.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 355–56W, on Brixton police, what operational reasons rendered Brixton police unable to accept reports of minor crime over the telephone between 2 and 8 January. [31337]

Mr. Denham: I understand from the Commissioner that staff absences accounted for the inability of police in Brixton to accept reports of minor crime over the telephone for the period concerned. A decision was made to use the available staff to ensure continuity of service in the Crime Management Unit. Leaving the Crime Management Unit inadequately staffed would have had a greater adverse effect on the investigation of crime. Throughout this period members of the public were able to report minor crime in writing or in person at police stations.

Terrorism Costs (Avon and Somerset Police Authority)

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to make additional funds available to Avon and Somerset Police Authority to recognise extra security duties and costs post 11 September 2001; [31825]

(2) what additional funds have been made available to Avon and Somerset Police Authority to mitigate the impact on normal policing of increased security responsibilities post 11 September 2001. [31826]

Mr. Denham: We are currently considering how additional funding for costs incurred since September 11 should be distributed between police authorities. A decision will be made soon.

Police Support Staff

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase and enhance the role of support staff in the police. [31675]

Mr. Denham: Proposals for new and enhanced functions to be carried out by civilian support staff were set out in "Policing a new century" (CM5326). The Police Reform Bill sets out the limited police powers that may be needed by support staff to enable them to carry out these functions.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the eight sites under consideration for the proposed asylum accommodation centres; and in which parliamentary constituencies they are located. [31731]

Angela Eagle: They are as follows:

Qinetiq (formerly Defence Evaluation Research Agency (DERA)) Pershore, Worcestershire (Mid Worcestershire).

Royal Air Force (RAF) Hemswell, West Lindsey, Lincolnshire (Gainsborough).

Sully Hospital, Barry, South Glamorgan (Vale of Glamorgan).

Hooton Park, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire (Ellesmere Port and Neston).

Land vacated by Ministry of Defence (MOD) Logistics, Bicester, Oxfordshire (Banbury).

Air West Edinburgh (formerly RAF Turnhouse), Edinburgh (Edinburgh West).

RAF Newton, West Bridgeford, Nottinghamshire (Rushcliffe).

National Energy Site Killinghome, near Grimsby, North Lincolnshire (Cleethorpes).

We also expect to identify any further sites which are available through the procurement competition which we will be launching shortly.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics he has collated from English police authorities on their expenditure on purchasing private medical insurance for staff in each financial year since 1998–99. [32873]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Surrey is the only police authority which currently makes private medical insurance available to all its staff. The cost of the scheme, which began in November 2001, is about £550,000 a year.

Speed Cameras (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many motorists have been convicted of speeding offences as a result of evidence from speed cameras within the Greater London area in each of the last three years. [32898]

Mr. Denham: Information held centrally on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database for the Metropolitan police and City of London is not sufficiently robust to identify proceedings for speeding offences where the offence has been detected by camera.

However, data supplied directly from the police showing the number of prosecutions and fixed penalties notices issued for speeding offences as a result of the use of cameras is given in the table.

Prosecutions and fixed penalties for speeding offences detected by camera within the Metropolitan police area[1], 1998–2000

Disposal/police force area	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Prosecutions	2,983	6,982	5,522
Fixed Penalties	14,155	13,048	44,092

[1] Includes City of London

Prison Inmates

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of hours is per week that a prison inmate at a prison in England or Wales *(a)* spends out of their cell and *(b)* works in a prison workshop over the last 12 month period for which figures are available. [34418]

Beverley Hughes: The average time out of cell for all prisoners in England and Wales for the current financial year to the end of December is 9.9 hours on a weekday and 8.7 hours at weekends. On average, prisoners spent 4.0 hours per week working in prison workshops over the same period. Data for December included in these figures are provisional and subject to validation.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions *(a)* she, *(b)* other Ministers in her Department and *(c)* officials in her Department have had with Ministers and officials in other Government Departments to ensure that the costs of (i) public liability insurance and (ii) applying for road closures do not prevent members of the public from celebrating the Golden Jubilee. [31084]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Discussions are held with colleagues in other relevant Government Departments on a wide range of issues relating to the Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Public liability insurance is available at reasonable cost in the commercial markets. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is responsible for road traffic regulations policy. The impact of this policy on the Golden Jubilee celebrations is being assessed. We expect to make a statement shortly.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what events *(a)* she is and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events her Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33260]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Invitations to the majority of events taking place as part of the queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations, including the national events in central London over the Jubilee weekend of 1–4 June 2002, have not yet been issued. It is also too soon for invitations to have been sent out for the Commonwealth Games. However, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, Ministers from other Departments and I expect to attend events including the National Service of thanksgiving at St. Paul's Cathedral on 4 June and the Commonwealth Games in Manchester from 25 July to 4 August.

It is my Department's role, working with all the interested parties including other Government Departments, to support the planning for Golden Jubilee celebrations in a way that embraces the six themes for the Jubilee: celebration; giving thanks; service; involving the whole community; looking forward as well as back; and the commonwealth while adhering to Her Majesty's wish that there should be no undue expenditure from public funds. It is not the role of government to arrange events. It is for local communities to decide how they wish to celebrate the Golden Jubilee.

We will publish a comprehensive list of events that Ministers will be attending nearer the time.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Rural Policy

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on the co-ordination of rural policy. [34011]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: None. However the Rural Regeneration Committee, DA(RR), chaired by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, reports, as necessary, to the Domestic Affairs Committee which I chair.

Financial Propriety

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidelines exist regarding the propriety of personal employees of a Minister receiving payments from an organisation with which a Department is involved in negotiations; and if he will make a statement. [34323]

Mr. Leslie: The Ministerial Code requires Ministers to ensure that no conflict arises, or appears to arise, between their public duties and their private interests, financial or otherwise. The remuneration and terms of employment of personal employees of Ministers working on non-Government business is not a matter for Government.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32816]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office has a flexible retirement policy for its staff.

Grades below the senior civil service

Age 60 is the normal age of retirement for all grades below the senior civil service. It is also the earliest age at which full superannuation benefits may apply.

Retention beyond age 60 is possible up to age 70 subject to departmental needs and continuing health and efficiency. Retention beyond age 70 is allowed only in exceptional circumstances.

Early retirement with actuarially reduced benefits is available to staff aged 50 or over.

The Cabinet Office agencies closely follow the Cabinet Office model, with analogous discretions allowing for extensions of service.

The senior civil service

The Cabinet Office is responsible for setting the retirement age for all members of the senior civil service. This is age 60. Heads of Departments and agency chief executives have flexibility to retain beyond this age if they judge it in the public interests and are satisfied about the fitness and efficiency of individuals to carry out their duties.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions on which she has received hospitality in her ministerial capacity from *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Andersen Consulting and *(c)* Accenture in the last two years. [31699]

Ms Hewitt: I attended a business dinner hosted by Arthur Andersen on 22 January 2002. As e-Commerce Minister I chaired a seminar on e-Commerce co-hosted by the DTI and Andersen Consulting at Lancaster House on 15 November 2000.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the projects on which *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Andersen Consulting and *(c)* Accenture are engaged for her Department. [31700]

Ms Hewitt: Current contracts with Arthur Andersen are as follows:

Framework arrangement for Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund projects. The contract runs from November 2000 to October 2002

Study of UK competitive position. The contract runs from July 2000 to March 2002

Research and updating of information sheets. The contract runs from January 2000 to December 2002.

There are no current contracts with Andersen Consulting or Accenture.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what pre-publication reports by Arthur Andersen she received between May 1997 and December 2001. [31938]

Ms Hewitt: The information is not held centrally by the Department and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what dates since 7 June 2001 *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* special advisers in her Department have met employees of (i) Andersen and (ii) Accenture on official business; and if she will make a statement. [32101]

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions on which she and her ministerial colleagues have met representatives of *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Andersen Consulting and *(c)* Accenture since June 2001; and what subjects were discussed. [31701]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers, special advisers and officials in my Department regularly meet a wide range of representatives from business. However as the Prime Minister's reply on 19 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 102W, makes clear, it is not normal practice to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contracts her Department has had since 1997 with *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture for (i) accountancy, (ii) audit and (iii) consultancy work; and what staff have been seconded (A) to her Department from and (B) from her Department to these firms. [32421]

Ms Hewitt: The information on contracts is set out as follows. The first contract was with Andersen Consulting (later Accenture); the remainder with Arthur Andersen.

Research for the Foresight Financial Services Panel. The contract ran from September 1999 to March 2001—Consultancy.

Joint reporting accountants on a study of a possible introduction of public-private partnership into British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. The contract ran from October to December Accountancy 2001—Accountancy.

Statistical study of the British Biotechnology industry. The contract ran from April 2001 to January 2002—Consultancy.

Framework arrangement for Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund projects. The contract runs from November 2000 to October 2002—Consultancy.

Review of CMI, Cambridge. The contract ran from June to December 2001—Consultancy.

High technology industry survey of foreign investors. The contract ran from September 2000 to March 2001—Consultancy.

Study of UK competitive position. The contract runs from July 2000 to March 2002—Consultancy.

Research and updating of information sheets. The contract runs from January 2000 to December 2002—Consultancy.

These contracts were awarded following best departmental practice which involved obtaining competitive tenders and, where applicable, following EU procurement.

On secondments, centrally held departmental records show that since 1997 there have been two secondees from Arthur Andersen, one from 1 July 1997 to 31 December 1998 and one from 15 April 1998 to 28 April 2000. There have been only one DTI secondee to Andersen Consulting from 2 January 1997 to 7 November 1997.

Enron

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list all Government *(a)* contracts and *(b)* consent awarded by the department to (i) Enron Corporation, (ii) En[illegible]n Europe and (iii) Arthur Andersen between May 199[illegible]d December 2001. [31935]

Mr. Wilson: [illegible]tracts awarded during this period with Arthur Anders[illegible]vere as follows:

Joint reporti[illegible]ccountants on a study of a possible introduction of Public-P[illegible]te partnership into British Nuclear Fuels Limited. The contract ran from October 2000 to December 2001

Statistical study of the British Biotechnology industry. The contract ran from April 2001 to January 2002

Framework arrangement for Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund projects. The contract runs from November 2000 to October 2002

Review of CMI, Cambridge. The contract ran from June to December 2001

High technology industry survey of foreign investors. The contract ran from September 2000 to March 2001.

Study of UK competitive position. The contract runs from July 2000 to March 2002

Research and updating of information sheets. The contract runs from January 2000 to December 2002.

These contracts were awarded following best departmental practice which involved obtaining competitive tenders and, where applicable, following EU procurement rules.

My department has no contracts with Enron Corporation or Enron Europe. Consents have been awarded under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for the following facilities in which Enron Europe was involved:

Extension to Sutton Bridge power station, 1997

Isle of Grain power station, 2000

Black Start facility at Teesside power station, 1998.

All these cases were scrutinised and determined in the usual way under the section 36 statutory process, taking account of the views of the local planning authority, statutory bodies, local people and any other person making representations to the Secretary of State.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions since 1997 when *(a)* Ministers in her Department and *(b)* special advisers in her Department have discussed UK energy policy with members of the American Embassy in London; and if she will make a statement. [32507]

Ms Hewitt: Such discussions are covered by Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and are thus confidential.

Accountants

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many contracts and what fees in each financial year since 1997–98 *(a)* PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, *(c)* KPMG, *(d)* PA Consulting, *(e)* WS Atkins, *(f)* Accenture, *(g)* Deloitte & Touche, *(h)* McKinsey, *(i)* Capita, *(j)* AEA Technology, *(k)* Xansa Group, *(l)* Sema Group, *(m)* CMG Admiral, *(n)* ICL Group and *(o)* Logica received for advising her Department on PFI and PPP contracts; and if she will make a statement. [32505]

Ms Hewitt: My Department and its agencies have had, since 1997–98, two contracts with KPMG, one contract with PricewaterhouseCoopers, one contract with Xansa, one contract with Deloitte & Touche and two contracts with Capita for advising on PFI and PPP contracts. There were no contracts with the other companies listed. The fees in each financial year since 1997–98 were as follows:

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Capita	217,921	279,486	24,693	35,785	Nil
KPMG	4,650	100,000	25,000	Nil	Nil
PwC	145,945	157,406	18,800	110,837	38,888
Xansa	402,750	511,079	161,462	Nil	Nil
Deloitte & Touche	Nil	Nil	Nil	828,239	921,761

Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what meetings have taken place between Ministers in her Department and employees of Citigate since 7 June 2001; and if she will make a statement; [32812]

(2) if she will list the meetings that Ministers in her Department have had since 1 January 2000 with representatives of *(a)* Chevron, *(b)* Texaco, *(c)* Phillips Petroleum, *(d)* IMC Global, *(e)* TXU and *(f)* CMS; and if she will make a statement; [32919]

(3) if she will list the dates of meetings that *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* Ministers in her Department have had since 1 January 1999 with representatives of Global Crossing; and if she will make a statement; [34056]

(4) if she will list the *(a)* dates and *(b)* subjects of meetings that (i) special advisers and (ii) Ministers in her Department have had since 1 January 1999 with representatives of General Electric; and if she will make a statement; [34053]

(5) if she will list the dates of meetings that *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* Ministers in her Department have had since 7 June 2001 with representatives of Seeboard; and if she will make a statement. [34061]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers, special advisers and officials in my Department regularly meet a wide range of representatives from business. However as the Prime Minister's reply of 19 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 102W, makes clear, it is not normal practice to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Energy Industry

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what occasions she and her Department have held meetings since May 1997 with representatives from *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Exxon-Mobil, *(d)* Enron, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf; if she will state the purpose of each meeting; and if she will provide details of the outcomes and agreements reached as a result of each meeting. [33216]

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings *(a)* she and *(b)* her senior departmental officials have had with Enron and its subsidiaries in the last two years. [32435]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers, special advisers and officials in my Department regularly meet a wide range of representatives from business. It is not normal practice to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

As the Prime Minister's reply of 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 698W, makes clear, however, details of meetings between DTI Ministers and representatives of Enron have been disclosed, without setting a precedent, because unsubstantiated and unjustified allegations were made against the Government and the DTI is the lead Department on energy policy.

These details (taken from official records of Ministers' engagements) are as follows:

> My right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry) met senior Enron executives on 26 May 1999 and opened the Enron Europe HQ on 29 February 2000.
>
> My right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) (then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) (then Energy Minister) met senior executives from a range of energy companies including Enron on 23 September 1998 to discuss the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation.
>
> My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West met the chief executive of Enron on 28 April 1998.
>
> My right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), (then Energy Minister) met the senior executives from Enron on 9 February 2000 and on 13 April 2000 (alongside other energy executives) to discuss Transportation of Coal; and visited the offices of Enron at 40 Grosvenor Place on 5 October 2000.

In addition DTI Ministers may have attended receptions or other events at which Enron executives were also present.

Information Technology

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33691]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested by the hon. Gentleman that is readily available from central records is as follows.

			Number registered in:			
Financial year	*Total value (excluding VAT)*	*Number of contracts let*	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*Number of foreign companies*
1998–99	10,895,760	276	276	—	—	—
1999–2000	21,768,872	53	52	—	—	1
2000–01	37,449,912	95	95	—	—	—
2001–02	20,231,791	78	77	1	—	—

Contracting parties in the 1998–99 financial year:

Action, Ameritech, Ascot Systems, ASE Consulting, Belmar-Zenith, Cap Gemini, CMG Admiral, Complete Media, Computacenter, Data Display, Dataware, Dell, Dr. Solomons, EDS, International Computers Ltd., i2, Interskill DBI, KPMG, MFT Computer Systems, Net Tel, OLSY, Reflex Magnetics, SAS, Secure, Sequent, Sight and Sound, Silicon Graphics, Spectrum, Stellar, Ultima, Wang, XANSA, Zeh Graphics.

Contracting parties in the 1999–2000 financial year:

Cap Gemini, Computacenter, Getronics, HR Planning Software, International Computers Ltd., Insight Consulting; Macwarehouse, Oracle, Parity Resources, Parity Systems, QCC, SMC, Yale Consulting.

Contracting parties in the 2000–01 financial year:

AbilityNet, Action, ASE Consulting, Cap Gemini, Cathedral Consortium, Compuserve, Computacenter, Drake, E.cognition, Elan, Glensound, IBM, International Computers Ltd., I-CD Publishing, Infologistix, KPMG, Osmond, PVS, RNIB, SCC, Schlumberger Sema, Site Reports, The Accountant, Visionary Systems, Xansa, Yale Consulting.

Contracting parties in the 2001–02 financial year:

AbilityNet, Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, Cathedral Consortium, CMG Admiral, Computacenter, I-CD Publishing, Insight Consulting, International Computers Ltd., Line Management, KPMG, Method Applications, Oracle, Parity Reources, Posturite, Pulse Data, RNIB, Rock, SCC, Telesensory, The Speech Centre, Yale Consulting, Vogon International.

Notes:

1. Readily available electronic records are not available for years before 1998–99 and the information for 1997–98 could be extracted from manual records only at disproportionate cost.

2. Only contracts valued at over £1,000 are included.

3. Information has only been provided for IT contracts let by the DTI's central IT procurement unit. Information about locally let contracts is not available from central records and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

4. Information supplied is for the core Department and excludes IT contracts let by the DTI's agencies.

5. IT systems and support has been widely interpreted to include the purchase of IT equipment and related services.

Coalminers (Compensation)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was paid by the Government from January to December 2001 in Wrexham for respiratory disease, pursuant to the miners' compensation scheme for *(a)* damages to claimants and *(b)* legal costs for claimants' lawyers. [33530]

Mr. Wilson: As at the end of January 2002 the Department has paid nearly £252 million in respiratory disease compensation. In the Wrexham constituency, as at the end of December, £744,000 had been paid. A breakdown for the period January to December 2001 is not available in the time requested, as constituency figures have been available only since the end of October 2001.

With regard to legal costs, the Department has paid £45 million to solicitors in relation to processing claims for respiratory disease. A breakdown for Wrexham and for the period January to December 2001 is not available in the time requested.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid to date to each firm of solicitors involved in the compensation claims for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [33667]

Mr. Wilson: In total there are some 300-plus firms of solicitors currently processing claims under either/or both schemes. The Department is not able to provide a breakdown by every firm of solicitors in the time available. However, detailed in the table are breakdowns of the costs paid (excluding generic trial costs) to the top 10 claims handlers under both schemes.

Chronic bronchitis and emphysema

£ million

Claims handler in order based on total claims intimated	*Costs paid (excluding generic trial costs)*
Thompsons	9.8
Hugh James Ford Simey	6.9
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	2.8
Raleys	4.2
Mark Gilbert Morse	0.5
Browell Smith & Co.	3.1
Graysons	2.1
Watson Burton	1.4
Irwin Mitchell	2.0
Randell Saunders	0.4

Vibration white finger

£ million

Claims handler in order based on total claims intimated	*Costs paid (excluding generic trial costs)*
Thompsons	5.7
Browell Smith & Co.	4.0
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	3.6
Raleys	3.0
Hugh James Ford Simey	3.0
Graysons	2.0
Moss	1.4
Watson Burton	1.9
AMS Law	1.0
Towells	1.3

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid out to former coalminers to date, in each region, as compensation for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger; and if she will make a statement. [33661]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the Department's Coal Health Claims website—www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth—where a breakdown of headline statistics by region, and by constituency can be found.

Since the beginning of November last year we have seen a significant increase in the numbers of full and final offers being made for respiratory disease claims. We have now paid out nearly £710 million in compensation across both schemes.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much to date has been paid to lawyers who are handling claims for former coalminers under the *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger compensation claims for unsuccessful cases. [33668]

Mr. Wilson: The Department does not pay solicitors costs in relation to unsuccessful claims, apart from a small customer care fee for claims registered prior to the signing of the Claims Handling Agreement on 24 September 1999.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how long on average it took to process a claim for compensation on behalf of coalminers suffering from *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger, by region, in the last 12 months. [33669]

Mr. Wilson: In the time available the Department is not able to provide a breakdown of average processing times by region over the last 12 months.

However, in respect of respiratory disease, the average time nationally between medical assessment and date of offer in the last six months is five months and 14 days. With regard to vibration white finger, VWF, the average duration between medical assessment and date of offer in the last six months is six months and five days.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the average length of time taken to process a claim for compensation on behalf of coalminers suffering from *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger, by each firm of solicitors, in the last 12 months. [33662]

Mr. Wilson: A breakdown of time taken by solicitors to process claims is not available in the time requested.

Employment Tribunals

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost to small businesses of employment tribunals in the last calendar year. [33703]

Nigel Griffiths: We have not made such an assessment.

Post Offices

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of rural post offices. [34007]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on 29 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 1039W.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many grants have been made under the rural post office scheme, broken down by county; and what the total sum paid out to date is. [33615]

Mr. Alexander: The Government have made available a £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where traditional services would otherwise close. To date, 139 application forms have been despatched and funding has been allocated to seven initiatives as follows:

Amount	*Area*
£13,200	to Capel-le-Ferne, Kent
£1,669	to Goadby Marwood, Leicestershire
£208	to Risbury, Herefordshire
£10,200	to Kirk Ireton, Derbyshire
£3,862	to Coleby, Lincolnshire
£4,000	to Henlow, Bedfordshire
£16,730	to Buriton, Hampshire

£24,928 has been paid out for schemes at Capel Le Ferne, Risbury and Buriton. Further payments will be made following verification of invoices by Post Office Ltd.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications have been made for assistance under the rural post office scheme, broken down by county. [33614]

Mr. Alexander: 29 completed applications out of the 139 forms requested to date have been received by Post Office Ltd. for the £2 million fund made available by Government to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas. They are as follows:

Capel Le Ferne, Kent
Holcombe, Devon
Buriton, Sussex
Risbury, Herefordshire
Kirk Ireton, Derbyshire
Struan, Highland
Goadby Marwood, Leicestershire
Coleby, Lincolnshire
South Warnborough, Hampshire
Deri, Caerphilly
Tavernspite, Pembrokeshire
Henstridge, Somerset
Wanborough, Wiltshire
Ringmer, Sussex
Almondbank, Perth and Kinross
Acton Trussell, Staffordshire
Henlow, Bedfordshire
Bernisdale, Higland
Winteringham, Lincolnshire
Milford, Staffordshire
Lubenham, Leicestershire
Dawlish Warren, Devon
Tortington, Sussex.
Laxay, Western Isles
Folkingham, Lincolnshire.
Bewcastle, Cumbria
Ollaberry, Shetland Islands
Standon, Staffordshire
Bowden, Borders.

Project from Norfolk have yet to reply.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the annual pre tax profits of the Post Office were in each year from 1980 to date; and how much was made over to the Treasury in each year. [34278]

Mr. Alexander: I refer my hon. Friend to the published reports and accounts of the Post Office for the figures from 1998 onwards, and to the Trade and Industry Committee Third report on the Post Office (97–98 session) for the figures from 1982 to 1997.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received on the future of the Post Office network. [34009]

Mr. Alexander: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry receives representation from numerous sources. The Government are committed to the maintenance of a nationwide network of post offices.

Business Survival Rates

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland, *(e)* each English region and *(f)* each local authority in the United Kingdom, the percentage of businesses surviving three years for the latest period for which figures are available. [34307]

Nigel Griffiths: We estimate survival rates on the basis of businesses registering for VAT who are still registered three years after. These data are available at Business Link, Training and Enterprise Council and Local Enterprise Company level. Data at local authority level are not available. The latest data relate to 1996 registrants and are set out in the table.

	Percentage
Scotland	61.2
England	62.4
Wales	63.1
Northern Ireland	70.1
North-east	61.4
County Durham	61.6
Northumberland	65.7
Tees Valley	60.8
Tyne and Wear	60.3
North-west	60.1
Cheshire and Warrington	63.6
Manchester	55.8
Cumbria	65.8
East Lancashire	60.4
North Manchester	57.8
Merseyside	63.0
West and north Lancashire	59.5
Yorkshire and the Humber	60.8
Humberside	61.9
North Yorkshire	66.2
South Yorkshire	59.7
West Yorkshire	58.8
East Midlands	61.2
Derbyshire	62.8
Leicestershire	61.2
Lincolnshire	61.8
Northamptonshire	61.7
Nottinghamshire	58.9
West Midlands	61.3
Birmingham and Solihull	55.3
Coventry and Warwickshire	65.7
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	67.5
Shropshire	64.4
Staffordshire	61.2
The Black Country	58.4
Eastern	65.3
Bedfordshire	63.3
Cambridgeshire	65.4
Essex	63.6
Hertfordshire	67.5
Norfolk	66.2
Suffolk	65.9
London	59.5
South-east	66.2
Berkshire	64.4
Hampshire	67.1
Kent and Medway	64.6
Oxfordshire/Milton Keynes/Bucks	66.9
Surrey	67.6
Sussex	66.0
South-west	65.0
Dorset	63.7
Devon and Cornwall	64.1
Gloucestershire	65.0
Somerset	68.1
West	63.1
Wiltshire and Swindon	68.9
Celtec	62.7
Mid Wales	68.3
South-east Wales	62.9
West Wales	61.2
Argyll and Bute	65.5
Ayrshire	62.7
Borders Enterprise	67.8
Caithness and Sutherland	66.4
Dumbarton	61.3
Dumfries and Galloway	71.3
Fife	60.6
Forth Valley	61.0
Glasgow Development Agency	49.1
Grampian	68.6
Inverness and Nairn	61.9
Lanarkshire	51.8
Lochaber	77.7
Lothian and Edinburgh	63.9
Moray Badenoch and Strathspey	76.8
Orkney	68.7
Renfrewshire	57.0
Ross and Cromarty	75.6
Shetland	76.0
Skye and Lochalsh	57.8
Tayside	65.4
Western Isles	75.6

Source:
Small Business Service April 2001

Regional Assistance (North-west)

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry further to the answer to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East, (Mr. Howarth) of 29 January 2002 , *Official Report*, column 160W, if she will list the recipients of regional assistance grants within the Liverpool, Walton constituency in each year from 1992 to 2001. [34432]

Alan Johnson: Recipients of regional assistance grants in Liverpool Walton are set out in the following table. This represents offers of regional selective assistance made by the Department of Trade and Industry. Offers that are not yet in the public domain have been excluded.

Financial year	*Company name*
1992–93	Panda Alarms Ltd.
1992–93	Commercial Hydraulics Liverpool Ltd.
1992–93	Food Integrants Ltd.
1992–93	W. R. Wright and Sons Ltd.
1993–94	Fortress Fabrications Ltd.
1993–94	Yes Stores Ltd.
1993–94	Fortress Fabrications Ltd.
1994–95	Fortress Fabrications Ltd.
1994–95	Stella Products Ltd.
1996–97	Ascotcrown Ltd.
1996–97	James Price Glazing Ltd.
1997–98	Dunlop Hevea (Industrial Footwear) Ltd.
1999–2000	Friskies Petcare (UK) Ltd.

Small Business Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Small Business Service has to publish and maintain a clear strategy backed by clear milestones and targets. [33982]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service's strategy for 2001–04 and business plan for 2001–02 are available in the Libraries of the House and on www.sbs.gov.uk.

SBS's priorities and operational targets for the next year are currently being developed and will be published in their business plan for 2002–03. Operational targets for 2002–03 will be announced in the House.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) her Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34414]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not held centrally in the Department of Trade and Industry and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Responsibility for the provision of mobile telephones for official purposes and for payment of the associated call charges was devolved to individual directorates, agencies and NDPBs at the end of March 1993. Since August 1997, the DTI has increasingly made use of the central Mobile Telecommunications contract managed by the Office for Government Commerce. Vodafone are the latest suppliers of this contract, which provides a call-off arrangement for DTI users at advantageous prices ensuring that the Department obtains good value for money.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total cost to her Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34178]

Ms Hewitt: The Department entered into a contract for the provision of accounts with CSL Group Ltd., effective from 1 April 1995. The contract, which covered an initial period of five years, was extended for a further two years. The cost of services is in part dependent upon volume of transactions. The average cost is approximately £2 million per annum.

The Department has also entered into a PFI agreement for the development of a new financial accounting system. Under the terms of the agreement, the costs of development (approx £10 million) are recoverable over the (10-year) life of the system.

£ million

	Accounts services provision	*PFI agreement*
1997–98	2	0
1998–99	2	0.5
1999–2000	2	1.1
2000–01	2	1.4

Advantage West Midlands

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are directly employed by Advantage West Midlands; and how many equivalent full-time posts this represents. [34806]

Alan Johnson: Advantage West Midlands employs 173 staff; this includes staff seconded to other organisations. This figure represents 170.7 full-time equivalent posts.

Skills Councils

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has made to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to include the manufacturing sector in the trailblazers for the new sector skills councils. [34577]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI was represented in the interdepartmental group that considered bids to become trailblazer sector skills councils. We are pleased that important manufacturing interests such as textiles, oil and gas production, refining and distribution and chemicals manufacture are represented amongst the trailblazers. We are committed to building the conditions in which a successful manufacturing sector can thrive. The network of business-led sector skills councils currently being put in place will provide the framework in which to develop a highly skilled workforce that will support improved productivity and innovation in manufacturing companies in the UK.

Consignia

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when a permanent chairman will be appointed to Consignia plc. [34793]

Mr. Alexander: Arrangements are in hand to recruit a permanent Chairman of Consignia. With the help of recruitment consultants, we are undertaking an open competition in accordance to the Commissioner for Public Appointments Code of Practice. We are looking to make an appointment as soon as possible. In the interim, the Board of Consignia have asked Allan Leighton to Chair the Board.

Sub-post Offices

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria will apply to the allocation of the Your Guide scheme when the pilot project is extended to the sub-post office network. [34791]

Mr. Alexander: We are currently in the process of evaluating the pilot of Your Guide running in Leicestershire and Rutland. In parallel with the evaluation we are working with the e Envoy's Office, other Departments and Consignia to design the form and content of a potential national service should the pilot prove a success.

Regional Assistance Grant (East Sussex)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much regional assistance grant to industry was awarded to each parliamentary constituency in East Sussex in each year since 1992; and if she will make a statement. [34368]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The regional selective assistance grants for each parliamentary constituency in East Sussex in each year since 1992 is set out in the table:

Regional selective assistance grant awarded in East Sussex from 1992 to 2001

Constituency	*Total number of grants*	*Total (£)*
1992	0	0
1993	0	0
1994		
Bexhill and Battle	1	40,000
Hastings and Rye	5	163,912
1995		
Bexhill and Battle	5	182,000
Hastings and Rye	14	449,000
1996		
Bexhill and Battle	7	1,033,900
Hastings and Rye	7	430,000
1997		
Bexhill and Battle	2	17,250
Hastings and Rye	6	282,000
1998		
Bexhill and Battle	1	7,000
Hastings and Rye	4	238,000
1999		
Bexhill and Battle	1	97,000
Hastings and Rye	4	226,500
2000		
Bexhill and Battle	3	93,000
Brighton Kemptown	1	660,000
Brighton Pavilion	1	95,000
Hastings and Rye	4	150,500
2001	0	0

Enterprise grants awarded in East Sussex from 1999 to 2001

Constituency	*Total number of grants*	*Total (£)*
1999	0	0
2000		
Hastings and Rye	2	26,800
Lewes	2	100,900
2001		
Bexhill and Battle	2	98,500
Hastings and Rye	3	175,350
Hove	3	104,700
Lewes	3	136,949

Cable and Wireless

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has agreed to allow Cable and Wireless to redeem the special share that the Government holds with the company. [35551]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's special share in Cable and Wireless was redeemed today for its nominal value of £1. This means that the Government no longer hold any shares in Cable and Wireless.

The Government have made this decision to remove the requirement on Cable and Wireless to obtain the Government's written consent before making certain acquisitions or disposals. This should enable Cable and Wireless to make decisions that are in its own interests and consequently to compete more effectively in the telecommunications sector.

Coal Authority Quinquennial Review

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the report of the first stage of the quinquennial review of the Coal Authority will be published. [35616]

Mr. Wilson: The report is being published today on my Department's website at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/coal/index.htm. Copies are also being placed in the Libraries of the House.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Women

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister for Women if she will make a statement on the benefits to the economy of flexible working for women. [33981]

Ms Hewitt: The economy needs a high rate of labour participation and both women and men want opportunities for productive paid employment. Flexible working is often the key to women's participation. Employers who adopt flexible working policies report that: staff are easier to attract and recruitment costs are less; skilled staff are retained and better returns are gained from training; staff turnover decreases; staff morale improves and absenteeism decreases; and changing market conditions are dealt with more effectively. In addition to the economic advantages the opportunity to work flexible hours can make a real difference to the lives of women, whether it is the woman or her partner who works flexibly; their families; and, their children.

Retention of staff is key to the stability of an organisation. The typical recruitment costs of replacing an individual have been estimated at £3,900. And these costs do not take account of the investment made in training which is lost if skilled employees have to change jobs. Skills are lost to the economy, for example, when women take lower skilled jobs and less well paid jobs on return from maternity leave. A survey of parents carried out in 2000 found that 10 per cent. of non-employed mothers with dependent children under 16 said that the lack of flexible working opportunities was the main barrier to their finding employment. The continuing pay gap is an indicator of the skills lost to the economy: women's hourly earnings are 81.6 per cent. of men's earnings.

This is why the Government are looking to improve the opportunities to work flexible hours. The Government's Work-Life Balance campaign encourages all employers to introduce ways of working which meet the needs of the business and its customers while simultaneously improving the work-life balance of their employees. In addition, for working mothers and fathers who juggle their work responsibilities with caring for their children, the Government through their Employment Bill are introducing a right to apply to work flexibly for parents with children aged under six (or 18 for parents of disabled children). If the new right encourages the participation of just 5 per cent. of mothers alone who are currently economically inactive it will increase the labour supply of women by 55,000.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for Women when she last met ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health to discuss health issues relating to women. [34015]

Ms Hewitt: The Ministers for Women, supported by the Women and Equality Unit, have worked closely with our colleagues in the Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills in the production of a report entitled "Better Services—Better Working Lives" which was published in December 2001.

The report was published as part of the Government's drive to deliver first class public services that are accessible to everyone. Women are the key users of health and education services, whether accessing the services themselves or for their children, and they are also in the forefront of delivering these services. The report which is based on the experiences of women as deliverers and users of these services will help inform future policy-making.

PRIME MINISTER

African Visit

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Prime Minister what the objectives of his forthcoming visit to Africa are; and if he will make a statement. [33781]

The Prime Minister: I visited Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal from 7–10 February. I was accompanied by the Secretary of State for International Development and my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The main purpose of my visit was to discuss with African leaders how to take forward the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NePAD) and the G8 Action Plan for Africa. I had fruitful discussions with Presidents Obasanjo, Kufuor, Kabbah and Wade. In an address to the National Assembly in Nigeria I was able to set out the need for a true partnership of shared responsibility and mutual interest between the developed world and Africa. I focused on peace and conflict resolution, good government, trade, growth, health and education—themes we were able to develop further during the visit. I also discussed with President Obasanjo the need for free and fair presidential elections in March in Zimbabwe.

I also addressed the National Parliament in Ghana and outlined the argument for a conception of aid as an investment in the future of Africa and the developed world. I visited the Ghana Armed Forces Staff College, where I met a number of African officers with experience of conflict resolution in Africa. At the Ghanaian Cocoa Research Institute in Tafo and at Suhun Co-operative I saw how Ghanaian farmers are seeking to improve cocoa production and increase the value they can add to their raw product in Ghana and discussed with them the consequences of globalisation.

In Sierra Leone I saw the real and beneficial impact the UK's commitment to conflict resolution has had and how peace has been restored to a country whose democracy and stability were threatened by armed rebels. It was heartening to see the preparations for democratic elections this May. There is a long way to go, but the healing process is under way in Sierra Leone, in large part thanks to the role played by British and United Nations forces.

In Senegal I attended a seminar hosted by President Wade on the conditions necessary to achieve growth in Africa, with President Kufuor, Vice President Zuma of South Africa, and a number of experts on regional integration President Chirac's personal representative on Africa also participated. On Sunday I visited Ouakam Centre near Dakar for people infected with HIV. HIV/AIDS is having a devastating effect in Africa. But Senegal, which has succeeded in keeping prevalence low, is a beacon of hope. I expressed our continued support for the Global Health Fund.

This visit, as well as being an important expression of UK commitment to Africa, was important in deepening the dialogue with African leaders in the run-up to June's G8 Summit to be held in Canada where the partnership between the developed world and Africa would be a key issue.

Hinduja Inquiry

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will ensure that Sir Anthony Hammond will seek evidence from *(a)* S. P. Hinduja, *(b)* G. P. Hinduja and *(c)* Davin Jewell in his reopened inquiry. [34875]

The Prime Minister: The decision who to invite for interview is a matter for Sir Anthony Hammond.

EU 037/2000

Mr. Jack: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the communications received by his Office from 20 November onwards from Mr. Bill Moyes on the subject of the implications of EU 037/2000. [34839]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, I have not received any communications.

Lord Birt

Norman Lamb: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions Lord Birt has travelled by train since his appointment to the Forward Strategy Unit. [34639]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 723–24W.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Prime Minister what experience Lord Birt has in relation to rail transport. [34789]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 298W.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will take steps to ensure that Lord Birt gives oral evidence to the Select Committees when requested. [34145]

The Prime Minister: Ministers are directly accountable to the House for their decisions and actions. It is proper for them to express a preference as to who should explain their policies and what action is being taken in the House. This is in line with the practice of successive Governments. There has been no change to the rules.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost is of the offices used by Lord Birt at 45 Old Bond street. [34146]

The Prime Minister: There are no costs to the public purse.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations he has made to the Saudi Government on the treatment of imprisoned British nationals resident there; and how many British nationals are in prison in Saudi Arabia. [34669]

The Prime Minister: The Government have made representations to the Saudi Government about those British nationals detained following a series of bombings. We continue to do so. I have personally raised these cases in my contact with the Saudi Government.

Nine British nationals are currently detained in Saudi Arabia for various alleged offences.

Broadcasting and Telecommunications Reception

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish a summary of the remarks he made at the reception held at 10 Downing street for the broadcasting and telecommunications industry. [34772]

The Prime Minister: This was an informal event. No summary of my remarks was made.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* people and the organisations they represent who (i) were invited to and (ii) attended the reception held at 10 Downing street for the broadcasting and telecommunications industry. [34771]

The Prime Minister: It is not my practice to list individual names of guests invited to receptions at 10 Downing street. A range of representatives from the communications industry attended.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Employment Rights Act

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to change the provisions of sections 50 and 51 of the Employment Rights Act 1996. [33909]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

We have no present plans.

Legal Services Ombudsman

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training she has put in place for junior staff to take additional qualifications in the office of the Legal Services Ombudsman. [33298]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All junior staff in the Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman have qualifications commensurate with their responsibilities and in line with the personnel policies of the Lord Chancellor's Department. However, the Department may assist with a proportion of the costs for staff who wish to obtain further qualifications through further education.

Auld Report

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received on the Auld consultation; and if he will place copies of the responses in the Library. [33747]

Mr. Wills: A total of 365 responses were received by the end of the period for public comment 31 January 2002. Copies of the responses will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and in the Supreme Court Library. Responses from the general public and the main criminal justice stakeholders, subject to their agreement, will also be placed on the Lord Chancellor's website www.criminal-courts-review.org.uk. The Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33853]

Mr. Wills: The information requested is as follows:

	Number of contracts	*£*
(a) PricewaterhouseCoopers		
(i) 1997–98	3	460,056
(ii) 1998–99	9	2,193,703
(iii) 1999–2000	3	360,693
(iv) 2000–01	4	65,812
(v) 2001 to date	3	73,717
(b) Ernst & Young		
(i) 1997–98	0	—
(ii) 1998–99	1	227,588
(iii) 1999–2000	1	29,375
(iv) 2000–01	2	481,749
(v) 2002 to date	3	301,720
(c) Deloitte & Touche		
(i) 1997–98	0	—
(ii) 1998–99	1	231,475
(iii) 1999–2000	4	77,546
(iv) 2000–01	4	193,778
(v) 2001 to date	11	905,050
(d) KPMG		
(i) 1997–98	3	340,426
(ii) 1998–99	1	1,433
(iii) 1999–2000	3	56,025
(iv) 2000–01	1	4,183
(v) 2001 to date	1	29,375
(e) Anderson[1]	—	—

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[1] No contracts have been let during the time period stated.

Northern Ireland Court Service could not produce figures for 1997–98 as the information is not stored on their current accounting system.

Magistrates

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to increase the maximum daily allowance for loss of earnings for magistrates. [33910]

Mr. Wills: The financial loss allowance and allowances for travel and subsistence are reviewed annually. Any new rate is effective from 1 September. The last increase was in September 2001.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates have suffered substantial loss of earnings in order to ensure that they sit on their obligatory number of sitting days in the last five years. [33904]

Mr. Wills: Such information does not exist.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of magistrates claimed loss of earnings in the last 12 months. [33911]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department does not collect figures for the proportion of magistrates claiming for loss of earnings. However, a report "The Judiciary in the Magistrates' Courts" (RDS Occasional Paper No. 66), prepared for the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Home Office, and published in late 2000 suggested that 76 per cent. of magistrates who stated that they were employed did not claim any loss of earnings.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the maximum daily allowance is for loss of earnings for a magistrate. [33905]

Mr. Wills: The financial loss allowance payable to self-employed magistrates is £41.78 for a sitting of up to four hours and £83.56 for over four hours. The amounts payable to employed magistrates, which are not taxable, are £32.17 for a sitting of up to four hours; and £64.34 for over four hours.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rural Bus Services

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 427–28W, if she will list the rural authorities and settlements that have a bus service *(a)* six days, *(b)* seven days and *(c)* six/seven days a week. [35226]

Alun Michael: The most comprehensive information about parishes and settlements and the extent to which they have a bus service *(a)* six days, *(b)* seven days and *(c)* six/seven days a week is based on completed parish clerk questionnaire responses to the Countryside Agency's Rural Services Survey. This is information collected in the year 2000 and is available on the Countryside Agency's website at: www.countryside.gov.uk/ruralservices/index.htm

It is not possible to provide a list in respect of rural authorities and settlements as requested because the information is not available in the format requested.

It should be noted that a combined list of parishes and settlements in 2000 would be over 14,000 rows long with information from 6,100 parish councils covering 12,200 settlements.

For 1997 information was collected only at parish level by the Rural Development Commission (one of the Countryside Agency's predecessor organisations). It is not readily available in a parish list format.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list, by region, the value of outstanding payments for suckler cow premium. [32618]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The value of claims awaiting payment at 31 January 2002 is as follows:

£

RPA office	*Value*
Cambridge	2,512,448.00
Carlisle	8,430,340.90
Crewe	3,231,748.40
Exeter	11,613,583.00
Newcastle	1,337,837.70
Northallerton	7,883,602.80
Nottingham	3,234,627.40
Reading	1,895,917.20
Total	40,140,105.40

EAGA

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what monitoring and evaluation systems she has in place for measuring the progress of EAGA. [33132]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* EAGA Partnership is one of the two scheme managers for the Government's Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) in England. HEES is marketed as the Warm Front Team and is the Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector.

DEFRA keeps in regular contact with EAGA Partnership. EAGA is set annual performance targets for each of its three regions. This is further broken down into the six catchment areas used by the Government Offices. These targets include: levels of spend per area and the number of householders to be assisted at the £1,000 and £2,000 grant levels. The number of central heating installations, repairs and replacement boilers to be fitted are also incorporated into the annual targets.

Monthly performance reports assess delivery against targets and covers issues such as customer care and heating capacity. This process is further strengthened by the use of an external contractor, White Young Green, to biannually audit both HEES scheme managers quality control systems.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on what procedures EAGA have for developing liaison with *(a)* energy advice offices at local level and *(b)* installers, with particular reference to warm zones. [33131]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* EAGA Partnership, is one of the two scheme managers for the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES). It works with the Energy Efficiency Advice Centres (EEACs) throughout England to promote the benefits of the scheme. A number of EEACs undertake the initial home survey where a client's eligibility for assistance under HEES is assessed. The surveyor also recommends the appropriate insulation and heating measures to be installed. The advice centres use EAGA's publicity materials to promote the scheme. EAGA is working to further strengthen its partnership links with EEACs to assist in the delivery of the scheme.

HEES installers are appointed by the scheme managers through open competition following UK Public Procurement Rules and Regulations. Appointments are made on the basis of ability to meet the technical and quality requirements of the scheme and the price tendered. Installers' catchment areas may include areas covered by The Warm Zones pilot initiatives. A number of installers work with EAGA in these areas to refer potential clients to the scheme and are required to follow a code of practice on customer care.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to ensure that moneys from the aggregates tax sustainability fund are used to support projects in areas where quarrying has the greatest environmental impact. [27839]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* Consultation on how to distribute the sustainability fund in England ended on 27 November 2001. We are currently reflecting on all the issues raised by the consultation, and decisions on the final shape and distribution of the fund are expected to be made soon.

Recycling Plants

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which EU member states have implemented EC Regulation 2037/2000; and if she will list the commencement date in each case. [32057]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* EC Regulations are directly applicable in all member states, once they enter into force they form part of the law in each member state. EC Regulation No. 2037/2000 applied from 1 October 2000. The provisions relating to the management of waste domestic refrigeration equipment came into effect on 1 January 2002.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many officials in her Department are engaged in ensuring the implementation of EC Regulation 2037/2000. [32059]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Five officials (the equivalent of approximately two full-time posts) are engaged in ensuring the implementation of the regulation with regard to the manufacture, use, trade and export of ozone depleting substances. A further six officials (the equivalent of approximately three full-time posts) are engaged on the waste management aspects of the regulation.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent meetings she has had with outside bodies regarding the implementation of EC Regulation 2037/2000; when they took place; and who was present on each occasion. [32060]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* I have not met with outside bodies regarding this matter. However, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Environment met with a number of electrical retailers on Thursday 24 January—those present at the meeting included representatives from Dixon Group plc, RETRA (Radio Electrical and Television Retailers Association) and Kingfisher plc. There have also been a number of official level meetings with representatives from local authorities, the commercial refrigeration sector, electrical retailers, the voluntary sector, trade associations, and waste management companies too.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress towards meeting the recycling targets of EC Regulation 2037/2000. [32061]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* EC Regulation No. 2037/2000 does not contain specific targets for recycling. However, there are a number of options for dealing with waste fridges including re-use, export to other member states for treatment, disposal in the UK via high temperature incineration and storage pending treatment in the UK. Investors are in the process of providing a network of new recycling facilities in the United Kingdom. I understand that the first new facilities are likely to be operational in the spring.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish detailed specifications for the design and construction of recycling plants to meet the obligations of EC Regulation 2037/2000. [32058]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Draft standards for the extraction of ozone depleting substances from waste refrigeration equipment were issued in early December. These standards are currently being finalised by the Environment Agency and will be published shortly. All plant will need to meet these standards, but other decisions regarding the design and construction of recycling plants are matters for companies investing in these facilities.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of spending by her Department against budget in the current financial year. [31968]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Spending against budget is monitored during the year. It is forecast that existing budgets will be fully utilised during the current financial year.

Recycling

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding she is providing to *(a)* Gloucestershire and *(b)* local government in England to help with recycling projects; and if she will make a statement. [34638]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The Government have increased funding for the Environmental Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) block, which includes waste management, by £1.1 billion over the SR2000 period. There is also a ring-fenced fund of £140 million for local authority recycling and £220 million for waste private finance initiative projects over the same period. Councils will also benefit from the £40 million to the waste and resources action programme to overcome market barriers to reuse and recycling of waste.

The Department has just concluded a consultation on its proposals for the distribution of the £140 million fund. At this stage it is not possible to identify what funding Gloucestershire county council might receive from this source.

Refrigerators

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the expected cost to local authorities is of providing temporary storage for refrigerators. [30321]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The estimated costs for dealing with waste fridges are in the range of £22 to £35. This figure will cover transport, handling, storage and processing. The storage element will vary according to the length of storage, location of the site, and whether the local authority own the storage site.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much funding her Department has allocated to *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council and *(b)* Aylesbury Vale district council to assist with the costs of storing and processing refrigerators and freezers; and what plans she has to make further funding available. [30043]

Mr. Meacher: £6 million has been added to the provisional local government finance settlement for 2002–03 for the costs of implementing the ozone depleting substances regulation relating to the period 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2002. This will be distributed to local authorities using Standard Spending Assessments (SSA). The extra money has been added to the upper tier sub-block of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services SSA. We are continuing to assess the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action is required beyond that.

Wye Navigation Order

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by what date she will announce her decision on the Wye Navigation Order. [34154]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be able to announce a decision by the end of June.

Sellafield

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the summary of responses to the Sellafield MOX plant consultation 2001. [32724]

Margaret Beckett: A comprehensive summary of the responses to the consultation exercises on the Sellafield MOX plant formed one of three annexes to the Decision Document, published jointly by my Department and the Department of Health on 3 October 2001. The Decision Document and the annexes can be downloaded from my Department's website www.defra.gov.uk/environment/radioactivity/mox/index.htm.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the names of respondents to the 2001 consultation on the Sellafield MOX plant who were *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the SMP. [32726]

Margaret Beckett: Government Departments undertook two consultation exercises on the Sellafield MOX plant during 2001. Copies of all the responses (about 8,000), apart from those who asked for their responses to remain confidential, are available in my Department's library.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which SMP customers have specified that they want their separated plutonium back as MOX fuel and which have indicated that they do not want it immobilised as a waste. [32727]

Margaret Beckett: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1097W.

Water Industry Act

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she intends to take to review the Water Industry Act 1991. [34069]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's draft Water Bill, published for public consultation on 6 November 2000, proposed amendments to existing water legislation including the Water Industry Act 1991. The Bill aims to give water consumers a better deal by creating a more open and accountable industry. The Bill will be introduced when parliamentary time allows.

Noise Act

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many prosecutions by local authorities there have been in each of the last three years under the Noise Act 1996. [32899]

Mr. Meacher: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Available figures for all prosecutions against noise offences are collected by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) but figures are not held specifically for prosecutions under the Noise Act 1996. Figures for 2000–01 published by CIEH were announced by me on 20 December 2001. This information has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses but is also available on both the DEFRA and CIEH websites. A summary of the figures follows:

	Category of noise nuisance					
	Industrial	*Commercial/ leisure*	*Domestic*	*Construction/ demolition sites*	*Vehicles*	*Equipment in the street*
1998–99						
Complaints received	11,393	21,493	114,245	6,543	3,764	2,762
Complaints per million population	444	836	4,330	248	146	107
Notices served[1]	313	549	3,479	442	252	54
Prosecutions[1]	12	18	168	22	12	3
Convictions[1]	10	14	156	8	0	3
1999–2000						
Complaints received	12,738	28,661	155,860	8,829	4,686	3,384
Complaints per million population	421	960	5,149	292	156	113
Notices served[1]	336	1,000	5,142	547	537	90
Prosecutions[1]	6	45	349	8	0	2
Convictions[1]	2	42	304	8	0	2
2000–01						
Complaints received	11,475	34,745	169,810	10,822	5,172	6,501
Complaints per million population	346	1,038	5,001	325	162	209
Notices served[1]	283	1,393	5,351	808	507	236
Prosecutions[1]	4	78	313	39	2	4
Convictions[1]	4	49	255	28	0	2

[1] Figures grossed where incomplete.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 781W, if the improved ELISA test was used to diagnose those animals slaughtered after the last case of foot and mouth; and if she will make a statement. [35268]

Mr. Morley: The improved ELISA test was used as a screening test in the extensive serological testing programme that took place. Sera which gave positive ELISA tests were subject to a virus neutralisation test before any decision to cull animals was taken.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when MAFF *(a)* started and *(b)* concluded its investigation into whether pigs identified as suffering from foot and mouth disease on 19 February 2001 had been fed on illegally imported meat; and what their conclusion was. [33712]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The State Veterinary Service started an epidemiological inquiry into the origins of the foot and mouth outbreak immediately the first case was confirmed. These investigations are still ongoing. There are related criminal proceedings currently under way and it would be inappropriate to comment further at this time.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what moneys are outstanding to Dumfries and Galloway council in respect of that region's foot and mouth disease containment activities in 2001. [34437]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The Department has already paid the bulk of Dumfries and Galloway council's claim in respect of their disease control costs incurred during the foot and mouth outbreak. On 24 January 2002, my officials met with representatives of the council and SEERAD officials to resolve a number of outstanding issues relating to their claim. Agreement was reached on the payment process for the remaining £2,183,428.09. This should be paid in the next few weeks.

A claim for damages to roads has been submitted by the council and is being considered by the Department.

Farm Prices

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* farmgate and *(b)* market price was of (i) sheep, (ii) pigs, (iii) beef cattle, (iv) dairy cattle, (v) broiler chickens, (vi) free range chickens, (vii) sugar beet and (viii) cereals in each year since 1990. [34868]

Mr. Morley: The following tables show the farm gate output values, variable production costs, gross margins, fixed production costs and net margins for lowland sheep, pigs, beef cattle, dairy cattle, cereals and sugar beet for those years since 1990 for which data are available. These data are based on results from DEFRA commissioned surveys into the economics of farm enterprises. Data for broiler chickens and free range chickens are not available.

Lowland sheep

£ per ewe

	Lamb crop				
	Output	*Variable costs*	*Gross margin*	*Fixed costs*	*Net margin*
1991	56	23	33	n/a	n/a
1992	57	23	34	n/a	n/a
1993	66	24	42	n/a	n/a
1994	67	25	42	51	–9
1995	71	26	45	n/a	n/a
1996	77	27	49	n/a	n/a
1997	70	27	43	n/a	n/a
1998	66	25	40	n/a	n/a
1999	57	24	32	66	–33
2000	57	25	32	n/a	n/a

Pigs[1]

£ per finished pig

October to September	*Value of finished pig*	*Feed costs*	*Margin over feed*	*Total costs*	*Net margin*
1991–92	73	42	31	64	9
1992–93	71	45	26	67	4
1993–94	62	42	20	n/a	n/a
1994–95	72	42	31	n/a	n/a
1995–96	91	47	44	n/a	n/a
1996–97	77	43	34	70	7
1997–98	59	39	20	65	–6
1998–99	49	34	15	59	–10
1999–2000	58	36	22	n/a	n/a
2000–01	68	40	28	n/a	n/a

[1] Data based on results from special surveys into the economics of pig production

Lowland beef cattle finished at 16–22 months[1]

£ per head

Calendar year	*Output*	*Variable costs*	*Gross margin*	*Fixed costs*	*Net margin*
1991	223	122	101	n/a	n/a
1992	215	126	88	n/a	n/a
1993	265	132	133	n/a	n/a
1994	266	138	129	n/a	n/a
1995	289	146	143	141	2
1996	256	163	93	158	–65
1997	198	145	53	n/a	n/a
1998	209	136	72	n/a	n/a
1999	249	134	113	n/a	n/a
2[illegible]	248	137	111	n/a	n/a

[1] Data based on results from special surveys into the economics of lowland beef production

Dairy cows

£ per cow

April to March	*Output*	*Variable costs*	*Gross margin*	*Fixed costs*	*Net margin*
1991–92	1,149	413	737	n/a	n/a
1992–93	1,240	427	813	n/a	n/a
1993–94	1,297	468	829	n/a	n/a
1994–95	1,318	497	821	n/a	n/a
1995–96	1,453	555	897	n/a	n/a
1996–97	1,480	547	933	574	359
1997–98	1,293	485	808	n/a	n/a
1998–99	1,192	441	751	n/a	n/a
1999–2000	1,117	448	669	n/a	n/a
2000–01	1,137	455	682	n/a	n/a

Winter wheat

£ per ha

Harvest year	*Output*	*Variable costs*	*Gross margin*	*Fixed costs*	*Net margin*
1991	861	258	603	n/a	n/a
1992	892	253	640	n/a	n/a
1993	952	265	688	365	322
1994	1,063	268	795	n/a	n/a
1995	1,253	281	972	n/a	n/a
1996	1,157	300	857	n/a	n/a
1997	919	309	610	n/a	n/a
1998	856	279	577	429	148
1999	872	255	617	n/a	n/a
2000	835	256	579	n/a	n/a

Barley

£ per ha

Harvest year	*Output*	*Variable costs*	*Gross margin*	*Fixed costs*	*Net margin*
1991	659	212	447	n/a	n/a
1992	764	211	553	n/a	n/a
1993	805	212	593	360	233
1994	895	213	682	n/a	n/a
1995	1,076	224	852	n/a	n/a
1996	1,028	247	780	n/a	n/a
1997	804	249	555	n/a	n/a
1998	735	226	509	418	91
1999	761	205	556	n/a	n/a
2000	732	207	525	n/a	n/a

Sugar beet—harvest year 1995

	£ per ha
Output	1,886
Variable costs	636
Gross margin	1,249
Fixed costs	564
Net margin	685

Note:

Figures may not add due to rounding

Dairy Farms

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the revenue lost per annum since 1990 to dairy farms as a result of *(a)* bovine TB, *(b)* pneumonia, *(c)* bovine viral diarrhoea, (c) mastitis, *(d)* calf scours and *(e)* foot rot, broken down by constituency. [31809]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Information is not collated on the impact on farmers' revenues of different animal diseases.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average veterinary costs per annum since 1990 to dairy farms were as a result of *(a)* bovine TB, *(b)* pneumonia, *(c)* bovine viral diarrhoea, (c) mastitis, *(d)* calf scours and *(e)* foot rot, broken down by constituency. [31810]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* While estimates of average veterinary costs per farm for dairy farms are available, it is not possible to attribute these costs to specific animal diseases nor to give these by constituency.

Genotype Test Errors

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 240W, on genotype test errors, if she will list *(a)* the total number of samples that were originally tested, *(b)* the number of samples that were originally tested that were found to have been wrong, *(c)* the total number of samples that have been retested and *(d)* the total number of samples that have been retested that were subsequently found to be wrong. [33777]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) Total number of samples that were originally tested by LGC

Up to 4,257

(Note: This is the total number of samples that had been sent to LGC by DEFRA: results had been reported to DEFRA for 2,420 of these at the time the problem was identified.)

(b) Number of samples that were originally tested that were found to have been wrong

At the time the problems emerged, LGC estimated that up to 356 samples had been wrongly reported to DEFRA. A definitive figure could not be arrived at prior to re-testing of all samples.

(c) Total number of samples that have been retested

4,257

(Note: That is, all the samples that had been sent to LGC were re-tested.)

(d) The total number of samples that have been re-tested that were subsequently found to be wrong.

304

The number that had been reported to sheep flock owners is 39, representing less that 0.2 per cent. of the total samples processed by the two private-sector laboratories (of which LGC is one) contracted to provide genotyping services to DEFRA.

(Note: The figure of 304 is the number of original samples which, as a result of re-testing, were found to have had been wrongly reported to DEFRA.)

Mains Sewerage

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to set targets to reduce the number of residential properties not connected to mains sewerage. [32264]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* It would not be practicable to set targets as it is largely a matter between householders and sewerage undertakers which has to be considered on a case-by-case basis. If their existing non mains drainage system is causing an environmental or amenity problem, householders can apply to the sewerage undertaker to provide mains sewerage, the cost of which would be met by customers generally if the specified criteria are met. Alternatively, a householder not on mains sewerage can requisition a sewer from the sewerage undertaker with the householder meeting the cost.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many residential properties in each region have been connected to mains sewerage for the first time in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [32265]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Ofwat does not collect information on how many residential properties in each region are connected to mains sewerage each year. It collects estimates from sewerage companies each year of the number of households served by those companies. Estimates for the year 2001–02 are published by Ofwat in "Tariff structure and charges 2001–02 report". Copies are in the Library. The figures for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are as follows.

Thousand

	Householders	
	2000–01	*2001–02*
Anglian Water	2,188	2,208
Dwy Cymru	1,177	1,192
United Utilities	2,706	2,737
Northumbrian Water	1,049	1,042
Severn Trent Water	3,291	3,314
South West Water	569	576
Southern Water	1,610	1,628
Thames Water	4,830	4,883
Wessex Water	982	947
Yorkshire Water	1,864	1,886

Correspondence

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber of 3 July 2001 on behalf of Dr. A. Jones of Nethy Bridge. [32246]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* We have no record of having received the letter referred to by my hon. Friend.

Circuses

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the animal welfare implications of circus practices involving the use of animals within the UK; and if she will make a statement. [30443]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 239W.

Regional Food

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to promote regional food chain supply and marketing initiatives. [32897]

Mr. Morley: We are pursuing a wide range of activities at regional and national level, directly and through bodies such as the Countryside Agency and Food from Britain which we grant aid. Support for appropriate projects is also available under the England Rural Development Programme.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent on administering the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; and what proportion of total spending on the Countryside Stewardship Scheme was paid to farmers in each of the last five years. [33100]

Mr. Morley: The table shows how much of the Department's running cost budget has been spent on administering the Countryside Stewardship Scheme over the last five years compared with payments to farmers over the same period (the latter is also expressed as a percentage of the total).

£000

	Administration costs	Payments to farmers	Percentage payments to farmers
1997–98	6,690	15,078	69
1998–99	7,643	19,896	72
1999–2000	8,541	23,892	74
2000–01	13,712	29,753	68
2001–02[1]	8,911	48,893	85

[1] 2001–02 figures are provisional and not strictly comparable with previous years, owing to 1. the creation of the Rural Development Service on 1 April 2001; 2. the diversion of staff on to FMD duties during the course of 2001.

Badgers

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she issues on the relocation of badgers in suburban areas from *(a)* private home owners, *(b)* schools and *(c)* other public buildings. [32809]

Mr. Morley: Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. For the purposes of preventing serious damage to property there is provision within the legislation for action to be taken under a licence from the Department. This is assessed on a case-by-case basis. Where relocation is the only feasible option the Department provides technical advice.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has made to the Department of Health regarding the transmission of TB by badgers. [32846]

Mr. Morley: In order to keep under review the potential of Mycobacterium bovis to infect humans a Joint Liaison Group on Bovine Tuberculosis in Animals and Man was established between the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health (DH). Liaison between the Department and DH continues through the Chief Medical Officer's UK Zoonoses Group.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost to her Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34177]

Mr. Morley: The Department has only been in existence since June 2001, so does not have such historical information. The forecast cost in 2001–02 for accountancy services is £561k.

National Parks

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will give national parks the right to be represented on regional assemblies. [34128]

Alun Michael: The Government's proposals for elected regional assemblies in England will be presented to Parliament in a White Paper as soon as it is ready. This will set out the relationship between assemblies and other local and regional stakeholders.

Dorset

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the financial initiatives and resources sponsored by her Department in the last 12 months for Dorset which are additional to the Government SSA grants. [29890]

Mr. Morley: The major financial initiatives and resources sponsored in the last 12 months for Dorset are:

(a) Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments

£000

Scheme	*UK*	*EU*
Arable Area Payment Scheme	427	200
Beef Special Premium Scheme	59	2,265
Countryside Stewardship Scheme	427	200
Extensification Payment Scheme	23	788
Environmentally Sensitive Areas	206	188
Slaughter Premium Scheme (EUTM)	0	122
Exception Payments (Miscellaneous)	23	0
Farm Woodland Premium Scheme	12	4
Farm Woodland Scheme	6	1
Organic Farming Scheme	325	303
Sheep Annual Premium Scheme	0	1,002
Suckler Cow Premium Scheme	2	1,095
Slaughter Premium Scheme	0	3

(b) Flood and Coastal Defences

In the last 12 months the following schemes and studies have been approved for grant aid:

Operating authority	*Scheme*
Purbeck borough council	Evening Hill coast protection Swanage beach management study Durlston Bay strategy study
Bournemouth borough council	Poole and Christchurch Bay strategy study
West Dorset district council	Beaminster Ph3A flood alleviation Lyme Regis (Windsor Terrace) flood alleviation Preston Brook study
Environment Agency	Pymore flood alleviation Flood warning improvements

The Department has paid grants of some £756,000 to the named schemes, as well as other on-going schemes.

As part of the response to the autumn 2000 floods, the Department has further provided the Environment Agency with special contributions towards the costs of (i) emergency response and repairs and (ii) design and feasibility for accelerated river defences. The contributions made to the Avon/Dorset Flood Defence Committee in the last 12 months for these items have totalled £413,000 and £164,000 respectively.

Farm Payments

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total amount paid to farm businesses was in each of the last five years, indicating in each case the cost of administering the *(a)* arable area payment scheme, *(b)* suckler cow premium scheme, *(c)* hill livestock compensatory allowance, *(d)* hill farming allowance, *(e)* countryside stewardship scheme and *(f)* environmentally sensitive areas schemes. [27758]

Mr. Morley: The amounts paid for *(a)* arable area payments scheme were:

£

Scheme year	*Amount paid*	*Administration costs*
1996	1,054,740,241	6,824,000
1997	1,055,721,796	6,388,000
1998	685,942,025	6,730,000
1999	1,130,409,358	6,347,000
2000	882,979,696	[1]7,222,000

[1] Estimated outturn

The amounts paid for *(b)* suckler cow premium scheme were:

£

Scheme year	*Amount paid*	*Administration costs*
1996	81,524,702	2,685,900
1997	78,762,180	2,373,600
1998	77,854,276	2,493,300
1999	70,567,139	3,752,071
2000	67,923,516	3,742,781

The amounts paid for *(c)* hill livestock compensatory allowance were:

£

Scheme year	*Amount paid*	*Administration costs*
1996	27,128,357	1,127,000
1997	42,398,518	996,000
1998	28,086,148	1,046,000
1999	44,288,837	1,755,281
2000	43,666,451	927,037

There were no amounts paid for *(d)* hill farm allowance for these periods.

The amounts paid for *(e)* countryside stewardship scheme were:

£

Scheme year	*Amount paid*	*Administration costs*
1996	12,468,000	2,031,000
1997	17,126,000	1,793,000
1998	22,030,000	1,884,000
1999	26,038,000	1,773,000
2000	31,915,000	2,918,000

The amounts paid for *(f)* environmentally sensitive areas scheme were:

£

Scheme year	*Amount paid*	*Administration costs*
1996	27,591,000	1,461,000
1997	32,984,000	1,290,000
1998	36,376,000	1,355,000
1999	41,144,000	1,743,000
2000	43,807,000	2,005,000

Farm Closures

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* farms and *(b)* farm closures there were in each constituency in each year since 1990. [34874]

Mr. Morley: Figures showing the number of farms in each constituency for 1990, 1995 and 2000 are being made available in the House of Commons Library. Figures are not readily available for the years in between. Information on the number of farm closures in each constituency is not available.

Ministerial Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list each of the overseas trips made by herself and other members of her ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30174]

Mr. Morley: I refer to the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 707W.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Higher Education (Bassetlaw)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of people in Bassetlaw have attended higher education; and what the national average is. [29389]

Margaret Hodge: The latest available figures from the local area labour force survey show that, in 2000–01, 18.3 per cent. of people of working age resident in the constituency of Bassetlaw held a qualification at degree level (or equivalent) or above, compared to 23.3 per cent. in the United Kingdom.

Student Tuition Fees

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many representations she has received since 1997 from *(a)* education bodies and groups, *(b)* hon. Members and *(c)* members of the public concerning tuition fees for students; and if she will make a statement. [30970]

Margaret Hodge: Since 1 April 2000 the Department has received 103 letters from hon. Members and 421 letters from members of the public about tuition fees in higher education. We cannot give a breakdown of how many letters on this subject were received from education bodies and groups. Prior to 1 April 2000, no centralised electronic record was kept and we cannot therefore give reliable information.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a review of higher education student finance in October. In view of the benefits conferred on individuals by higher education, the Government believe it is right for students and their families to contribute to the cost. We are re-examining the balance of contributions between the state, the students and their families to ensure that we have appropriate arrangements in place to expand participation to 50 per cent. of those aged 18–30 by 2010.

Higher Education (Access)

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on Government policy relating to widening participation in higher education. [31149]

Margaret Hodge: The Government's policy is to increase participation so that by the end of the decade, 50 per cent. of 18 to 30 year olds have the opportunity to experience higher education. As part of this objective, the Government intend to widen participation to those groups traditionally under-represented in higher education. We have taken a number of steps to support our policy. They include the Excellence Challenge programme, targeted at raising the aspirations of young people from our cities, educational maintenance allowances introduced in pilot areas to encourage greater staying-on and attainment rates post-16; policy to raise levels at 16 and 18, by driving up standards in secondary schools; the Connexions Service, to ensure that young people get the advice and support they need to achieve; and new qualifications in school, college and university to expand choices of study.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many universities had agreed a target for widening participation by 31 December 2001. [33030]

Margaret Hodge: 122 of the 126 higher education institutions that were required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to submit widening participation strategies, have agreed their targets with the funding council. HEFCE is working with the four outstanding institutions to agree their targets and we expect those targets to be agreed as soon as possible.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial penalties she plans to impose on institutions which do not agree targets on widening participation in university education. [33031]

Margaret Hodge: The funding of individual higher education institutions, and the terms and conditions of grant, are matters for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). In HEFCE circular 01/29, the Funding Council stated that:

> "If (Widening Participation) strategies and acceptable accompanying action plans are not submitted, we may withhold all or part of the funding for 2001–02 from the postcode premium, and/or aspiration funding, where applicable. Funding for future years (2002–03, 2003–04) will be released on the production and approval of a report on progress towards the targets set in the action plan".

HEFCE is at present considering what further measures to introduce, and will consult with the sector about this shortly.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given HEFCE on promoting wider participation in university education. [33032]

Margaret Hodge: The guidance, which the Secretary of State has provided to HEFCE was outlined in the grant letter of 29 November 2001 to the council, a copy of which can be found in the Commons Library. This guidance emphasises the importance given to the Government's commitment to widen participation and to meet their target of ensuring that 50 per cent. of young people should have the opportunity to benefit from higher education by the time they reach 30 years of age.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the cost of meeting the Government's target on widening participation in university education. [33035]

Margaret Hodge: The Government are committed to increasing and widening participation. Costs are being considered as part of the spending review. The outcome of the spending review will be made public in the summer.

Departmental Leave Entitlement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in her Department in each of the last four years. [31752]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since 1 April 2000 all staff outside of the senior civil service have been entitled to 25 days annual leave on appointment, rising to 30 days after 10 years' service.

Between 1 August 1998 and 31 March 2000, staff up to and including Higher Executive Officer (HEO) were entitled to 25 days on appointment. Staff in grades up to and including HEO equivalent qualified for 30 days entitlement after 15 years' service. Staff at Senior Executive Officer (SEO)—Grade 6 continued to qualify for 30 days after 10 years service.

Prior to 1 August 1998, staff in grades up to and including HEO equivalent received 22 days entitlement on appointment, rising to 25 days after one year. Staff in grades at SEO—Grade 6 received 25 days on appointment. Staff in grades up to Executive Officer (EO) equivalent qualified for 30 days entitlement after 20 years' service, staff at HEO equivalent qualified for 30 days after 15 years' service, and SEO—Grade 6 qualified for 30 days after 10 years' service.

Annual leave entitlement for members of the senior civil service is set at 30 days and has been for the last four years.

Student Finance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what grants and loans are available to a higher education non-home student living and studying outside London, with parents *(a)* who are each earning £20,000 a year and are divorced, *(b)* who are each earning £20,000 a year and are married and *(c)* one whom is earning £40,000 a year and the other of whom earns nothing. [32732]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The starting point for assessment of student support is the parents' gross taxable income. This is reduced by certain allowances, largely pension contributions that qualify for tax relief, to produce a residual income. In the case of divorced or separated parents, local education authorities will normally base the assessment on the parent's residual income with whom the student lives.

In 2001–02 academic year, a student who was living away from the parental home, studying outside London, whose parent's residual income is £20,000 a year would be eligible to receive a public contribution of £1,030 towards their tuition fees and a student loan of £3,815.

A student with the same circumstances but whose parents are married and have a combined residual income of £40,000 would be liable to meet the full cost of tuition fees of £1,075 but would be eligible to receive a student loan of £2,860. The same level of support would also be available to a student where one parent had a residual income of £40,000 a year and the other parent had no income as the public support we provide is based on joint parental income.

Examination Marking

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many examiners in England and Wales were examining *(a)* A-level, *(b)* AS-level and *(c)* GCSE for the first time in 2001; what percentage the total of these figures is of the total number of examiners; and what the comparable (i) A-level and (ii) GCSE figures were for 1997. [33106]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Data on first time examiners recruited by the awarding bodies are not collated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority or the Department. Each awarding body keeps its own records.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to encourage participation by her Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33550]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We welcome initiatives that aim to support sustainable development education. Various areas of the curriculum in England provide opportunities to study fair trade and other international development issues in all sectors of education. It is up to educational institutions to choose whether and how to take part in a particular initiative such as Fair Trade Fortnight. The Department for International Development is providing £120,000 to the Fairtrade Foundation over three years (2001–03) in support of its annual Fair Trade Fortnight campaigns.

Class Sizes (St. Helens)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* five, *(b)* six and *(c)* seven-year-olds in (i) St. Helens, South, (ii) St. Helens metropolitan borough authority and (iii) Merseyside were in class sizes of over 30 in (A) 1997, (B) 1998, (C) 1999, (D) 2000 and (E) 2001. [33696]

John Healey: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of key stage 1 pupils in classes of 31 or more taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools[1]—as at January each year

	St. Helens, South	*St. Helens local education authority*	*Merseyside Government office region*	*England*
1997	1,080	2,463	15,859	476,822
1998	1,087	2,519	16,293	485,311
1999	990	2,271	11,746	356,586
2000	561	1,050	[2]—	176,962
2001	32	32	[2]—	35,813

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed

[2] Not applicable

Source:

Annual Schools Census

From January 2000 the Merseyside region was included within the north-west Government office region.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W, how many learning providers fall into each decile measured by the amount owed to them by her Department *(a)* on 23 November 2001 and *(b)* on 24 October 2001; and what was the upper and lower value of each decile. [33786]

John Healey *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The figures for amounts owed in the tables include payments due for eligible claims and amounts withheld from providers already suspended prior to the closure of the programme on 23 November. The figures for amounts owed in the table for 23 November also include amounts withheld pending validation checks on claims.

(a) Amounts owed to providers at 23 November 2001

Decile	*Range start (£)*	*Range end (£)*	*Number of registered providers*
1	1	100,826	2,323
2	100,826	201,651	23
3	201,651	302,477	9
4	302,477	403,303	6
5	403,303	504,129	0
6	504,129	604,954	2
7	604,954	705,780	0
8	705,780	806,606	1
9	806,606	907,431	0
10	907,431	1,008,257	1
Total			2,365

(b) Amounts owed to providers at 24 October 2001

Decile	*Range start (£)*	*Range end (£)*	*Number of registered providers*
1	1	34,660	1,238
2	34,660	69,320	33
3	69,320	103,980	8
4	103,980	138,640	0
5	138,640	173,300	3
6	173,300	207,960	0
7	207,960	242,620	1
8	242,620	277,280	0
9	277,280	311,940	1
10	311,940	346,600	1
Total			1,285

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many learning providers under the ILA scheme fall into each decile measured by the value of their work for the Department; and what was the upper and lower value of each decile. [33787]

John Healey *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The figures of registered learning providers listed in the table relate only to those providers who have at some stage made claims through the Individual Learning Account Centre system. The value of work covers the period from 1 September 2000 to 23 November 2001 and includes amounts withheld from providers already suspended prior to the programme closure on 23 November and amounts withheld pending validation checks on claims.

Decile	Range start (£)	Range end (£)	Number of registered providers
1	1	626,347	5,984
2	626,347	1,252,694	48
3	1,252,694	1,879,042	20
4	1,879,042	2,505,389	3
5	2,505,389	3,131,736	1
6	3,131,736	3,758,083	1
7	3,758,083	4,384,430	1
8	4,384,430	5,010,778	0
9	5,010,778	5,637,125	0
10	5,637,125	6,263,472	2
Total			6,060

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the level of fraud discovered in individual learning accounts. [34012]

John Healey: The Department's Special Investigations Unit is investigating 93 registered learning providers. Of these, police are investigating 13 and the Department's Special Investigation Unit is discussing a further 53 with the police.

44 arrests have been made in relation to allegations of fraud with the operation of the individual learning account programme, 12 have been charged one of whom has been convicted.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [34207]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following table details the equipment stolen or lost from the Department for Education and Skills, valued less than £50 each.

Financial year 1998–99: Nil return

Financial year 1999–2000: Nil return

Financial year 2000–01: Nil return.

Financial year 2001–02

Description	Telephone charger	Dictaphone
Number of items	1	1
Approximate value per item (£)	25	40
Total approximate value (£)	25	40

Note:

The total number of items stolen amounts to £65 for the last four years.

English Baccalaureate

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans her Department has to introduce an English Baccalaureate; and if she will make a statement. [34565]

Mr. Timms: The White Paper, "Schools: achieving success" explains that we want to begin a debate about how to develop a coherent 14–19 education phase. As part of such a phase, the White Paper puts forward the proposal for an overarching award that would recognise achievement in both academic and vocational subjects. A forthcoming 14–19 consultation paper will consider the proposal for such an award in more detail.

AS Levels

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many representations have been made to the Hargreaves inquiry on the first year of AS levels. [34662]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority received 150 representations about AS levels while compiling its report into Curriculum 2000.

Standard Spending Assessment (LEAs)

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will rank each local education authority by *(a)* the average salary per teacher and *(b)* the funding per pupil allocated through the standard spending assessment for the latest year for which figures are available. [34798]

Mr. Timms: The rankings of each LEA with regard to average teacher salary at 31 March 2000 and primary and secondary SSA per pupil in 2002–03 are as follows. A ranking of 1 denotes highest average salary and highest funding per pupil.

Lea number	LEA name	Average salary rank	SSA pp rank
201	City of London	31	13
202	Camden	3	8
203	Greenwich	10	12
204	Hackney	2	4
205	Hammersmith and Fulham	8	7
206	Islington	11	5
207	Kensington and Chelsea	1	6
208	Lambeth	6	3
209	Lewisham	7	10
210	Southwark	4	9
211	Tower Hamlets	5	2
212	Wandsworth	15	16
213	Westminster	13	11
301	Barking and Dagenham	17	22
302	Barnet	25	30
303	Bexley	33	40
304	Brent	9	17
305	Bromley	21	47
306	Croydon	24	25
307	Ealing	19	19
308	Enfield	23	23
309	Haringey	12	15
310	Harrow	22	31
311	Havering	20	45
312	Hillingdon	32	32
313	Hounslow	26	21
314	Kingston upon Thames	27	46
315	Merton	14	28
316	Newham	16	14
317	Redbridge	28	29
318	Richmond upon Thames	29	63
319	Sutton	30	41
320	Waltham Forest	18	18
330	Birmingham	65	33
331	Coventry	40	70
332	Dudley	110	133
333	Sandwell	113	57
334	Solihull	129	144
335	Walsall	70	92
336	Wolverhampton	53	55
340	Knowsley	137	26
341	Liverpool	45	27

Lea number	*LEA name*	*Average salary rank*	*SSA pp rank*
342	St. Helens	42	95
343	Sefton	72	101
344	Wirral	36	69
350	Bolton	127	103
351	Bury	80	123
352	Manchester[1]	150	24
353	Oldham	106	76
354	Rochdale	102	67
355	Salford	149	61
356	Stockport	81	143
357	Tameside	130	104
358	Trafford	71	119
359	Wigan	62	129
370	Barnsley[1]	140	100
371	Doncaster	82	77
372	Rotherham	67	112
373	Sheffield[1]	96	86
380	Bradford	69	51
381	Calderdale	99	93
382	Kirklees	79	89
383	Leeds	58	98
384	Wakefield	139	120
390	Gateshead	142	85
391	Newcastle upon Tyne	118	43
392	North Tyneside	89	115
393	South Tyneside	55	59
394	Sunderland	104	78
420	Isles of Scilly	39	1
800	Bath and North East Somerset	78	148
801	Bristol, City of	105	80
802	North Somerset	95	138
803	South Gloucestershire	117	150
805	Hartlepool	141	74
806	Middlesbrough	107	37
807	Redcar and Cleveland	144	71
808	Stockton-on-Tees	132	90
810	Kingston Upon Hull, City of	94	48
811	East Riding of Yorkshire	92	130
812	North East Lincolnshire	116	75
813	North Lincolnshire	85	94
815	North Yorkshire	60	118
816	York	112	137
820	Bedfordshire	83	82
821	Luton	35	34
825	Buckinghamshire	73	83
826	Milton Keynes	100	58
830	Derbyshire	57	134
831	Derby	68	79
835	Dorset	108	131
836	Poole	101	145
837	Bournemouth	97	110
840	Durham	135	91
841	Darlington	133	106
845	East Sussex	122	62
846	Brighton and Hove	90	44
850	Hampshire	120	113
851	Portsmouth	119	52
852	Southampton	147	39
855	Leicestershire[1]	103	149
856	Leicester	84	38
857	Rutland	37	147
860	Staffordshire	98	142
861	Stoke-on-Trent	121	81
865	Wiltshire	77	128
866	Swindon	148	136
867	Bracknell Forest	51	72
868	Windsor and Maidenhead	34	60
869	West Berkshire	111	107
870	Reading	134	49
871	Slough	66	20
872	Wokingham	54	139
873	Cambridgeshire	128	127
874	Peterborough	136	64
875	Cheshire	114	141
876	Halton	124	54
877	Warrington	143	146
878	Devon	75	117
879	Plymouth	59	97
880	Torbay	123	105
881	Essex	46	65
882	Southend-on-Sea	44	53
883	Thurrock	48	36
884	Herefordshire	91	111
885	Worcestershire	87	140
886	Kent	56	66
887	Medway	43	73
888	Lancashire	74	109
889	Blackburn with Darwen	76	50
890	Blackpool	145	88
891	Nottinghamshire	38	126
892	Nottingham	125	35
893	Shropshire	49	121
894	Telford and Wrekin	52	96
908	Cornwall	50	99
909	Cumbria	63	114
916	Gloucestershire	126	132
919	Hertfordshire	64	56
921	Isle of Wight	138	42
925	Lincolnshire	88	108
926	Norfolk	61	102
928	Northamptonshire	131	124
929	Northumberland	47	116
931	Oxfordshire	109	84
933	Somerset	41	122
935	Suffolk	86	125
936	Surrey	146	68
937	Warwickshire	115	135
938	West Sussex	93	87

[1] These LEAs have returned data for less than 20 per cent. of their teachers. To estimate average salaries in these authorities, figures from March 1999 were grossed up by 3.9 per cent.

Amy Gehring

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what date her Department received notification from Surrey police of their concerns about Miss Amy Gehring; what action was taken to consider her inclusion on list 99 before the conclusion of recent criminal proceedings; and when Ministers were informed of the communication from Surrey police. [35222]

Mr. Timms: The Department received a letter on 20 November 2000 from Surrey police which contained factual information about allegations made against Miss Gehring, and stated that no further police action would be taken. The letter did not express concern about the risk that Miss Gehring might pose to children. By this time Timeplan had already placed Miss Gehring in the school where more alleged assaults took place, having failed to inform the LEA, DfES or the school of a Surrey child protection unit warning that she was a serious risk to children. After receiving information from the police my officials initiated their list 99 procedures, making a criminal background check and writing to Timeplan seeking copies of all the documents relating to the case. On 8 January 2001 my officials were informed by Surrey police that Miss Gehring's conduct was the subject of a fresh police investigation and they followed our normal practice of suspending further inquiries until documents, witness statements and other evidence from the police investigation and trial became available. Ministers were informed of the initial letter from Surrey police on 24 January 2002.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners have *(a)* claimed and *(b)* been awarded the minimum income guarantee in Shrewsbury and Atcham; and if he will make a statement. [32588]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested.

As at August 2001 there were 2,900 minimum income guarantee (MIG) claimants in the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the proportion of *(a)* men and *(b)* women over state pension age who have income from earnings. [32616]

Mr. McCartney: The information required is not fully available in the format requested. However such information as is available shows that 15 per cent. of pensioner couples have income from earnings and 4 per cent. of single male pensioners and 4 per cent. of single female pensioners have income from earnings.

Source:

The Family Resources Survey 1999/2000

Industrial Action (Jobcentre Plus)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he last met the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus to discuss the industrial action by Public and Commercial Services Union staff; and what the outcome of the discussions were. [32646]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly meets the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus to discuss a range of issues, including the current industrial dispute with the Public and Commercial Services Union.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 38W, to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant), on pension savings, what the source is of his estimates of contributions to non-state pensions; and if he will provide a breakdown of these totals between different categories of employer and different categories of non-state pension scheme. [32756]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The source of the estimates of contributions to non-state pensions provided to the hon. Member for Lichfield was the Office for National Statistics MQ5 publication as quoted in "Opportunity for All" (Cm 5260). The figures are calculated by summing the contributions of both employers and employees to self-administered pension funds and income for pension business of insurance companies. Data are not available to break down the information as requested.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information will be provided on combined pension forecasts to advise individuals of any loss of entitlement to means-tested benefits. [15796]

Mr. McCartney: The purpose of the combined pension forecast is to provide people with good information about their current and future retirement incomes in order to help them make better informed decisions about their needs in retirement and raise awareness of the importance of making adequate provision.

The forecast provides information from both employers/pension scheme providers and the Department about current and projected entitlements that could be accrued through the payment of contributions.

Motability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was *(a)* the total number of applicants for Motability vehicles, *(b)* the number of successful applicants *(c)* the number of successful applicants who cease to qualify after approval but before a vehicle is provided, in each of the last four years. [32892]

Maria Eagle: Information is not available in the form requested. The available information is shown in the table.

Calendar years

	Applications received	*Agreements made live*
1998	166,030	136,023
1999	194,664	147,022
2000	201,498	146,076
2001	196,224	141,445

Applications may be made up to three months before delivery, and the differences between the numbers of applications received, processed and promulgated can be due to a number of causes, but principally are the result of either lack of appropriate benefit entitlement, dealer-related errors or changing customer preferences resulting in a fresh application for a different vehicle.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the length of waiting time and the number of people waiting for an application for a Motability vehicle, from initial application to delivery of the vehicle, was in each of the last three years. [32978]

Maria Eagle: There has never been a waiting list for the Motability main scheme.

Winter Fuel Payments

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 262W, ref 29706, on winter fuel payments, in what format such information is available. [32921]

Mr. McCartney: Information relating to the number of winter fuel payments by age band is not available. The table shows the number of men, by local authority area, in Scotland who received a payment last year. The information is not available for earlier years, and the details for this winter are not yet available.

Men in Scotland who received a winter fuel payment in 2000–01 by local authority area

	Number
All	409,500
City of Aberdeen	15,620
Aberdeenshire	17,980
Angus	9,700
Argyll and Bute	7,840
Scottish Borders	9,860
Clackmannanshire	3,500
West Dumbartonshire	7,100
Dumfries and Galloway	14,000
City of Dundee	12,220
East Ayrshire	10,040
East Dumbartonshire	8,760
East Lothian	8,360
East Renfrewshire	8,000
City of Edinburgh	33,000
Falkirk	11,980
Fife	28,780
City of Glasgow	43,380
Highland	17,820
Inverclyde	7,340
Midlothian	6,680
Moray	8,020
North Ayrshire	10,680
North Lanarkshire	22,660
Orkney Islands	2,060
Perthshire and Kinross	13,380
Renfrewshire	14,160
Shetland Isles	1,800
South Ayrshire	10,120
South Lanarkshire	24,480
Stirling	7,300
West Lothian	10,520
Western Isles	2,360

Source:

WPF data based on 5 per cent. sample from Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service, so subject to sampling error.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for each year since 1997, *(a)* how many and *(b)* what proportion of men aged between 60 and 64 years, who were not in receipt of a social security benefit, received a winter fuel payment. [33623]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. However, over 600,000 men who are not in receipt of a social security benefit received a winter fuel payment last year.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what methods and outlets were used in 2000–01 to publicise entitlement to winter fuel payments. [18986]

Mr. McCartney: We have run information campaigns for both winter 2000 and winter 2001, to inform people aged 60 and over about winter fuel payments.

Activities include: press advertisements in national newspapers including titles in Scotland and Wales; a leaflet and poster; a dedicated winter fuel payment helpline and on-going information on the internet. We distributed leaflets and posters to a variety of venues including: local social security offices; post offices; people in caring and advisory roles; libraries; town halls; hospitals; supermarkets; bingo halls; fuel outlets; doctors' surgeries; as well as from our orderline. We have worked successfully with a number of voluntary organisations who distributed our leaflets amongst their networks, including Age Concern, National Pensioners' Convention, Local Government Organisation and Citizens' Advice Bureaux. National and regional press releases were issued to highlight the winter fuel payment campaign to the press.

A mailshot was also undertaken in spring each year to people we could identify as being newly eligible for a winter fuel payment, and who would need to claim it, to inform them of the payment.

State Pension (Spanish Residents)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people receiving UK state pensions are resident in Spain. [33488]

Mr. McCartney: At 31 March 2001 there were 43,100 people in receipt of UK state retirement pensions resident in Spain.

Source:

Pensions Strategy Computer System at 31 March 2001 based on a 5 per cent. sample.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Mortgages

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people no longer receive income support as a result of the fall in interest rates affecting mortgages over the past six months. [33962]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years, giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34181]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Consultancy Services

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33842]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested on the number of contracts let is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information requested on remuneration is provided in the table.

Remuneration

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
PricewaterhouseCoopers	1.7	1.2	0.3	0.5	0.3
Ernst & Young	1.9	2.7	3.8	0.98	0.97
Deloitte & Touche	2.4	2.4	2.8	10.7	3.6
KPMG	0.1	1.0	0.42	0.52	0.90
Andersen Consulting	18.4	21.3	9.0	Nil	Nil

Notes:

1. Figures to 2000–01 relate to contracts awarded by the ex-Department of Social Security.

2. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC)—was formed on 1 July 1998 as the result of a merger of the Price Waterhouse and Coopers & Lybrand organisations. PWC spend for the 1997–98 was split with Price Waterhouse accounting for just over £1 million and Coopers & Lybrand, £685,000. Figures from 1 September 2000 may not show the full value of DSS/DWP business to PWC as payment for any work it has done, via its membership of the EDS-led Affinity consortium under the ACCORD contract, is made direct to EDS. Of the total shown so far for 2001–02, £54,000 is in respect of work done for the Employment Service part of DWP and £268,000 for the former DSS part.

3. Ernst & Young/CGEY—The consulting arm of Ernst & Young was purchased by Cap Gemini in 2000 to form Cap Gemini Ernst & Young (CGEY). The figure for 2000–01 is made up of £620,000 paid to Ernst & Young and £357,000 to CGEY. All of the 2001–02 spend is with CGEY, £63,000 of this being in respect of work for the former ES part of DWP and £911,000 with the ex-DSS part.

4. Andersen Consulting—The figures in the table relate to Andersen Consulting—rather than its former sister organisation within Andersen Worldwide, Arthur Andersen (AA). Andersen Consulting split from the Andersen Worldwide organisation in 1999 and has been known as Accenture since January 2000. The figures shown for 1997–8 to 1999–2000 largely reflect business which moved to Inland Revenue with the transfer of the Contributions Agency in April 2000.

Benefit Recipients

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit recipients he estimates would be worse off obtaining a job paying *(a)* 50 per cent., *(b)* 60 per cent. and *(c)* 70 per cent. of the national average wage, assuming no travel to work costs were incurred. [35218]

Malcolm Wicks: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was paid in housing benefit by each local authority in the last year for which information is available; what the average weekly claim was, and what the administration costs per claim falling on the local authority were. [35220]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the changes in housing benefit regulations since 1997; and what the estimated administrative cost of implementing each change was. [35221]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Interviews (Travel Expenses)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when his Department or its predecessor last reviewed its policy towards paying travelling expenses to potential employees coming for interview. [14856]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* Neither DWP, nor its predecessors, have ever paid travelling expenses to candidates applying for employment with the Department. There has been no evident need to review this position and there are no plans to do so. However, as an organisation, we do several things to help unemployed people with the costs of attending interviews which, subject to the normal eligibility criteria, could be useful for someone attending an interview with this Department. These include the Travel to Interview Scheme which aims to assist jobseekers in their search for work outside the normal area by refunding associated costs. Also the recently introduced adviser discretion fund allows new deal personal advisers the flexibility to make discretionary monetary awards to help people quickly into jobs.

New Deal

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Arundel and South Downs are on the new deal programme, broken down by each category of the new deal. [18317]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table:

Numbers on the programme at end November 2001

Programme	*Number*
New deal for young people	8
New deal 25plus	17
New deal for lone parents	57
New deal 50plus (employment credit claims)	[1]14

[1] End December 2001

Note:

Constituency level information is not available for the new deals for disabled people or partners.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the private sector companies that are in receipt of funds from the new deal in Leicester. [31057]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The private sector companies that are in receipt of funds from the new deal in Leicester are Fern Training and Development (new deal for young people) and Pelcome Training Ltd. (new deal 25plus).

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money will be spent on the new deal for disabled people over the next three years. [19499]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* £120 million for Job Broker services has been allocated to the new deal for disabled people for the financial years 2001–02 to 2003–04.

Benefits Agency

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to improve standards of decision making at the Benefits Agency in response to the President of the Appeals Service report on Standards of Decision Making by the Secretary of State 2000–01. [27224]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to John Cryer, dated 6 February 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what steps he is taking to improve standards of decision making at the Benefits Agency (BA) in response to the President of the Appeals Service Report on Standards of Decision Making by the Secretary of State 2000–01.

The BA Board receives regular reports on Decision Making and Appeals standards at its monthly meeting and monitors the situation closely. The President's quarterly reports are seen by the BA Standards Committee who consider the Judge's observations when framing recommendations for BA Board for future improvement activities. In addition the BA has reviewed its procedures and has introduced measures to more closely align the consideration of the President's conclusions alongside its processes for handling recommendations from other groups, such as Internal Audit.

Early evaluation following the introduction of Decision Making and Appeals, and research undertaken by the Standards Committee, confirmed the need to review the training available to support Decision Makers. Refresher training on Decision Making and Appeals principles has therefore been delivered and Training Services have re-designed two of their packages to support staff, Appeals presentation and Appeals preparation. Both packages reinforce the need to reconsider a decision where new evidence has come to light or errors have been found. The training builds on products developed locally by trainers and has undergone extensive quality assurance by a range of key stakeholders and is one of a series of products designed to support Decision Makers in the BA. The resulting new products were distributed to delivery staff in October; others are planned for introduction later in the year.

An internal review covering the quality of decision making, guidance and training available following the introduction of these measures is currently underway. The BA Board will consider any further recommendations for improvement as a result of the review.

In conclusion, many decision errors are purely procedural and do not effect the correct level of payment being made to the customer. However, the BA takes all decision making errors seriously and is taking positive action to address the issues raised.

I hope this is helpful.

Airline Industry Redundancies

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to assist individuals made redundant as a result of the downturn in the airline industry; and if he will make a statement. [27548]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The Rapid Response Service supports communities affected by redundancy and helps people make the transition into sustainable new jobs. This service will receive an additional £6 million over the next two years. This extra investment will boost the support offered and enable us to work even more effectively with employers to match people to new jobs.

As well as the support of the Rapid Response Service, people made redundant can benefit from the wide range of help and advice on offer through jobcentres to enable them to move into work. We already have well established on-site jobcentres at Gatwick, Stansted and Manchester airports. Most people who lose their job are able to find another one quickly from among over 10,000 new vacancies that are notified to the Employment Service every working day.

Benefit Fraud (Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many prosecutions were made for benefit fraud in the York and North Yorkshire area in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [28196]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of prosecutions for fraud in benefits other than housing benefit in the York and North Yorkshire area is not available. Information on prosecutions for housing benefit fraud in the City of York and North Yorkshire is in the tables.

	Cases referred for prosecution	*Successful prosecutions*
City of York		
1996–97	1	0
1998–99	2	2
1999–2000	6	2
2000–01	[1]—	[1]—
North Yorkshire		
1996–97	[2]28	[2]19
1998–99	52	24
1999–2000	51	28
2000–01	[2]36	[2]23

[1] Signifies the data are not available.

[2] Data are not available for all the North Yorkshire local authorities. For 1996–97 the figures exclude Ryedale local authority, and for 2000–01, the figures exclude Richmondshire local authority and the City of York.

Notes:

1. The data refer to households, which may be a single person, a couple or a family.
2. Figures are taken from local authority management information returns. It is possible that there could be some double counting with Benefits Agency data if there were cases which involved a joint prosecution.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the reform of measures against housing benefit fraud. [29758]

Malcolm Wicks: We are introducing a comprehensive new anti-fraud scheme that provides financial incentives to local authorities to prevent, detect, sanction and prosecute benefit fraud. 63 authorities took on the new scheme in April 2001 and the remaining authorities will join in April 2002.

In addition we are improving funding of the verification framework and breaking it into modules, making it easier for local authorities to introduce it incrementally. In April 2001 we began continuously measuring the levels of fraud and error in housing benefit. We have also developed a new set of standards for assessing local authorities' performance in several areas, including the prevention of housing benefit fraud. We intend to launch the standards in April.

We are also working more closely with local authorities on fraud matters through joint regional boards to improve performance and spread good practice.

Removal Loans

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have received loans from the Department of Social Security towards paying for removal costs when moving house in the past five years; how much these loans have totalled; how much of this has been repaid; and if he will make a statement. [32139]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The information is not available.

Minimum Income Guarantee (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners he estimates are *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* claiming the minimum income guarantee in each parliamentary constituency in Wales. [32230]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of the number of people who may be eligible for the minimum income guarantee (MIG) are not available below national level.

The number of pensioners claiming the MIG in each parliamentary constituency in Wales is in the table:

Income Support MIG claimants by parliamentary constituency in Wales—August 2001

Parliamentary constituency	*Number of MIG Claimants*
Aberavon	2,600
Alyn and Deeside	2,100
Blaenau Gwent	3,000
Brecon and Radnorshire	1,700
Bridgend	2,500
Caernarfon	2,400
Caerphilly	2,800
Cardiff Central	2,500
Cardiff North	1,400
Cardiff South and Penarth	4,000
Cardiff West	3,100
Carmarthen East and Dinefwr	2,400
Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire	2,400
Ceredigion	1,500
Clwyd South	2,500
Clwyd West	2,900
Conwy	2,600
Cynon Valley	2,400
Delyn	2,100
Gower	2,400
Islwyn	2,500
Llanelli	3,600
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	1,700
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	2,500
Monmouth	1,800
Montgomeryshire	1,700
Neath	2,900
Newport East	2,100
Newport West	2,300
Ogmore	2,000
Pontypridd	2,200
Preseli Pembrokeshire	2,300
Rhondda	3,400
Swansea East	3,100
Swansea West	3,600
Torfaen	2,700
Vale of Clwyd	2,900
Vale of Glamorgan	2,400
Wrexham	2,300
Ynys Môn	2,400

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry August 2001

Workless households

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what percentage of children *(a)* live in workless households and *(b)* lived in workless households in each of the last five years. [32274]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is in the table.

	Children living in workless households:	
As at spring	*Number*	*Percentage*
1996	2,256,000	19.3
1997	2,078,000	17.9
1998	2,076,000	17.8
1999	2,015,000	17.3
2000	1,831,000	15.7
2001	1,779,000	15.3

Notes:

1. 'Children' refers to all children aged under 16.
2. A workless household is a household that includes at least one person of working age where no-one is in employment.
3. The spring data are used annually in the set of Opportunity for All indicators.

Source:

Labour Force Survey, Spring Quarters (covering March to May) GB figures. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a quarterly sample survey of over 60,000 households in the United Kingdom.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in which years since 1972 his Department and its predecessors have had accounts qualified by the Comptroller and Auditor-General due to irregular expenditure; and if he will specify the irregular expenditure involved in each case. [26152]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Pursuant to my written answer on 31 January 2002, *Official report*, column 758W, details of the accounts for the Department for Work and Pensions and its predecessors which have been qualified by the Comptroller and Auditor General on the basis of irregular expenditure since 1971–72 are shown in the table which has been placed in the Library.

The Departmental Resource Account for 1999–2000 was also qualified, on the same basis as the Class XII Vote 1 and the National Insurance Fund Accounts.

TREASURY

Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31770]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Deputy Prime Minister on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1129–30W. HM Treasury provided this information to the Interchange Unit, Cabinet Office to complete the annual interchange statistical exercise.

Income Tax

Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the percentage of the total revenue from income tax which, in the last year for which figures are available, accrued from the emoluments of public sector employees. [32837]

Dawn Primarolo: Readily available information is in terms of "Pay-As-You-Earn" tax deductions from pay and is given in Inland Revenue Statistics table 2.10, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income_tax/it_t10_1.htm). The categories "Education" and "Health and social work" in the table include a small proportion of private sector employees.

Barnett Formula

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the factors he will take into consideration when deciding if the Barnett formula will remain the basis upon which changes in public spending totals resulting from the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review will be applied to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. [34308]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government's policy on funding the devolved Administrations is set out in the Statement of Funding Policy published by the Treasury in July 2000.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans to review the Barnett formula following the findings of Census 2001 about Scotland's population. [34309]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Barnett formula uses the latest published mid-year population estimates. The outcome of the 2001 census will be taken into account when available.

Rural Tax Concessions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce tax concessions for shops, post offices and pubs in rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [34008]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keep all taxes under review and any changes will be made as part of the normal Budget process.

The Government have announced their intention to introduce a number of measures to help small businesses, including: the introduction of a VAT flat-rate scheme for small businesses with a turnover of less than £100,000 and the extension of the 10p starting rate of corporation tax in Budget 2002. And at the pre-Budget report the Government published the Carter review of payroll and are taking forward their consultation on its recommendations for helping small businesses deal with payroll.

Meetings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* his senior departmental officials have had with Enron and its subsidiaries in the last two years. [32432]

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations with whom he has had meetings about the future of the Barnett formula in the last 12 months; and what meetings on this subject he has planned for the next six months. [34310]

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what meetings have taken place between Ministers in his Department and employees of Citigate since 7 June 2001; and if will make a statement; [32811]

(2) if he will list the meetings that Ministers in his Department have had since 1 January 2000 with representatives of *(a)* Chevron, *(b)* Texaco, *(c)* Phillips Petroleum, *(d)* IMC Global, *(e)* TXU and *(f)* CMS; and if he will make a statement; [32918]

(3) what meetings *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* special advisers in his Department have had with senior members of energy companies since 7 June 2001; and if he will make a statement; [33976]

(4) if he will list the dates of meetings that *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* Ministers in his Department have had since 1 January 1999 with representatives of Global Crossing; and if he will make a statement; [34055]

(5) if he will list the meetings that *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* special advisers in his Department have had since 7 June 2001 with representatives of Seeboard; and if he will make a statement; [34059]

(6) pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 704–05W, if he will list the attendees of each meeting with individuals external to the Government he attended in his official capacity in July 2001; and if he will make a statement; [34538]

(7) on which dates in July 2001 he met *(a)* trade unions or their representatives and *(b)* employees of private companies or their representatives in his official capacity; and if he will make a statement. [34539]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis. I refer to the answer given by my right hon Friend the Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 689W, stating that as with previous Administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Euromarker

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his plans are for consultation on proposals for the introduction of the new Euromarker. [35971]

Mr. Boateng: The Customs and Excise consultation document "Improving markers in rebated fuels—Introduction of the 'Euromarker'" is published today. Copies are available in the Vote Office and in the Library.

Structural Funds

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the EU on the structural funds that will replace the Objective I funding programme in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* South Yorkshire, *(c)* Merseyside and *(d)* Cornwall. [33963]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government have regular discussions with their counterparts in EU member states on a wide range of topics. These include the implementation and effectiveness of the structural funds regime. As it is five years away, it is too early to speculate on the shape that Structural Funds might take outside the current financial perspective.

Employment Rates

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the latest figures for employment rates are for each county in the UK. [34913]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Paul Flynn, dated 11 February 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment rates. (34913)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of the employment rates for each county of the United Kingdom. The latest available estimates are for autumn (September to November) 2001. These are available on Nomis®, which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 224W, whether the names of the Treasury management units which are involved in the preliminary technical work for evaluating the five economic tests are being withheld under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and if he will make a statement. [33074]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* No. A wide range of officials from several Treasury management units is contributing.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent by HM Treasury on special advisers in each year since May 1997. [7790]

Ruth Kelly: Expenditure on Treasury special advisers in the years since 1997 was as follows.

	£000
1997–98	214
1998–99	220
1999–2000	226
2000–01	247

These figures are on a like for like basis, and therefore do not include the costs of the Council of Economic Advisers, that was established in 1997 with appointments made over the period.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32015]

Ruth Kelly: Direct salary costs and pension contributions will account for 19 per cent. of HM Treasury DEL in 2001–02.

Conference Sponsorship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he sought advice from the Cabinet Office before approving the sponsorship arrangements for the April 1999 Conference, "Creating Knowledge: Creating Wealth"; and if he will make a statement. [34062]

Ruth Kelly: The conference "Creating Knowledge: Creating Wealth" was one of a series of conferences held following publication of the Treasury guidance "Selling Government Services into Wider Markets" in July 1998. The sponsorship arrangements for these conferences followed a competitive process and were fully in accordance with Cabinet Office guidelines in place at the time the arrangements were made.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34397]

Ruth Kelly: The information required is not held in the format required and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34294]

Ruth Kelly: The table shows the legal fees incurred by the Treasury, Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue 1997–98. Figures for the current year are not yet available.

£ million

	HM Treasury	*HM Customs and Excise*	*Inland Revenue*
1997–98	0.8	18.6	13.3
1998–99	1.7	20.7	11.9
1999–2000	1.4	22.6	17.1
2000–01	1.2	24.1	22.0

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34169]

Ruth Kelly: It has not been possible to establish the cost of accountancy services in HM Treasury, Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise.

The information is not held in the format required and any further examination would be of a disproportional cost.

Economic Statistics

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland, *(e)* each English region and *(f)* each local authority in the United Kingdom (i) GDP per head of population, (ii) average gross weekly full-time earnings, (iii) average gross weekly household incomes, (iv) VAT registrations as a percentage of stock business and (v) VAT registered business per 10,000 population aged 16 and over. [34305]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Hugo Swire, dated 11 February 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question with regard to a number of sub-national economic statistics. I am replying in his absence. (34305)

The information you require is not readily available in the way you request. It could only be compiled from a variety of sources at disproportionate cost. The information that is available can be obtained from the following sources, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Information required for (a) Scotland, (b) England, (c) Wales, (d) Northern Ireland, (e) each English region and (f) each local authority in the United Kingdom

Information	*Source*
(i) GDP per head of population	Regional Accounts articles in (a) Economic Trends March 2001 and (b) Economic Trends May 2001 www.statistics.ons.gov.uk/regional accounts: (a) GDP per capita for the countries and regions up to 1999 and (b) GDP per capita for sub-regions and local areas up to 1998
(ii) Average gross weekly full-time earnings	New Earnings Survey data are available from the NOMIS labour market data system. Countries and Regions of the United Kingdom and Local Authority District level information is available
(iii) Average gross weekly household incomes	Family Spending (2002), provides average gross weekly household incomes for Countries and Regions of the United Kingdom
(iv) VAT registrations as a percentage of stock business and (v) VAT registered business per 10,000 population aged 16 and over	VAT registration statistics are available from the Small Business Service of Department of Trade and Industry at www.sbs.gov.uk/statistics. Countries and Regions of the United Kingdom and Local Authority District level information is available.

Commonwealth Education Fund

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the creation of a Commonwealth Education Fund; who will be in charge of it; and whether the £10 million funding will be for 2002 only. [34761]

Mr. Boateng: Under Clare Short's leadership, DFID have committed over £600 million since 1997 to achieving universal primary education. The Commonwealth Education Fund will complement this effort by supporting civil society to help Commonwealth Governments to ensure that the poorest and most marginalised children are able to enrol in and complete good quality primary education. The fund will support innovative ways of working with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (including street children, former child soldiers and nomadic children). It will also help promote public participation in education planning and delivery in the Commonwealth.

The Government have pledged an initial £10 million to kick-start the fund. They will also match contributions by business, pound for pound including tax relief. Money raised by this year's Comic Relief "Sports Day" earmarked for education in Commonwealth countries will also be matched pound for pound, including tax relief, by the Government.

Work in preparing the details of the Commonwealth Education Fund is on-going and we hope to make a further announcement on 26 February.

Debt Relief

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to promote a bankruptcy process for nations burdened with unpayable debts. [34760]

Mr. Boateng: Over the past three years, the Government have been working with our G7 partners to reform the international financial architecture and to deliver an international financial system that is less prone to crises and better able to withstand them when they occur. A key component of this reform effort has been the development of a new framework for private sector involvement in crisis prevention and resolution which ensures that all parties who benefit form the international financial system play their part in maintaining stability.

Recent experience has highlighted some of the legal and practical obstacles that may prevent countries with unsustainable private debt burdens from restructuring those debts in a timely and orderly manner. An international bankruptcy procedure has the potential to address some of these obstacles and thereby improve the overall operability of the crisis resolution framework. The Government therefore welcome the recent proposal by the IMF to explore options for establishing a new Sovereign Debt Restructuring Mechanism.

Separately, the UK continues to work hard to ensure that the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative delivers a sustainable relief from debt for eligible countries. We also call on other countries to follow our leads on bilateral policies, such as 100 per cent. relief at Decision Point, and in holding payments in trust for those countries yet to receive debt relief. Already 24 countries have qualified for debt relief, and they will benefit from over $56 billion in debt reduction, which will bring their debts to below the average of developing countries.

HEALTH

Medical Students

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical students in universities in 1997 were expected to qualify in the period 1998 to 2002. [27230]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The available data are given in the table. Figures for the number of medical students graduating in 2002 will be available in January 2003.

Students on first degree medical courses[1] in HE institutions in the UK

	Number
Students enrolled in 1997–98[2]	24,360
of which, those graduating in:	
1998	5,160
1999	4,910
2000	5,160
2001	5,160

[1] Includes home domiciled and overseas students on clinical and pre-clinical medical courses. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Census count as at 1 December 1997.

Following a review of the medical workforce, published in December 1997 which recommended that the intake to medical schools in the UK should be increased by 1,000 a year, and the commitments made in the Year 2000 NHS Plan, the number of places available to study medicine will increase to almost 5,900 by 2006—an increase of some 2,150 over 1997 levels.

Disabled Doctors

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of doctors graduated from medical school this year who are registered disabled. [24660]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The latest figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency show that in 2001 6 per cent. of UK domiciled students who graduated in medicine reported that they had a disability.

Agency Nurses

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by each acute trust on agency nurses as *(a)* a total annual amount and *(b)* a proportion of the annual expenditure in each of the last three years for which records are available. [16397]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

HIV

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department has taken to combat stigma in HIV *(a)* transmission and *(b)* illness. [20788]

Yvette Cooper: The Department funds HIV and sexual health promotion for gay men, African communities and the general population. This includes information on how HIV is and is not transmitted and how to access national health service services. In addition, on 26 November last year, the National AIDS Trust, funded by the Department, launched a new pilot campaign, "Are You HIV Prejudiced?", aimed at raising awareness of HIV and AIDS and the negative effect of stigma and discrimination which can act as a barrier to people accessing testing and treatment and care services. The first ever national sexual health and HIV strategy highlighted the importance of reducing stigma associated with HIV. We are currently considering responses to the extensive consultation on the strategy, including replies specifically on addressing stigma.

Dispensing

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reduction in dispensing fees paid to community pharmacists. [R] [20787]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 611W-12W.

NHS Direct

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have used the service provided by NHS Direct in each year since its introduction. [21606]

Ms Blears: Since NHS Direct was launched in March 1998 it has handled around 9,000,000 calls. This calendar year alone it has handled over 4,500,000 calls. NHS Direct currently handles 120,000 calls a week.

Correspondence

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to reply to the letter of 24 July from the hon. Member for New Forest, West regarding placements for young people with learning difficulties. [22737]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent on 23 January 2002.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 10 October 2001, 22 November 2001, 18 December 2001 and 16 January 2001 relating to her constituent, Mrs. Barbara Handley of Cheshunt. [29323]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* A reply was sent on 28 January.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Suffolk of 10 October 2001, concerning Mr. Dominique Porche, of Haverhill, a constituent. [29763]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* A reply was sent on 25 January.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton dated 29 November 2001 with regard to Mr. Alan Robinson; [27322]

(2) when he intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton dated 3 December 2001 with regard to Mrs. J. Sharpe; [27323]

(3) when he intends to reply to the written questions tabled to him by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. J. Sharpe (ref. 27323) and Mr. A. Robinson (ref. 27322). [29900]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State replied to my right hon. Friend's letter with regard to his constituent, Mrs. J. Sharpe, on 28 January.

A reply was sent with regard to Mr. A. Robinson on 23 January.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Under-Secretary for Health intends to reply to the letter dated 20 November 2001 from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding his constituent Mrs. B. Kennedy of Peterhead. [28754]

Yvette Cooper: A reply was sent on 24 January.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letter of the hon. Member for Torbay of 10 September 2001 on behalf of the Haemophilia Society of Devon. [29272]

Yvette Cooper: A reply was sent on 28 January.

Meat Industry

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abattoirs and meat processing plants have failed to pay inspection charges in the last 12 months for completed inspections in the last two years. [22668]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Approximately 1,100 of 1,400 licensed fresh meat plants are currently operating in Great Britain. Of these, 11 companies operating licensed fresh meat plants have failed to make any payments to the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) in the period November 2000 to date for their inspection charges. These premises comprise five red meat full throughput slaughterhouses, one poultry meat full throughput slaughterhouse, one red meat low throughput slaughterhouse, three red meat full throughput cutting plants, and one poultry meat low throughput cutting plant. The total debt owed by these 11 companies is £468,652.21.

Two of the 11 companies are still operating, but the other nine have ceased trading. The MHS has taken legal action against both of the companies that are still operating and has received Judgment against one, which will potentially lead to the withdrawal of service by the MHS. In the other case, proceedings are currently stayed pending receipt of fresh information from the defendant, as directed by the judge.

In respect of the nine companies which have ceased trading:

two companies have entered into voluntary arrangements;

two companies went into liquidation before the MHS could obtain Judgment;

The MHS obtained Judgment against three companies which subsequently went into liquidation;

The MHS obtained Judgment against one company, however the Sheriff was unable to seize any goods as the company had ceased trading. Any further action by the MHS would not be cost effective in relation to the size of the debt (£3,195.43);

One company owner was the subject of a bankruptcy order petitioned for by another creditor.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23793]

Ms Blears: The numbers of staff in all Departments are shown in table C of "Civil Service Statistics 2000" published on 31 August 2001, copies of which are available in the Library.

Registered Practitioners (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many registered practitioners there have been in the constituency of Buckingham in each year since 1997; [23716]

(2) how many *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* registered general practitioners there were in the Buckinghamshire health authority area in each year since 1997; [24856]

(3) how many vacancies there were for general practitioners in the Buckinghamshire health authority area in each year since 1997. [24857]

Ms Blears: The information on general practitioner vacancies requested is not available centrally. Information may be obtained from the chairmen of Buckinghamshire health authority and the primary care groups and trusts in the Buckinghamshire health authority area.

The information on the number of practitioners is as follows:

All practitioners (excluding GP retainers)[1] and unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[2] in England, South-east region, Buckinghamshire health authority and Aylesbury Vale primary care group: 1997–2000

Headcount

All Practitioners (excluding GP retainers)	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
England	29,389	29,697	29,987	30,252
South-east region	5,034	5,134	5,175	5,177
Buckinghamshire health authority	397	408	423	424
Aylesbury Vale primary care group	—	—	65	67

All practitioners (excluding GP retainers)[1] *and unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)*[2] *in England, South-east region, Buckinghamshire health authority and Aylesbury Vale primary care group, 1997–2000*

Headcount

All Practitioners (excluding GP retainers)	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
of which:				
UPEs				
England	27,099	27,392	27,591	27,704
South-east region	4,691	4,740	4,779	4,803
Buckinghamshire health authority	372	382	396	403
Aylesbury Vale primary care group	—	—	61	65

Notes:

GP Retainers were collected for the first time in the 1999 census. In 1999 there were 972 GP retainers in England, 222 in South-east region, 12 in Buckinghamshire HA and one in Aylesbury Vale PCG. In 2000 there were 1,117 in England, 230 in South-east region, 0 in Buckinghamshire HA and 0 in Aylesbury Vale PCG.

Data as at 1 October each year between 1997 and 1999 and at 30 September 2000.

[1] Practitioners (excluding GP retainers) including GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs, PMS salaried GPs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (para 52 SFA) and PMS other.

[2] UPEs include unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

GP Leavers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs in Surrey have left the profession in each of the last five years. [23311]

Ms Blears: Information is collected on unrestricted principals and equivalents leaving Surrey health authorities but this does not indicate if they left the profession, took a career break or transferred to another area of work. Further information will be available from the chairmen of the primary care groups and trusts in Surrey.

Information on leavers for the last five years currently available is shown in the table.

Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[1]*: Leavers*[2] *from England, East Surrey and West Surrey health authorities 1995–2000*

Headcount

		Of which:	
	England	*East Surrey HA*	*West Surrey HA*
1995–96	1,184	10	15
1996–97	1,058	13	21
1997–98	1,040	12	17
1998–99	1,030	13	17
1999–2000	1,090	5	16

[1] UPEs include Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

[2] The estimate of leavers is based on those UPEs reported in the Department of Health's annual GP census in one year but not reported the following year. Leavers will include both longer term career breaks and wastage.

Notes:

1. Excludes UPEs who have moved between East and West Surrey or to another FHSA/HA.
2. Data for 1995–96 has been converted to match April 1996 HA boundaries.
3. Data as at 1 October each year between 1995 and 1999 and at 30 September 2000.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Waiting Lists

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients in the Buckinghamshire health authority area waited more than *(a)* 13 weeks and *(b)* 26 weeks for a first outpatient appointment in each reporting period over the last 10 years; [24858]

(2) how many patients there were in the Buckinghamshire health authority area on in-patient waiting lists waiting more than *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* nine months, *(d)* 12 months, *(e)* 15 months, *(f)* 18 months and *(g)* 24 months for each reporting period since 1997; [24859]

Ms Blears: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Homelessness

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued to social services departments and the NHS concerning the role of health and social care staff in the development and delivery of strategies to prevent homelessness. [24191]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill currently before Parliament will devolve responsibility for developing a local health improvement and modernisation plan to local primary care trusts. They will also receive a statutory duty to work in partnership with local authorities to assess local care needs and ensure the delivery of appropriate services. PCTs will also be responsible for improving the health status of the local population; including working in partnership with local authorities to address issues such as homelessness.

The Rough Sleepers Unit published a good practice handbook, "Preventing Tomorrow's Rough Sleepers", in 2001. This contains examples of action that can be taken by various service providers, including health practitioners and social services, to prevent people from becoming homeless. The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions will also publish guidance to local authorities on developing homelessness strategies with local partners including health service providers.

We are aware that children placed in temporary accommodation, especially in bed and breakfast, must have regular health and developmental checks by health staff. New guidance will be issued to local authorities on this issue in the near future.

National Network for the Arts in Health

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the financial cost of the National Network for the Arts in Health project; and if he will publish an evaluation of its work. [24583]

Ms Blears: Art has long been used in hospital buildings, with many recognising the healing power of the arts. The arts can contribute very significantly to the provision of health care; by improving the environment for patients, visitors and staff; by encouraging community participation and social regeneration; through therapeutic activity and staff development.

The National Network for the Arts in Health was established in October 2000 to provide a range of services for those interested and working in the field of Arts in Health.

The National Network for the Arts in Health is funded through a variety of sources, including membership fees, and grants from the following bodies; Kings' Fund, Nuffield Trust, PPP Healthcare and Medical Trust, Arts Council for England, The Baring Foundation, Esmee Fairbarn Charitable Trust, London Forum for arts in health and various publications and activities. This totalled £116,440 in the year 2000–01.

The HDA contracted the National Network to do a specific piece of work in updating an existing database of projects via a questionnaire and host the website by which the data is made available. (Total £15,OOO in the year 2000–01).

The Department has no plans to request or publish any evaluation of NNAH's work. It is expected that this will be the responsibility of the network's board of governors.

Cancer

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent measures his Department has taken to increase awareness of cancer in schools. [24346]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Our healthy schools programme addresses a range of health and lifestyle issues that will impact on the long-term health of young people. Issues covered include the:

health risks from smoking and substance misuse,

sun safety,

promoting healthy eating,

promoting physical activity.

Increasing consumption of fruit and vegetables is widely recognised as a protection against some cancers and cardiovascular disease. Information about the protection afforded by fruit and vegetables against cancer is set out in the national school fruit scheme booklet, which is supplied to all participating schools. This information is also available on the national school fruit scheme website address www.doh.gov.uk/schoolfruitscheme.

Urban Regeneration

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by his Department; how much each scheme has available to invest; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough councils and *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [25476]

Ms Blears: The Department does not manage any schemes specifically targeting urban regeneration. However, implementation of the NHS plan, particularly in relation to primary care reform, will have an impact on urban regeneration. Specifically there are 26 health action zones set up in 1998 and 1999 to tackle health inequalities. They have been taking forward a range of activity that impacts on the determinants of health through their programmes which have included action in areas such as housing, education, crime, employment and transport, and working with ex-drug users. They are also working closely with new deal for community projects in their areas.

HAZ funding for Teeside is shown in the table and compared to national HAZ funding.

Total allocations for Tees HAZ and all HAZs including Tees

£000

	Programme and development	*Innovations fund and employment pilots*	*Smoking cessation*	*Drugs*	*Targeted funding for Has in HAZ areas*	*Total*
Tees						
1998–99	20	0	0	0	0	20
1999–2000	1,231	320	407	0	1,274	3,232
2000–01	1,589	704	406	135	2,547	5,381
2001–02	1,589	802	406	135	[1]4,713	7,645
England						
1998–99	5,682	0	0	1,780	0	7,462
1999–2000	42,601	2,016	9,993	1,880	30,002	86,492
2000–01	40,527	7,147	10,000	1,800	59,998	119,472
2001–02	40,527	8,448	10,000	1,800	[1]101,813	162,588

[1] Health inequalities adjustment

Head Injuries

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will increase funding for voluntary organisations providing care services for people with head injuries. [25452]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* There are no plans to provide specific funds for voluntary organisations dealing with head injury. Commissioning local services for patients with head injuries is the responsibility of health authorities, trusts and primary care teams. They are the people best placed to identify the health needs of local populations and they will decide whether these services are best provided by voluntary organisations, or by someone else.

The Department provides funds to voluntary organisations through the Section 64 General Scheme (Section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968). In 2001–02, for example, 575 grants totalling nearly £21 million were awarded to 397 voluntary organisations. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis and voluntary organisations providing care services for people with head injuries have an equal chance of obtaining awards.

Data Treatment

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 737W, if he will establish standards to facilitate data quality maintenance, data transfer and data sharing. [25351]

Ms Blears: The National Health Service Information Authority is responsible for the development of NHS data standards, and supports the independent Information Standards Boards that approve data standards for use by the NHS.

The NHS Information Authority has also been commissioned to maintain and develop data quality standards for use by NHS hospital trusts in the collection of data required for management purposes. The process enables a trust to demonstrate that it has systems in place that meet pre-defined standards of data quality to fulfil its own management information requirements, and those of the commissioners of the trust's services.

In addition, the NHS is to adopt standards for the transfer and sharing of data compliant with the electronic Government interoperability framework (e-GIF). Implementing the e-GIF within the NHS will be managed as an integral part of the NHS Information for Health strategy. The e-GIF standards are mandated on all new systems. The NHS Information Authority is leading work on migrating existing legacy systems to comply with e-GIF standards.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by his Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29421]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30085]

Ms Blears: Estimates of expenditure on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in the Department in the last four years are as follows:

	£
1997–98	415,890
1998–99	423,560
1999–2000	419,490
2000–01	423,160

This expenditure covers central purchasing through the Department's library, the regional offices and direct purchasing by individual units. Expenditure of agencies has been excluded.

Musculoskeletal Injuries

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were diagnosed with musculoskeletal injuries in the last year for which figures are available; and how many *(a)* GP consultations, *(b)* physiotherapy sessions and *(c)* hospital beds were taken up in that year with those injuries. [30190]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Information on general practitioner consultations and physiotherapy sessions are not collected centrally. Figures for musculoskeletal injuries and bed days are shown in the table.

Admissions and bed days where main diagnosis may be related to musculoskeletal injuries—NHS Hospitals, England 2000–01

	Admissions	*Bed days*
S02 Fracture of skull and facial bones	26,970	46,500
S03 Dislocation sprain and strain of joints and ligaments of head	302	344
S07 Crushing injury of head	4	2
S08 Traumatic amputation of part of head	118	282
S09 Other and unspecified injuries of head	37,466	66,600
S12 Fracture of neck	1,686	24,078
S13 Dislocation sprain and strain of joints and ligaments at neck level	1,163	4,739
S14 Injury of nerves and spinal cord at neck level	443	6,873
S15 Injury of blood vessels at neck level	47	275
S16 Injury of muscle and tendon at neck level	55	103
S17 Crushing injury of neck	20	33
S19 Other and unspecified injuries of neck	1,084	2,649
S22 Fracture of rib(s), sternum and thoracic spine	7,718	54,913
S23 Dislocation sprain/strain of joints and ligaments of thorax	71	470
S24 Injury of nerves and spinal cord at thorax level	52	1,244
S28 Crush injury thorax and traumatic amputation part of thorax	37	251
S29 Other and unspecified injuries of thorax	490	1,813
S32 Fracture of lumbar spine and pelvis	11,504	150,123
S33 Dislocation sprain and strain joint ligaments lumbar spine and pelvis	161	1,012
S34 Injury nerves lumbar spinal cord abdomen low back and pelvis	61	828
S38 Crushing injury/trauma amputation of part of abdomen lower back and pelvis	55	230
S39 Other and unspecified injuries of abdomen lower back and pelvis	2,725	9,964
S42 Fracture of shoulder and upper arm	18,450	122,002
S43 Dislocation sprain and strain of joints and ligaments of shoulder girdle	2,995	11,893
S46 Injury of muscle and tendon at shoulder and upper arm level	378	1,101

Admissions and bed days where main diagnosis may be related to musculoskeletal injuries—NHS Hospitals, England 2000–01

	Admissions	*Bed days*
S47 Crushing injury of shoulder and upper arm	3	9
S48 Traumatic amputation of shoulder and upper arm	10	164
S49 Other and unspecified injuries of shoulder and upper arm	456	1,966
S52 Fracture of forearm	48,698	134,031
S53 Dislocation sprain and strain of joints and ligaments elbow	1,036	1,630
S56 Injury of muscle and tendon at forearm level	1,925	2,891
S57 Crushing injury of forearm	52	283
S58 Traumatic amputation of forearm	16	220
S59 Other and unspecified injuries of forearm	283	952
S62 Fracture at wrist and hand level	17,337	30,837
S63 Dislocation sprain strain joint and ligaments at wrist and hand level	2,299	3,125
S66 Injury of muscle and tendon at wrist and hand level	9,592	12,098
S67 Crushing injury of wrist and hand	1,505	1,943
S68 Traumatic amputation of wrist and hand	3,347	5,066
S69 Other and unspecified injuries of wrist and hand	1,281	2,141
S72 Fracture of femur	63,385	1,117,498
S73 Dislocation, sprain and strain of joint and ligaments	745	6,799
S76 Injury of muscle and tendon at hip and thigh level	756	4,254
S77 Crushing injury of hip and thigh	17	129
S78 Traumatic amputation of hip and thigh	3	180
S79 Other and specified injuries of hip and thigh	2,065	15,888
S82 Fracture of lower leg, including ankle	42,930	338,010
S83 Dislocation sprain and strain of joints and ligaments of knee	4,837	9,399
S84 Injury of nerves at lower leg level	44	164
S87 Crushing injury of lower leg	73	344
S88 Traumatic amputation of lower leg	36	1,630
S89 Other and unspecified injuries of lower leg	1,377	6,986
S92 Fracture of foot, except ankle	5,288	32,747
S93 Dislocation sprain and strain joints and ligaments at ankle and foot level	1,034	4,325
S96 Injury of muscle and tendon at ankle and foot level	356	793
S97 Crushing injury of ankle and foot	216	1,323
S98 Traumatic amputation of ankle and foot	91	576
S99 Other and unspecified injuries of ankle and foot	502	2,177
T02 Fractures involving multiple body regions	516	6,820
T03 Dislocations sprains and strains involving multiple body regions	27	92
T04 Crushing injuries involving multiple body regions	39	325
T05 Traumatic amputations involving multiple body regions	10	213
T06 Other injuries involving multiple body regions NEC	29	352
T07 Unspecified multiple injuries	24	67
T08 Fracture of spine, level unspecified	112	1,572
T09 Other injuries of spine and trunk, level unspecified	421	2,530
T10 Fracture of upper limb, level unspecified	28	187
T11 Other injuries of upper limb, level unspecified	555	1,878
T12 Fracture of lower limb, level unspecified	23	276
T13 Other injuries of lower limb, level unspecified	850	5,066
T14 Injury of unspecified body region	2,624	10,701

These figures do not represent the number of patients, as a person may be admitted more than once within the year. The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the hospital episode statistics data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital. Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

NHS Dentists

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is to be made available to the review of NHS dentistry in Shropshire and Staffordshire; when the review is due to be completed; and if it is his policy to follow up the recommendations of the review. [30386]

Ms Blears: West Midlands North National Health Service Workforce Confederation is currently undertaking a review of NHS Dentistry in Shropshire and Staffordshire on behalf of Shropshire health authority, South Staffordshire health authority and North Staffordshire health authority. This work will enable the health authorities to quantify recruitment and retention issues and identify possible local solutions.

In keeping with our determination to decentralise decision-making in the NHS, and as this is a local review, all decisions with regard to funding and implementation will be a matter for the health authorities involved.

GP Surgeries

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been burnt by radiators in GP surgeries in each of the past 10 years; and what he estimates to be the cost to GP practices of installing radiator guards in every surgery in the UK. [31029]

Ms Blears: There are about 10,500 general practitioner premises in England. Information on the numbers of radiators and incidents is not collected centrally.

Burns from radiators are not reportable under the Reporting of Incidents, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations. To collect the information requested would incur disproportionate costs.

We estimate it would cost approximately £100 to fit a guard to a radiator.

In 1998 National Health Service Estates issued guidance relating to low surface temperatures (Health Guidance Note "Safe Hot Water and Surface Temperatures"). The installation of low surface temperature radiators is advised in all health care settings. This eliminates the need for guard installation.

NHS Service Reviews

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department is making of the efficacy of public and community involvement in local reviews of NHS services. [30793]

Ms Blears: Subject to the passage and subsequent enactment of section 19 of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will make an independent assessment of the efficacy of public and community involvement in local reviews through it's work with patients' forums and overview and scrutiny committees. These data will be collected locally by the commission and fed to Government via the commission's headquarters.

A prime example of the involvement of local people in determining the future of their health services occurred in my hon. Friend's constituency. It was agreed, after strong views were expressed by Crawley residents, that a review of the future provision of health care in South East Surrey and North West Sussex would take place. This review will involve local stakeholders in seeking agreement on a configuration which will ensure appropriate local access and meet the requirement for high quality, professional care.

Hormonal Treatments

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been conducted into the effects of hormonal treatments on women who are prone to *(a)* bipolar and *(b)* depressive illness; and if he will make a statement. [31075]

Yvette Cooper: Neither the Department nor the Medical Research Council (MRC) are currently supporting any research specifically into the effects of hormonal treatments on women who are prone to bipolar and depressive illness.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the MRC which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC have a significant amount of research into mental disorders, including depression and is also funding the WISDOM (Women's International Study of Long Duration Oestrogen after Menopause) trial which is looking at women on long term hormone replacement therapy.

The Department provides national health service support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities that take place in the NHS. The Department is providing or has provided support for a number of projects on mental health in general. Details of research projects can be found on the National Research Register, which is available in the Library and most medical libraries on CD-ROM, or on the internet at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

Obesity

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the levels of obesity in the UK; and if he will make a statement; [31162]

(2) what recent measures he has taken to reduce levels of obesity in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [31163]

Yvette Cooper: The most recent health survey for England, in 1999, showed that one in five adults suffers from obesity. The National Audit Office report: Tackling Obesity in England, published in February 2001, provides a comprehensive assessment on the levels of obesity in England. It found that obesity had nearly trebled in the last 20 years, and is responsible for 9,000 deaths each year, before the age of retirement. It also states that obesity is a risk factor for heart disease, cancer, stroke and type 2 diabetes. The most likely causes of obesity are identified as an increasingly sedentary lifestyle combined with changes in eating patterns.

Obesity is a complex condition, but is largely preventable through addressing diet and physical activity. We have therefore put in place major cross-Government programmes of work to address these factors. The NHS Plan, Cancer Plan and National Service Frameworks all prioritise action to improve diet and increase physical activity.

Also the National Service Framework for Diabetes, published in December 2001, recognises obesity as a modifiable risk factor for type 2 diabetes and that it will need to be the focus of prevention strategies for diabetes.

The Health Development Agency is currently reviewing the evidence on effective interventions to prevent obesity. Their report, to be published early this year, will provide the evidence base on what works. To support primary care trusts, we have also asked the Health Development Agency to develop a framework to support the development of programmes to prevent overweight and obesity.

Last year the National Institute for Clinical Excellence issued guidance on the anti-obesity drugs Orlistat and Sibutramine. Patients are prescribed these drugs to help them lose weight in combination with counselling and advice on diet and exercise.

Ministerial Meetings

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the health minister in the Scottish Executive; and if he will make a statement. [31335]

Ms Blears: On Monday 28 January 2002.

Kidney Dialysis

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many kidney dialysis machines have been issued to patients for use in their homes in each of the last five years in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Hillingdon Health Authority. [31355]

Jacqui Smith: The available information is based on figures published in the third annual report of the United Kingdom Renal Registry, copies of which are available in the Library. In 1998 there were 516 patients in England using a haemodialysis machine at home. In addition, it is estimated that 1,150 adult patients and 83 children were using home automated cycling machines for peritoneal dialysis. Information for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a matter for the devolved administrations. Equivalent information is not available at health authority level.

Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the penalties that apply to the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital Warrford if surgical waiting list targets across all surgical disciplines are not met. [31547]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The performance against waiting list targets by the Royal Devon and Exeter healthcare national health service trust will be one of a number of criteria used to assess the trust in the annual performance ratings. There are no financial penalties if the trust does not reach key targets on waiting times; however, the trust's performance rating will determine how the trust can use additional monies from the performance fund. The best performing trusts gain additional freedoms in recognition of their success.

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31742]

Ms Blears: The Department holds no information on the average annual leave entitlement however actual leave entitlement in the last four years can be provided as shown in the table.

Year	*On entry*	*After one year*	*After 10, 15 or 20 years service depending on civil service grade*
1997–98	22	25	30
1998–99	22	25	30
1999–2000	22	25	30
2000–01	30	30	30

As of 1 August

Notes:

1. Excludes staff in the senior civil service whose annual leave entitlement is currently set by Cabinet Office at 30 days and has been so for the last four years.

2. Excludes part-time, job share and casual staff annual leave entitlement. This is calculated at a pro rata rate dependent on the terms of employment.

Infertility

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting list was for infertility treatment, broken down by health authority; how much each health authority spent on infertility treatment in each year since 1997; what action will be taken to address the differences according to area in infertility treatment; and if he will make a statement. [32717]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested on the waiting list and the amounts spent by health authorities is not available centrally. The Department undertook a baseline survey of infertility provision in the national health service in 1999. A report on this "Survey of NHS Infertility Services 1997–98" has been published and copies are available in the Library.

We have listened carefully to the representations we have received from couples seeking infertility treatment, and from hon. Members and interested bodies working in the field. We have asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to consider and update the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' existing guidelines on the management of infertility treatment in order to ensure that clinical guidance based on the latest knowledge and best practice are available for use throughout the NHS.

We want to see an improved service and greater efficiency for the benefit of all patients. We see the referral of these guidelines to NICE as a major step forward in infertility treatment by which we can act positively to improve services and reduce the postcode lottery in this area of health care.

Care Homes

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost has been to the East Riding of Yorkshire council for administrating the registration of care homes in the last 12 months. [32098]

Jacqui Smith: For 1999–2000, the latest year for which information is available, East Riding of Yorkshire council reported total gross expenditure on registration and inspection activities, other than inspection of under-8s, of £143,000. They reported that, of this, £76,000 was recovered in fees so that the net cost to them was £67,000.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* amount spent on funding care homes through local authorities and *(b)* the cost of care by region in 2001 was; and if he will make a statement. [33590]

Jacqui Smith: In 1999–2000 (the latest year for which data are available) £3.2 billion gross was spent on funding residential care homes through local authorities. The table gives a breakdown of this expenditure by region and client group.

Gross expenditure on residential care homes by region and client group, 1999–2000

£000

Government office region	*Older people*	*Adults with physical disabilities*	*Adults with learning disabilities*	*Adults with mental health problems*
North East	129,151	5,387	26,877	6,286
Yorkshire and the Humber	221,718	11,145	61,947	13,931
East Midlands	178,004	9,705	46,442	11,262

Gross expenditure on residential care homes by region and client group, 1999–2000

£000

Government office region	*Older people*	*Adults with physical disabilities*	*Adults with learning disabilities*	*Adults with mental health problems*
West Midlands	217,313	14,949	76,920	13,659
South West	196,444	14,883	70,138	14,513
East of England	233,319	18,777	101,014	17,503
London	279,912	35,528	187,153	65,472
South East	291,926	23,712	145,870	19,478
North West	320,302	23,172	73,113	25,508
England	2,068,089	157,258	789,474	187,612

Total gross expenditure all client groups, England 3,202,433

Source: Form RO3, General Fund Services Revenue Account (Personal Social Services)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to collect centrally the figures for survival rates following unplanned moves of care home residents from their care home; and if he will make a statement. [33593]

Jacqui Smith: Data on survival rates following unplanned moves of care home residents from their care home are not currently collected, and have not been prioritised for future collections.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many older people moved into care owing to reaching the cost ceiling for care in the home in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [33591]

Jacqui Smith: Data on the number of people moved into care as a result of reaching the cost ceiling for care at home are not collected centrally.

Councils with social services responsibilities should plan supported admissions to residential care in consultation with prospective residents and other interested parties. Final decisions should be based on a full consideration of assessed needs, agreed outcomes, the quality of care, and costs. The Department will be publishing guidance on this point shortly.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many older people are waiting for an assessment before being admitted to a care home in the Portsmouth area; and if he will make a statement. [33922]

Jacqui Smith: In September 2001 (the latest information available centrally) 25 people of all ages within the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority area had their discharge from hospital delayed because they were awaiting an assessment of their future care needs. The assessment determines their future care needs, these may be met in a range of settings, including care homes or their own home.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many county council residential homes for the elderly there were in England in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* at the most recent date for which figures are available. [34571]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of local authority staffed residential care homes for older people[1] is shown in the table.

Number of local authority staffed homes and places for older people in England, 1990, 1997 and 2001

Rounded numbers

At 31 March	*Local authority staffed homes*	*Total places in local authority staffed homes*
1990	2,480	103,600
1997	1,500	54,680
2001	1,190	41,830

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nursing homes and *(b)* residential homes are (i) known to have conformed by 1 April 2001 and (ii) expected to conform by 1 April 2002 to the care home standards to be implemented on 1 April 2002; and what proportion they represent of all such homes. [34765]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* It will be for the National Care Standards Commission to decide in the particular circumstances of each individual home whether the home conforms to the standards necessary to meet the assessed needs of its residents. The standards were extensively consulted on and the Department has no evidence to suggest that large numbers of care homes will be unable to meet them. The Commission will form a more detailed picture of care homes' compliance with the national standards as it completes its first cycle of inspections of providers in England during 2002–03.

Hospital Infections

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to protect surgical patients from exposure to poisons; [32779]

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made to ensure total sterilisation of surgical instruments; and if he will make a statement. [32798]

Yvette Cooper: We have received advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathies Advisory Committee that a key factor in reducing the risk of person-to-person spread of vCJD during surgery is a high standard of decontamination of surgical instruments. This is confirmed by the Risk Assessment that we published on 16 March 2001.

Since October 2000, we have carried out a comprehensive survey of decontamination facilities and practices in the national health service in England, the results of which we published on 11 December 2001. Those hospitals falling below the standard required were helped to produce action plans. As a result, all NHS acute hospitals in England now have access to satisfactory decontamination services.

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[1] Includes local authority staffed care homes for elderly mentally infirm people.

The modernisation of NHS decontamination services is a long-term process, not a one-off event, and we will continue to ensure that appropriate precautions, based on evidence and scientific advice, are taken to ensure patient safety.

Hospices

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums of money that have been recently announced for the hospice movement will be available to the private sector. [32549]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* Hospices are provided either by the voluntary sector or by the national health service.

In the NHS Cancer Plan we pledged that the NHS contribution to the costs of specialist palliative care (including voluntary sector hospices) would increase. By 2004 the NHS will invest an additional £50 million in specialist palliative care. This will match on a national basis the funding provided by the voluntary sector and will enable the NHS to increase their contribution to the costs hospices incur for agreed levels of services.

Disabled Parking

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many disabled parking spaces are available at North Durham University Hospital. [33495]

Jacqui Smith: The University Hospital of North Durham has 876 car parking spaces of which 32 are disabled bays.

Preventive Care

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is given to preventive support for older people; what assessment has been made of required resources for intermediate care; and if he will make a statement. [33920]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan announced an extra £900 million annually by 2003–04 for new intermediate care and related services to promote independence and improve quality of care for older people, together with targets for additional intermediate care beds and non-residential places and the number of people to benefit.

Full details are in the intermediate care circular Health Service Circular 2001/01:Local Authority Circular (2001)1 published in January last year, copies of which are available in the Library.

Waiting Times

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the average patient waiting time for every month from 1 January 2001 to 31 January 2002 at the Royal Devon and Exeter accident and emergency department and *(b)* the monthly average of England's accident and emergency departments over the same period. [33601]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Neurological Conditions

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 143W, on neurological conditions, (1) what the time scale is for scoping, planning and implementing the framework; [34342]

(2) whether motor neurone disease will have its own section within the framework. [34313]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework (NSF) for Long-term Conditions is likely to focus on the needs of people with neurological disease, and brain and spinal injury, as well as some of the common issues faced by people with a long-term condition. The Department expects to decide the specific scope and content of the NSF later this year.

Mental Health Acts

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish a White Paper on the reform of the Mental Health Acts; and if he will make a statement. [34071]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* We published the White Paper "Reforming the Mental Health Act" in December 2000. The White Paper made clear our intention to reform mental health legislation and bring it into line with the contemporary patterns of care and treatment, including the changes and new investment set out in the NHS Plan, and to improve the provisions for high risk offenders, including those who are dangerous and severely personality disordered.

New legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will appoint the non-executive directors of the South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust; and when they will be appointed. [34495]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The non-executive members of the board will be appointed by the National Health Service Appointments Commission, in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. It is anticipated that the appointments will be made in March.

Delayed Discharges

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average delay for patients with delayed discharges is in the third quarter of 2001–02. [33617]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not yet available. The most recent information available (second quarter of 2001–02) is available in the Library.

Bed Blocking

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of acute beds are blocked in each acute National Health Service hospital trust. [33618]

Jacqui Smith: Figures are collected centrally on the number of acute beds blocked in each health authority and these have been placed in the Library. Figures are not collected centrally on numbers in each hospital trust.

Victoria Climbie Inquiry

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements have been made to publicise the seminars planned as part of the Victoria Climbie inquiry; who has been invited to attend; and when they will take place; [33989]

(2) when he expects the Victoria Climbie inquiry to conclude its evidence gathering. [34046]

Jacqui Smith: The Victoria Climbie inquiry is an independent statutory inquiry commissioned by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and the Home Department. The Secretary of State for Health understands that Phase II of the inquiry will start in March and will consist of a series of five seminars. Further information about the seminars can be obtained from www.victoria-climbie-inquiry.org.uk.

We understand that phase I of the inquiry is expected to end this month, and that phase II is expected to end in April. The report of the inquiry is expected later this year.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 12 February 2002

SCOTLAND

Hospital Waiting Lists

5. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she intends to meet health ministers from the UK Government and the devolved Administrations to discuss NHS waiting lists. [32336]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with UK Ministers and Scottish Ministers on a wide range of issues. Last autumn, on my behalf, my hon. and learned Friend the Advocate-General attended the Joint Ministerial Committee on Health, when a variety of issues was discussed. However, NHS waiting lists in Scotland are a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive.

Rail Network

6. **Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the regions on the Strategic Rail Authority plan as it affects Scotland. [32337]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues at the DTLR on a wide range of matters, including the operation of the rail network.

Rural Economy

8. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the future viability of the rural economy in Scotland with special reference to designation of assisted areas. [32339]

Mr. Foulkes: Rural Scotland has a dynamic and vibrant economy and enjoys significant regional aid coverage.

Small Business

10. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to encourage small business development in Scotland. [32341]

Mrs. Liddell: We have delivered the conditions under which business can prosper. The fundamentals of the Scottish economy as part of the UK economy remain strong—high levels of employment, low levels of unemployment, strong public finances, low inflation and the low interest rates. Specific support activity to encourage small business development in Scotland is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

11. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she next expects to meet representatives of small businesses to discuss regulation and employment issues. [32342]

Mrs. Liddell: I next plan to meet the Federation of Small Businesses and the Forum of Private Business on Monday 11 March.

European Capital of Culture

12. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the role of her Department in the competition for European Capital of Culture 2008. [32343]

Mrs. Liddell: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for identifying the UK nomination for European Capital of Culture 2008. The Scotland Office has been involved in preparatory work to establish a process for assessing bids to become European Capital of Culture in 2008.

Ministerial Travel

13. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her policy is on the use of railways for ministerial travel between Glasgow and London. [32344]

Mrs. Liddell: I use the most efficient and cost-effective mode of transport and travel by train as and when appropriate.

Unemployment

14. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on unemployment in Scotland. [32345]

Mrs. Liddell: Latest figures show that the number of people in Scotland out of work and claiming benefit stands at 104,700, a reduction of 600 on the previous month and down by 6,400 over the year.

Energy Review

15. **Anne Picking:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the Scotland Office involvement in the PIU energy review. [32346]

Mr. Foulkes: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 165W.

24. **Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the contribution made by her office to the energy review, with special reference to clean coal technology. [32355]

Mr. Foulkes: I represented the Scotland Office on the PIU Energy Review Project Advisory Group. The potential role of clean coal technology was within the scope of the review.

Government policy is to encourage the development of clean coal technology for application both at home and abroad.

18. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations she has received concerning the Government's energy policy in Scotland. [32349]

Mr. Foulkes: I represented the Scotland Office on the PIU Energy Review Project Advisory Group. I have regular discussions with a wide range of individuals and organisations with interests in different aspect of energy policy.

Aggregates Levy

16. **Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has made to the Treasury on the imposition of the aggregates levy in Scotland. [32347]

Mr. Foulkes: I met with representatives of the British Aggregates Association on 21 January and conveyed to my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury the views expressed by the Association.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations have been made to Her Majesty's Treasury on the aggregates levy; and if she will make a statement. [23829]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* My hon. Friend the Minister of State met with representatives of the British Aggregates Association on 21 January and conveyed to my right hon. Friend the financial Secretary to the Treasury the views expressed by the Association.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate has been made of the amount yielded from the proposed aggregates levy in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [23953]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The proposed aggregates levy is expected to raise around £380 million in the UK in its first full year. The revenues raised will be returned to business and local communities affected by quarrying through a 0.1 percentage point cut in employer's national insurance contribution. Additionally Scotland's share from the Sustainability Fund, allocated by HM Treasury using the Barnett formula, is likely to be approximately £3 million.

Friends of Scotland Initiative

17. **Rosemary McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the First Minister about her Friends of Scotland initiative. [32348]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with the First Minister on a wide range of issues. The First Minister is very supportive of my Friends of Scotland initiative and we will work together on this for Scotland.

Air Traffic Control Centre, Prestwick

19. **John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met representatives of NATS to discuss construction of the Prestwick air traffic control centre. [32350]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his previous questions on the subject on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 710W.

Attendance Allowance

20. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to her answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 595W, on attendance allowance, what role the Scotland Office played in discussions with the Scottish Executive on payment of attendance allowance to those recipients who will be entitled to receive free personal care in Scotland. [32351]

Mrs. Liddell: I have nothing more to add to the answer given to the hon. Lady on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 595–96.

Minimum Income Guarantee

21. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pensioners in Scotland are benefiting from the minimum income guarantee. [32352]

Mr. Foulkes: Around 181,000 people in Scotland benefit from the minimum income guarantee.

Scottish Parliament

22. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive about the costs of the devolved Parliament. [32353]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers. The costs of the Scottish Parliament will be met from the Scottish Assigned Budget.

Oil and Gas Industry

23. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Minister for Energy to discuss developments in the UK oil and gas industry. [32354]

Mr. Foulkes: I have regular discussions with my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy to discuss a wide range of issues including the UK oil and gas industry.

Euro

25. **Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Board of Directors of the Scotland in Europe campaign to discuss the impact of the euro on Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [32356]

Mrs. Liddell: I meet regularly with a wide range of people and organisations to discuss issues relating to the Scottish economy. Scottish businesses that have trading links with the euro area, not just those who export or import, will be affected. The Government are therefore committed to working in partnership with the Scottish Executive and with business to ensure the right level of euro preparations in Scotland for working with the euro now.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the names of staff who have been seconded to her Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and Civil Service grades within her Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35833]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. No staff have been seconded to my Department from the private sector.

Devolution Funding Policy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on her role as the Minister responsible for the Government's financial relations with the devolved Administration in Scotland. [32894]

Mrs. Liddell: Details of the financial arrangements with the devolved Administration in Scotland were set out in "Funding the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly: A Statement of Funding Policy". The second edition of the Statement was published in July 2000 by HM Treasury.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Devolution

29. **David Cairns:** To ask the Advocate-General if she will make a statement about *(a)* the subject matter and *(b)* changes in the number of devolution cases taken to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council since 1998. [32361]

The Advocate-General: Since May 1999, nine devolution issue cases have been taken to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. All nine cases have concerned points arising under the European Convention on Human Rights. Among the subject matters of the cases were section 172 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, prejudicial pre-trial publicity, assumptions under the Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995 as to whether property was the proceeds of crime, fixed legal aid payments, the competence of section 1 of the Mental Health (Public Safety and Appeals) (Scotland) Act 1999, temporary sheriffs, and delay in criminal proceedings. The number of cases in each year was: in 2000, three cases; in 2001, five cases; and so far in 2002, one case.

32. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Advocate-General what devolution issues have been raised in the last month under the Scotland Act 1998. [32364]

The Advocate-General: Since 1 January 2002, 19 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me. They have all raised points under article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights which protects the right to a fair trial.

Duties

30. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Advocate-General pursuant to her answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1126W, on her duties, if she will make a statement, in light of the role she has developed under the Scotland Act, on the actings of the Scottish Executive with respect to which she has sought to ensure that the UK Government have early warning. [32362]

The Advocate-General: I encourage lawyers from my office to work together closely with Scottish Executive lawyers at an early stage in the development of legislation. Any difficulties will, where possible, be resolved through consultation between the Government and the Scottish Executive. The lawyers in my office will play a part in identifying difficulties and resolving them and I will advise as Advocate-General on occasion.

European Institutions (Reform)

31. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Advocate-General if she will make a statement on the implications of reform of European institutions on the operation of the Scotland Act 1998. [32363]

The Advocate-General: Sections 29(2)(d) and 57(2) of the Scotland Act 1998 ensure that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Ministers cannot act incompatibly with Community law. Any changes in Community law which may result from reform of the European institutions would not change that position.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Portcullis House

50. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the number of repairs required to the fabric and installations of Portcullis House since it was opened; and what is the estimated total cost. [32388]

Mr. Kirkwood: Contractors are responsible for repairing any faults in their work identified in the 12 months following the hand-over of Portcullis House in August 2000. During the first 12 months some 3,200 defects were identified, ranging from a missing screw to a cracked pane of glass. This is well within the expected norm for a new building of this size and complexity—the vast majority of defects were minor and have not affected the users of the building. The costs of these repairs do not fall to the House of Commons; they are borne by the contractors.

The repairs for which the House has been responsible have mostly been minor and have been carried out as part of the day to day maintenance of the building.

Select Committees

51. **Jim Dobbin:** To ask the President of the Council what proposals he has for reform of the system for the appointment of members to select committees. [32389]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Modernisation Committee published its first report on select committees this morning.

The committee recommends that a new Nominations Committee, chaired by the chairman of Ways and Means and including seven of the most senior members of the Chairman's Panel, should be responsible for overseeing the process of nominations to select committees.

We believe that the new committee will be provide an independent mechanism, placing nominations to all select committees in the hands of an independent authoritative body and ensuring that the nominations to the committees that scrutinise Government are in the hands of the Commons.

Private Members' Bills

52. **Anne Picking:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to make proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to reform the system of Private Members' Bills. [32390]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I am aware many Members would like to see reform of the system of Private Members' Bills. My right hon. Friend has no proposals to make as yet, but we would welcome hon. Members' views.

Members' Pensions (Survivor Benefits)

53. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on the impact of the June 2001 decision to extend hon. Members' pension plans to their unmarried partners. [32391]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend has asked the Trustees of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund to consider the matter. I should remind the House that, should extension of survivor benefits to unmarried partners lead to increased costs to the scheme, we would expect these costs to be borne by scheme members.

Works of Art

54. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how much is available to commission and acquire works of art for the Palace of Westminster. [32392]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House of Commons has an Acquisition Budget of £50,000 in the current financial year for acquiring works of art, supplemented by an Acquisition Budget of £100,000 in the current financial year for acquiring works of art specifically for Portcullis House. In the new financial year, 2002–03, the main budget will rise to £100,000 and a further £100,000 will be available for Portcullis House. Mr. Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art is responsible for commissioning and acquiring works of art for the House of Commons. The House of Lords has separate acquisition funds.

Sitting Hours

55. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on changes to the parliamentary timetable and calendar. [32394]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I expect the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons may wish to report on changes to the parliamentary calendar.

The dates of periodic adjournments are always subject to vote by the House.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee how much has been spent on timber for the refurbishment of the Norman Shaw South building. [35681]

Derek Conway: The cost of timber to be supplied under the contract for the refurbishment of Norman Shaw South is some £80,000.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee how much certified timber has been used in the refurbishment of the Norman Shaw South building; and what proportion of the total timber purchased for this refurbishment this represents. [35679]

Derek Conway: All the timber supplied for the refurbishment of Norman Shaw South is being certified as lawfully obtained from forests and plantations which are managed sustainably.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what action was taken by his Committee to ensure that timber procured for the refurbishment of the Norman Shaw South building was sourced both *(a)* sustainably and *(b)* legally. [35680]

Derek Conway: The General Specification used for parliamentary works contains the following clause:

> "Sources of timber: it is the employer's policy to purchase only timber and timber products from sustainably managed sources. When requested, the contractor must submit to the project manager documentary evidence (which has been or can be independently verified) that the timber supplied under this contract has been lawfully obtained from forests and plantations which are managed to sustain their bio-diversity, productivity and vitality and to prevent harm to other ecosystems and any indigenous or forest-dependent people. Such evidence may take the form of a certificate issued under a credible independent verification system, or such other documents which demonstrate the operation of an environmental management system incorporating forest management criteria that conform with internationally recognised principles such as the Helsinki guidelines."

This clause was added in 2000 and has applied to all contracts drafted since then. The contract for the refurbishment of Norman Shaw South was agreed before then but the contractor is nevertheless supplying certification in line with the clause.

Select Committee Websites

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Chairman of the Information Select Committee how many hits there were on the website of each departmental select committee in the weeks beginning *(a)* 28 January and *(b)* 4 February; and if any website went down because of excess demand. [35102]

Michael Fabricant: The figures for hits on the website of each departmental select committee for the weeks listed are given in the following table. Totals are derived from committee pages on both the parliament server (home pages and press notices) and the publications server (committee publications). No down-time was recorded on either server during the period 28 January to 10 February 2002.

	28 January to 3 February			*4 to 10 February*		
Departmental committee	*Parliament server[1] hits*	*Publications server[2] hits*	*Total hits*	*Parliament server hits*	*Publications server hits*	*Total hits*
Culture, Media and Sport	4,988	5,952	10,940	3,202	5,454	8,656
Defence	3,335	4,947	8,282	2,088	4,192	6,280
Education and Skills	874	773	1,647	560	522	1,082
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	868	1,286	2,154	508	736	1,244
Foreign Affairs	4,571	4,466	9,037	2,603	3,113	5,716
Health	2,268	6,164	8,432	1,480	5,711	7,191
Home Affairs	2,250	4,218	6,468	2,250	2,975	5,225
International Development	4,338	3,440	7,778	2,715	2,911	5,626
Northern Ireland Affairs	2,415	1,617	4,032	1,499	654	2,153
Science and Technology	4,262	4,042	8,304	2,587	3,373	5,960
Scottish Affairs	1,135	2,256	3,391	753	999	1,752
Trade and Industry	3,938	5,798	9,736	2,719	7,035	9,754
Transport, Local Government and the Regions	2,839	4,402	7,241	2,217	4,817	7,034
Treasury	3,519	4,463	7,982	2,461	2,559	5,020
Welsh Affairs	2,973	1,516	4,489	1,852	1,438	3,290
Work and Pensions	323	288	611	213	217	430
Total	44,896	55,628	100,524	29,707	46,706	76,413

[1] Select Committee home and press notice pages are held on the Parliament server www.parliament.uk in Westminster

[2] Select Committee publications' pages are held on the Publications server www.publications.parliament.uk in Norwich

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judiciary

39. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to encourage employers to give working magistrates sufficient time off work to fulfil their Bench duties. [32374]

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on initiatives to encourage more people on low incomes to become JPs. [32368]

Caroline Flint: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what initiatives are being taken to broaden the social mix of magistrates. [32375]

Mr. Wills: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is committed to producing a national strategy for recruitment. His local advisory committees undertake a range of recruitment initiatives and these have delivered a Bench that has equal numbers of men and women and increasingly reflects the ethnic composition of the population. We need to do more to improve the social composition. The national strategy will be our means of delivering this aim. It will be published in the spring.

Transsexuals

40. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has for changes to the legal status of transsexual people. [32377]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Issues of concern to transsexual people were considered by the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People. The Government are sympathetic to the issues raised in the report and are considering how to take the matter further.

Child Guardians

41. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made in setting up an IT system that will enable child guardians to record the details of the children with whom they work. [32378]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Establishment of CAFCASS as a new, unified service provides an opportunity for improved communication and case management across the service. CAFCASS's IT project has been taken forward in two phases. Phase 1 provided a general infrastructure for CAFCASS. It is operating alongside systems inherited by CAFCASS from its predecessor services, which record case information on children who are the subject of court reports. The plans for Phase 2 provide for development of an integrated system to extend Phase 1 systems and supply improved management information, including case information, and interfaces with other organisations. CAFCASS is currently reviewing its Phase 2 IT strategy to assess immediate and longer term needs in the light of the operating experience it now has.

Criminal Courts (Reorganisation)

42. **David Taylor:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about the Auld report recommendations for a middle tier court; and if he will make a statement. [32379]

Mr. Wills: A total of 365 responses were received by the end of the period for public comment on 31 January. Of the representations received, a proportion referred to the middle tier court but the exact figure is not yet known. Representations on all the recommendations in Sir Robin Auld's report are now being carefully considered and analysed in detail. Responses from the general public and the main criminal justice stakeholders, subject to their agreement, will be placed on the Lord Chancellor's website www.criminal-courts-review.org.uk. The Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Parking Spaces

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what car parking spaces are provided and what the average annual cost of providing such spaces is for *(a)* the Official Solicitor's Office, *(b)* the Council on Tribunals, *(c)* the Statutory Publications Office and *(d)* the Judge Advocate-General's Office. [33657]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows:

(a) The Official Solicitor's Office does not provide car-parking spaces.

(b) The Council on Tribunals has one parking space, the cost of which is included in the rent and not calculated as a separate amount.

(c) The Statutory Publications Office does not provide car-parking spaces.

(d) The Office of the Judge Advocate General has three spaces, the cost of which is included in the rent and not calculated as a separate amount.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what car parking spaces are provided and what the average annual cost of providing them is for the *(a)* Domestic Legal Services, *(b)* Legal Services Commission, *(c)* Legal Services Ombudsman and *(d)* Law Commission. [33658]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows:

(a) It is not clear which organisation is envisaged in the term 'Domestic Legal Services'.

(b) The Legal Services Commission has a total of 169 car parking spaces over 19 sites. The estimated annual average cost for providing these spaces is £170,000, or £1,000 per space.

(c) The Legal Services Ombudsman provides six car-parking spaces at an annual cost of £1,500 each.

(d) The Law Commission provides no car-parking spaces.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what car parking spaces are provided and what the average annual cost is for providing such spaces to *(a)* CAFCASS, *(b)* the Public Guardianship Office and *(c)* the Public Record Office. [33660]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows:

(a) CAFCASS' headquarters at Archway Tower has seven parking spaces which cost £3,954. The number and cost of car parking spaces provided for the remainder of CAFCASS's estate is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

(b) The Public Guardianship Office's section of the car park at Archway Tower provides space for 42 cars. These spaces are for the use of contractors, visitors and staff. The Public Guardianship Office pays £25,200 per year to rent this space, which includes a secure bicycle rack.

(c) The Public Record Office provides 116 car parking spaces for members of the public using its facilities and 106 spaces for staff as its Kew site. In addition, there are four disabled spaces for use by either staff or public. The average annual total cost of providing these spaces is £121,659.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many car parking spaces are reserved for judges; what the total cost is of providing such spaces; and what criteria are used for allocating car parking spaces to judges. [33682]

Mr. Wills: Data on judicial car parking spaces have been collected for 63 of the largest court buildings. These are shown in the table. These buildings represent 75 per cent. of the Court Service estate. The information for the remainder of the estate is not immediately available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The judicial car parking spaces for the above buildings form part of the site and are not paid for separately. Judges are categorised as essential users of court buildings and car parking spaces are allocated to them on that basis.

Judicial car parking spaces

Property name	*Number of spaces*
Basildon Combined Court	7
Basingstoke County Court	6
Blackfriars Crown Court	13
Bournemouth Combined Court	11
Bow County Court	4
Bradford Combined Court	12
Brighton County Court	6
Bristol Crown Court	13
Cardiff Civil Justice Centre	11
Cardiff Crown Court	8
Central Criminal Court	18
Central London Trial Centre	14
Chelmsford Crown Court	6
Chester Crown Court	4
Chichester Combined Court Hearings	3
Derby Combined Court	5
Durham Crown Court	2
Exeter Combined Court	2
GKN House, 22 Kingsway—Public Trust Office	6
Great Grimsby Combined Court	4
Harrow Crown Court	8
Immigration Appellate Authority, Taylor House	11
Inner London Sessions House, Newington House	10
Ipswich Crown Court	3
Isleworth Crown Court	8
Kingston upon Hull Combined Court	6
Kingston upon Thames Crown Court	12
LCD Headquarters, Selborne House	8
Leeds Combined Court	17
Leicester Crown Court	10
Lewes Combined Court	5
Luton Crown Court	3
Maidstone Combined Court	14
Manchester Crown (Crown Square)	16
Middlesex Guildhall Crown Court	7
Newcastle upon Tyne Combined Court	13
Newport Crown Court	3
Norwich Combined Court	11
Nottingham Combined Court	12
Official Referees Courts, St. Dunstans House	6
Oxford Combined Court	9
Peterborough Combined Court	6
Portsmouth Combined Court	9
PRFD First Avenue House	10
Principal Registry of the Family Division	6
Reading Crown Court	11
Royal Courts of Justice	57
Southwark Crown Court	21
Swansea County Court	7
Swansea Crown Court	10
Teeside Combined Court	3
Truro Combined Court	4
Worcester Crown Court	5

Judicial car parking spaces

Property name	*Number of spaces*
York County Court	3
York Crown Court	5
Grand total	504

Magistrates

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what discussions he has had in the past year with employers' organisations to encourage their members to give time off for Bench duties. [33906]

Mr. Wills: I have not held any such discussions. However, the issue of gaining support from more employers will be addressed in the national strategy for recruitment, which will be published in the spring.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of magistrates are *(a)* full-time employed, *(b)* self employed, *(c)* part-time workers, *(d)* retired and *(e)* unemployed. [33912]

Mr. Wills: 72.3 per cent. of magistrates are recorded as being in paid employment and 27.7 per cent. are recorded as being "not in paid employment". No distinction is made in our records between full-time and part-time or between retired and unemployed.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of the magistracy is aged under *(a)* 60 and *(b)* 40. [33914]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor gave a breakdown of the magistracy in his Judicial Appointments annual report 2000–01,(Cmd 5248). The report showed that 4 per cent. of magistrates were aged under 40 and 64.6 per cent. were aged between 40 and 60. Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of working magistrates work in *(a)* the public and *(b)* the private sectors. [33913]

Mr. Wills: Our records on magistrates' occupations are not broken down into public and private sector. The following table provides a breakdown by occupation category. However, this can only be a rough guide to the proportions working in the public and private sectors because some lecturers and teachers will work in the private sector for instance, as will some health care employees.

Occupational breakdown of magistrates

Occupation	*Percentage*
Lecturers and teachers	8.7
Civil servants	3.7
Local government employees	4.6
Farmers and other agricultural workers	1.5
Health care professionals	3.8
Other health care employees	3.0
Other professionals	23.6
Employees of national companies	4.7
Employees of local companies/organisations	10.0
Self-employed	8.8
Not in paid employment	27.7

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many full-time employed magistrates have been *(a)* put onto the reserve list and *(b)* retired from the bench, in each of the last two years because of difficulties in getting time off for bench duties; and what proportion of working magistrates that represented in each year. [33903]

Mr. Wills: In total approximately 18,000 magistrates are in paid employment. In 1999, 182 magistrates resigned citing pressure of work or employment difficulties as the reason. In 2000 the figure was 186 and in 2000–01 (from which year figures were kept by financial year) the figure was 221. That is about 1 per cent. of all employed magistrates each year.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 is ensuring that working magistrates have sufficient time off work to fulfil their bench duties. [33902]

Mr. Wills: My officials are not normally informed of magistrates experiencing difficulties in obtaining sufficient time off to fulfil their bench duties. That is an issue between the employee and the employer, although the Clerk to the Justices or Secretary to the Advisory Committee will encourage the employer to be more supportive if the magistrate is happy for the Clerk to do so. Therefore I am not in a position to state whether section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 is ensuring that working magistrates have sufficient time off work to fulfil their bench duties.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the employers who have discouraged their employees from undertaking Bench duties in the last five years. [33907]

Mr. Wills: If magistrates experience difficulties with their employers discouraging them from undertaking Bench duties, the normal course is for the Clerk to the Justices or the Secretary to the Advisory Committee to contact employers to encourage them to be more supportive by persuading them that it benefits them to have employees who are magistrates because of the skills which magistrates develop in the discharge of their judicial duties. It would be unusual for issues between a magistrate and his or her employer to be reported to my officials and no record is kept of the rare instances they are reported.

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the provisions of section 51 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 have been used by a magistrate; and what the outcome was in each case. [33908]

Mr. Wills: If all attempts by the Clerk to the Justices or Secretary to the Advisory Committee to encourage an employer to be more supportive fail, and a magistrate decides to take his or her employer to an employment tribunal, that is a matter between the employee and the employer. My officials are not normally informed of any cases nor the outcome, nor is any record kept of those rare cases when they take place.

Helen Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people from Warrington, North constituency were serving as magistrates in Warrington *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [32254]

Mr. Wills: On the latest available information, approximately 57 per cent. of the magistrates currently serving on the Warrington Bench live in the Warrington, North constituency compared to 59 per cent. in 1997.

Judge Advocate-General

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what official foreign visits the Judge Advocate-General has made since his appointment; and what was the purpose of such visits. [32397]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Records are available from 1996 and the information requested is set out in the table.

Schedule of foreign official visits by Judge Advocate-General 1996–2001

Date	*Place visited*	*Duration*	*Purpose of visit*
July 1996	Canada	5 days	Commonwealth law conference
June 1997	Hungary	5 days	Military law conference, and to advise on UK military law
August 1997	Washington DC, USA	5 days	To attend international conference on criminal and military law
November 1997	West Point and Maxwell Air Force Base, USA	5 days	To give a lecture on UK military law and human rights at both institutions
May 1998	Romania	3 days	To address a NATO seminar on military law
September 1998	USA	Washington DC, USA	To attend international conference on criminal and military law
April 1999	Ankara, Turkey	4 days	To address a military conference on military law and human rights
May 1999	Estonia	3 days	To advise on UK military law (with the Provost Marshal)
June 1999	Hungary	5 days	Military law conference, and to advise on UK military law
September 1999	USA	Washington DC, USA	To attend international conference on criminal and military law
February 2000	Charlottesville and Georgetown University DC	5 days	To give a presentation on UK military law and human rights
April 2000	The Hague	2 days	Visit to International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia
September 2000	Canada (Calgary)	5 days	Interview candidates for judicial officer posts with JAG office
October 2000	Gibraltar	3 days	Interview candidates for judicial officer posts with JAG office
June 2001	Hungary	5 days	Military law conference and to advise on UK military law
September 2001	Copenhagen, Denmark	5 days	To attend international conference on criminal and military law

Note:

The Judge Advocate General also makes regular visits to his permanent office at Rheindahlen, Germany for official office purposes

Northern Ireland Court Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff in her Department work *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* for part of their time on matters related to the Northern Ireland Court Service. [32580]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of staff employed by the Northern Ireland Court Service can be broken down as follows:

Part-time staff: 97 (full-time equivalent—60)

Full-time staff: 596

Total staff: 693[1]

[1] Figure excludes the number of staff on career break. Twenty-one staff on career break; total staff including career break staff—714.

Reporting Procedures

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what reporting procedures exist between the Public Guardianship Office and her own. [33289]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office is part of the Lord Chancellor's Department. He receives regular reports on the operational performance of the Public Guardianship Office (PGO), from the chief executive and is consulted by the chief executive on the handling of operational matters which could give rise to substantial public, parliamentary or judicial concern. The Head of Policy Group serves as a focal point to provide advice to Ministers and support the chief executive. He is also, in consultation as necessary, with the ministerial advisory board, responsible for advising Ministers and the Permanent Secretary on the PGO's strategic direction, plans, targets and performance. The ministerial advisory board (MAB), which meets quarterly, was set up to consider strategic issues relevant to the PGO and provide independent advice to Ministers on the strategic direction of the PGO, its governance and its performance, with particular reference to its key performance measures.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what reporting procedures exist between the Judge Advocate-General's Office and her own. [33287]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are no formal procedures in place between the office of the Judge Advocate General and the Lord Chancellor's Department.

The Office of the Judge Advocate General is a judicial appointment made by Her Majesty the Queen under Letters Patent, and the work that his office carries out is judicial and quasi-judicial advisory post trial work for the Army and Royal Air Force, and is performed by the Judge Advocate General or by judicial officers appointed by the Lord Chancellor or by the Judge Advocate for that purpose. Since the functions of the Judge Advocate General and his judicial officers are judicial or quasi judicial, reporting is not constitutionally appropriate, although the Judge Advocate General is answerable to the Lord Chancellor in the same circumstances as all other judges within his jurisdiction.

The budget and accounts of the Office of the Judge Advocate General are supervised by the Lord Chancellor's Department in the usual way. Sir Hayden Phillips, the Permanent Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department, is the accounting officer and is responsible to the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office for the propriety of public expenditure incurred by the Office of the Judge Advocate General.

Court Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training programmes are made available to junior administrative staff in the Court Service. [33299]

Mr. Wills: The training programmes available to junior administrative staff in the Court Service are as follows:

Business skills
Customer service modules
Delivering results
Desk training
Diversity awareness
Induction
IT
Job specific selection for job holders
Job specific selection for job holder's development
Letter writing
Local safety office
National Vocational Qualifications
Open learning
Personal effectiveness
Prince's Trust volunteers scheme
Working with others.

Green Travel Plans

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what green travel plans are in place for *(a)* judges, *(b)* the Court Service, *(c)* magistrates' courts, and *(d)* staff in the Department, deployed on (i) freedom of information and (ii) data protection and identity. [33693]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows:

(a) My Department has no green travel plans in place for judges; our green travel plans are specific to an individual site rather than to any particular group of court users.

(b) The Court Service has a green travel plan in place at its headquarters building. The Department and its agencies aim to reduce their environmental impacts, such as emissions from vehicles and congestion, from transport use across all its activities. These include travel on business, operation of the car fleet and pool cars, contractors, deliveries and visitors.

(c) My Department is not directly responsible for magistrates' court buildings as they are owned by local authorities. Information on green travel plans put in place at magistrates' courts by local authorities is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

(d) My Department has no green travel plans in place for staff in the Department, as deployed on (i) freedom of information or (ii) data protection and identity. Our green travel plans are specific to individual buildings rather than to any particular group of staff.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what green travel plans her Department has for *(a)* the Land Registry, *(b)* CAFCASS and *(c)* the Public Guardianship Office. [33663]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows:

(a) Of the 26 Land Registry offices, 13 have implemented site-specific green travel plans. The remaining 13 offices expect to implement plans before the end of this financial year. There are also Land Registry policies, covering all offices, providing interest-free advances of salary for the purchase of season tickets for travel to work using public transport and for staff wishing to purchase bicycles for travel to work.

(b) Launched in April 2001, CAFCASS inherited staff with over 100 different terms and conditions. Travel policies for CAFCASS, including green travel plans, will be considered during the process of harmonisation of terms.

(c) In line with departmental guidelines, the Public Guardianship Office (PGO) offers staff interest-free advances of salary for the purchase of season tickets and for staff wishing to purchase bicycles. To assist those staff travelling to work by bicycle, the PGO has installed a secure bicycle rack at Archway Tower together with shower and locker facilities. Details of public transport routes into Archway and the surrounding area are published on the PGO intranet.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what green travel plans are in place for *(a)* the legal services ombudsman's office and *(b)* the Law Commission. [33681]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows.

(a) The legal services ombudsman has less than 50 people and so does not meet the target criteria for having a green travel plan.

(b) The Law Commission does not currently have a green travel plan. However, introduction of the Lord Chancellor's Department's green transport plan to its other offices, including the Law Commission, is under consideration.

Jury Intimidation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department by what date she intends to produce *(a)* in draft and *(b)* in published form proposals to tackle intimidation of jurors. [29948]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Northern Ireland Court Service has lead responsibility in consultation with the police for drawing up a policy in relation to countering intimidation of jurors. Preparation of an intimidation policy will be completed by 31 March 2002 and published thereafter.

Human Rights

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the Government's policy is on establishing a Human Rights Commission in Britain. [33943]

Mr. Wills: The Government have not ruled out the possibility of a Human Rights Commission, but we would have to be clear about the role and functions of such a commission and its relationship to the several existing equality commissions. One option is a single, overarching human rights commission, with a federal structure, to cover all these areas, which requires consideration alongside other proposals.

During the last Parliament, the Joint Committee on Human Rights issued a consultation document seeking views on what form a human rights commission might take. We will consider very carefully any recommendations the Joint Committee may make following this consultation.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what the Government's policy is on monitoring the implementation of the Human Rights Act 1998; [33944]

(2) what resources have been made available to monitor the effects on public authorities of the Human Rights Act 1998. [33942]

Mr. Wills: We keep the impact of the Act under continuous review. My Department has a dedicated Human Rights Unit with legal support offering guidance and advice to Government Departments and public authorities, as well as to members of the public, about the Human Rights Act. However, this is not a matter for the Lord Chancellor's Department alone, and the Government have made it clear that all Departments must play their part in delivering information and monitoring, including for their public authorities.

Further details of my Department's activities in this area were contained in my recent memorandum to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which my hon. Friend will have seen.

Children (Court Proceedings)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) under what statutory powers a court can prevent publication of the identity of children concerned in court proceedings by e-mail; [32162]

(2) if he will introduce proposals to improve the protection of the identities of children concerned in court proceedings, with particular reference to electronic communications; [32164]

(3) under what statutory powers a court can prevent publication of the identity of children concerned in court proceedings in messages on an electronic bulletin board system; [32163]

(4) under what powers courts can prevent publication of the identity of children concerned in court proceedings in messages on a web page. [32224]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

Sections 39 and 49 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 restrict publication of the identity of under-18s involved in criminal court proceedings. They apply to print and broadcast media: we do not believe they cover electronic communications.

We are due to implement further restrictions in the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. We believe they will cover electronic communications which can be shown to be addressed to the public or a section of the public.

Coroners

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many coroners there are; and how many are women. [34895]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

There are 124 coroners in England and Wales, including 11 women.

Correspondence

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance his office has provided to Government Departments on dealing with hon. Members' correspondence. [33286]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

In July 2000, my Department published "Handling Correspondence from Members of Parliament: Guidance for Departments", which set out the general principles which Departments should follow when replying to correspondence from hon. Members. In 2001, my Department also published "Handling Correspondence from Members of Parliament: Good Practice Guidance" to promote the sharing of good practice between Departments and agencies and to help raise standards.

Copies of both publications are available in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31795]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO's fraud investigation team carry out a programme of visits to overseas posts and Departments in the UK to detect, deter and investigate fraud and financial malpractice. They also train staff in fraud awareness and issue anti-fraud guidance. Our internal auditors also follow a demanding schedule of audits both overseas and in the UK.

The FCO have also introduced new schemes for beating fraud including "whistleblowing" guidance, additional self-audit packages and fraud/malpractice hotline details in pay-slips.

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31775]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office gave him on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1130W.

Gibraltar

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the significance of Gibraltar as a UK trading partner. [32020]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to him on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 953W.

Liberia

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Liberia, with specific regard to human rights abuses. [34427]

Mr. MacShane: We are very concerned by the worsening conflict between Government forces and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy dissidents, the resultant humanitarian crisis and the serious human rights situation. We are working hard to resolve instability in the Mano River sub-region and promote greater respect for human rights. We have called on the Presidents of Guinea and Liberia to stop supporting rebel groups which are destabilising each other's countries.

We are concerned at reports of Liberian forces committing serious human rights abuses against civilians, in particular, internally displaced persons. There is an increasing flow of refugees into Sierra Leone. The EU opened Article 96 talks with Liberia in November 2001, demanding greater respect for human rights before resuming EU development funding. The UK and EU have called for legal investigations to be launched into all human rights abuses, more human rights training for security personnel and the creation of an independent human rights commission.

We are continuing to provide humanitarian assistance to Liberia. Over the past 18 months we have contributed £1 million to the Consolidated Appeal for West Africa, some of which is allocated to Liberia. All of this assistance is channelled through NGOs, not the Government of Liberia.

HIV/AIDS

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provision he is making to respond to the forthcoming request from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for a report on the UK's implementation of the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights. [34133]

Peter Hain: The HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of the most serious threats to health in modern times. Globally, over 40 million people live with HIV/AIDS. Tackling this crisis, both in the United Kingdom and overseas, is a major priority for this Government.

The Government fully support the UN's efforts to highlight the importance of the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights. We stand ready to contribute to the planned 2003 report to the UN Commission on Human Rights on implementation of the guidelines, once a request has been received.

FCO Telecommunications Network

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in how many embassies the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network hardware has been installed in each of the last six months; in how many he expects it to be installed in the next six months; and if he will make a statement. [34623]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network (FTN) provides two main services for our diplomatic missions overseas. One is connection to a telecommunications network; the second is the provision of a telephone system (PBX). Provision of these services entails installation of hardware at our missions. In each of the last six months FTN hardware has been installed as shown.

Month	*Telephone systems*	*Network connections*	*Total installations*
August 2001	5	4	9
September 2001	5	12	17
October 2001	9	8	17
November 2001	8	5	13
December 2001	7	17	24
January 2002	7	9	16
Total	41	55	96

Work planned for the next six months should see FTN hardware installed as shown.

Month	*Telephone systems*	*Network connections*	*Total installations*
February 2002	7	13	20
March 2002	7	18	25
April 2002	4	18	22
May 2002	10	20	30
June 2002	9	11	20
July 2002	4	10	14
Total	41	90	131

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place the contract for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network in the Library; and if he will make a statement [34622]

Mr. MacShane: Under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information we are unable to deposit the document.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the date upon which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network will be fully operational; and if he will make a statement. [34621]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network (FTN) provides two main services for our diplomatic missions overseas. One is connection to a telecommunications network; the second is the provision of a telephone system (PBX). These services are being provided under a 10-year PFI contract, signed in May 2000, at which time it was envisaged that the network would cover 136 missions by May 2002. The scope of the network has now increased to cover 210 missions, with work due for completion before the end of 2002. It will be 2004 before the target for PBX replacement is reached. In the interim period, reliable telephone connectivity between our missions and UK offices will be achieved by using a mix of new and legacy PBXs.

British Detainees

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if all British detainees in *(a)* Afghanistan and *(b)* Cuba have been allowed contact with family members in the UK. [34933]

Mr. Bradshaw: The International Committee of the Red Cross has access to detainees in both Afghanistan and in Guantanamo Bay, and is able to pass messages from family members to the detainees and vice versa.

Ian Stillman

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure the British high commission in New Delhi provides interpreter help for Ian Stillman; and if he will make a statement. [34982]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is for Mr. Stillman's lawyer to make the necessary application to the court for an interpreter. It is not the policy of the FCO to provide, from official funds, interpreters, or signers for the deaf, for individuals in court cases abroad.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many consular visits there have been to Ian Stillman since he lost his appeal. [34981]

Mr. Bradshaw: No consular visits have taken place since the appeal judgment was announced on 11 January. The last consular visit was due to take place on 19 December but Mr. Stillman was in Shimla receiving dental treatment. The next consular visit is due on 19 March.

Consular visits to British nationals in jail in India normally take place on a quarterly basis.

Private Military Companies

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will publish the proposed Green Paper on private military companies outlining options for the control of private military companies; and if he will make a statement. [35976]

Mr. Straw: We have today published a consultation document entitled: "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation".

This paper originates in a request made by the Foreign Affairs Committee in its second report on Sierra Leone. I regret very much that the Government did not meet the timetable originally promised for this document.

Over the years the House has concerned itself from time to time with the activities of freelance mercenary soldiers. There were a number of disturbing and sometimes disgraceful incidents in Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. These gave rise to justifiable indignation and a strong wish to curb this unsavoury business.

The situation has changed since the 1970s. Africa's problems are different and so also is the nature of outside intervention. In some cases at least it is companies more than individuals who have been at issue there recently.

The term "private military companies" covers many different sorts of organisation. Some are respectable and well-established names; some are transient and not always reputable companies. Public attention has focused most sharply on companies who have provided soldiers ready to take part in combat. There are many different opinions—some of them strongly held about such activities, an issue which is explored in the paper.

These sort of activities attract attention and controversy but they are neither the most numerous, nor necessarily the most important part of the private military sector. A growing number of companies who would not take part directly in combat nevertheless provide important military services such as training, planning, logistics, weapons procurement and intelligence. In today's world such services can be significant force multipliers and may have a considerable impact on fighting capability. It is timely that we should consider this growing industry and look at the question of whether some form of regulation would be appropriate.

Mercenary activity is an old phenomenon but a corporate sector providing military services is relatively new. Given the professionalism and high reputation of Britain's armed services it is not surprising that this is an area in which British companies are active. The idea of regulating this sector is also relatively new. It raises many difficult legal and practical issues. There are many different interests and points of view of which we should take account. We therefore wish to embark on a wide process of consultation before formulating a policy. Against this background the paper outlines the issues, the recent history and the current debate, and finally sets out some of the options for regulation—but does not make any specific proposals. Before doing that I would like to hear the views of those directly concerned and indeed of all interested parties.

This is a serious subject which merits careful examination. The private military sector is a growing phenomenon which could develop in a helpful or an unhelpful way. I shall be surprised if we emerge from the debate with the conclusion that the best solution is to do nothing at all.

I look forward to receiving contributions to the debate from Members of this House and elsewhere—and I will welcome views from the widest range of sources. I hope that in due course, as the discussion develops this House will also provide time for a full and open debate.

DEFENCE

Trident

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what technical programme his Department conducts to assure the safety and serviceability of the Trident warhead; and if he will make a statement. [36107]

Dr. Moonie: The Government attach great importance to maintaining the safety and serviceability of the United Kingdom's nuclear weapons. The Strategic Defence Review in 1998 confirmed the need for a robust capability to underwrite the safety and reliability of Trident, in the absence of nuclear testing. A scientific methodology is being developed to continue to give this assurance with high confidence. A detailed technical review of the scientific methodology behind this programme will be published shortly in a major scientific journal.

To ensure that we continue to be confident of the safety and reliability of our nuclear weapons, it is essential to understand the properties of warhead materials such as high explosive and plutonium under a very wide range of physical conditions, and how these properties change with age. Confidence in the safety and performance of Trident is based ultimately on predictions from high fidelity numerical models run on super computers. The Atomic Weapons Establishment has recently announced a major investment in a new super computer that will substantially upgrade its capability. However, experimental studies are still essential to validate the computational models and improve understanding of basic theory. As a continuing part of this programme the UK will shortly collaborate with the US in conducting a plutonium hydrodynamic experiment at the U1A facility in Nevada. This experiment will not produce nuclear yield and will be fully consistent with our obligations under the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. Historical nuclear test data and information from the forensic examination of warheads withdrawn from the stockpile provide further information for the process.

A400M

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to his German counterpart about the German Parliament's approval of the A400M Project. [33088]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 215–16W. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence raised the A400M project with his German counterpart when they met on 18 January and since then, during a telephone exchange when he again expressed the hope that the issue could be resolved quickly.

NATO Budget

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list common budget contributions by NATO members to the three NATO budgets in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002; and if he will indicate the provisional projections for future years. [33193]

Mr. Hoon: Budget ceilings for NATO's three budgets were set as follows:

	Security investment programme (million of NAU)[1]	*Military budget (million of NAU)*[2]	*Military budget (million of NAU)*[3]	*Civil budget (million of Belgian francs)*
1997	183.5	176.3	—	5,721
1998	183.5	178.9	—	5,847
1999	183.5	188.7	—	5,996
2000	183.5	188.8	15.6	6,080
2001	185.0	191.6	17.7	6,253
2002	185.0	192.8	16.8	[4]euro 166.9 million

[1] The value of NATO Accounting Units has varied from £2.680 in January 1997 to £2.122 in January 2002.

[2] These figures include an account supporting NATO's Airborne Early Warning Force to which the UK does not contribute. Our contribution to this force is made in kind, by the assignment to SACEUR of the RAF's E3D Sentry aircraft.

[3] Post-Kosovo, a separate military budget account to cover Balkans operations was established.

[4] For 2002, the civil budget was set in euros—euro 161.4 million, plus euro 5.5 million for additional security enhancements at NATO HQ required after 11 September 2001.

Ceilings for 2003 have still to be settled, but we would expect them to be of the same order as those for 2002.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts regarding NATO member contributions to the 2002 NATO budgets; and if he will make a statement. [33192]

Mr. Hoon: I have had no discussions with NATO Defence Ministers on contributions to the three NATO budgets for 2002. The 2002 budget ceilings for the NATO Security Investment Programme and the Military Budget were noted during the NATO Defence Ministers' meeting on 7 June 2001, when the UK was represented by our Permanent Representative. NATO's Civil Budget is a matter for the Foreign Secretary.

IT

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from

May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33684]

Dr. Moonie: Total expenditure by the Ministry of Defence on IT systems and support, including hardware and software, furniture, ancillary equipment and licence fees has been as follows:

	£ million
1997–98	506.688
1998–99	554.750
1999–2000	509.406
2000–01	478.663
2001–02	[1]379.966

[1] Covering period April 2001 to January 2002

The additional information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am therefore unable to provide a substantive answer on that element in accordance with Exemption 9 (voluminous and vexatious requests) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Submarine Officers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 337W, on submarine officers, what the specific disciplines necessary to conduct a warfare officer's first appointment are; and if he will make a statement. [33857]

Mr. Ingram: Before taking up their first appointment as a warfare officer in a submarine, officers will have completed common training with their surface flotilla counterparts in naval general training, which includes navigational instruction. Thereafter, those selected will receive four months shore training in nuclear physics and engineering pertinent to the type of nuclear reactor fitted to the class of submarine to which they are being appointed. They will also receive training in submarine warfare and general engineering systems.

On completion of this shore training, all warfare officers will join their first submarine in a training billet where they will spend the next 12–18 months receiving comprehensive training in all aspects of the individual submarine's systems, standard operating procedures, and emergency operating procedures. At every step they undertake practical and oral examination boards, chaired by the commanding officer, to ensure that they have achieved an appropriate standard of training and expertise. This entitles them to be awarded their submarine badge.

Having been awarded their submarine badge, and having had a further period of consolidation on board a submarine, warfare officers will complete six months further shore training. Once this is completed, they become qualified to pilot a submarine on the surface and navigate the boat while submerged close inshore.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 337W, on submarine officers, what the maximum length of time allowed is between a naval officer having a physical assessment and joining a ship; and if he will make a statement; [33859]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 337W, on submarine officers, what tests a submarine officer undergoes in the physical assessment conducted before joining a vessel; and if he will make a statement; [33860]

(3) what tests a naval officer undergoes in the physical assessment conducted before joining a vessel; and if he will make a statement; [33919]

(4) what assessment was made of the physical ability of Lieutenant Ashley Philpott and Lieutenant Ian Tabberer before joining HMS Triumph; and if he will make a statement. [33921]

Mr. Ingram: All naval personnel are medically screened when they enter the service. The medical examination on entry is valid until an individual reaches the age of 30. After this, five yearly medical examinations are carried out as a matter of routine to age 50. Thereafter, medical examinations are undertaken at two yearly intervals. the normal medical category for an officer is P2—fit for worldwide service. This category is common for all Royal Naval personnel, including submariner officers. Service medical examinations assess an individual's physical condition (upper and lower body), hearing, eyesight, mental capacity and emotional stability.

There is no formal requirement for personnel to undergo a physical assessment at the time they are notified of their re-appointment or when they join a new unit. However, medical documents are reviewed on these occasions and a medical examination is carried out if an assessment is not 'in date', or if personnel are being appointed to the submarine service for the first time. All submariners are required to qualify for service in submarines by undertaking submarine escape tank training (SETT) and to remain qualified by undergoing SETT at intervals of between three and four and a half years. Personnel must be in medical category P2 to attend SETT and are required to undergo a medical re-examination as part of their training. Many submariners undertake SETT at lesser intervals.

The maximum length of time between a service officer having a medical examination and joining a ship will vary depending on personal circumstances and the length of training patters and sea/shore appointments, but for submarine officers, this would be up to three to four and a half years. However, a range of other medical assessments such as classified radiation worker medicals, hearing tests etc. are also periodically carried out depending on the specific nature of an individual's employment. Furthermore, naval personnel receive a full range of primary medical care through the Royal Navy Medical Service. This includes treatments as well as provisions such as vaccinations and well man or woman clinics. Where a medical condition becomes apparent during a primary health care visit, an individual's medical status, including their fitness for sea service, is reviewed as a matter of routine.

Although it is inappropriate to comment on individuals, naval personnel are required to be medically fit for their duties before and during appointment to any unit, including submarines. It is incumbent on all personnel to bring to the attention of the appropriate authorities, at any time, any material factor including those of a medical nature, that may affect their ability to carry out their duties.

In situations where an individual's medical condition has changed sufficiently to warrant medical downgrading or recategorisation, one of the factors that is taken into consideration is whether they are able to continue with their present duties in their current unit. This applies particularly to submariners given the environmental conditions that are peculiar to submarines and their limited medical facilities.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints have been received about the *(a)* suitability and *(b)* condition of MOD married quarters each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [34034]

Dr. Moonie: The number of complaints received by Defence Housing Executive about the condition of properties is as follows:

Year	*Complaints*
April 1998 to March 1999	92
April 1999 to March 2000	77
April 2000 to March 2001	50
April 2001 to September 2001	28

Figures for 1997–98 are not available.

Separate records of complaints about suitability are not held centrally and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Suitable accommodation for entitled service personnel is defined by type. There are five property types for officers and three types for other ranks. In general, rank and appointment determines the property type allocated to officers and family size determines the type for other ranks. There are special standards for high cost areas such as London. Joint service property scales lay down specifications for every property type, and a four-tier grading system is used to determine level of charges in properties which do not fully comply with the specifications.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims for *(a)* serious neglect and *(b)* vandalism against MOD houses have been made in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [34607]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive, which manages service families' accommodation in Great Britain, has no formal record of the number of complaints made about serious neglect or vandalism. The incidence of vandalism is low on occupied estates and is dealt with as and when it arises. Unoccupied estates, awaiting disposal or upgrade, are kept as secure as is practicable. Local or Ministry of Defence police patrol sites, where this is considered necessary.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent upgrading MOD married quarters in each constituency since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [34610]

Dr. Moonie: A breakdown of upgrade expenditure by constituency is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, a total of £95.7 million has been spent on the upgrade of service families housing in England, Scotland and Wales since 1997. This can be broken down as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1997–98	12.4
1998–99	13.6
1999–2000	27.8
2000–01	41.9

These figures do not include new builds, demolition/ rebuild or PFI projects.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who manages MOD housing in each constituency; and if he will make a statement. [34609]

Dr. Moonie: Services families' accommodation in Great Britain is managed by the Defence Housing Executive (DHE). The DHE was set up in 1995, bringing the three services' housing functions into a single management unit.

Services families' accommodation in Northern Ireland is managed by the Families' Housing Service responsible to the GOC Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on private sector housing for service personnel in the last 12 months, broken down by constituency; and if he will make statement. [34033]

Dr. Moonie: The table shows the expenditure on substitute accommodation in Great Britain rented by the Ministry of Defence from the private sector when accommodation according to entitlement could not otherwise be provided for service personnel and their families. Figures relate to the period 1 January to 31 December 2001. A breakdown by constituency could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£000

	Family accommodation	*Single accommodation*
Rent	9,361	22,304
Fees	212	1,272
Council tax, utilities, telephone line rental, etc.	933	3,432
Total	10,506	27,008

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel are seeking married quarters accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [34031]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive (DHE) is required to provide, on request, family accommodation for entitled service personnel within 10 miles of their duty station and by their required date. In general, houses are kept waiting for service families, rather than service families kept waiting for housing. During 2000–01, over 97 per cent. of entitled service families were housed within 28 days of their required date (against a target of 92 per cent.) and a similar achievement is expected for 2001–02.

When DHE accommodation is unavailable, substitute service families accommodation (SSFA) is provided, by DHE, from the private rental market.

Alvis 4 Mamba Vehicles

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made to replace the Army's fleet of Alvis 4 Mamba vehicles. [34403]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 858W, to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock).

Northern Ireland

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the cost to the defence budget of the emergency deployment to Northern Ireland in each financial year since 1991–92. [34860]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 348W, to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws).

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many forces personnel have been committed overseas in each month since January 2000; and where. [34832]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of UK regular forces located overseas since January 2000 are given in the table. These figures are published twice yearly in TSP6 "Global Deployment of Service Personnel", which is held in the Library of the House.

Location of UK regular forces overseas 1 January 2000—1 December 2001

	2000											
	1 Jan.	*1 Feb.*	*1 March*	*1 April*	*1 May*	*1 June*	*1 July*	*1 Aug.*	*1 Sept.*	*1 Oct.*	*1 Nov.*	*1 Dec.*
Total overseas	39,888	40,841	40,641	42,708	42,855	43,082	42,922	41,389	44,704	44,931	44,173	43,754
Europe	29,318	29,866	29,076	28,818	28,386	26,946	25,332	25,416	25,740	25,301	26,969	26,961
Cyprus	3,610	3,590	3,566	3,631	3,604	3,525	3,514	3,626	3,641	3,687	3,705	3,686
Gibraltar	413	429	473	457	407	396	412	418	424	429	427	407
Other Mediterranean, near east and Gulf	1,457	1,449	1,296	1,502	1,615	1,606	1,074	1,011	995	966	1,531	1,537
Far East	295	297	300	297	279	292	938	926	904	890	289	338
Other locations	4,795	5,210	5,930	8,003	8,564	10,317	11,652	9,992	13,000	13,658	11,252	10,825

	2001											
	1 Jan.	*1 Feb.*	*1 March*	*1 April*	*1 May*	*1 June*	*1 July*	*1 Aug.*	*1 Sept.*	*1 Oct.*	*1 Nov.*	*1 Dec.*
Total overseas	37,658	39,378	39,378	38,898	37,829	38,695	40,922	40,958	43,562	47,020	44,292	43,044
Europe	24,047	24,290	23,275	22,948	22,520	21,811	21,013	21,593	20,739	19,600	20,335	23,924
Cyprus	3,455	3,565	3,429	3,659	3,653	3,516	3,491	3,625	3,150	3,708	3,560	3,566
Gibraltar	452	474	584	485	463	473	464	462	401	434	408	414
Other Mediterranean, near east and Gulf	1,382	1,522	1,694	1,553	1,347	1,576	2,274	2,538	3,801	9,520	8,804	4,388
Far East	308	325	276	273	266	262	280	279	280	275	278	283
Other locations	8,014	9,202	10,120	9,980	9,680	11,057	13,400	12,461	15,191	13,483	10,907	10,469

Chinook Inquiry

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he will take as a result of the House of Lords Committee inquiry into the Chinook helicopter crash in 1994. [35336]

Mr. Ingram: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister informed the House on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 856, this is a complex issue. We are now studying the report in detail, and will make a full response in due course.

Former Service Personnel

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the measures he is taking to ensure that service personnel are equipped to cope with civilian life when they leave the services. [35270]

Mr. Ingram: Resettlement and career transition services for those leaving the regular armed forces are core elements of my Department's Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy (AFOPS). The range of services that currently exist to assist service personnel with the process of re-entering civilian life includes housing and finance briefings, workshops, seminars, relevant training and assistance in job-finding. The range of activities and the amount of time available to individuals to undertake them depends on the length of time spent in the regular armed forces. The most comprehensive service is available to those with at least five years 'reckonable' service, although those who are medically discharged at any time after the completion of basic training are also eligible for the full service. These services are currently provided in the form of a partnership between my Department and the Coutts Consulting Group, and are known as the Career Transition Partnership (CTP). A job-finding service is offered for those who have at least three years of reckonable service. A lesser level of support is available to those who have served less than three years in the armed forces, and who are not therefore eligible for the CTP. The CTP commenced operations on 12 October 1998, and has its own dedicated website, www.ctp.org.uk.

A Veterans Advice Unit also exists and provides a single point of contact for ex-service personnel seeking advice on where to obtain expert help on individual issues.

Freefall Bombs

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of gravity bombs made in the UK were for *(a)* war stock and *(b)* the longer term in (i) 1998–99 and (ii) 2000–01. [31827]

Dr. Moonie: In 1998–99 and 2000–01 no freefall bombs, sometimes referred to as "gravity bombs", were manufactured to supplement war reserve stock. In the same periods, purchases were made to support training, and for development purposes. Of these, less than 3 per cent. restricted to non-explosive practice bombs, were manufactured outside the United Kingdom.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 21W, on departmental expenditure, if he will make a statement about the increase in his departmental expenditure on commercial and HMSO publications since 1997–98. [32286]

Dr. Moonie: Procurement of newspapers, magazines and periodicals is not managed centrally. Instead it is cascaded to budget holders. Therefore the reason for and decision to procure is left to budget holders with the requirement that such purchases should be properly scrutinised, accounted for and undertaken in the most cost-effective manner.

The 2000–01 outturn is atypical. Expenditure in 2001–02 is currently expected to be £7.5 million, which is very much in line with 1999–2000 outturn. But, given varying requirements, some fluctuation in this area of expenditure from year to year is to be expected as can be seen from patterns of previous expenditure.

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 599W, if he will specify the appropriate guidance to the UK forces operating in Afghanistan to ensure compliance with the UK's international legal obligations; and if prisoners captured in Afghanistan by UK forces will be accorded prisoner of war status under the Geneva Convention. [35032]

Mr. Hoon: I am withholding the specific details of the guidance referred to, in accordance with Exemption (1a) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Whether any detainee is a prisoner of war depends on the facts of each individual case. It is for the Detaining Power in the first instance to take a view.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what progress has been made in securing commitment from the Turkish Government to take over the UK-led ISAF command in Afghanistan; [33188]

(2) what other countries have offered to take over the UK-led ISAF command in Afghanistan. [33189]

Mr. Hoon: We are working closely with Turkey and a number of other countries on the handing over of the command of the International Security Assistance Force.

Royal Ordnance

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the status is of the partnering agreement between the MOD and Royal Ordnance; and if it is his policy to guarantee indigenous supply of ammunition. [33025]

Dr. Moonie: The Framework Partnering Agreement between BAE Systems RO Defence and the Ministry of Defence was signed in December 1999 and has been running successfully for two years. During this period both sides have met their commitments. The policy relating to the supply of ammunition ensures that the ammunition is safe and suitable for use, and provides both value for money and security of supply.

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with BAE Systems concerning the closure of ROF Birtley. [33024]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has held no direct discussions with BAE Systems on the future of the RO Defence (ROD) site at Birtley. The MOD is aware that ROD is conducting a review of its manufacturing strategy and this review includes the options for the Birtley site. It is expected that the outcome of this review will be announced at the end of February 2002.

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on Royal Ordnance's policy relating to the TACAS project and the supply of hardware from indigenous bases. [33026]

Dr. Moonie: I am not aware of any representations being made to the Ministry of Defence on Royal Ordnance's policy relating to the Tubed Artillery Conventional Ammunition System (TACAS) project. The TACAS project has only just entered the assessment phase. RO Defence, as the assessment phase prime contractor, is reviewing possible solutions, from a worldwide range of sources, to meet the TACAS requirement. On current plans, a decision on the way forward is not expected to be made until autumn 2004.

Ammunition Supplies

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the MOD's ammunition supplies over the next five years will be sourced from overseas *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly from a UK supplier. [33027]

Dr. Moonie: The complete information requested on future supplies is not available. Many ammunition requirements have either not yet been tendered, are currently subject to tender evaluation and/or have not been placed to contract.

During the past year, the proportion of the Ministry of Defence's ammunition supplies obtained directly from overseas was approximately 8 per cent. by value. The remaining 92 per cent. was sourced from UK suppliers, largely Royal Ordnance. Data on ammunition supplies sourced from overseas via a UK supplier is not readily available.

Computer Hacking

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in 2001 attempts were made to gain unauthorised access to computers in his Department by hacking; and of those how many were successful. [32740]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence, in common with any organisation that is connected to the internet, is subject to widespread and frequent attempts to probe its electronic boundaries. There is no evidence of any successful incursion from an external source to any Departmental computer system.

During 2001, 12 incidents of computer hacking were reported, of which two were website defacements and 10 were internal incursions. None of these had any impact on the conduct of military operations or other core Defence business.

Pakistan Ordnance Factories

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what UK-based training was provided by Royal Ordnance for engineers and staff of Pakistan Ordnance Factories in relation to munitions and weapons manufactured by POF under licensed production deals agreed with Royal Ordnance prior to 1987. [32280]

Dr. Moonie: In the 1970s, prior to the privatisation of the Royal Ordnance Factories (ROF), assistance was provided to the Pakistan Ordnance Factories by ROF. This assistance was related to technology transfer and training for the manufacturing of the 105 mm L64 Tungsten core Armour Piercing Fin Stabilised Discarding Sabot tank ammunition. The Ministry of Defence is continuing to ascertain the exact amount of training provided under these arrangements.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34212]

Dr. Moonie: Reported cases of stolen equipment are held centrally on a summary basis only and relate to suspected theft by Crown Personnel and contractors of stores and equipment usually recorded, especially in respect of lower value items, as multiples or combinations of items such as tools, items of clothing, foodstuffs etc. The Ministry of Defence does not keep fully detailed records of individual or non-aggregated items valued at less than £50 proven to have been stolen or recorded as lost. The information requested therefore could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tritium

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements his Department has made to obtain tritium supplies in the event that tritium production is halted in the UK. [34000]

Dr. Moonie: The UK has sufficient stocks of tritium to meet the needs of the Trident programme for the foreseeable future.

HMS St. Albans

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if HMS St. Albans will enter service in September. [34401]

Dr. Moonie: HMS St. Albans is planned to enter service in September, on completion of her current weapon equipment set-to-work and trials programmes.

Military Demonstration (Copehill Down)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature of the demonstration of military capability given to the Afghan Government's Ministers at Copehill Down on 1 February. [34417]

Mr. Hoon: General Fahim Khan and a team from the Afghan Interim Administration visited the United Kingdom between 29 January and 3 February for discussions with the United Kingdom Government. They also paid visits to a number of units of the British Army.

The demonstration they witnessed was of a company attack in an urban environment, represented by a mock-up of a village in Copehill down training area. The attack consisted of indirect fire using battlefield simulation, sustained small arms and main armament engagements supported by tanks, from the edge of, and in, Copehill Down village. The demonstration lasted approximately thirty minutes. The Afghan visitors then had the opportunity to meet the troops involved and view their equipment.

Procurement

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on agreements reached at the UK/French Government's industry conference on defence procurement. [34415]

Dr. Moonie: At the France/UK Government and Industry Conference held on 29 January, the French and UK Ministries of Defence agreed to examine practical measures to improve access to each others' markets. These include: exchanging data on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); holding another conference addressed specifically at SMEs; exploring the potential to conduct international co-operative PFI projects; and assessing the extent of defence trade between the UK and France.

War Pensions

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many war pensions were granted by the War Pensions Agency to armed forces personnel last year. [34558]

Dr. Moonie: A claim for war disablement pension may only be made after discharge from the armed forces.

The total number of war pensions granted by the War Pensions Agency from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001 was 7,209.

Service Pay

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rates of annual pay are for *(a)* a private in the

Army and *(b)* a marine in the Royal Marines (i) at commencement of basic training and (ii) once basic training has been completed, at age (A) 17, (B) 18, (C) 19, (D) 20 and (E) 21 years. [34960]

Mr. Ingram: All adult private soldiers and marines (aged 17 and above) who enter the Army or Royal Marines receive an annual pay rate of £10,344.10, irrespective of age. On completion of appropriate training (basic/trade) or, in the case of Army recruits, after 26 weeks if this is sooner, they move on to the next pay rate which is £12,070.55 per annum. The pay rates quoted are for the current year 2001–02.

Human Rights Cases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the legal cases brought against his Department and the armed forces since 1997 citing *(a)* the European Convention of Human Rights and *(b)* the Human Rights Act 1998, stating in each case (i) whether the case was found for the plaintiff or for his Department, or settled out of court, (ii) the net cost to his Department of fighting the case, including of any damages paid, (iii) action taken to, pursuant similar cases being brought in the future and (iv) the cost of that action. [34830]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence does not record separately those cases brought against the Department raising issues under the European Convention of Human Rights or the Human Rights Act 1998. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Civilian Contractors (Gulf)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his response to the recommendation in paragraph 92 of the seventh report of the Defence Committee, session 1999–2000, concerning civilian contractors who served in the Gulf; whether he intends to make provision to compensate Paul Connolly; and if he will make a statement. [34915]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces Pension Scheme

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence of those members of the armed forces pension scheme who retired between 1975 and 1977, how many *(a)* survive and *(b)* are survived by a widow or widower to whom a pension is paid. [33619]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost to the armed forces pension scheme *(a)* for existing service personnel and *(b)* for those who have already left the services of paying full half pensions to surviving widows or widowers for the whole of their remaining lives notwithstanding re-marriage. [32764]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army service personnel have been granted war disablement pensions since the earliest date for which he recently examined the records. [32678]

Dr. Moonie: A claim for war disablement pension may be made only after discharge from the armed forces. The War Pensions Agency is responsible for administration of the War Pensions Scheme.

Information on war disablement pensions in payment to former members of each service is not available. However, as at 31 December 2001 a total of 223,000 war disablement pensions were in payment.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 857W, on service pensions, if he will make a statement on the findings of his inquiries when they are completed. [35739]

Dr. Moonie: I will provide the hon. Member with further advice first when we have completed our work to try to clarify precisely when the problem arose and then later when we have a clearer idea of the numbers of service personnel affected.

Work to try to establish the start-point for the error should be completed in a few weeks. Establishing the numbers affected is expected to take significantly longer. The publicity given to the problem has already generated a considerable number of inquiries and we will deal with these as quickly as possible.

Organophosphate Pesticides

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the international studies of the effect of exposure to organophosphate pesticides, with particular reference to their use in the Gulf War, which are under review in his Department; and if he will make a statement. [35404]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

ASRAAM Project

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the ASRAAM Project. [34402]

Dr. Moonie: The Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile entered service at the end of January 2002, with the delivery of the first batch of missiles.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Minimum Voting Age

Bob Spink: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, if he will make a statement on the Commission's plans for changing the minimum age of voting. [34047]

Mr. Beith: I understand from the Chairman of the Electoral Commission that the Commission has no such plans but does intend to look in due course at the minimum voting age as part of its review programme of electoral law and practice. Any change would require legislation.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by her Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34301]

Dr. Howells: This information is not held centrally. The costs of collating it would be disproportionate.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what legal costs have been incurred by her Department in each of the last four years. [34282]

Dr. Howells: The legal costs incurred by the Department for the years in question are shown in the following table:

	£
1998–99[1]	550,018
1999–2000[1]	587,418
2000–01[1]	998,901
2001–02[2]	783,043

[1] Outturn

[2] To date

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by her Department and how much reclaimed. [34456]

Dr. Howells: The Department's total expenditure on hospitality is shown in the table. The figures exclude the Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies. The information requested on food and alcohol is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	£
1997–98	17,230
1998–99	28,688
1999–2000	32,533
2000–01	[illegible]0,891
2001–02 spend to date	24,311

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if she will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if she will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34381]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the publications issued by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34197]

Dr. Howells: Information on the cost and circulation of each document could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. I have, however, included the overall yearly figures spent on publications during the period.

	£
1998–99	288,100
1999–2000	448,238
2000–01	448,140
2001–02	[1]170,664

[1] To date

DCMS publications 1998–99

The Eyre Review

Export of Works of Art 1997–98

Response to the Select Committee on the Multimedia Revolution

Creative Industries Mapping Document

Departmental Annual Report 1998

Common Wealth and Museums Report

Digital Convergence Green Paper

Portable Antiquities Annual Report

Building a Global Audience

Government Response to the LIC Report

DCMS/Wolfson Fund Annual Report 1997–98

Children's Play Leaflet

National Lottery Information Leaflet

New Opportunities Fund Consultation Document

Interfaith Millennium Leaflet Reprint

Museums in the Learning Age

Sustainable Tourism Document

Tomorrow's Tourism Strategy Report

DCMS publications 1999–2000

Government Art Collection Leaflet

Export of Works of Art

Government Art Collection Conditions of Loan Booklet

Portable Antiquities Annual Report

World Heritage Sites

Treasure Annual Report

Finding Our Past Leaflet

Building a Global Audience

The Future Funding of the BBC

Review of the BBC's Financial Projections

Creative Industries—Report on the Creative Industries Finance Conference

Creative Industries—Exports: Our Hidden Potential

Creative Industries—Internet Inquiry: Snapshot of a rolling wave

Creative Industries—Your Creative Future

Creative Industries—UK Television Exports Inquiry

Annual Report 2000

Local Cultural Strategies

PAT 10—Policy Action Team 10: Report to the Social Exclusion Unit

A Sporting Future For All

Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries

The White Book—Option Appraisal of Expenditure Decision: A Guide for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its Sponsored Bodies

Consumers Call the Tune—The Impact of New Technologies on the Music Industry

Report on the DCMS/Wolfson Fund 1998–99

Libraries and the Regions—A discussion paper

Appraisal of Annual Library Plans 1999

British Library Review

Regional Consortium Leaflet

Efficiency and Effectiveness of Government-sponsored Museums and Galleries

Report of the Tourism Consumer Group

Guidance on Disposals of Historic Buildings

DCMS publications 2000–01

Treasure Annual Report

Vacant Plinth Advisory Panel Report

Broadcasting Command Paper

Review of the Transparency of the BBC

Creative Industries Finance Booklet

DCMS Annual Report 1999–2000

Learning Power of Museums

Government Art Collection—Conditions of Loan Booklet

Public Appointments Guidance

Tax Relief for Charities Booklet

Music Industry Report

Library Standards Report

Coalfields and the Lottery Report

Museums Education Report

Museums Social Inclusion Report

New Opportunities Fund Consultation Paper

Better Public Buildings

A Sporting Future for All

Tourism Summit Leaflet

Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001

DCMS Recruitment Booklet

The Government's Plan for Sport

Culture and Creativity

Local Cultural Strategies

Music Industries Document: Consumers Call the Tune

Marching Into the Millennium

DCMS publications 2001–02

Portable Antiquities Annual Report

A Vision for Culture On line

London Open House leaflet

Banking On A Hit Report

Cricket Disorder Report

Operation of the National Lottery—Select Committee Response

Staging International Sports Events—Select Committee Response

Tourism—the Hidden Giant and Foot and Mouth—Select Committee Response

Summer Supplementary Estimates

Lottery Achievements—The First Seven Years

A Force for Our Future—The Government Statement on the Historic Environment

Library and Information Matters—Report

DCMS Publicity Guidelines

DCMS Event Guidelines

Report of the Gambling Review Body

Digital TV—Information for Landlords

CIEPAG—Achievements leaflet

Media Ownership Rules Consultation paper

Winter Supplementary Estimates

Viewers Panel Report

English National Stadium Review

Public Appointments registration form

Public Reappointments booklet

DCMS Recruitment literature reprint

Audio Visual Industries Training Group Report

Honours Guidance Binder

Equal Opportunities Document Reprint

DCMS Identity Guidelines

Communications White Paper—Select Committee Response

Biennial Conservation Report

Creative Industries Finance Conference Report.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total cost to her Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34170]

Dr. Howells: The costs of external accountancy services for the Department for the years in question is shown in the table.

	£
1998–99	115,298
1999–2000	115,309
2000–01	172,025
2001–02[1]	140,540

[1] Spend to date

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) her Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34398]

Dr. Howells: This information cannot be provided save at disproportionate cost. My Department spent £500 on mobile telephone equipment in 2000–01 and £28,000 on mobile calls and line rental in the same period. Expenditure in previous years was at the same level.

Mobile Libraries

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to increase the number of mobile libraries. [34097]

Dr. Howells: Mobile library provision, as with branch libraries, is a matter for library authorities in line with their duty to provide comprehensive and efficient services within the terms of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Child Protection (Sport)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what financial assistance is provided to national governing bodies of sport to draw up and implement child protection policies; and what plans she has to provide further assistance. [34518]

Dr. Howells: The Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) was established in 2000 and is a three-year joint venture between Sport England (funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the NSPCC. Each are contributing £300,000 towards the unit, which provides a wide range of services to governing bodies including training, consultancy, information and guidance, and case-specific support. In addition, Sportscoach UK makes a significant contribution to governing bodies in the child protection area through coaching and its education programme, and Sport England have identified two staff to work closely with the CPSU on child protection work. It is worth noting too that the Criminal Records Bureau, which was set up partly in response to the Protection of Children Act 1999 in England and Wales, will help governing bodies with their child protection policies.

Regional Arts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the spending by regional arts boards was, per capita of population served, in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [35158]

Dr. Howells: The table collated by the Arts Council of England provides the figures requested by the hon. Member.

ALL RAB	*EEA*	*EMA*	*LA*	*NA*	*NWA*
1995–96 Direct arts spend	4,406,276	4,116,211	12,474,394	6,496,922	7,971,107
Mid-95 Population	5,257,300	4,036,100	7,007,100	3,095,200	6,497,600
1995–96 Spend per head (£)	0.84	1.02	1.78	2.10	1.23
1996–97 Direct arts spend	4,499,474	4,131,044	13,075,294	7,113,607	8,321,574
Mid-96 Population	5,292,800	4,053,100	7,074,200	3,091,300	6,489,000
1996–97 Spend per head (£)	0.85	1.02	1.85	2.30	1.28
1997–98 Direct arts spend	4,615,052	4,145,321	12,724,078	6,700,651	9,751,399
Mid-97 Population	5,334,500	4,068,200	7,122,100	3,086,800	6,481,400
1997–98 Spend per head (£)	0.87	1.02	1.79	2.17	1.50
1998–99 Direct arts spend	4,282,894	4,242,899	12,843,375	7,113,607	8,530,042
Mid-98 Population	5,377,000	4,080,700	7,187,400	3,082,600	6,486,500
1998–99 Spend per head (£)	0.80	1.04	1.79	2.31	1.32
1999–2000 Direct arts spend	4,666,124	5,331,877	13,686,076	8,100,981	9,860,501
Mid-99 Population	5,418,900	4,101,800	7,284,900	3,073,300	6,478,100
1999–2000 Spend per head (£)	0.86	1.30	1.88	2.64	1.52
2000–01 Direct arts spend	5,349,901	7,399,162	25,996,282	11,557,019	18,500,627
Mid-2000 Population	5,459,700	4,118,000	7,375,100	3,068,200	6,493,200
2000–01 Spend per head (£)	0.98	1.80	3.52	3.77	2.85
2001–02 Direct arts spend	8,397,333	8,731,487	30,140,051	11,947,163	17,711,128
Mid-2000 Population	5,459,700	4,118,000	7,375,100	3,068,200	6,493,200
2001–02 Spend per head (£)	1.54	2.12	4.09	3.89	2.73

All RABs	*SA*	*SEA*	*SWA*	*WMA*	*YA*
1995–96 Direct arts spend	3,434,829	2,527,027	3,999,425	5,498,493	6,600,651
Mid-95 Population	4,722,800	4,057,800	3,893,600	5,306,500	5,029,400
1995–96 Spend per head (£)	0.73	0.62	1.03	1.04	1.31
1996–97 Direct arts spend	3,409,478	2,548,760	3,918,246	5,305,054	6,543,122
Mid-96 Population	4,755,000	4,076,800	3,904,700	5,316,600	5,035,400
1996–97 Spend per head (£)	0.72	0.63	1.00	1.00	1.30
1997–98 Direct arts spend	3,351,454	2,599,726	4,161,363	5,599,932	6,541,524
Mid-97 Population	4,793,900	4,110,600	3,930,400	5,320,800	5,037,000
1997–98 Spend per head (£)	0.70	0.63	1.06	1.05	1.30
1998–99 Direct arts spend	3,865,165	2,628,456	4,018,475	5,723,581	6,706,437
Mid-98 Population	4,822,800	4,134,100	3,948,300	5,332,200	5,042,900
1998–99 Spend per head (£)	0.80	0.64	1.02	1.07	1.33
1999–2000 Direct arts spend	4,372,224	2,923,597	4,339,348	6,664,429	7,349,451
Mid-99 Population	4,855,200	4,180,100	3,977,500	5,335,600	5,047,000
1999–2000 Spend per head (£)	0.90	0.70	1.09	1.25	1.46
2000–01 Direct arts spend	8,811,035	4,869,210	7,105,493	11,589,981	10,546,268
Mid-2000 Population	4,876,500	4,201,000	4,012,400	5,334,800	5,057,700
2000–01 Spend per head (£)	1.81	1.16	1.77	2.17	2.09
2001–02 Direct arts spend	10,374,000	5,737,846	8,559,355	12,844,798	11,762,000
Mid-2000 Population	4,876,500	4,201,000	4,012,400	5,334,800	5,057,700
2001–02 Spend per head (£)	2.13	1.37	2.13	2.41	2.33

Notes:

1. RAB arts spend figures are taken from RAB audited accounts, with the exception of 2001–02 figures which are taken from RAB business plans for that year.
2. Population figures are calculated from figures provided by National Statistics. Mid-2000 figures are the latest available.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on the funding of regional arts and cultural services. [35157]

Dr. Howells: The Arts Council of England carries out funding of regional arts organisations at arm's-length from the Government through the regional arts boards.

Regional arts boards are currently independent charitable organisations, and grants to them from the Arts Council are subject to conditions set by the council. The council made operating grants of £97.6 million to the regional arts boards during the financial year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the savings which would be achieved under the revised proposals from the Arts Council of England regarding funding of arts in the regions. [35159]

Dr. Howells: The Arts Council of England has set a target of £8 million to £10 million in savings from administration to put back into the arts. We have made it clear to the Arts Council of England that this target must be met. It is preparing a timetable for the restructuring which will generate those savings once the transfer to a single organisation has been completed.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total cost to her Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35023]

Dr. Howells: The cost of external consultants for the Department for the years in question is shown in the table.

	£
1998-99	379,156
1999–2000	711,394
2000–01	320,795
2001–02 spend to date	421,609

Libraries

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the frequency of visits by members to libraries per annum in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [35248]

Dr. Howells: There has been no such formal assessment. However, with effect from 2001–02, library authorities will report, in their annual library plan, on their current position against the public library standards, which includes a target for visitor numbers. This will allow all library authorities to be assessed against the best performing ones.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list by local authority *(a)* the number of members of library services and *(b)* the proportion of the authority's population who are members of its libraries; and if she will make a statement. [35247]

Dr. Howells: This information is not collected centrally. In 1999–2000, there were nearly 13.8 million active borrowers in England, ie. 27.7 per cent. of the population. An active borrower is a person who has borrowed at least one item from the library during the year.

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the functions, engagements and events which Ministers, her officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35693]

Dr. Howells: The information my hon. Friend has requested is not held centrally and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate costs.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the names of staff who have been seconded to her Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and Civil Service grades within her Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35841]

Dr. Howells: The Department has had no members of staff seconded from the private sector since May 1997.

Commonwealth Games

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if additional public funding is being sought for the Commonwealth games in Manchester; and if she will make a statement. [35740]

Mr. Caborn: On 2 July 2001 I announced an additional £80 million in funding for the games together with a contingency fund of £25 million, made up from contributions from Government, Sport England and Manchester city council. This additional funding was based on a thorough and realistic appraisal of the games equal costs undertaken by Patrick Carter.

Since then the games has remained firmly on track and within budget. And I can confirm that we have not received any requests for additional public funding over and above that announced last year although Government and the other funders have approved an £8.4 million call on the contingency following the collapse of Atlantic Telecom, the games principal sponsor and telecoms infrastructure provider at the end of last year.

"Hidden Britain"

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the exclusion of the Northern Highlands, the Western Isles and the Northern Isles from the British Tourist Authority "Hidden Britain"; and if she will make a statement. [R] [35846]

Dr. Howells: The British Tourist Authority's (BTA) "Hidden Britain" campaign was designed to promote areas not normally explored on traditional tourist trails. It is not always possible to feature every part of Britain, but the BTA aims to ensure that each campaign is broadly representative. The BTA worked closely with the three national tourist boards, including VisitScotland, in preparing the "Hidden Britain" initiative.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30094]

Mr. Leslie: Estimated expenditure on newspapers, magazines and periodicals since 1997 is not held centrally and is available only at disproportionate cost.

Visual and Aural Impairment

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to promote the use of RNID typetalk within Government Departments. [31187]

Mr. Leslie: The Central Office for Information has published guidance for Government Departments on providing information in accessible formats for disabled people, including the use of textphone services. There are three text phone users in the Cabinet Office and all staff have also received advice on contacting them.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Government Departments employ a trained lip speaker. [31188]

Mr. Leslie: Departments are responsible for their own arrangements: while some Departments may employ their own trained lip speakers, others may bring in lip speakers for specific events. Numbers are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Government publications were published in *(a)* Braille and *(b)* large print in 2001. [31189]

Mr. Leslie: Individual Departments are responsible for their own publications. Information on numbers published are not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. Government Departments are always willing to consider requests for providing information in accessible formats. For example, the Office of the e-Envoy consulted the Informability Unit at COI when planning the publication "Your guide to getting on". Copies have been produced in audio, large print and braille formats. By February 2002, 16 Braille, 75 large print and 525 audio copies had been supplied since the start of the public awareness campaign in November 2001.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many sign language specialists are employed by Government Departments for public and media relations. [31186]

Mr. Leslie: Departments are responsible for their own arrangements: while some Departments may employ their own sign language specialists, others may bring in sign language specialists for specific events. Numbers are not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. As an example, in November the Cabinet Office ran the Civil Service training exercise "Dunchester's Millions" for a group of disabled undergraduates, which introduces potential candidates to the work of a Civil Service Fast Streamer. Three sign language interpreters were employed at this event to give profoundly deaf students an opportunity to participate fully in the activities.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Government Departments provide *(a)* Braille facilities, *(b)* text phone facilities and *(c)* lip speaking training for employees. [31185]

Mr. Leslie: All Government Departments provide reasonable adjustments for disabled staff depending on an individual's particular needs. This includes the provision of Braille facilities, text phone services and lip speaking training where appropriate. For example, the Cabinet Office has three text phone users. The Cabinet Office Disability Staff Network (DisCO) is also running a deaf awareness workshop, which raises awareness among employees of the causes of deafness. It also offers background to sign language, deaf culture and lip reading skills.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether it is possible to receive an audio version of Government publications. [31312]

Mr. Leslie: Yes. Many Government publications are published in audio versions as a matter of course. Departments are always willing to consider requests to provide other publications in accessible formats. For example, the Office of the e-Envoy consulted the Informability Unit at COI when planning the publication "Your guide to getting on". Copies have been produced in audio, large print and braille formats. By February 2002, 16 braille, 75 large print and 525 audio copies had been supplied since the start of the public awareness campaign in November 2001.

Social Exclusion Unit

John Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future work programme of the social exclusion unit. [33734]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Tackling social exclusion is a priority for this Government. We have put in place a twin track strategy to tackle low incomes and improve public services. The social exclusion unit was set up in 1997 to co-ordinate policy-making on specific cross-cutting projects focusing on some of the most intractable social problems. The unit has completed five major projects on tackling rough sleeping, teenage pregnancy, truancy and school exclusions, neighbourhood renewal and 16 to 18-year-olds not in education. These have resulted in a total of 27 reports, of which six set out a full policy response from Government.

Over the next 12 months the social exclusion unit is planning to complete four projects on areas of cross cutting work. These areas are: reducing the rates of re-offending among ex-prisoners; developing a more effective system to prevent young people from running away and to help those that do; improving the educational achievement of children in care; and removing the transport barriers that prevent people accessing work and critical services.

The Prime Minister and I will take a view on any new project as the work programme develops.

The unit will also be working closely with the implementation units in other Government Departments to ensure that there is effective implementation of previous work carried out by the unit.

To support this work the social exclusion unit will communicate and consult with members of the public, the voluntary and the business sector, local government and key professionals regarding the Government's policies on social exclusion, and ensure that they receive accurate, up-to-date information about the work of the unit.

Regional Government White Paper

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the White Paper on Regional Government will be published. [35308]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W.

Ministerial Meetings (Lobbyists)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* his senior departmental officials have had with Enron and its subsidiaries in the last two years. [32430]

Tom Brake: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what occasions he and his Department have held meetings since May 1997 with representatives from *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Exxon-Mobil, *(d)* Enron, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf; if he will state the purpose of each meeting; and if he will provide details of the outcomes and agreements reached as a result of each meeting. [33218]

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what meetings have taken place between Ministers in his Department and employees of Citigate since 7 June 2001; and if he will make a statement. [32813]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Solicitor-General in how many cases referred to the Crown Prosecution Service it decided not to prosecute in each of the last three years. [34419]

The Solicitor-General: The figures show the number of defendants whose case was handled by the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the last three years, and the outcome of proceedings.

The number and proportion of defendants whose case was discontinued in a magistrates' court was as follows:

	Number	*Percentage*
1999	164,682	12.1
2000	166,001	12.8
2001	172,398	13.1

The number and proportion of defendants whose case was dropped in the Crown Court before a jury was sworn was as follows:

	Number	*Percentage*
1999	9,331	10.7
2000	10,070	11.9
2001	11,292	13.7

The above figures represent cases in which the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to proceed with a prosecution on consideration of the evidence and the public interest.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Nursery Places

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* actual and *(b)* percentage change in the number of nursery places provided by the (i) statutory and voluntary sectors and (ii) private sector in each education authority in England and Wales between 1996–97 and 2001–02; what percentage of three year olds had a nursery place in 1996–97; how many had a nursery place in 2000–01; and how many she expects to have a nursery place in 2001–02 in each education authority in England. [32406]

Margaret Hodge: The following table contains the available information on numbers of free early years education places taken up by three and four-year-olds. It has been derived from the table published alongside Statistical Bulletin 11/2001 "Provision For Children Under Five Years Of Age in England—January 2001" on my Department's statistical website www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/. My Department is planning to publish information for January 2002 in May.

My Department estimates that there are free early years education places available for all eligible four-year-olds in England. Since September 1999, we have invested substantially in new free early years education places for three-year-olds. The table shows three-year-olds took up 335,000 free early years education places in January 2001, up from 214,000 in January 1997. We are committed to providing all three-year-olds, whose parents want one, with free early years education places by September 2004. Information for Wales is a matter for the Education Department of the National Assembly for Wales.

Numbers of three and four-year-olds taking up free early education places, England, Government office regions and LEA areas 1997–2001
Position in January each year (spring term)

	1997			
	3-year-olds			
	Maintained nursery and primary schools[1,2]	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*[3]	*4-year-olds*[4,5]	*Total*
England	214,173	0	576,176	790,349
North-east	23,707	0	31,811	55,518
Darlington	915	0	1,290	2,205
Durham	4,217	0	5,868	10,084
Gateshead	1,259	0	2,241	3,500
Hartlepool	1,143	0	1,215	2,358
Middlesbrough	1,919	0	2,004	3,923
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,878	0	3,087	4,965
North Tyneside	1,837	0	2,441	4,278
Northumberland	2,255	0	3,638	5,893
Redcar and Cleveland	1,988	0	1,889	3,877
South Tyneside	1,525	0	1,923	3,448
Stockton on Tees	2,351	0	2,515	4,866
Sunderland	2,420	0	3,701	6,121
North-west	42,204	0	83,348	125,552
Blackburn with Darwen	709	0	1,912	2,621
Blackpool	547	0	1,593	2,140

Numbers of three and four-year-olds taking up free early education places, England, Government office regions and LEA areas 1997–20
Position in January each year (spring term)

	1997			
	3-year-olds			
	Maintained nursery and primary schools[1,2]	Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[3]	4-year-olds[4,5]	Total
Bolton	2,295	0	3,341	5,636
Bury	1,079	0	2,281	3,360
Cheshire	2,636	0	7,555	10,192
Cumbria	2,597	0	5,587	8,184
Halton	558	0	1,570	2,128
Knowsley	2,044	0	2,263	4,307
Lancashire	4,392	0	12,427	16,819
Liverpool	4,187	0	5,595	9,782
Manchester	3,722	0	5,981	9,703
Oldham	1,540	0	3,124	4,664
Rochdale	1,407	0	2,790	4,197
Salford	2,231	0	3,263	5,494
Sefton	2,051	0	3,226	5,277
St. Helens	1,108	0	2,200	3,308
Stockport	1,634	0	3,274	4,908
Tameside	1,705	0	2,881	4,586
Trafford	1,856	0	2,815	4,671
Warrington	827	0	2,327	3,154
Wigan	1,434	0	3,513	4,947
Wirral	1,645	0	3,830	5,475
Yorkshire and the Humber	31,844	0	61,664	93,508
Barnsley	1,264	0	2,868	4,132
Bradford	4,376	0	6,637	11,013
Calderdale	1,309	0	2,626	3,935
Doncaster	2,364	0	3,800	6,164
East Riding of Yorkshire	1,053	0	3,214	4,267
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	2,240	0	3,517	5,757
Kirklees	2,974	0	4,911	7,885
Leeds	6,065	0	8,755	14,820
North East Lincolnshire	922	0	2,079	3,001
North Lincolnshire	521	0	1,842	2,363
North Yorkshire	1,642	0	5,996	7,638
Rotherham	1,304	0	3,397	4,701
Sheffield	2,594	0	5,952	8,546
Wakefield	2,540	0	4,217	6,757
York	676	0	1,853	2,529
East Midlands	17,140	0	47,870	65,010
Derby	1,331	0	3,056	3,056
Derbyshire	3,612	0	8,295	13,238
Leicester	924	0	3,909	3,909
Leicestershire	1,474	0	5,921	8,400
Lincolnshire	1,686	0	6,576	8,262
Northamptonshire	2,277	0	7,464	9,741
Nottingham	1,816	0	3,871	5,688
Nottinghamshire	3,939	0	8,396	12,335
Rutland	81	0	382	382
West Midlands	29,098	0	64,117	93,215
Birmingham	7,427	0	12,474	19,901
Coventry	1,674	0	3,651	5,325
Dudley	2,267	0	3,696	5,963
Herefordshire	182	0	1,869	2,051
Sandwell	3,035	0	3,990	7,025
Shropshire	471	0	2,944	3,415
Solihull	1,250	0	2,575	3,825
Staffordshire	3,471	0	9,563	14,227
Stoke-on-Trent	1,193	0	3,085	3,085
Telford and Wrekin	319	0	1,921	2,240
Walsall	3,079	0	3,585	6,664
Warwickshire	1,357	0	5,551	6,908
Wolverhampton	2,793	0	3,277	6,070
Worcestershire	580	0	5,937	6,517

Numbers of three and four-year-olds taking up free early education places, England, Government office regions and LEA areas 1997–2001
Position in January each year (spring term)

	1997			
	3-year-olds			
	Maintained nursery and primary schools[1,2]	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*[3]	*4-year-olds*[4,5]	*Total*
East of England	11,658	0	62,005	73,663
Bedfordshire	1,266	0	4,704	6,739
Cambridgeshire	1,093	0	5,769	6,861
Essex	1,559	0	14,007	15,566
Hertfordshire	4,095	0	13,796	17,891
Luton	769	0	2,674	2,674
Norfolk	1,493	0	8,184	9,677
Peterborough	373	0	1,922	2,295
Southend-on-Sea	213	0	1,918	2,131
Suffolk	605	0	7,351	7,956
Thurrock	192	0	1,680	1,872
London	40,536	0	85,128	125,664
Inner London	18,959	0	31,794	50,753
Camden	802	0	1,808	2,610
City of London	11	0	30	41
Hackney	1,474	0	2,625	4,099
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,053	0	1,336	2,389
Haringey	2,004	0	2,913	4,917
Islington	1,266	0	2,184	3,450
Kensington and Chelsea	542	0	1,213	1,755
Lambeth	1,462	0	2,706	4,168
Lewisham	1,412	0	2,917	4,329
Newham	2,030	0	3,759	5,789
Southwark	2,222	0	3,067	5,289
Tower Hamlets	2,340	0	2,722	5,062
Wandsworth	1,614	0	3,035	4,649
Westminster	727	0	1,478	2,205
Outer London	21,577	0	53,334	74,911
Barking and Dagenham	1,332	0	2,436	3,768
Barnet	2,021	0	3,534	5,555
Bexley	1,069	0	2,657	3,726
Brent	1,712	0	3,047	4,759
Bromley	107	0	3,427	3,534
Croydon	1,537	0	3,951	5,488
Ealing	2,625	0	3,851	6,476
Enfield	1,112	0	3,179	4,291
Greenwich	1,981	0	2,994	4,975
Harrow	451	0	2,308	2,759
Havering	449	0	2,414	2,863
Hillingdon	560	0	3,268	3,828
Hounslow	1,563	0	2,560	4,123
Kingston upon Thames	888	0	1,564	2,452
Merton	1,644	0	2,225	3,869
Redbridge	687	0	2,943	3,630
Richmond upon Thames	570	0	1,843	2,413
Sutton	325	0	2,140	2,465
Waltham Forest	944	0	2,993	3,937
South-east	10,602	0	88,329	98,931
Bracknell Forest	218	0	1,536	1,754
Brighton and Hove	450	0	2,441	2,441
Buckinghamshire	597	0	5,679	6,566
East Sussex	933	0	4,799	6,182
Hampshire	1,092	0	13,109	14,568
Isle of Wight	115	0	1,302	1,417
Kent	1,532	0	14,635	16,167
Medway	315	0	2,962	3,277
Milton Keynes	290	0	2,743	2,743
Oxfordshire	770	0	6,875	7,645
Portsmouth	171	0	2,039	2,039
Reading	255	0	1,796	2,051
Slough	231	0	1,559	1,790
Southampton	196	0	2,148	2,148

Numbers of three and four-year-olds taking up free early education places, England, Government office regions and LEA areas 1997–2001
Position in January each year (spring term)

	1997			
	3-year-olds			
	Maintained nursery and primary schools[1,2]	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*[3]	*4-year-olds*[4,5]	*Total*
Surrey	2,080	0	12,051	14,131
West Berkshire	236	0	1,761	1,996
West Sussex	648	0	7,597	8,245
Windsor and Maidenhead	225	0	1,565	1,790
Wokingham	248	0	1,732	1,980
South-west	7,384	0	51,904	59,288
Bath and North East Somerset	308	0	1,685	1,993
Bournemouth	127	0	1,533	1,533
Bristol, City of	2,755	0	4,688	7,443
Cornwall[6]	988	0	5,136	6,124
Devon	866	0	6,866	7,732
Dorset	300	0	3,621	4,175
Gloucestershire	58	0	6,171	6,229
North Somerset	159	0	1,810	1,969
Plymouth	361	0	2,885	3,246
Poole	127	0	1,348	1,348
Somerset	472	0	5,204	5,676
South Gloucestershire	403	0	2,745	3,148
Swindon	94	0	2,142	2,142
Torbay	151	0	1,213	1,364
Wiltshire	215	0	4,858	5,167

	2001			
	3-year-olds			
	Maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*[3]	*4-year-olds*[4]	*Total*
England	226,634	108,815	589,293	924,742
North-east	21,871	3,288	29,436	54,595
Darlington	919	49	1,299	2,268
Durham	3,850	612	5,451	9,913
Gateshead	1,342	593	2,275	4,209
Hartlepool	961	34	1,130	2,125
Middlesbrough	1,849	115	1,537	3,502
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,773	857	2,928	5,558
North Tyneside	1,767	232	2,291	4,290
Northumberland	2,139	136	3,421	5,696
Redcar and Cleveland	1,601	14	1,707	3,322
South Tyneside	1,450	143	1,719	3,312
Stockton on Tees	1,813	100	2,329	4,242
Sunderland	2,407	404	3,347	6,158
North-west	39,566	20,727	84,733	145,025
Blackburn with Darwen	966	679	2,030	3,676
Blackpool	314	1,075	1,562	2,951
Bolton	2,088	926	3,659	6,673
Bury	1,046	91	2,217	3,354
Cheshire	2,172	783	7,800	10,755
Cumbria	2,410	1,138	5,586	9,133
Halton	542	577	1,414	2,533
Knowsley	1,847	133	2,184	4,164
Lancashire	4,199	5,155	15,681	25,036
Liverpool	3,648	1,310	4,479	9,436
Manchester	3,890	713	5,375	9,978
Oldham	1,507	1,048	3,051	5,606
Rochdale	1,287	966	2,733	4,985
Salford	1,836	247	2,712	4,795
Sefton	2,103	778	3,155	[illegible],036
St. Helens	1,084	495	2,079	3,659
Stockport	1,703	87	3,323	5,114

	2001			
	3-year-olds			
	Maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*[3]	*4-year-olds*[4]	*Total*
Tameside	1,580	581	2,764	4,925
Trafford	1,497	196	2,551	4,244
Warrington	889	1,099	2,360	4,348
Wigan	1,358	1,194	3,634	6,186
Wirral	1,600	1,455	4,383	7,438
Yorkshire and the Humber	31,804	15,223	58,804	105,831
Barnsley	1,356	529	2,098	3,983
Bradford	4,520	1,196	5,882	11,598
Calderdale	1,184	666	2,364	4,215
Doncaster	2,249	161	3,740	6,150
East Riding of Yorkshire	1,024	138	3,388	4,550
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	2,036	517	3,170	5,724
Kirklees	2,489	1,488	5,028	9,005
Leeds	5,642	1,786	8,436	15,864
North East Lincolnshire	933	554	1,902	3,388
North Lincolnshire	637	536	1,771	2,944
North Yorkshire	1,705	3,218	6,287	11,210
Rotherham	1,364	876	3,093	5,333
Sheffield	3,372	2,030	5,825	11,227
Wakefield	2,592	611	3,980	7,183
York	701	916	1,840	3,457
East Midlands	19,103	8,321	48,829	76,253
Derby	1,845	859	2,808	5,512
Derbyshire	4,016	3,099	8,384	15,499
Leicester	2,146	1,112	3,849	7,107
Leicestershire	129	639	6,641	7,408
Lincolnshire	1,749	41	7,022	8,812
Northamptonshire	2,294	835	7,876	11,005
Nottingham	2,509	700	3,557	6,765
Nottinghamshire	4,328	1,008	8,318	13,653
Rutland	87	30	374	491
West Midlands	30,441	9,450	65,826	105,717
Birmingham	7,200	3,844	14,033	25,076
Coventry	1,984	1,031	3,753	6,767
Dudley	2,336	738	3,743	6,816
Herefordshire	336	115	2,249	2,701
Sandwell	3,059	100	3,509	6,668
Shropshire	499	309	3,144	3,952
Solihull	1,499	59	2,711	4,270
Staffordshire	2,554	443	9,201	12,198
Stoke-on-Trent	1,842	367	2,836	5,044
Telford and Wrekin	651	596	2,115	3,363
Walsall	2,838	151	3,427	6,416
Warwickshire	1,473	813	5,964	8,250
Wolverhampton	2,584	134	3,010	5,728
Worcestershire	1,586	751	6,132	8,468
East of England	15,740	4,352	64,060	84,151
Bedfordshire	1,202	218	4,888	6,308
Cambridgeshire	1,154	867	5,897	7,918
Essex	1,992	221	15,051	17,264
Hertfordshire	6,406	257	13,495	20,159
Luton	975	996	2,643	4,614
Norfolk	1,932	126	8,404	10,462
Peterborough	288	593	2,132	3,013
Southend-on-Sea	446	440	2,087	2,973
Suffolk	857	477	7,617	8,950
Thurrock	488	157	1,845	2,490
London	46,679	20,825	87,835	155,339
Inner London	21,508	10,078	34,058	65,644
Camden	915	718	2,075	3,707
City of London	12	1	35	48
Hackney	1,520	968	2,714	5,202
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,025	586	1,564	3,174

	2001			
	3-year-olds			
	Maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*[3]	*4-year-olds*[4]	*Total*
Haringey	1,932	486	3,391	5,809
Islington	1,252	812	2,089	4,153
Kensington and Chelsea	612	277	1,031	1,920
Lambeth	1,955	1,163	3,062	6,180
Lewisham	1,892	968	3,018	5,878
Newham	3,306	551	3,947	7,804
Southwark	2,242	1,150	3,397	6,789
Tower Hamlets	2,358	281	2,809	5,448
Wandsworth	1,629	1,349	3,210	6,187
Westminster	858	768	1,717	3,343
Outer London	25,171	10,747	53,778	89,695
Barking and Dagenham	1,418	326	2,338	4,082
Barnet	1,995	389	3,665	6,049
Bexley	1,314	911	2,570	4,796
Brent	1,684	875	2,985	5,544
Bromley	247	428	3,657	4,332
Croydon	1,894	623	4,123	6,640
Ealing	2,604	527	3,725	6,856
Enfield	1,236	1,034	3,483	5,753
Greenwich	1,800	765	2,846	5,411
Harrow	615	350	2,379	3,344
Havering	603	1,210	2,317	4,130
Hillingdon	1,813	119	3,336	5,268
Hounslow	1,564	550	2,491	4,605
Kingston upon Thames	911	172	1,678	2,760
Merton	1,707	117	2,099	3,923
Redbridge	1,587	852	3,352	5,790
Richmond upon Thames	546	40	1,974	2,560
Sutton	266	360	2,037	2,663
Waltham Forest	1,367	1,098	2,723	5,188
South-east	12,705	14,255	93,691	120,651
Bracknell Forest	147	735	1,329	2,212
Brighton and Hove	732	1,032	2,560	4,325
Buckinghamshire	790	404	6,075	7,269
East Sussex	588	1,113	4,953	6,654
Hampshire	589	1,748	14,560	16,897
Isle of Wight	131	471	1,433	2,035
Kent	1,494	818	15,773	18,085
Medway	412	2,119	3,231	5,762
Milton Keynes	379	197	2,774	3,349
Oxfordshire	1,024	213	6,885	8,122
Portsmouth	441	880	2,501	3,822
Reading	716	202	1,721	2,639
Slough	976	32	1,655	2,664
Southampton	334	1,346	2,310	3,990
Surrey	2,426	2,145	12,755	17,326
West Berkshire	273	99	1,646	2,018
West Sussex	816	441	8,222	9,479
Windsor and Maidenhead	306	226	1,521	2,052
Wokingham	131	32	1,787	1,950
South-west	8,725	12,375	56,080	77,180
Bath and North East Somerset	288	195	1,827	2,310
Bournemouth	282	914	1,568	2,764
Bristol, City of	2,653	1,169	4,453	8,274
Cornwall[6]	987	2,089	5,208	8,284
Devon	1,200	630	7,330	9,159
Dorset	215	288	3,987	4,490
Gloucestershire	97	3,385	8,472	11,954
North Somerset	200	98	2,000	2,297
Plymouth	744	1,508	2,540	4,792
Poole	92	742	1,374	2,208
Somerset	503	217	5,404	6,124
South Gloucestershire	341	145	3,114	3,600
Swindon	412	172	2,346	2,930
Torbay	391	505	1,349	2,245
Wiltshire	320	319	5,108	5,747

	Actual change in numbers 1997 to 2001[7]		Percentage change in numbers 1997 to 2001[8]	
	3-year-olds	*4-year-olds*	*3-year-olds*	*4-year-olds*
England	121,276	13,118	57	2
North-east	1,452	–2,375	6	–7
Darlington	53	10	6	1
Durham	245	–417	6	–7
Gateshead	676	34	54	1
Hartlepool	–148	–85	–13	–7
Middlesbrough	45	–467	2	–23
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	752	–159	40	–5
North Tyneside	162	–150	9	–6
Northumberland	20	–216	1	–6
Redcar & Cleveland	–373	–182	–19	–10
South Tyneside	68	–204	4	–11
Stockton on Tees	–438	–185	–19	–7
Sunderland	391	–354	16	–10
	0			
North-west	18,089	1,385	43	2
Blackburn with Darwen	936	118	132	6
Blackpool	842	–32	154	–2
Bolton	719	319	31	10
Bury	58	–63	5	–3
Cheshire	319	245	12	3
Cumbria	951	–1	37	–0
Halton	561	–156	101	–10
Knowsley	–64	–79	–3	–3
Lancashire	4,963	3,254	113	26
Liverpool	771	–1,116	18	–20
Manchester	881	–605	24	–10
Oldham	1,015	–73	66	–2
Rochdale	846	–58	60	–2
Salford	–148	–551	–7	–17
Sefton	830	–71	40	–2
St. Helens	471	–121	43	–5
Stockport	156	50	10	2
Tameside	456	–117	27	–4
Trafford	–163	–264	–9	–9
Warrington	1,162	33	141	1
Wigan	1,118	120	78	3
Wirral	1,410	553	86	14
Yorkshire and the Humber	15,183	–2,860	48	–5
Barnsley	621	–770	49	–27
Bradford	1,340	–755	31	–11
Calderdale	541	–262	41	–10
Doncaster	46	–60	2	–2
East Riding of Yorkshire	109	174	10	5
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	313	–346	14	–10
Kirklees	1,003	117	34	2
Leeds	1,362	–319	22	–4
North East Lincolnshire	565	–178	61	–9
North Lincolnshire	652	–72	125	–4
North Yorkshire	3,281	291	200	5
Rotherham	936	–304	72	–9
Sheffield	2,808	–127	108	–2
Wakefield	663	–236	26	–6
York	941	–13	139	–1
East Midlands	10,284	960	60	2
Derby	1,372	–248	103	–8
Derbyshire	3,503	89	97	1
Leicester	2,334	–60	253	–2
Leicestershire	–706	720	–48	12
Lincolnshire	104	447	6	7
Northamptonshire	852	413	37	6
Nottingham	1,392	–314	77	–8
Nottinghamshire	1,397	–78	35	–1
Rutland	35	–8	43	–2
West Midlands	10,793	1,709	37	3
Birmingham	3,617	1,558	49	12
Coventry	1,341	102	80	3
Dudley	807	46	36	1

	Actual change in numbers 1997 to 2001[7]		*Percentage change in numbers 1997 to 2001*[8]	
	3-year-olds	*4-year-olds*	*3-year-olds*	*4-year-olds*
Herefordshire	270	380	148	20
Sandwell	124	–481	4	–12
Shropshire	337	201	71	7
Solihull	308	137	25	5
Staffordshire	–474	–362	–14	–4
Stoke-on-Trent	1,016	–249	85	–8
Telford and Wrekin	929	194	292	10
Walsall	–90	–158	–3	–4
Warwickshire	929	412	68	7
Wolverhampton	–75	–267	–3	–8
Worcestershire	1,757	194	303	3
East of England	8,434	2,055	72	3
Bedfordshire	155	183	12	4
Cambridgeshire	928	129	85	2
Essex	654	1,044	42	7
Hertfordshire	2,568	–301	63	–2
Luton	1,202	–31	156	–1
Norfolk	565	220	38	3
Peterborough	508	211	136	11
Southend-on-Sea	673	169	316	9
Suffolk	729	266	120	4
Thurrock	453	165	236	10
London	26,968	2,707	67	3
Inner London	12,627	2,264	67	7
Camden	831	266	104	15
City of London	2	5	18	15
Hackney	1,014	89	69	3
Hammersmith and Fulham	558	227	53	17
Haringey	414	479	21	16
Islington	798	–96	63	–4
Kensington and Chelsea	347	–182	64	–15
Lambeth	1,656	355	113	13
Lewisham	1,448	101	103	3
Newham	1,827	188	90	5
Southwark	1,170	330	53	11
Tower Hamlets	299	87	13	3
Wandsworth	1,364	175	84	6
Westminster	899	239	124	16
Outer London	14,341	443	66	1
Barking and Dagenham	412	–97	31	–4
Barnet	363	130	18	4
Bexley	1,156	–87	108	–3
Brent	847	–62	49	–2
Bromley	568	231	531	7
Croydon	980	172	64	4
Ealing	506	–126	19	–3
Enfield	1,158	303	104	10
Greenwich	584	–149	30	–5
Harrow	514	71	114	3
Havering	1,364	–97	304	–4
Hillingdon	1,372	68	245	2
Hounslow	551	–69	35	–3
Kingston upon Thames	195	114	22	7
Merton	180	–125	11	–6
Redbridge	1,752	409	255	14
Richmond upon Thames	16	131	3	7
Sutton	301	–104	93	–5
Waltham Forest	1,521	–271	161	–9
South-east	16,358	5,362	154	6
Bracknell Forest	664	–207	304	–13
Brighton and Hove	1,315	119	292	5
Buckinghamshire	597	397	100	7
East Sussex	768	154	82	3
Hampshire	1,245	1,451	114	11
Isle of Wight	487	131	424	10
Kent	780	1,138	51	8
Medway	2,216	269	704	9
Milton Keynes	286	31	98	1

	Actual change in numbers 1997 to 2001[7]		*Percentage change in numbers 1997 to 2001*[8]	
	3-year-olds	*4-year-olds*	*3-year-olds*	*4-year-olds*
Oxfordshire	467	9	61	0
Portsmouth	1,150	462	672	23
Reading	663	–76	260	–4
Slough	778	96	337	6
Southampton	1,484	162	758	8
Surrey	2,491	704	120	6
West Berkshire	137	–115	58	–7
West Sussex	609	625	94	8
Windsor and Maidenhead	306	–44	136	–3
Wokingham	–85	55	–34	3
South-west	13,716	4,176	186	8
Bath and North East Somerset	175	143	57	8
Bournemouth	1,069	35	845	2
Bristol, City of	1,067	–236	39	–5
Cornwall[6]	2,088	72	211	1
Devon	963	464	111	7
Dorset	203	366	67	10
Gloucestershire	3,424	2,301	5,903	37
North Somerset	139	190	87	10
Plymouth	1,892	–345	524	–12
Poole	707	26	556	2
Somerset	248	200	53	4
South Gloucestershire	83	369	21	13
Swindon	490	204	523	10
Torbay	745	136	494	11
Wiltshire	424	251	197	5

[1] Headcount of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools Census.

[2] Figures for LEAs that were re-organised in April 1997 were obtained by apportionment.

[3] Part-time equivalent number of children aged three at 31 December in the previous year from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise. Nursery Education Grant for three-year-olds was allocated to the 65 local education authorities in 1999–2000 and all LEAs in 2000–01.

[4] Part-time equivalent number of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise.

[5] Summer term 1997.

[6] Includes Isles of Scilly

[7] Expressed as the difference between the numbers of children attending a provider in 2001 compared to 1997.

[8] Percentage change in the numbers of children attending a provider in 2001 compared to 1997.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* three and *(b)* four-year-olds in St. Helens, South there are (i) with a full-time nursery place and (ii) without a full-time nursery place. [33697]

Margaret Hodge: The available information shows that there were 120 three-year-olds and 1,570 four-year-olds who took up full-time nursery education places in St. Helens local education authority area in January 2000.

My Department estimates that there are free part-time early education places available for all eligible four-year-olds in England. We are also committed to providing all three-year-olds, whose parents want one, with free part-time early years education places by September 2004.

Private Finance Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on how many of her Department's PFI contracts Arthur Andersen has been an adviser; and if she will make a statement. [31719]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Individual Government Departments are responsible for taking decisions on the goods and services they acquire, whether through the Private Finance Initiative or other procurement routes, taking into account the Government's policy of seeking value for money for the taxpayer. As regards PFI contracts, the public sector as a whole has signed hundreds of deals covering the delivery of a range of services, including hospitals, police stations, transport and schools. Many hundreds of firms covering a range of activities will be involved in the delivery of contracted services. In my Department Arthur Anderson has not been used as an adviser on any PFI contracts.

Teachers Pay and Conditions

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the supplemental submission to the School Teachers' Review Body from the six teaching organisations in England issued in December 2001; and if she will make a statement. [35061]

Mr. Timms: It is for the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) to consider evidence submitted to it and their assessment will inform their recommendations to my right hon. Friend. The STRB's main report for 2002–03 was published in January and my right hon. Friend is now consulting key stakeholders, including teaching unions, on proposed changes to teachers' pay and conditions of service before any changes are implemented. The STRB is currently undertaking a special remit on teacher work load and is expected to report in April.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will allow head teachers and teachers a three-month sabbatical once they have completed 10 years continuous service; and if she will make a statement. [35062]

Mr. Timms: No. However a sabbatical scheme for experienced teachers with five years or more experience in challenging schools (defined as having 50 per cent. or more free school meals) was introduced in September 2001. Sabbaticals last for a period of up to six weeks, and can be used flexibly. The sabbatical scheme will run for an initial three year period and will then be reviewed.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will establish any new rents-to-mortgages schemes for teachers in the London area. [35063]

Mr. Timms: We have no plans at present to introduce such a scheme. However, we do recognise that the cost of housing in London is one of the drivers behind teachers' decisions about their future. That is why, as part of the Government's £250 million Starter Homes Initiative, more than 1,600 London teachers will receive assistance to purchase homes in areas of high price or demand. We are also working closely with the Department for Transport, London and the Regions, the NHS, Home Office and the Housing Corporation, to develop a long-term strategy that will provide affordable housing for key workers.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what further action she is taking to reduce the level of student performance evaluation work required by teachers; and if she will make a statement. [35064]

Mr. Timms: Performance evaluation helps to ensure that pupils and students are getting a good education. Coursework assessment is a long standing feature of examinations and can be a valuable way of assessing achievement that cannot readily be demonstrated in an examination. The Government are not planning any changes to coursework limits.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what further action she is taking to help schools in London retain teachers. [35065]

Mr. Timms: Retaining good teachers within the profession is key to continuing to raise standards in schools. Our research has consistently shown that work load is a significant factor in influencing teachers to leave the profession. That is why we have asked the School Teachers' Review Body to consider the findings of the recent PricewaterhouseCooper's study that we commissioned into reducing teachers' work loads. The STRB will report to us by the end of April this year and we have already announced the piloting of 30 school work force pathfinders to test out innovative solutions to reducing work load and bureaucracy in schools. In addition, we made almost £20 million available in 2001–02 directly to schools in London to fund local recruitment and retention initiatives. In recognition of the problems that London teachers continue to face, we have recently announced a further, increased, figure of more than £22 million for 2002–03. The cost of housing in London is also a key driver behind teachers' decisions about their future. That is why, as part of the Government's £250 million Starter Homes Initiative, more than 1,600 London teachers will receive assistance to purchase homes in areas of high price or demand. We have also announced our proposal to accept the STRB's recently announced recommendations, including a further above inflation pay increase of 3.5 per cent. for all teachers and that good, experienced, teachers should in future be able to receive a £2,148 pay increase on crossing the threshold after five years instead of seven. London allowances, other than the inner London Supplement, will also be increased by 3.5 per cent. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out our longer term proposals for all teachers and teaching in a pamphlet, "Professionalism and Trust", published in November 2001.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason Surrey has been allocated less money from the Recruitment and Retention Fund than other LEAs in the South East. [35805]

Mr. Timms: The criteria used for deciding allocation of funding was made on the basis of regional vacancy rates, using data supplied annually by LEAs on form 618G. These were averaged out over the last three years for which validated data were available—i.e. ending with the data for January 2001—to avoid the allocation being over-influenced by a one-off peak in vacancies in a single year. In order to make any sort of accurate assessment of need we had to work from a reliable and statistically valid baseline. That is what the form 618G provided us with. We used the same criteria for the 2000–01 allocations and we had always indicated that we would seek a consistent approach in both years.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent guidance has been issued to schools in relation to management of performance-related pay for teachers. [35621]

Mr. Timms: Performance pay points are awarded at the discretion of governing bodies of individual schools. My Department sent guidance on teachers' pay to schools in England and Wales in September. This included advice on school salary policies and awarding performance pay points.

Student Finance

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of the levels of student debt on leaving university; and if she will make a statement. [35561]

Margaret Hodge: The most recent assessment made in a Departmental survey, in the Student Income and Expenditure Survey for 1998–99, was an average of £2,528 anticipated debt. That survey was conducted before the present system of student support was fully implemented. The most recent evidence, from the UNITE/MORI poll conducted in the autumn of 2001, suggests that higher education students currently owe on average £4,203 and expect to owe £8,133 on graduating. This has to be considered in the context of graduates currently earning around 35 per cent. more than the national average and potentially around £400,000 more over their working lives.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to reduce the burden of debt on students; and if she will make a statement. [35562]

Margaret Hodge: Our current review of student finance is considering both the student debt issue, particularly in relation to the lower socio-economic groups, and the relative contributions of students, parents and the Government to student support. We shall make an announcement on the outcome of the review and will consult with all interested parties.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about parental contributions to student fees. [35563]

Margaret Hodge: Our review of student finance is considering the relative contributions of students, parents and the Government to student support. We shall make an announcement on the outcome of the review and will consult with all interested parties.

Lecturers (Pay)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many higher and further education establishments have not implemented the 3.7 per cent. wage rise for lecturers. [34917]

Margaret Hodge: The Department does not collect this information centrally. However, we understand from figures produced by the Association of Colleges that 80 per cent. of general further education colleges have implemented an award of 3.7 per cent. or higher, a further 10 per cent. have implemented a partial award and 10 per cent. have yet to make an award.

Lecturers in higher education institutions are paid according to separate higher education pay scales and have settled for a minimum 4.3 per cent. pay award for 2001–02. We are not aware of any Higher Education Institutions failing to implement the award.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures there are to ensure that the wage increase for university lecturers, agreed in August 2001, is paid by colleges and universities to staff. [34918]

Margaret Hodge: The higher education employers and trades unions will monitor the implementation of the pay awards they have agreed. The Government do not play a part.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the President of the Council what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33248]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1204W.

Fair Trade Goods

Mr. Weir: To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 897W, on Fair Trade goods, if, during Fair Trade Fortnight, he will review the amount of fairly traded goods used in his Department. [35450]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on 11 February 2002.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Wray: To ask the President of the Council if he will make proposals to the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons to enable an employee of an hon. Member to hand in oral questions to the Table Office. [34626]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Procedure Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into parliamentary questions, and I will ensure this suggestion is drawn to the attention of the Chairman.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Farms

Miss McIntosh: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, how many farms the Church owns; and how many it owned in 1997. [34465]

Mr. Bell: The Church Commissioners currently own 353 farms of at least 20 hectares, and a large number of smaller holdings.

On the best information available, the comparable figure for 1997 is 379.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to written answer 23221, of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 495W, for what reason this information is market sensitive; and which share prices of other markets could be affected by the provision of a response to it. [26732]

Mr. Spellar: Release of this unaudited information could have an adverse effect on the company's bonds. We are not aware of other share prices of other markets that could be affected.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will provide working capital for the company limited by guarantee prior to the completion of Railtrack administration. [30240]

Mr. Jamieson: No working capital will be required.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) who made the approaches to *(a)* Mr. Iain McAllister and *(b)* Mr. Iain Coucher to join the team working on a company limited by guarantee to bid for Railtrack; and what other approaches have been made to potential directors of a company limited by guarantee to bid for Railtrack; [30230]

(2) who took the decision to recruit *(a)* Mr. Iain McAllister and *(b)* Mr. Iain Coucher to the team working on a company limited by guarantee to bid for Railtrack. [30231]

Mr. Jamieson: It is in the public interest that at least one viable bid is submitted to the administrator for him to judge alongside any other bids that are made. To this end my Department took the initial steps to engage a team to develop a bid based on the concept of a company limited by guarantee.

My Department announced the appointment of Iain McAllister on 29 November 2001. Subsequently, the Strategic Rail Authority announced on 17 December that it had taken responsibility for the engagement of the CLG team and for meeting its bid costs. The SRA announced the appointment of Iain Coucher on 16 January. Copies of the relevant press notices have been placed in the Library of the House. It is for the bid team to make a proposal to the administrator, including a proposal for the management of the proposed company.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will meet the legal costs of the team working to establish a company limited by guarantee to bid for Railtrack. [30237]

Mr. Jamieson: The cost of the bid team's legal advisers, will be paid directly by the Strategic Rail Authority from within its budget.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he has received requests from the European Commission for clarification of the application for state aid consent for Railtrack in administration. [30229]

Mr. Jamieson: There is a continuing dialogue with the European Commission about the application that the United Kingdom has submitted for state aid approval.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, ref 30241, *Official Report*, column 320W, how and when these costs will be repaid to the SRA. [33409]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The SRA is itself funding the cost of putting forward a proposal based on the concept of a CLG on the basis that it is in the public interest to ensure that at least one viable bid is put to the administrator, which would enable Railtrack to be taken out of administration as soon as possible, which articulates a particular vision for a not for distributable profit railway network operator and which can be tested against other bids.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether Schroder Salomon Smith Barney are retained by his Department. [33412]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 583W.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many shares he held in Railtrack Group Plc on 31 March 2001; how many he holds now; and what value was received for shares sold; [34785]

(2) what the market value at 31 March 2001 was of shares held by him in Railtrack Group Plc; and what the current market value is of such shares. [34786]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The Government held 1,031,243 shares in Railtrack Group Plc at 31 March 2001, approximately 0.2 per cent. of the total called up share capital. They still holds these shares.

At the share price of 687p on 31 March 2001, the Government's shareholding was valued at £7.08 million. Trading in the shares of Railtrack Group Plc was suspended on 8 October 2001. At that time the share price was 280, valuing the Government's shareholding at £2.89 million.

Transport for London

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff are employed by Transport for London working *(a)* exclusively and *(b)* 50 per cent. of their time on new train routes in London. [27704]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for the Mayor and Transport for London.

Rail Strikes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* days work by staff, *(b)* days work by passengers, *(c)* trains and *(d)* passenger journeys have been lost to railway strike action in each year since 1991. [28734]

Mr. Spellar: The information is not available in the form requested.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30181]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 707W.

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31782]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1129–30W.

Local Government Finance

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will state, for each local authority in London, what the real terms increase in total external support was between *(a)* 1992–93 and 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 and 2001–02; and what the projected real terms increase will be in 2002–03. [31819]

Dr. Whitehead: Because of changes in function, responsibility and area it is not possible to produce a fully consistent set of grant figures for the period from 1992–93 to 2002–03. The main changes comprise the transfer of funding of colleges of further education and sixth form colleges from local authorities to the Further Education Funding Council and changes associated with the introduction of the Greater London Authority. There are also various smaller changes in function and responsibility.

Table 1 shows the actual amount of total external support received by London authorities in 2001–02, the adjusted amount for 2001–02 for comparison with 2002–03, the amount for 2002–03, the cash increase relative to the adjusted 2001–02 amount, and the increase in real terms.

Table 2 shows, for the City and the London boroughs, the actual amounts of total external support received in 1992–93, 1996–97, 1997–98 and 2001–02, together with the actual changes in total external support between 1992–93 and 1996–97 and between 1997–98 and 2001–02.

For any year total external support is the sum of redistributed non-domestic rates, Revenue Support Grant, Principal Formula Police Grant, SSA Reduction grant and Central Support Protection Grant.

Table 1

£ million

Authority	*Actual 2001–02 grant*	*Adjusted 2001–02 grant*[1]	*2002–03 grant*	*Adjusted cash increase*	*Adjusted real increase*
City of London	87.307	85.605	89.029	3.424	1.284
Camden	197.281	184.995	197.944	12.950	8.324
Greenwich	222.117	212.448	223.376	10.929	5.616
Hackney	242.677	238.720	249.106	10.386	4.417
Hammersmith and Fulham	144.503	138.019	146.490	8.471	5.020
Islington	199.670	196.090	203.933	7.844	2.940
Kensington and Chelsea	117.917	113.989	122.280	8.292	5.441
Lambeth	260.331	255.965	268.418	12.453	6.052
Lewisham	241.892	235.029	244.529	9.500	3.623
Southwark	269.502	265.415	283.523	18.108	11.471
Tower Hamlets	288.075	280.332	296.449	16.117	9.107
Wandsworth	206.822	197.065	204.948	7.883	2.955
Westminster	198.752	191.544	205.117	13.573	8.783
Barking and Dagenham	146.386	139.743	148.240	8.497	5.003
Barnet	207.164	190.168	202.544	12.376	7.621
Bexley	154.980	146.360	156.610	10.250	6.590
Brent	223.458	211.269	223.766	12.497	7.214
Bromley	172.766	156.535	166.674	10.139	6.225
Croydon	224.286	219.247	231.468	12.221	6.739
Ealing	231.215	220.207	231.267	11.061	5.554
Enfield	218.542	205.308	219.733	14.424	9.291
Haringey	218.050	211.003	222.832	11.829	6.553
Harrow	128.889	127.855	134.053	6.199	3.002
Havering	140.082	135.491	142.977	7.486	4.098
Hillingdon	166.928	154.842	165.681	10.839	6.967
Hounslow	173.953	161.867	168.711	6.845	2.797
Kingston upon Thames	81.060	74.257	79.455	5.198	3.341
Merton	109.805	106.620	111.720	5.100	2.434
Newham	301.631	297.248	314.154	16.906	9.473
Redbridge	181.765	165.434	175.930	10.496	6.359
Richmond upon Thames	77.840	77.255	80.404	3.149	1.217
Sutton	116.266	106.043	113.551	7.508	4.856
Waltham Forest	199.383	194.705	203.903	9.198	4.329
GLA—all functions	1,921.062	1,882.079	1,943.191	61.111	14.050

[1] For comparison with 2002–03

Table 2 *£ million*

Authority	*1992–93 grant*	*1996–97 grant*	*Actual increase between 1992–93 and 1996–97*	*1997–98 grant*	*2001–02 grant*	*Actual increase between 1997–98 and 2001–02*
City of London	66.322	91.699	25.377	94.473	87.307	–7.167
Camden	187.375	177.850	–9.525	181.669	197.281	15.612
Greenwich	192.385	192.117	–0.268	189.742	222.117	32.375
Hackney	260.536	232.572	–27.965	231.980	242.677	10.697
Hammersmith and Fulham	164.172	141.059	–23.113	137.485	144.503	7.018
Islington	207.103	181.565	–25.538	180.452	199.670	19.218
Kensington and Chelsea	129.902	109.063	–20.839	108.858	117.917	9.059
Lambeth	304.100	251.203	–52.897	243.876	260.331	16.454
Lewisham	223.606	207.480	–16.126	210.053	241.892	31.840
Southwark	248.790	227.136	–21.654	227.260	269.502	42.242
Tower Hamlets	233.668	234.105	0.436	237.612	288.075	50.463
Wandsworth	248.595	203.582	–45.013	200.232	206.822	6.591
Westminster	219.329	190.100	–29.229	194.241	198.752	4.511
Barking and Dagenham	108.486	109.785	1.300	112.042	146.386	34.344
Barnet	200.265	168.138	–32.127	170.167	207.164	36.997
Bexley	139.662	120.304	–19.359	121.680	154.980	33.300
Brent	261.863	206.830	–55.033	201.552	223.458	21.906
Bromley	169.135	137.560	–31.576	141.661	172.766	31.106
Croydon	230.242	185.432	–44.810	187.175	224.286	37.112
Ealing	249.843	197.592	–52.251	192.255	231.215	38.960
Enfield	195.798	172.569	–23.229	175.844	218.542	42.698
Haringey	210.626	187.379	–23.246	184.301	218.050	33.749
Harrow	135.610	110.637	–24.973	109.234	128.889	19.655
Havering	139.639	115.946	–23.693	114.841	140.082	25.241
Hillingdon	153.274	138.194	–15.080	138.589	166.928	28.338
Hounslow	159.277	146.096	–13.181	147.188	173.953	26.765
Kingston upon Thames	87.682	68.505	–19.177	68.087	81.060	12.973
Merton	114.200	92.488	–21.712	92.160	109.805	17.645
Newham	250.284	239.128	–11.156	242.050	301.631	59.582
Redbridge	160.990	142.499	–18.490	144.277	181.765	37.488
Richmond upon Thames	91.913	64.605	–27.308	65.851	77.840	11.989
Sutton	105.900	94.605	–11.294	95.225	116.266	21.040
Waltham Forest	197.033	169.359	–27.674	167.912	199.383	31.471

TransPennine Rail Services

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the new TransPennine franchise will ensure that services continue to stop at South Milford station *(a)* on Sundays and *(b)* in the evenings when there is no alternative service. [32035]

Mr. Jamieson: Services departing from Hull after 19.00 and departing Leeds after 18.45 Mondays to Fridays, 18.15 Saturdays and Sundays, currently call at South Milford and these are protected by the Passenger Service Requirement (PSR). Bidders for the new TransPennine Express franchise have been instructed by the Strategic Rail Authority that services protected by the PSR must be maintained.

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has for infrastructure works on the WCML between Rugby and Crewe to *(a)* alleviate the effects of and *(b)* reduce the number of crossing moves at (i) Nuneaton, (ii) Lichfield and (iii) Colwich; and what is (A) the current status of, (B) the start date of and (C) the expected completion date for such works; [31985]

(2) what plans he has for upgrading the power signal boxes on the WCML at *(a)* Warrington, *(b)* Preston and *(c)* Carlisle; and what is (i) the status of, (ii) the start date of and (iii) the expected completion date for such works; [31994]

(3) what plans he has for the redevelopment of the Styal Line junction at *(a)* Wilmslow, *(b)* Heald Green and *(c)* Slade Lane on the WCML; and what is (i) the status of, (ii) the start date of and (iii) the expected completion date for such works; [31998]

(4) what plans he has for upgrading the manual signal boxes at *(a)* Basford Hall, *(b)* Crewe Coal Yard, *(c)* Salop Goods and *(d)* Grest Lane and what is the (i) status of, (ii) start date of and (iii) expected completion date for such works; [31988]

(5) what plans he has for infrastructure works to *(a)* alleviate the effects of and *(b)* reduce the number of crossing moves (i) to the north and south of Crewe Station on the Stafford to Preston route of the WCML, (ii) at Norton Bridge Junction to and from the Manchester line and (iii) at Basford Hall; and what is (1) the status of, (2) the start date of and (C) the expected completion date for such works; [31989]

(6) what plans he has for infrastructure works on the WCML between Crewe and Manchester to allow additional capacity between Crewe and Manchester airport; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for the expected resulting capacity increase between Crewe and Manchester airport of such works; [31997]

(7) what plans he has for infrastructure works on the WCML between Stafford and Colwich to alleviate the effects of slow line conflicts at *(a)* Milford,

(b) Whitehouse and *(c)* Trent Valley Junction at Stafford; and what is (i) the status of, (ii) the start date of and (iii) the expected completion date for such works; [31987]

(8) what plans he has for the provision of additional track and for alternative projects, to alleviate the capacity constraints caused by the mixture of fast and slow trains on the WCML between *(a)* Birmingham and Wolverhampton and *(b)* Birmingham and Rugby; and what is (i) the status of, (ii) the start date of and (iii) the extended completion date for such work; [31986]

(9) what plans he has for the development of additional tracks on the 2-track stretches of the WCML between Crewe and Carlisle; and what is *(a)* the percentage of the route due to remain 2-track following from, *(b)* the status of, *(c)* the start date of and *(d)* the expected completion date for such works; [31990]

(10) what plans he has for redevelopment of the junctions at *(a)* Ardwick and *(b)* Stockport (Edgeley) on the WCML; and what is (i) the status of, (ii) the start date of and (iii) the expected completion date for such works; [31993]

(11) what plans he has for the redevelopment of *(a)* Acton Grange, *(b)* Euxton and *(c)* Farrington Curve Junctions on the WCML; and what is (i) the status of, (ii) the start date of and (iii) the expected completion date for such works; [31991]

(12) what plans he has for the development of additional tracks on the 2-track stretches of the WCML between *(a)* Stafford and Colwich and *(b)* Tamworth and Armitage; and what is (i) the percentage of the route due to remain 2-track following from, (ii) the status of, (iii) the start date of and (iv) the expected completion date for such works; [32087]

(13) what plans he has for the development of additional tracks on the 3-track stretches of the WCML between Rugby and Attleborough; and what is (i) the percentage of the route due to remain 3-track following from, (ii) the status of, (iii) the start date of and (iv) the expected completion date for such works; [31984]

(14) what plans he has to redevelop the entrance to Liverpool Lime Street Station on the WCML to reduce capacity constraints; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [31996]

(15) what plans he has for works to *(a)* reduce the length of headways between Carstairs and Slateford on the West Coast Main Line and *(b)* construct overtaking loops on the WCML between Cairstairs and Slateford; and what is the (i) status of, (ii) start date of and (iii) expected completion date for such works; [32000]

(16) what plans he has for the provision of *(a)* additional tracks and *(b)* alternative projects, to alleviate the capacity constraints caused by an increasing differential in train speeds on the WCML between Euston and Rugby; and what is (i) the current status of, (ii) the start date of and (iii) the expected completion date for such works; [31983]

(17) what plans he has for upgrading the manually operated ground frames on the WCML to the north of Preston; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [31995]

(18) what plans he has for infrastructure works to alleviate the capacity constraints on the WCML between Springs Branch and Flyde Junction caused by the mix of speed and crossing movements; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [31992]

(19) what plans he has to increase the number of tracks along the 2-track section of the WCML to the north of Carlisle; and what is (i) the status of, (ii) the start date of and (iii) the expected completion date for such works; [32001]

(20) what plans he has for *(a)* the provision of additional tracks and *(b)* alternative projects to alleviate capacity constraints caused by differential train speeds on the WCML between Wilmslow and Sandbach; and what is (i) the status of, (ii) the start date of and (iii) the expected completion date for such works. [31999]

Mr. Byers: The west coast main line upgrade is a commercial arrangement between Virgin and Railtrack. Work is in hand to deliver Phase 1 outputs in 2003. The train operating companies, freight operators, Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority are currently reviewing the Phase 2 outputs. Discussions are in progress to identify a solution which provides best value to the taxpayer while optimising both route capacity and operational ability, and which best meets the requirements of the many different users of the line. Various infrastructure works are being considered, as are various timetabling options.

Rail Passengers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 526–27W, on rail passenger projections, from whom the research was commissioned on *(a)* future rail passenger demand on Eurostar and *(b)* to develop a model of rail passenger demand; for what reasons his Department did not require a research report to be published; by what means of communication his Department was informed of the research findings; and if he will provide a summary of the main findings from the research. [32547]

Mr. Jamieson: The research on future rail passenger demand on Eurostar was commissioned from Booz Allen and Hamilton. The Department did not require a research report to be published because of the commercially sensitive nature of the subject. The Department was informed of the research findings by spreadsheet reports and a seven page report. The main findings of the research were that growth in Eurostar passenger and revenues was expected to continue albeit to a lower level than forecast in 1998.

The research to develop a model of rail passenger demand is on going. The findings of the research are expected to be published following the conclusion of the study. I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column: 426W and 21 January 2002 *Official Report*, columns 569–70W.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 532W, on the Strategic Rail Authority, on what date the final direction and guidance will be published; what implications the update will have for the Strategic Rail Authority plan published on 14 January; and if he will make a statement. [32407]

Mr. Jamieson: Final directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority will be published in due course.

Rail Freight

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 526W, on rail freight projection, from whom the research was commissioned in both cases; for what reasons his Department did not require a research report to be published; by what means of communication his Department was informed of the research findings; and if he will provide a summary of the main findings from the research. [32546]

Mr. Jamieson: The research into future demand to move deep sea containers by rail was commissioned from PricewaterhouseCoopers. The Department did not require a research report to be published because of the commercially sensitive nature of the subject. The Department was informed of the research findings by presentations and a written report.

The research to review freight modelling techniques across all modes was commissioned from ME&P part of the WSP Group. The research is ongoing and the findings are expected to be published following the conclusion of the study.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, Ref 31538, *Official Report*, column 328W, how much of the £3.5 billion of funding had not been announced prior to 14 January 2002; how much of the funding is capital investment; and how much of this is unallocated. [33407]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* All of the £3.5 billion of public funding for rail freight was included in the rail expenditure figures published in the Ten Year Plan for Transport in July 2000. Around three-quarters of the £3.5 billion is expected to be capital investment. All of it will be allocated in accordance with the mechanisms for applying public funds set out in the Strategic Rail Authority's Freight Strategy, published in May 2001.

Rail Fares

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 532W, on the regulation of rail fares, on what date the results of the study on the regulation of fares will be published; what implications the conclusions will have upon the Strategic Rail Authority plan published on 14 January; and if he will make a statement. [32408]

Mr. Jamieson: The existing fares policy has been in operation since the first franchises were let in 1996, with around 40 per cent. of fares subject to regulation. The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is now reviewing this policy to see how it might be improved. As part of this review it will be seeking the contribution of industry stakeholders, including both train companies and passengers.

The SRA will be issuing a consultation document within the next few months. The outcome of this study will be announced as soon as possible. However, until conclusions have been reached about the results of the review it will not be possible to know what implications they may have for the current and future strategic plans.

Rail Delays

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the total weekly rail delays, in minutes, for each week from 1 June 2001 to 30 January 2002; and if he will make a statement. [31307]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Delay minutes are an operational matter for Railtrack. The Strategic Rail Authority publishes information on train punctuality and reliability quarterly in "On Track". The issues published on 14 March 2002 will report performance to the end of December 2001. Data on train operating companies' performance is published on a six monthly basis in "National Rail Trends".

A5 Nesscliffe Bypass

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on *(a)* the progress made and *(b)* the expected completion date of the A5 Nesscliffe bypass near Shrewsbury. [32587]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 12 February 2002:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the A5 Nesscliffe Bypass.

We awarded £1[illegible] million Design and Build Contract for this scheme to Balfour Beatty Construction Ltd on 21 December 2001. Site clearance is due to start this month and, based on the current programme, we expect the bypass to open in Spring 2003.

Around the time the main works start in March, a public exhibition will be held in Nesscliffe, to explain the planned construction programme to local people. Details of the venue will be sent to you nearer the time.

If you require any further information, Paul Tully, the Project Manager for the scheme, would be pleased to help. We can be contacted at the Agency's offices at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham, B15 1BL or by telephone on 0121 678 8456.

Aviation Industry (Emergency State Aid)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with European colleagues regarding Europe-wide aid to airlines; and which European Governments have granted aid to their flag carriers in the last 12 months. [32531]

Mr. Jamieson: Guidelines issued by the European Commission on emergency state aid for the European aviation industry following the events of 11 September were discussed by Community Transport Ministers at the Transport Councils on 16 October and 7 December 2001.

A one-month bridging loan of euro 125 million to Sabena from the Belgian Government was approved by the European Commission as rescue aid on 17 October 2001. The French Government have recently notified the Commission that they propose to grant some euro 55 million in emergency aid to French airlines affected by 11 September. In Switzerland a complex financial package was put together in the wake of the collapse of Swissair, which included some euro 650 million of direct aid from the Swiss federal and Canton Governments. We do not have details of aid provided by other European countries outside the European Community.

Fixed Penalty Notices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many fixed penalty notices were issued by *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council and *(b)* Aylesbury Vale district council in each of the last five years; what the average fine levied in each year was; and what the total sums raised in each year were. [32175]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held by my Department.

Departmental Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33212]

Dr. Whitehead: There have been no secondments between DTLR and the companies listed in either 1999–2000, 2000–01 or since April 2001.

Departmental Meetings (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what occasions he and his Department have held meetings since May 1997 with representatives from *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Exxon-Mobil, *(d)* Enron, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf; if he will state the purpose of each meeting; and if he will provide details of the outcomes and agreements reached as a result of each meeting. [33215]

Dr. Whitehead: Ministers and officials from this Department meet representatives from major oil companies regularly to discuss a range of issues. It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Buses

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to allow longer buses to be used on UK roads. [32910]

Mr. Jamieson: The European Directive on the dimensions of certain categories of vehicles was amended on 17 January 2002 to allow increases in the length of buses and coaches. The changes include provisions to ensure that longer buses are compatible with UK road layouts. My Department will shortly be consulting on regulations to implement it into UK law.

At present it is planned to hold a trial of a number of coaches 12.8m in length (current UK maximum is 12m) that will be travelling between Bath, Swindon, London Heathrow airport and London. The purpose of this trial is to assess options for wheelchair accessibility.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the *(a)* current status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for the channel tunnel rail link phase one project. [32996]

Mr. Byers: Section 1 of the channel tunnel rail link, from the channel tunnel to Fawkham junction, is currently on time, on budget and approximately 78 per cent. complete. Work started in 1998 and is due for completion in 2003.

London Underground (Sickness Absence)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action is being taken to reduce the number of working days lost through absence of staff on medical grounds on the London underground. [32914]

Mr. Jamieson: In response to what London Underground (LU) recognised was an unacceptable level of performance during 2000–01, they initiated a programme of activity to address this and get performance moving back to the levels which had been achieved in 1999–2000. A major focus of this activity was to reduce peak hour train cancellations due to the non-availability of train operators, as well as to better manage staff absences of all kinds.

The benefits of this work are now being realised, with the level of peak cancellations due to the non-availability of train operators now running at less than 20 trains per week, down by 80 per cent. since December 2000, and the level of employee attendance generally, improving. Details of the specific management actions being taken are a matter for LU.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 50W, for what reason London Underground is not able to provide information on absence on medical grounds for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; [32913]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 50W, on London Underground, for what reason London Underground is unable to disaggregate by year the total for working days lost through authorised absence, unauthorised absence and due to sickness for the period January 1996 to December 2000; [32912]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground Ltd. advises that accurate and consistent figures for the period in question could be provided only by gathering information from individual staff records. This information can therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33545]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department is not a major direct purchaser of products that could be subject to fair trade, but I am encouraging the catering contractor in my headquarter buildings to attend.

Radioactive Materials (Transport)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the incidents involving trains carrying *(a)* radioactive materials and *(b)* other nuclear materials which have resulted in the radioactive contamination of (i) vehicles and (ii) packaging in the north-west of England in the last six months. [33526]

Mr. Jamieson: Such incidents are reported on an annual basis in the review of accidents and incidents including the transport of radioactive material. These reports are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Council Tax

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of households in which the head of the household is registered as disabled paid at least *(a)* 5 per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent. and *(c)* 15 per cent. of their gross income in council tax in the last year for which figures are available. [33625]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not available.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33872]

Dr. Whitehead: There have been no secondments from DTLR to any of the companies listed within the dates given.

Since April 2001 there has been one inward secondment from PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Rail Industry

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the implications of the European Union Transport White Paper for vertical integration of the UK rail Industry. [32653]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* EC Directive 2001/14, referred to in the EU Transport White Paper, requires the separation of infrastructure capacity allocation functions from the provision of railway transport services. This does not necessarily preclude vertical integration, and any proposals which meet EU requirements will be afforded due consideration.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34161]

Dr. Whitehead: Information as to the costs of accountancy services is not available due to disproportionate costs.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34319]

Dr. Whitehead: The exact answer required cannot be provided in the details asked for except at disproportionate cost. However, information is available as follows:

Mobile Phone expenditure for the Department is:

£

Fiscal Year	*Mobile phone spend by DTLR*
1997–98	33,357.57
1998–99	157,764.96
1999–2000	244,623.72
2000–01	332,401.94
2001–02[1]	280,042.26

[1] Year to date

£

Mobile phone spend	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Agencies					
Vehicle Inspectorate	[2]—	[2]—	247,395.00	297,960.00	215,175.00
Planning Inspectorate	[2]—	[2]—	5,400.00	4,705.25	2,943.82
DVLA	[2]—	105.75	776.44	2,240.50	1,200.86
Vehicle Certification Agency	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	9,607.44	10,610.39
Highways Agency	126,739.00	127,716.00	119,246.00	139,300.00	83,631.00
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	1,281.16	2,741.16	2,066.60	927.68	1,875.68
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	[2]—	74,686.00	88,075.00	105,130.00	97,410.00

£

Mobile phone spend	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Fire Service College	3,591.00	3,517.00	4,183.00	1,404.00	2,525.00
Driving Standards Agency	13,226.00	10,791.00	16,134.00	21,357.00	16,504.00
The Rent Service	[2]—	[2]—	57,000.00	133,000.00	99,000.00
NDPBs					
Tower Hamlets Housing Action Trust	1,134.53	1,412.66	2,497.92	1,684.42	[2]—
Audit Commission	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	510.17	1,511.13
Health and Safety Executive	[2]—	[2]—	195,353.00	239,575.00	197,344.00
Housing Corporation	22,379.00	22,166.00	21,088.00	30,264.00	34.116.00
Liverpool Housing Action Trust	[3]13,000.00	13,000.00	13,000.00	13,000.00	13,000.00
Northern Lighthouse Board	9,942.67	34,681.00	48,997.99	52,764.06	36,930.40
Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust	3,629.00	1,406.00	341.00	682.00	41.00
Castle Vale Housing Action Trust	16,700.00	18,200.00	13,300.00	17,300.00	12,000.00
Stonebridge Housing Action Trust	2,819.00	2,556.00	1,838.00	1,582.00	1,345.00
Standards Board	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	2,202
Trinity House Lighthouse Service	46,000	47,000	45,000	46,000	[4]59,000

[1] Year to date

[2] Figures unavailable

[3] Estimated figures

[4] Projection to end of fiscal year

Notes:

Figures do not reflect machinery of Government changes

Figures are unavailable from the remaining NDPBs, without incurring disproportionate cost

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34286]

Dr. Whitehead: Information as to legal costs incurred by the Department is unavailable due to disproportionate costs.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if he will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if he will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34374]

Dr. Whitehead: A list showing the amounts spent by DTLR(C) and each agency has been placed in the Libraries of the House. As much information as can be readily retrieved has been set out, though this differs between agencies, some of whom could not provide all the information required without incurring disproportionate cost.

Expenditure in respect of Ministers is not recorded separately but is included within the figures for DTLR(C).

For overseas travel the Department pays flat rate per diem allowances as advised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Accordingly it is not possible to determine separate accommodation and food costs.

It is the Department's policy not to reimburse staff directly for alcohol costs. However, where in some cases staff are paid a flat rate allowance for subsistence costs this may be spent on alcohol but information on this is not available.

Information in respect of NDPBs is not available due to disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by his Department and how much reclaimed. [34448]

Dr. Whitehead: The exact answer required cannot be provided in the detail asked for except at disproportionate cost.

Rail Investment

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the public money going to the railways in the 10-year plan will support investment in new facilities. [33996]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 871–72W.

Electoral Modernisation

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what action he is taking to allow voting online; and if he will make a statement; [34331]

(2) what plans he has to propose an amendment of the law to allow voters to vote at any polling station; and if he will make a statement. [34333]

Dr. Whitehead: The development of online voting, which we are pursuing in partnership with the Electoral Commission as part of our programme of electoral modernisation, will allow people to vote wherever they have internet access, including in any polling station. The aim of this programme is to make voting more accessible, maintaining the security and integrity of the electoral process. Through a range of projects, including research, development and the piloting of innovations, we would expect an e-enabled general election sometime after 2006.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to encourage higher turnout at elections; and if he will make a statement. [34330]

Dr. Whitehead: As the Electoral Commission recognised in its report—Election 2001—it is above all the quality and persuasiveness of the policies put forward by the political parties, and their ability to motivate voters, that will determine future turnout trends. For their part, the Government are committed to making voting more accessible, with arrangements more suited to today's lifestyles, while maintaining the security and integrity of the electoral process.

Accordingly, we have established a programme of electoral modernisation, working with the Electoral Commission, and other stakeholders, which includes developing electronic voting, with the expectation of an e-enabled general election sometime after 2006.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to increase voter registration; and if he will make a statement. [34332]

Dr. Whitehead: Measures to promote public awareness of all aspects of the electoral system are now the responsibility of the Electoral Commission, under Section 13 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. I understand that the Commission intends to run two advertising campaigns each year, in the spring to encourage rolling registration in time for local government elections and in the autumn to encourage completion and return of the annual canvass form.

Student Accommodation (Houses in Multiple Occupation)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he intends to take to restrict the use of houses in multiple occupation for students. [34753]

Ms Keeble: The Government have no specific plans to restrict the use of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) by students. However, the Government are committed to raising the standards that exist in this part of the private rented sector. We have already consulted on our plans to introduce a national licensing scheme for HMOs. We believe that alongside our plans to introduce a new housing fitness regime and the selective licensing of landlords in areas of low housing demand we will achieve a real improvement in the quality of the private rented sector.

The measures we are pursuing will provide greater clarity as to what constitutes an HMO (currently a real difficulty for local authorities and landlords—particularly as to whether student households fall within the definition). Also, licensing criteria would include the physical condition of the property, the provision of relevant safety certificates, the fitness of the licensee and their management competency. This will benefit not only the occupants of these types of properties, many of whom will be students, but also responsible landlords and other local residents.

Domestic Violence Survivors' Refuges

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many refuges for survivors of domestic violence have been taken back into direct management by registered social landlords in each of the last five years. [34754]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is not recorded by the Department, nor are we aware of any centralised location where this is stored.

The Department has asked local authorities to collect current information (including with regard to refuges and other supported housing schemes) as part of the mapping of all housing related support services in preparation for supporting people. Information will be available by September.

Noise Insulation (Schools)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out his Department's policy on noise insulation for schools in respect of areas where *(a)* noise insulation regulations apply and *(b)* noise barriers are to be installed in a discretionary scheme by the Highways Agency. [34752]

Mr. Jamieson: The Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 apply to dwellings and other buildings used for residential purposes that are affected by a new or substantially altered road. Schools do not fall within this definition of residential use. However, residential accommodation belonging to schools may qualify for insulation.

The criteria for the Highways Agency to apply in considering the need for additional noise barriers that could be provided under the discretionary powers within the Highways Act was answered to the House in a written answer on 22 March 1999, *Official Report,* columns 50–51W.

The assessment of need in these cases has been based on the number of residential properties affected, in order to remain consistent with the application of the noise insulation regulations to highway improvement schemes.

Advanced Train Protection System

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the advanced train protection system to be installed and operational on all trains. [34572]

Mr. Jamieson: A steering group jointly chaired by the Strategic Rail Authority and Railway Safety is presently evaluating the options for the extension of automatic train protection, including their timings and their costs, and expects to report to the Health and Safety Commission in the spring. The Commission will then advise Ministers.

Park Homes

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many park home sites operate under planning permission but without licences. [34814]

Ms Keeble: Under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 most park home sites must have a site licence issued by the local authority. There are some exemptions from the need for a licence, for example, in respect of parks operated by local authorities or sites used to accommodate those engaged in building work. We do not hold information on the number of sites for which licences are not held.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to prevent the operation of park home sites without a full licence. [34815]

Ms Keeble: One of the recommendations of the Park Homes Working Party was that there should be a requirement for local authorities to be notified of a change of ownership of a park, so as to allow a licence to be issued the new owner. In our response to the Working Party's recommendations, we have indicated that we agree that a formal requirement for notification of a sale could help authorities to operate controls more effectively. We will consider this, along with other recommendations, when taking forward the agenda for reform set out in our recent response to the Working Party's report.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he will take to spread best practice in the park home industry to all park home sites. [34813]

Ms Keeble: Following recommendations made by the Park Homes Working Party, we have commissioned and published good practice guidance to local authorities on their roles with regard to harassment and illegal eviction, and site licensing. In addition, the Working Party suggested that the park home industry's voluntary model agreement for residents and site owners should be reviewed following discussion between residents' and site owners' bodies. We have welcomed this proposal and discussions between the parties have already begun.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he will take to prevent abuse of service charges for park home residents. [34812]

Ms Keeble: Following a recommendation made by the Park Homes Working Party, we have commissioned a study of the economics of the park homes industry to assist in consideration of the principles on which pitch fees should be set and reviewed, and the maximum level of commission which should be set. We will consider the position on the payments made by park home residents in the light of the findings of this study.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reform the Mobile Homes Act 1983; and if he will make a statement. [34811]

Ms Keeble: Proposals for amendments to the Mobile Homes Act 1983 were included in the recommendations of the Park Homes Working Party. Following consultation, we issued our response to the working party's report on 29 November last year, and placed copies of it in the Library of the House. This gives a detailed response to each of the working party's recommendations and indicates how we intend to take them forward.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total underspend in his Department was on *(a)* capital and *(b)* non-capital expenditure in each financial year since May 1997. [34027]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* It is not possible to provide a split between capital and non-capital expenditure on a cash basis, except at disproportionate cost.

Asbestos

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he has taken to strengthen the enforcement of regulations related to the handling of asbestos; and what future proposals he has in this area. [34809]

Dr. Whitehead: Through its programme of inspection of licensed asbestos work, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has made it a priority to target specific categories of licensees and to inspect sites where the proposed method of work gives cause for concern.

Enforcement under the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987 (as amended) (CAWR) and the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983 (as amended) has continued to rise significantly.

A proposed amendment to CAWR, will place a duty on occupiers and anyone else who has maintenance and repair responsibilities to manage asbestos in workplace premises. The regulations are also being amended to include a proposal to require accreditation for the analysis of material to determine whether it contains asbestos.

The guidance in the existing CAWR Approved Code of Practice for work with asbestos is also being reviewed.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many prosecutions have been brought, and by which agencies, for breach of asbestos-related regulations in each of the past 10 years. [34810]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE)'s prosecution statistics are based on the information laid by health and safety inspectors before the courts in England and Wales and on the charges preferred in Scottish courts. Each information laid or charge preferred relates to a breach of an individual legal requirement and a duty holder may be prosecuted for more than one of these breaches.

The table sets out proceedings taken over the last five years by HSE under the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987 (as amended) and the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983 (as amended), the main regulations applying to asbestos activities. Access to older data is not readily available and would require restoration of archived databases. HSE does not record prosecutions taken by other agencies.

Year	*Informations laid*	*Convictions*
1996–97	42	34
1997–98	49	43
1998–99	46	43
1999–2000	151	49
2000–01[1]	94	59

[1] Data for 2000–01 is provisional and subject to change.

Note:

Data from HSE's Field Operations Directorate (FOD), Hazardous Installations Directorate (HID), Land Divisions (exc mines, pipelines, explosives) and Nuclear Safety Divisions (NSD) (conventional safety only).

Travellers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives local authorities on the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998 in applications for and enforcement of possession orders to evict travellers from unauthorised occupation of public parks and open spaces. [34897]

Ms Keeble: No specific guidance has been given to local authorities on the requirements of the Human Rights Act in relation to applications for and enforcement of possession orders to evict travellers from unauthorised occupation of public parks and open spaces.

However, local authorities as public bodies are subject to the Human Rights Act and need to weigh this as a consideration in reaching decisions about possession order actions.

Car Safety

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made on making car fronts safer since the publication of the Road Safety Strategy. [34845]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) on 23 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 505W.

The European Commission's proposal to introduce pedestrian protection features in new cars by means of a negotiated agreement with vehicle manufacturers was approved by the Internal Market Council on 26 November 2001. It is currently being considered by the European Parliament.

Llandogo-Monmouth Bus Service

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the results were of the bus compliance officers investigation into the stagecoach red and white service between Llandogo and Monmouth; and what subsequent action has been taken. [35008]

Ms Keeble: Monitoring of the service by vehicle inspectorate bus compliance officers took place during December 2001. One timetable irregularity was found.

As a result of the monitoring exercise, the traffic commissioner decided that Red and White Services Ltd. should be reminded of their obligations to operate services in accordance with the registration, and that they could face disciplinary action if they do not. A letter to that effect was sent to the operator by the Welsh Traffic Area Office on 23 January 2002. The letter also advised that further reliability monitoring of the service would be conducted in the near future.

A47 Corridor

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for a multi-modal transport study of the A47(T) corridor in eastern England; who is undertaking the study; which length of the A47 corridor is to be included; when the study is to begin; when the report is expected to be published; and if he will publish submissions from interested parties which have already been made as part of the consultation process. [R] [35059]

Mr. Jamieson: The A47 between Norwich and Peterborough was included in the programme of Multi-Modal Studies announced on 23 March 1999 as a Tranche 3 Study. The study incorporates both the A47 between its junction with the A1, to the west of Peterborough, and the beginning of the Norwich Southern Bypass, just west of Norwich, and the Peterborough to Norwich railway via Ely.

On 28 January 2002, the Government Office for the East of England appointed WS Atkins Consultants Ltd. to undertake the study. Determining the precise work programme will be part of the first phase of the study, but it is expected to report to the Regional Planning Body in early 2003.

Consultation with key stakeholders, interested bodies and organisations, elected members and the public will be an essential part of the study. Results will be presented by the consultants in a "Consultation and Participation" report.

Representation of the People Act

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce proposals to amend the Representation of the People Act 2000 to allow citizens of EU member states resident in the UK to vote in Westminster parliamentary elections. [34979]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government's view is that extending the franchise in this way would need to be by reciprocal agreement with all other EU member states. There are no current proposals by the European Commission for action in this area.

Fire Service (London)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the integrated clothing project for the fire service in London. [35809]

Dr. Whitehead: I announced the results of the third round of the Private Finance Initiative for the fire service on 25 October 2001. The indicative bid which London submitted on behalf of a number of fire authorities for an integrated clothing project was not one of the bids selected for support. The unsuccessful bidders were offered feedback on their bids. A meeting has been arranged between officials and representatives of the fire service in London.

City of London (Ward Elections) Bill

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what communications have taken place between Ministers, officials and advisers with the City of London Corporation in relation to the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill since 1997. [35659]

Dr. Whitehead: As with many other Private Bills, we have had—and continue to have—discussions and correspondence with the promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill.

Ports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has for action on initiative 4.2.8 of Modern Ports: A UK Policy, that suggests a reserve of power to safeguard port marine safety. [35874]

Mr. Jamieson: We consulted in March 2000 on a proposed reserve power, which was recommended in our review of the Pilotage Act which was published in July 1998. We proposed that, if it appeared to the Secretary of State that a harbour authority had failed, or was failing, to discharge any of its statutory functions, and that a serious danger to navigation or serious threat of pollution was likely to result, he should have the power, after consulting the harbour authority and such other persons as he considered appropriate, to give the authority appropriate directions. There has been no opportunity so far to promote the necessary legislation.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will abolish the Statutory Harbour Undertakings (Pilotage Accounts) Regulations 1988. [35871]

Mr. Jamieson: These Regulations are made under Section 42 of the Harbours Act which relates to the accounts of statutory harbour authorities relating to the harbour activities and empowers the Secretary of State to prescribe their form and content. The Pilotage Act 1987, which transferred responsibility for providing pilotage services to competent harbour authorities and empowered them to levy pilotage charges, extended this provision to pilotage accounts.

The effect of the 1987 Act is to require pilotage accounts to be kept separately, although there is no similar requirement in relation to any other harbour authority activity. A review of the 1987 Act, published in 1998, recommended that this separation was no longer needed, but there has been no opportunity to change that requirement.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to ensure that the role of competent harbour authorities is separate from the ownership of a port. [35873]

Mr. Jamieson: A comprehensive review of responsibility for pilotage was undertaken after the 'Sea Empress' grounding five years ago. It was published, with Ministers' conclusions, in July 1998. It was a principal conclusion of that review that pilotage ought to remain a harbour authority function, and become fully integrated with other port safety services under harbour authority control.

Planning

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of appeals against a refusal of planning permission were received by the Inspectorate during the final month of the six month time limit in the last three years. [R] [35471]

Ms Keeble: The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Chris Shepley to Mr. John Burnett, dated 12 February 2002:

Sally Keeble has asked me to reply to your Question about the percentage of planning appeals made against refusal of planning permission during the final month of the six-month time limit in the last 3 years.

The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of appeals*	*Number submitted in the final month*	*Percentage submitted in the final month*
1999–2000	13,408	4,360	33
2000–01	15,105	4,643	31
2001–02[1]	7,175	1,983	28
Total	35,688	10,986	31

[1] Up to the end of July 2001 LPA decision dates

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has to introduce a statutory duty on local planning authorities to enforce planning controls; [R] [35469]

(2) what plans he has to provide additional powers to local planning authorities to encourage compliance with enforcement orders. [R] [35475]

Ms Keeble: As we indicated in our Planning Green Paper published on 12 December 2001, we intend to review the current arrangements for enforcement by local planning authorities.

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to enable a member of the public to have locus standi to apply for a prerogative order of mandamus or equivalent in respect of a breach of planning controls. [R] [35481]

Ms Keeble: We have no current plans to do so.

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he intends to amend section 87 of the Town and Country Act 1971 and section 171 B of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 relating to the use of a building as a single dwelling house. [R] [35470]

Ms Keeble: Section 87 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 was replaced by sections 171B, 172, 173 and 173A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. All these sections deal with aspects of local planning authorities' enforcement powers. As we indicated in our Planning Green Paper we intend to review the current enforcement arrangements.

Marine Accident Investigation Branch

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many investigations have been concluded by the MAIB; what the cost incurred was; and how many staff were employed in MAIB investigations in each of the last five years. [35736]

Mr. Jamieson: The MAIB receives, on average about 1,500 accident reports each year. Only a small number are subjected to a full investigation but many more are followed up in Administrative Inquiries where further information is sought. A number of these lead to the identification and promulgation of lessons to be learned. The sole aim of the MAIB is to prevent accidents at sea.

The figures are produced in tabular form.

Prior to 1999 only selected investigation reports were published. All investigations completed since have resulted in the production of a report that has been made publicly available. In very general terms the MAIB has tended to look at fewer accidents overall each year but more thoroughly.

The costs of all investigations are met from the running cost budget of the Branch. This has increased in each of the past five years. The greater expenditure incurred in 1998 was due to additional costs involved in conducting a higher than normal number of underwater surveys.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[1]
Administrative inquiries completed	695	628	636	546	459
Full investigations completed	55	40	39	40	47
MAIB running costs in £000	1,106	1,579	1,205	1,450	1,372
Staff involved directly in investigations	11	11	12	14	15

[1] Provisional

Solway Harvester

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from the Isle of Man authorities regarding the timing of the publication of the MAIB report into the Solway Harvester. [35103]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has had no representations from the Isle of Man authorities regarding the timing of the MAIB report into the Solway Harvester.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the police in the Isle of Man on the timing of the release of the MAIB report into the sinking of the Solway Harvester. [35468]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has had no discussions with the Isle of Man police regarding the timing of the MAIB report into the Solway Harvester.

Second Homes

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the most recent figures for the number of *(a)* second residences which are entitled to the 50 per cent. council tax rebate and *(b)* holiday residences taxed as such for business purposes broken down by (i) parish, (ii) district, (iii) unitary authority and (iv) county for the nations and regions of the UK, expressed (A) numerically and (B) as a percentage of the housing stock. [35568]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is as follows:

(a) We estimate that approximately 220,000 second homes (defined as furnished and no-one's main residence) in England were entitled to the 50 per cent. council tax discount as at October 2000. This represents 1.0 per cent. of the total domestic housing stock in England. Comparable figures for each parish, district and county/unitary area in England are not available.

(b) 15,507 premises in England were subject to non-domestic rates and iet as self-catering holiday homes at 1 January 2002. While many of these premises are individual self-catering holiday homes, some whole sites of holiday homes are counted as a single premises for rating purposes, even though they contain many individual homes. The figures do not include premises where it is not intended that the property is let as holiday accommodation for more than 140 days in a year as these are subject to council tax and not to non-domestic rates. Nor do the figures include bed and breakfast accommodation that is liable to non-domestic rates.

The figure mentioned is equivalent to the 0.07 per cent. of the total domestic housing stock in England, as recorded at 1 April 2001 on the 2001 HIP Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix. Although the HIP figures include holiday residences, it is possible that they are not counted in the same way as they are for non-domestic rating purposes.

I will write separately to the hon. Member with equivalent figures for each principal local authority in England. Separate figures are not, however, available for parishes.

Figures for *(a)* and *(b)* for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are a matter for the relevant devolved Administrations.

Pilots

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of section G(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act 1971 on the employment without work-permits of non-EU pilots as crew for UK-based airlines. [35733]

Mr. Jamieson: My officials have discussed the working of immigration legislation in the aviation field regularly with colleagues in the employment and immigration services. In principle I am not opposed to non-EU pilots directly employed by UK airlines having to obtain work permits, but I could not support any proposals for changing current arrangements which would create operational difficulties for UK airlines in terms of their ability to wet-lease foreign aircraft to meet emergency situations or seasonal fluctuations in demand, or for other acceptable reasons within the terms of the EU legislation governing the use of foreign registered aircraft by community airlines.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he has taken to encourage other EU countries to validate UK national pilot licences on the same basis as the UK validates the national licences of other EU member states. [35732]

Mr. Jamieson: The matter of validation of national pilot licences within the EU is addressed by EC Directive 91/670/EEC. The Directive requires EU member states to recognise those licences issued by other member states but allows an individual state to require additional requirements if there is reasonable doubt as to the equivalence of the licence. In compliance with the Directive, the UK requires all applicants for licence validation to pass an examination in national aviation law and in some circumstances further proficiency checks. Other EU member states similarly impose additional requirements for the validation of other states' licences, including UK pilot licences. These additional requirements are required to meet the national legislation of the state and are in accordance with the terms of the EC Directive 91/670/EEC.

Speed Signs (Bredhurst)

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions further to his answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 457W, on speeding signs in Bredhurst, if he will grant authorisation for the installation of interactive speeding signs in Kent where the sites have been approved and the parish councils are willing to pay for their installation. [35569]

Mr. Jamieson: The decision to seek approval to install speed activated signs rests with the local authority responsible. In this case Kent county council. If Bredhurst parish council believe their village is suitable for these signs they would need in the first instance to approach Kent county council. The council would need to consider whether the site is appropriate and seek approval from my Department.

My Department is currently considering the findings of a report prepared by TRL on the effectiveness of speed activated signs in reducing vehicle speeds. We hope to start preparing guidance for local authorities with a view to authorising those signs which the report has found to be effective later in the year.

Maritime Professionals

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to increase the number of people becoming trainers of maritime professionals; and if he will make a statement. [35566]

Mr. Jamieson: Recruitment is a matter for the individual shipping companies themselves. There are Government measures, however, to assist and encourage the training and employment of British seafarers. We provide financial support for seafarer training through the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme. Following a review of SMarT in autumn/winter 2000 and the receipt of EU State Aid clearance, additional courses will be included in the scheme and levels of funding will be increased. We introduced the tonnage tax option as part of the Finance Act 2000, a key feature of which is a minimum training obligation. This feature is unique to the UK, and requires each shipping company opting for the tonnage tax to recruit and train one officer trainee each year for every 15 officer posts in its fleet and also give consideration to employment and training opportunities for ratings.

Marine Safety

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has make of *(a)* safety and *(b)* working conditions on board ships; and if he will make a statement. [35567]

Mr. Jamieson: Marine surveyors from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) carry out inspections which include an assessment of compliance with health and safety requirements and other regulations which safeguard working conditions on board ships, and take any necessary action where deficiencies are found. On foreign ships in UK ports these inspections are carried out as part of a co-ordinated inspection regime with European partners.

Owners and operators of ships have a duty to provide a safe working environment for those on board ship, and employers on UK ships are required to use risk assessment to comply with health and safety legislation.

Ships' Officers

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the manpower strength of ships' officers. [35565]

Mr. Jamieson: Exact figures are not available. However, the latest available estimates are that there are about 15,000 active UK seafarer officers employed at sea assuming a retirement age of 65, or about 13,000 assuming a retirement age of 57.

Organophosphates

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the international studies and investigations of exposure to organophosphates in aviation engine lubricants, with particular reference to pilots and flight staff, which are under review in his Department; and if he will make a statement. [35402]

Mr. Jamieson: There are a number of investigations under way into episodic contamination from aviation engine lubricants that include, but are not confined to, the possibility of cabin air contamination by 'organophosphates'. This includes work in the UK involving the relevant aeroplane and engine manufacturers, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

Recent research sponsored by the CAA, and conducted by DSTL Porton Down, made a specific toxicological review of the products liberated from pyrolysed aviation engine oil. Further follow up work by the CAA is in progress. International studies into the quality of cabin air supplied to crew and passengers are being conducted by several bodies of repute. These include the US National Academy of Sciences, the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) Aviation Propulsion Lubricants Committee, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) and two EC Fifth Framework projects.

This research, together with that produced by CAA and industry itself, will be considered by a new specialist group involving the FAA, the Joint Aviation Authorities and industry representatives, tasked with reviewing the Joint Aviation Requirements (JAR) and Federal Aviation Requirements (FAR) design requirements for cabin ventilation and pressurisation. This Department will continue to monitor the outcome of research into episodic contamination through the aviation health working group.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the *(a)* running costs and *(b)* total budget are for the English regional development agencies in 2001–02. [33994]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The RDAs' net annual budget and administrative costs (running costs) for the financial year 2001–02 are as follows:

£000

Regional development agency	*Net budget*[1]	*Administration budget*
One North East	161,653	12,853
North West Development Agency	281,089	14,956
Yorkshire Forward	245,437	9,989
East Midlands Development Agency	96,940	7,528
Advantage West Midlands	170,721	8,793
East of England Development Agency	62,113	5,836
South East of England Development Agency	108,859	7,143
South West of England Regional Development Agency	92,059	9,099
London Development Agency	298,139	9,470
Total	1,517,010	85,667

[1] Excluding receipts

These are the latest figures available and are excluding receipts. The changes from the original budget reflect in-year additional funding for things such as the Business Recovery fund to help small businesses deal with the foot and mouth crisis and new programmes such as the regional centres of manufacturing excellence.

TREASURY

Special Advisers

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints have been reported in his Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25331]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The procedures for making complaints under the Civil Service Code are set out in the Treasury Staff Terms and Conditions Handbook. Civil servants are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints with their line manager. If for any reason this is not felt to be possible, perhaps because the line manager is part of the complaint, individuals may take their complaint to one of two nominated officials.

It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made within this department under paragraph 11 of the Code as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre details of complaints that are resolved within the management line.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31784]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has a wide range of measures in place to protect against theft and fraud. These include: physical security measures (security patrols, access control); sound business procedures (restricted access to the payment system, separation of duties, police checks on recruits); protection of assets (system of recording assets, security markings).

These procedures are regularly reviewed.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32817]

Ruth Kelly: The Cabinet Office is responsible for setting the retirement age for all members of the Senior Civil Service. This is age 60. Heads of Departments and Agency Chief Executives have flexibility to retain members of the Senior Civil Service beyond age 60 if they judge it in the public interest and they are satisfied about the fitness and efficiency of the individual to carry out his or her duties.

The policy for all other staff of HM Treasury and its agency the Debt Management Office is that they also retire at age 60.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33227]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The information on the number of television sets within a specific technical specification is not held.

There is no specific advice on the purchase of televisions, apart from the general procurement advice and guidance given on achieving best value for money on any purchase from Government funds.

10-Year Transport Plan

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether the total transport 10-year plan financial envelope has been increased by £2.2 billion additional money; and whether it represents new money resulting from discussions between the Treasury and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; [33768]

(2) when he allocated an additional £2.2 billion of funding for the 10-year transport plan; and if he will make a statement. [33928]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* In April 2001 an additional provision of £1.962 billion was made to the 10-year transport plan, for payment over the years 2001–02 to 2005–06.

£770 million has been made available in the Spending Review 2000 period. Decisions on funding the remaining £1.2 billion, due to become payable 2003–04 to 2005–06, will be taken in Spending Review 2002.

DTLR has allocated £290 million additional funding to the 10-year transport plan from unused rail provision in 2000–01.

Therefore, as things stand, an additional £2.252 billion has been allocated to the 10-year transport plan since the plan was published in July 2000.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately-provided accommodation (i) in [illegible] UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if he will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if he will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case; [34380]

(2) if he will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by his Department and how much reclaimed. [34455]

Ruth Kelly: The information is not held in the format required and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much public money each Capita-administered Government scheme has paid out; [33987]

(2) how many Government contracts Capita has; and how much these are worth. [33988]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Government plans to outsource future projects to Capita. [33985]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Each department is responsible for deciding whether it has outsourcing requirements. In any such procurement, selection would be through competitive tendering and on a value for money basis.

Debt Relief

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the number of heavily indebted poor countries having to borrow in order to meet the conditions attached to debt relief under that initiative. [34759]

Mr. Boateng: There is no requirement for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs) to borrow in order to qualify for debt relief under the HIPC initiative. A key feature of HIPC is that debt relief should be linked to poverty reduction, and the conditions for the HIPC initiative reflect this.

In order to qualify for debt relief, countries must develop a nationally-owned and led poverty reduction strategy, which sets out how the country will spend savings from debt relief, together with other resources and aid flows, in order to maximise the impact on poverty reduction.

For all countries that have qualified for debt relief, the IMF and World bank have carried out a detailed debt sustainability analysis, which Treasury officials, together with colleagues in the Department for International Development, have examined carefully and commented on, taking into account any new concessional borrowing to finance the poverty reduction strategies.

These analyses underline the critical importance of further financial support for many HIPC countries if they are to achieve the millennium development goals. For this reason the UK Government have been at the forefront of pressing for substantial increase in the global levels of development finance including grants and highly concessional loans. They have also insisted that these analyses are updated to take into account worsening global growth prospects and declines in terms of trade.

Promoting Sport in the Community

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what regulatory impact assessment has been undertaken on the proposal contained in the Treasury consultation paper, "Promoting Sport in the Community"; and what were its conclusions. [34513]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have just concluded their consultation exercise on the best way to support community amateur sports clubs that make a positive contribution to the community. Ministers will be considering the responses to the consultation and as with all policy proposals, an RIA will be carried out if there is a significant impact on business, in accordance with Cabinet Office guidelines.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Flook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason property transactions in Williton, Somerset, are exempt from stamp duty; and for what reason transactions in Brompton Regis, Somerset are not exempt. [34965]

Mr. Boateng: For England, the stamp duty exemption for disadvantaged areas is available for the 15 per cent. most deprived wards as identified by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000. In Somerset, the ward of Williton falls within this category but the area of Brompton Regis is not within a qualifying ward.

Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what indicators of housing need the ward-based statistics to be collected by the Office for National Statistics will include. [34931]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook for Mr. David Kidney, dated 12 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on ward based housing need indicators. (34931)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is currently leading the development of a web based Neighbourhood Statistics service which will provide a wide range of information about deprived neighbourhoods, including a number of housing needs indicators. The plan is to introduce this service by March 2004, but the core of the system will be the information that will be available from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing in 2003.

A prototype of this system is available now on the ONS web site (www.statistics.gov.uk) and this contains ward-based Indices of Deprivation, 2000, compiled from a range of variables. This prototype will be enhanced during 2002.

A number of housing needs indicators at ward level will be able to be derived from the 2001 Census data, including tenure, sharing, multiple occupation, overcrowding, number of rooms, basic amenities and vacant properties.

ONS is also working with a range of other Government Departments and Agencies to develop a set of ongoing indicators, including housing needs, as part of the Neighbourhood Statistics Service. These will be introduced from 2004 onwards and will cover, affordability, dwelling stock, unfit housing and disrepair, and vacant properties.

Manufacturing Industry

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs in manufacturing industry were lost *(a)* in each of the past 10 years and *(b)* in each month in 2001. [34835]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Paul Flynn, dated 12 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about how many jobs in manufacturing industry were lost (a) in each of the past 10 years and (b) in each month in 2001. (34835)

The information requested is shown in the attached tables. Table 1 shows the number of employee jobs in manufacturing for 1992 to 2001. Table 2 shows the number of employee jobs in manufacturing over the period January to November 2001. Rolling three-month averages are shown to reduce the variability in the data.

These estimates are based on the results of regular sample surveys of employers which count the number of employee jobs. The data are published in Statbase on the National Statistics website at www.statistics.gov.uk under series identifier YEJL.

Table 1: UK employee jobs in manufacturing (seasonally adjusted) 1992–2001

	Thousand	*Change over year*	*Percentage change over year*
June 1991	4,372	—	—
June 1992	4,146	−226	−5.2
June 1993	3,960	−186	−4.5
June 1994	3,975	15	0.4
June 1995	4,076	101	2.5
June 1996	4,121	45	1.1
June 1997	4,185	64	1.6
June 1998	4,204	19	0.5
June 1999	4,068	−136	−3.2
June 2000	3,965	−103	−2.5
June 2001	3,837	−128	−3.2

Table 2: UK employee jobs in manufacturing (seasonally adjusted) 2001

	Levels	*Change over month*	*Latest 3 months averages*	*Change 3 months on 3 months one year ago*	*Latest 3 months on 3 months one year ago (percentage)*
December 2000	3,896	—	—	—	—
January 2001	3,896	0	3,902	−117	−2.9
February	3,887	−9	3,893	−120	−3.0

Table 2: UK employee jobs in manufacturing (seasonally adjusted) 2001

	Levels	Change over month	Latest 3 months averages	Change 3 months on 3 months one year ago	Latest 3 months on 3 months one year ago (percentage)
March	3,881	–6	3,888	–114	–2.9
April	3,876	–5	3,881	–112	–2.8
May	3,858	–19	3,872	–111	–2.8
June	3,837	–20	3,857	–117	–2.9
July	3,826	–11	3,840	–124	–3.1
August	3,808	–18	3,824	–131	–3.3
September	3,790	–17	3,808	–134	–3.4
October	3,777	–14	3,792	–141	–3.6
November	3,760	–16	3,776	–146	–3.7

Stability and Growth Pact

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his intended policy at the ECOFIN meeting on 12 February regarding the Commission's position on the stability and growth pact. [35100]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The UK has consistently said that we support a prudent interpretation of the stability and growth pact, taking into account the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33546]

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 139W, on Fair Trade goods, if he will review during Fair Trade Fortnight the amount of fairly traded goods used in his Department. [35453]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury is not participating directly in Fair Trade Fortnight. The Government's contribution is through the Department for International Development, which is providing £120,000 to the Fairtrade Foundation over three years (2001–2003) in support of its efforts to target new groups through its annual Fair Trade Fortnight campaigns.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35935]

Ruth Kelly: The number of cases of work-related stress dealt with by the Department's Welfare service was: 11 in the year from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001; and 34 from 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001. No figures are available for 1999–2000.

No compensation has been paid to employees for work-related stress. The number of working days lost due to work-related stress was: 190 days between 1 January 1999 and 31 December 1999; 230 days between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2000; and 361 days between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2001. The information requested about the cost of the number of working days lost due to work-related stress could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Procedures put in place to reduce work-related stress include: a stress audit and follow-up work (cost £44,240); the provision of a staff welfare and counselling service (cost £31,900 per year); stress management training (cost £3,525) and complementary therapies (cost £2,350).

Lamfalussy Report

Mr. Spring: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals the Government will be making to the European Council at Barcelona on the implementation of the Lamfalussy report; and if he will make a statement. [35853]

Ruth Kelly: The Government note as a positive step forward recent agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission on Lamfalussy implementation. We believe it is now important to get on and implement the main Lamfalussy recommendations. In particular, it is important to ensure that consultation and transparency is part of the process for EC securities legislation; to prioritise those legislative measures that will deliver an effective single market; and to ensure that legislation is principles-based and flexible.

Welsh GDP

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate changes in the proportion of Welsh GDP as a percentage of the UK economy in 2001. [35625]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Adam Price, dated 12 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on estimating the proportion of Welsh Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a percentage of the UK economy in 2001. (35625)

The latest data available are for the year 1999, and were published as an ONS News Release on 27 February 2001.

These data show that in 1999 Wales accounted for 4 per cent. of the UK GDP (excluding Extra-Regio—this comprises compensation of employees and gross operating surplus which cannot be assigned to regions).

The ONS is currently compiling estimates for data up to the year 2000. We plan to publish these estimates later in the spring.

The publication referred to in this answer is available in the House of Commons Library and on the ONS website at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/regionalaccounts.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what compensation proposals will be forthcoming in respect of those persons who have opted out of SERPS and who had their pension policies affected by delayed payments from the Treasury, as a result of the computer error last year. [35737]

Ruth Kelly: Where there is a delay in paying age related rebates to those with appropriate personal pensions, compensation will be considered where it can be demonstrated that a loss has been suffered. The Inland Revenue can consider and pay compensation under their Financial Redress Scheme.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he has made to departmental expenditure ceilings within the controlled total for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03 since the Budget. [27925]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government will seek any resources additional to departmental budgets in the usual way through the Supply process, which includes the announcement to Parliament of additions to Departmental Expenditure Limits via parliamentary answers.

GDP/Revenues Ratio

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the change in the ratio of *(a)* income tax revenue and *(b)* national insurance revenue to GDP if GDP is (i) 1 per cent. above trend and (ii) 1 per cent. below trend in (1) the first, (2) the second and (3) subsequent years; and if he will make a statement. [34540]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government's estimate of the impact of the economic cycle on the public finances is set out in "Fiscal policy: public finances and the cycle" (HM Treasury, March 1999).

Reputational Externalities

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 705W, on reputational externalities, if he will state the reasoning underlying the statements concerning reputational externalities made to the National Audit Office reported on in footnote 10 and paragraphs 44–45 of HC54 of Session 2000–01 'The financial analysis of the London Underground Public Private Partnerships'; and if he will make a statement. [34887]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I presume the hon. Member is referring to footnote 8 in the said document. The comments contained in the NAO report are self-explanatory. The hon. Member will find details of the financial analysis behind the value for money appraisal of the London Underground PPP in the final assessment report produced by London Underground.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' underspending against the departmental expenditure limits in the last four years. [35397]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has only been in existence since June 2001, so does not have such historical information. It is forecast that budgets will be fully utilised during the current financial year.

Public Bodies (Resources)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what resources were made available to the *(a)* Disability Rights Commission, *(b)* Equal Opportunities Commission and *(c)* Commission for Racial Equality in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [33941]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Details of the funding, staffing and expenditure of public bodies, and the remuneration of board members, are set out in the annual publication "Public Bodies".

Copies of "Public Bodies 1999" and "Public Bodies 2000" are available in the Libraries of the House. "Public Bodies 2001" will be published shortly. The Disability Rights Commission was established on 25 April 2000.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the 2001 pre-Budget report, if he will estimate the distribution by household income quintile of the additional expenditure arising from the introduction of the state pension credit. [31283]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The information requested is in the table.

Proportion of additional expenditure arising form the introduction of the State Pension Credit by household income quintile

Percentage

Household income quintile	*Proportion of additional expenditure from State Pension Credit (after housing costs quintiles)*	*Proportion of additional expenditure from State Pension Credit (before housing costs quintiles)*
Lowest	30	35
2	48	43
3	16	15
4	5	5
Highest	1	0
All	100	100

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 1 per cent.
2. The largest proportion of expenditure goes to households in the second quintile because there are more pensioner benefit units in the second household income quintile.

Source:

DWP Policy Simulation Model 2001–02 based on 1999–2000 Family Resources Survey.

Pension credit will help tackle poverty among today's pensioners, without discouraging future pensioners from saving. It will provide a decent income in retirement and a reward for those who have saved.

For the first time, we will reward savings, ensuring those who have worked hard to save modest amounts, who are more likely to be in the second quintile, will gain from having done so.

Savings Credit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if pensioners' earnings will qualify for the savings credit. [30397]

Mr. McCartney: Our intention is to ensure pensioners are rewarded for their effort. We are continuing to consider the treatment of earnings in pension credit.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to improve uptake of stakeholder pensions. [31841]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Stakeholder pension sales of over 600,000 in the first nine months on the market are a very encouraging start. In addition, figures from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) show 312,096 employers had designated stakeholder pension schemes for their staff by the end of December 2001.

The sales of stakeholder pension have had a wider impact, ABI figures show increased new pension sales of 9 per cent. for the quarter July-September 2001 amounting to £2.8 billion. Regular premium pension business rose by 50 per cent. to £584 million on the same period last year, and new single premium pension policies rose by 2 per cent. to £2.2 billion.

We are also working to provide information to help people make informed decisions about saving for their retirement. We have already greatly improved the general pension information available by actively promoting our series of pension education guides. In addition, we are working in partnership with employers and pension providers to introduce new pension forecasts giving both state and private pension details.

Benefits

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time taken to process a new claim for the *(a)* working families tax credit and *(b)* jobseeker's allowance was in the last six months. [32469]

Malcolm Wicks: For the six months ending 31 December 2001 the average time taken to process a working families tax credit application was 15.2 working days and the average time taken to process a claim to jobseeker's allowance was 9.7 working days.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reform the regulations that govern the arrangements for electing trustees to the boards of occupational pension schemes. [32619]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* Changes to the Member-nominated Trustee and Director requirements were introduced in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000. We have been working on a package of regulations that would give effect to the changes, but need to ensure that they are consistent with the findings of the review of private pensions legislation that was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 26 September.

We have, therefore, decided to wait until the review team reports in July, and we have had time to consider their findings.

We shortly will be consulting on draft regulations that will allow schemes to continue with their present arrangements for the time being.

Industrial Action (Jobcentre Plus)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many members of staff at the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service took part in the recent industrial action; and what steps he is taking to resolve the dispute. [32871]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* On average 23,635 members of staff, out of a total of 100,000 across the Benefits Agency and Employment Service, took part in industrial action on 28 and 29 January 2002. This represents approximately one quarter of the combined total of staff in the two agencies. The figures on strike were down from the December action when an average of 27,538 members of staff took part.

To date, more than 60 hours of negotiations (spanning 17 meetings) have taken place with the PCS union in an attempt to settle the current safety dispute. A set of proposals aimed at resolving the dispute was put to the union on 17 October. Despite the recommendation of the union's negotiators, these proposals were rejected by the PCS National Executive Committee by a small margin.

The PCS tabled its own proposals on which the dispute might be settled in December. The PCS proposals were considered carefully and two meetings were held with the union. However, the proposals ran contrary to the Government's policy that Jobcentre Plus should be delivered in a predominantly unscreened environment. The delivery of a personalised, customer-focused service in a predominantly unscreened environment, supported by enhanced security measures, is central to the new Jobcentre Plus service.

The proposals on offer last October, save for those that have been overtaken by time, remain on the table. These include details of which services are appropriate for dealing from screened areas, revised risk assessments, enhanced job specifications for security guards, and a review, involving the PCS, of the operation of the Pathfinders. The proposals continue to offer a basis for a negotiated settlement to the dispute.

Code of Practice (Disability Rights)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Disability Rights Commission's revised Code of Practice on rights of access to goods, services, facilities and premises will come into force. [36267]

Maria Eagle: The revised Code of Practice on rights of access to goods, services, facilities and premises will come into force on 27 May 2002 following the making of an Order. It will be an invaluable guide for service providers in helping them understand the new duties and will enable them to plan now to ensure that physical barriers for disabled people can be overcome from 2004.

Minimum Incomes

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidelines on the minimum incomes for healthy living for *(a)* pregnant women, *(b)* families, *(c)* single adults and *(d)* pensioners (i) before and (ii) after rent and council tax his Department (A) takes into account and (B) provides to other Government departments when decisions are being made about the levels of (1) council tax, (2) income tax, (3) housing and council tax benefits, (4) income support and jobseeker's allowance, (5) working families tax credit and (6) the minimum wage. [34881]

Malcolm Wicks: The levels of social security benefits are reviewed each year and approved by Parliament. A range of factors is considered when reviewing benefit levels. The Department does not produce guidelines on minimum incomes.

Income Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the value of *(a)* expenditure (i) in cash terms and (ii) in current prices and *(b)* expenditure as a share of GDP on income support for the over-60s for 1992–93 and each succeeding year to the end of the public expenditure planning period. [35289]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

Expenditure income support for the elderly/minimum income guarantee

£ million

	Cash terms	*Real terms*	*Percentage of GDP*
1992–93	3,728	4,649	0.6
1993–94	3,939	4,794	0.6
1994–95	3,969	4,767	0.6
1995–96	3,888	4,540	0.5
1996–97	3,815	4,318	0.5
1997–98	3,773	4,143	0.5
1998–99	3,619	3,866	0.4
1999–2000	3,781	3,943	0.4
2000–01	4,067	4,169	0.4
2001–02	4,532	4,532	0.5
2002–03	4,329	4,223	0.4
2003–04	5,176	4,927	0.5

Notes:

1. Figures are consistent with those published in the pre-Budget report 2000
2. Figures for 2003–04 include expenditure on Pension Credit

Pensioners Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the value of expenditure *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in current prices and *(c)* as a share of GDP on (i) retirement pensions, (ii) winter fuel payments, (iii) means-tested benefits for pensioners, (iv) all other benefits for pensioners and (v) free TV licences for 1992–93 and each succeeding year to the end of the public expenditure planning period. [35290]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the tables:

Cash terms

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Retirement pensions	26,740	28,220	28,780	30,000	32,025	33,585
Winter fuel payme[illegible]	0	0	0	0	0	190
Means-tested benefits for pensioners[1]	7,315	8,100	8,370	8,550	8,635	8,650
All other benefits for pensioners[2]	4,770	5,455	5,680	6,030	6,325	6,370
Concessionary TV licences	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	38,830	41,770	42,830	44,580	46,985	48,795

£ million

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Retirement pensions	35,605	37,800	38,825	42,035	44,355	46,450
Winter fuel payments	195	910	1,680	1,700	1,700	1,720
Means-tested benefits for pensioners[1]	8,605	8,980	9,520	10,410	10,430	11,630
All other benefits for pensioners[2]	6,425	6,430	6,760	7,005	7,160	7,435
Concessionary TV licences	0	0	320	345	365	380
Total	50,825	54,125	57,105	61,495	64,015	67,610

Real terms

£ million 2001–02 prices

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Retirement pensions	33,345	34,340	34,565	35,030	36,250	36,880
Winter fuel payments	0	0	0	0	0	210
Means-tested benefits for pensioners[1]	9,075	9,805	10,015	9,925	9,730	9,475
All other benefits for pensioners[2]	6,000	6,685	6,860	7,100	7,205	7,015
Concessionary TV licences	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	48,420	50,835	51,440	52,055	53,185	53,585

£ million 2001–02 prices

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Retirement pensions	38,035	39,430	39,795	42,035	43,270	44,210
Winter fuel payments	210	950	1,725	1,700	1,660	1,635
Means-tested benefits for pensioners[1]	9,165	9,345	9,730	10,375	10,140	11,035
All other benefits for pensioners[2]	6,885	6,730	6,960	7,035	7,025	7,110
Concessionary TV licences	0	0	330	345	355	360
Total	54,295	56,455	58,535	61,495	62,455	64,355

[1] Figures for mean-tested benefits for the pensioner group include payments made to those aged 60 to 65.

[2] 'All other benefits for pensioners' includes payments of disability and bereavement benefits and Christmas bonus to those of pension age.

Notes:

1. Amounts are rounded to the nearest £5 million.
2. Totals may not appear to sum due to rounding.

Percentage of GDP

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Retirement pensions	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.1
Winter fuel payments	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Means-tested benefits for pensioners	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.0
All other benefits for pensioners	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Concessionary TV licences	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Total	6.3	6.4	6.2	6.1	6.1	5.9

Percentage of GDP

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Retirement pensions	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.2	4.2
Winter fuel payments	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Means-tested benefits for pensioners	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1
All other benefits for pensioners	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
Concessionary TV licences	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Total	5.9	5.9	6.0	6.2	6.1	6.2

[1] Less than 0.1 per cent.

Pensioners Incomes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners receiving one or more means-tested benefit have a weekly income of *(a)* up to £100, *(b)* £101 to £120, *(c)* £121 to £140, *(d)* £140 to £160, *(e)* £160 to £180, *(f)* £180 to £200, *(g)* £200 to £220, *(h)* £220 to £240 per week, *(i)* £240 to £260, *(j)* £260 to £280, *(k)* £280 to £300 and *(l)* over £300 per week. [35845]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table:

Number of pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits by weekly income band: Great Britain, May 2000

	Number
Total number of pensioners	3,250,000
Up to £100 weekly income	480,000
Between £100 and £119.99 weekly income	220,000
Between £120 and £139.99 weekly income	630,000
Between £140 and £159.99 weekly income	540,000
Between £160 and £179.99 weekly income	390,000
Between £180 and £199.99 weekly income	280,000
Between £200 and £219.99 weekly income	220,000
Between £220 and £239.99 weekly income	190,000
Between £240 and £259.99 weekly income	110,000
Between £260 and £279.99 weekly income	70,000
Between £280 and £299.99 weekly income	30,000
£300 and over weekly income	80,000

Notes:

1. The figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
3. Due to the estimation procedure to produce the figures, they have been rounded to the nearest ten thousand.
4. Pensioners are defined as a benefit unit where either the claimant and/or the partner are aged 60 and over.

5. Overlaps between jobseeker's allowance, minimum income guarantee, housing benefit and council tax benefit have been removed to calculate the total number of benefit units.

6. Includes income declared for the assessment of means-tested benefits (including disregarded income).

Sources:

1. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 2000.

2. Income support 5 per cent. Quarterly Statistical Enquiry May 2000.

3. Jobseeker's allowance 5 per cent. Quarterly Statistical Enquiry May 2000.

PRIME MINISTER

Honours List

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons *(a)* knighted (or equivalent) and *(b)* admitted to each rank of the orders of chivalry in the recent New Year's honours list were honoured for their contribution as (i) employees of Her Majesty's Government or of a Government-sponsored organisation, (ii) employees of local government or of a local government-sponsored organisation, (iii) private sector employees, (iv) voluntary sector employees, (v) health service employees, (vi) staff of schools and (vii) volunteers. [30023]

The Prime Minister: The information available is as follows:

(i) Five State Servants were honoured at Knight/Dame level in the new year honours list—2002, 30 at CB, CMG or CBE, 38 at OBE and 64 at MBE. It is not possible to readily identify employees of Government sponsored organisations.

(ii) Among local government employees, including police officers and fire fighters, there were one Knighthood, four CBEs, six OBEs and 28 MBEs. Figures for people employed by local government sponsored organisations cannot be readily identified.

(iii) It is not possible to identify from the names on the list those people who are employed in the private sector, many of whom will have been honoured because of what they have done outside their place of employment.

(iv) The list does not distinguish between paid and unpaid workers in the voluntary sector. Overall, people from the voluntary sector accounted for almost half of those on the list.

(v) For NHS employees there were two awards at Knight/Dame, four at CBE, 16 at OBE and 24 at MBE. The list also recognised the contribution made by many other people in the health sector, such as members of the Red Cross and the St. John's Ambulance Brigade.

(vi) Two members of school staff were honoured at Knight/Dame, three at CBE, 11 at OBE and 25 at MBE. There were also a significant number of awards elsewhere in the educational field, for example to people involved in further and higher education and vocational training.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons in each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland were *(a)* knighted or equivalent and *(b)* admitted to each rank of the orders of chivalry in each Honours List since May 1997. [34124]

The Prime Minister: This information is not held in the format requested and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the following table shows the number of awards made on my recommendation in each county in Northern Ireland since June 1999.

Numbers of Honours recipients in each county

County	*KCB*	*DBE*	*Kt*	*CB*	*CBE*	*OBE*	*MBE*
Antrim (including Belfast)							
Birthday 1999	—	—	—	—	1	5	16
New year 2000	—	—	1	—	2	13	43
Birthday 2000	—	1	—	—	5	7	24
New year 2001	—	—	1	—	2	15	18
Birthday 2001	—	1	1	—	—	6	22
New year 2002	—	—	1	1	1	8	20
Armagh							
Birthday 1999	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
New year 2000	—	—	—	—	—	1	2
Birthday 2000	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
New year 2001	—	—	—	—	—	1	4
Birthday 2001	—	—	—	—	—	1	2
New year 2002	—	—	—	—	—	1	3
Down							
Birthday 1999	—	—	—	1	3	5	13
New year 2000	—	—	—	2	1	6	12
Birthday 2000	1	—	—	—	—	5	8
New year 2001	—	—	—	—	2	6	13
Birthday 2001	—	—	—	2	2	3	11
New year 2002	—	—	—	—	3	6	10
Fermanagh							
Birthday 1999	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
New year 2000	—	—	—	—	—	1	2
Birthday 2000	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
New year 2001	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Birthday 2001	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
New year 2002	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Londonderry							
Birthday 1999	—	—	—	—	—	2	3
New year 2000	—	—	—	—	—	1	4
Birthday 2000	—	1	—	—	1	—	4
New year 2001	—	—	—	—	—	—	6
Birthday 2001	—	—	—	—	—	1	3
New year 2002	—	—	—	—	1	3	6
Tyrone							
Birthday 1999	—	—	—	—	—	3	3
New year 2000	—	—	—	—	—	—	5
Birthday 2000	—	—	—	—	1	—	2
New year 2001	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Birthday 2001	—	—	—	—	—	1	6
New year 2002	—	—	—	—	—	—	3

Suez Emergency 1951–54

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects the Chairman of the Honours and Decorations Committee to conclude his review of the 1951 to 1954 Suez Emergency and its recognition by way of a General Service Medal. [31850]

The Prime Minister: The Committee on the Grants of Honours, Decorations and Medals is aware of the past history of the case and of the representations currently being made for a medal. It is considering these representations very carefully.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his office and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32815]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 59–60W.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what the policy of his Office is for ensuring responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 are completed within 40 days; and what their procedure is to achieve this; [33474]

(2) what the period of time elapsed is for the oldest outstanding request for information under the Data Protection Act 1998, since receipt of the *(a)* original request and *(b)* administration fee; [33446]

(3) what his estimate is of the average cost of processing each information request under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33441]

(4) what administration fees are charged by his Office for information requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33458]

(5) what percentage of responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 No. 10 has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of the £10 fee, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the administration fee; [33465]

(6) how many requests the Department has received under the Data Protection Act 1998 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation; [33579]

(7) how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 his Office has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of the £10 administration fee, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the administration fee; [33436]

(8) how many responses the Department has completed to requests for information made under the Data Protection Act 1998 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation; [33572]

(9) what the longest period of time elapsed is between receiving *(a)* the administration fee and providing the information requested and *(b)* a request for information and providing the information requested, under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33451]

(10) what his procedure is for responding to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998; if he will place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement; [33479]

(11) how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 have been completed *(a)* within 40 days, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the original letter; and how many are still outstanding; [33567]

The Prime Minister: Our policy is to respond to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 as quickly and as accurately as possible and in accordance with the data protection principles.

For the purposes of the Act the Prime Minister's Office forms part of the Cabinet Office. The responsibility for co-ordinating responses to requests for information under the Act falls to the Cabinet Office Openness Unit. They arrange searches for personal data from relevant parts of the Department in accordance with the provisions of the Act and collate and send the responses.

The Act requires that a response be sent to anyone seeking information under the Act within 40 calendar days of sufficient information being received to verify the identity of the applicant and the location of the information being sought. The Cabinet Office procedures for handling requests for information under the Act are designed to ensure that wherever possible responses are sent within 40 days. Although the Act permits an administration fee of up to £10 to be charged, it is not currently the Cabinet Office policy to levy such a fee.

Since 1 March 2000, when the Act came into force, the Cabinet Office has responded to 24 requests for information within 40 days (83 per cent.), three between 40 and 60 days (10 per cent.) and two over 60 days (7 per cent.), with the longest being 86 days. This excludes those cases where the request was redirected to another Department, or the Cabinet Office has asked for further information from the applicant and no response was received. At present the Cabinet Office has four requests outstanding, one of which was received over 40 days ago.

Those making requests for information under the Act do not usually distinguish between the format in which the personal data are held when submitting a request. The time and effort required to process a request under the Act varies considerably depending on the nature and complexity of the request and no estimate is available of the average cost.

Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the publications issued by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34193]

The Prime Minister: My office published three Government annual reports. For the costs, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 18 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 206W.

All three reports were laid before Parliament. They were published through the Stationary Office, and are available on the internet. The 1998–99 and 1999–2000 reports were also available through Tesco and W. H. Smith.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34219]

The Prime Minister: In respect of my Office, none for the last four financial years.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 26W, which said that no items valued at more than £50 had been stolen or lost from my office in the last four financial years.

African Visit

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what sales of UK-produced defence equipment he proposes to promote during his forthcoming visit to African countries; and if he will make a statement. [34470]

The Prime Minister: None. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) on 11 February 2002.

Performance and Innovation Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will list the dates of meetings that *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* Members of the Performance and Innovation Unit have had since 7 June 2001 with representatives of Seeboard; and if he will make a statement; [34060]

(2) if he will list the dates of meetings that *(a)* his special advisers and *(b)* members of the Performance and Innovation Unit have had since 1 January 1999 with representatives of Global Crossing; and if he will make a statement; [34054]

(3) if he will place the records kept of contacts between his special advisers and the media concerning the Performance and Innovation Unit energy review in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [33975]

The Prime Minister: It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Nigeria

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations he has made to the Government of Nigeria regarding ethnic violence in Lagos. [35377]

The Prime Minister: I expressed my concern and sympathy to President Obasanjo when I saw him on 7 February. We support the Nigerian Government in their efforts to reduce the long-standing ethnic and religious tensions which underlie this and several other outbreaks of violence in recent months. The UK sponsors a number of projects aimed at reconciliation between different ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria.

UN Convention on Children's Rights

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Department is responsible for co-ordinating the Government's report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on Children's Rights to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; and for what reason. [35235]

The Prime Minister: The Children and Young People's Unit, reporting to the Minister for Children and Young People at the Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) will be responsible for co-ordinating the Government's next report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is a cross-departmental unit responsible for ensuring the coherence of the Government's policies for children and young people. It is therefore best placed to co-ordinate the Government's report.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for her Department in each of the last four years. [27902]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 406W.

In DEFRA we are unable to easily identify taxi fares as a separate item. The coding used to identify transactions groups travel by taxi with other forms of public transport (eg buses and underground), and to provide the information requested would incur disproportionate costs.

Fuel Poverty

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of fuel poverty in the ethnic minority communities; and if she will commission a study. [33597]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

Estimates suggest that the incidence of fuel poverty in England varies according to the ethnic group of the head of household. The 1996 English House Condition Survey estimated that the incidence of fuel poverty among white households was broadly similar to the average for all households in England in 1996 of about 22 per cent. The incidence of fuel poverty among black households was about 27 per cent. with that among Asian households estimated to be about 19 per cent.

The 2001 English House Condition Survey will update this information and the information on the extent of fuel poverty in England generally.

Fuel poverty is a devolved matter and therefore it is for the respective Assemblies and Parliament to report on the situation in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many acres of Grades 1, 2 and 3 agricultural land *(a)* in England and Wales and *(b)* in the Buckingham constituency were lost to development in each year since 1997. [32182]

Mr. Morley: The area of particular grades of agricultural land lost to development in England and Wales is not monitored on a systematic basis, partly because not all agricultural land has been surveyed by grade.

Departmental Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33199]

Mr. Morley: One member of staff (formerly of the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions) was seconded to Shell in September 2000.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 848W, when the consolidated list concerning *(a)* the Rural White Paper and *(b)* other departmental indicators will be placed in the Library. [35224]

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 847W, when the consolidated list on the Rural White Paper's headline indicators will be placed in the Library. [35225]

Alun Michael: The consolidated list of research into Rural White Paper headline indicators has been sent to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

LGC

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 240W, on genotype test errors, what plans she has to review the work carried out by LGC on the potential contamination of sheep brains with bovine material in October 2001. [33775]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* No errors were made by LGC in the tests of sheep and cow brains used for BSE research. An error had previously been reported on an entirely different test on sheep blood samples which used a robotic sampling system. The cross-checking genetic test of the brains in the flawed IAH experiment did not use this robotic system and was performed at a different laboratory at the LGC. LGC have performed an internal audit of this and are satisfied that the sheep and cow brains samples were correctly handled and that the results can be traced back to the correct samples.

Ashmoor Pit, Petrockstowe

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the retrospective Environmental Impact Assessment of the Ashmoor Pit, Petrockstowe will be published. [R] [35472]

Mr. Morley: The draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been circulated for comment and Devon county council, among others, has offered some constructive comments. The future of the Ashmoor pit is currently being discussed with local interests and the EIA will be prepared for publication upon conclusion of those discussions.

Thames Flood Barrier

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimates she has made of the number of years of protection afforded to London by the Thames Flood Barrier; when these estimates were made; and when they were last reviewed. [32893]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The Thames Barrier is the largest component of the complex system of gates, walls and embankments which form the tidal defences to London and the Thames Estuary. The Barrier is a robust and flexible installation with a design based on rates of sea level rise predicted in the 1970s which were higher than those currently anticipated. It provides London with a high level of protection from tidal flooding and with normal care and maintenance should continue to do so until at least the latter half of this century. Even then, although the Barrier may need to be closed more frequently, it will continue to fulfil its primary function. This conclusion was confirmed in the Environment Agency's latest annual review in November 2001.

The Environment Agency is currently developing its Thames tidal defence strategy for the next one hundred years, with several studies already in progress.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out for each Civil Service grade within her Department the *(a)* total number of staff employed and *(b)* the number aged (i) 16 to 25, (ii) 26 to 35, (iii) 36 to 45, (iv) 46 to 60 and (v) over the age of 60 years. [32885]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The number of permanent and casual staff employed in the Department for Environment, Food and rural Affairs by grade equivalent and by age band is set out in the table. These figures exclude staff in the Department's executive agencies.

	Age					
Grade	*16–25*	*26–35*	*36–45*	*46–60*	*Over 60*	*Total*
SCS	0	1	36	103	2	142
Grade 6	0	2	20	83	1	106
Grade 7	0	55	145	247	2	449
SEO	3	116	298	342	8	767
HEO	37	302	430	331	8	1,108
EO	285	708	552	405	13	1,963
AO	640	692	510	601	69	2,512
AA	336	203	202	312	48	1,101
Total	1,301	2,079	2,193	2,424	151	8,148

Correspondence

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to the letter of 18 November 2001 from Ms Anne Parker concerning the implementation of the recommendations of Task Force for the Hills; [28283]

(2) when the Director of the Government Office for the north west will reply to the letter of 18 November from Ms Anne Parker concerning the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force for the Hills. [28281]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* A response was sent to Ms Anne Parker on 6 February 2002.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* parliamentary questions, *(b)* letters and *(c)* other representations she has received from hon. Members regarding delays in responding to correspondence in 2001–02. [32558]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* At 31 January 2002, the Department had received 83 parliamentary questions from hon. Members regarding delays in responding to correspondence in this session.

Our correspondence database can not easily identify those letters received from hon. Members regarding delays in responding to their correspondence. Since the beginning of this Session the Department has received a total of 7,029 letters from hon. Members and to provide the information requested would incur disproportionate costs.

We have no records of other representations received.

Meat Imports

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff *(a)* are employed examining meat imports into the United Kingdom; and *(b)* were so employed in each of the last six years. [32196]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* All products of animal origin imported from third countries into the UK must enter at designated UK Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) where they are subject to veterinary inspections. The inspection services at the BIP are the responsibility of the local authority or port health authority and it is for the appropriate local authority to deploy inspection staff at the BIP in response to the volume and nature of products imported through the BIP. For this reason the exact number of inspectors engaged in checking imports can vary from day-to-day. Most of these staff also undertake a range of other duties. As at November 2001 the total number of local authority staff employed at BIPs was 196 comprising 97 Environmental Health Officers, 48 Official Veterinary Surgeons and 51 support staff. Figures are not available for previous years.

HM Customs officers also carry out checks for the presence of illegally imported meat and other animal products in passengers' luggage. In addition, State Veterinary Service staff are also empowered to deal with illegally imported animal products when they are found.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many consignments of imported meat products have been rejected on inspection, and from which countries they originated, in each of the last five years. [33070]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The table provided covers rejected consignments of red meat and red meat products from third countries from January 1997 to June 2001. Information is not yet available for the second half of 2001. The total number of consignments rejected is 119 in 1997, 140 in 1998, 175 in 1999, 196 in 2000 and 149 in the first six months of 2001.

Rejected consignments of imported meat and meat products from January 1997 to June 2001

Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*January to June 2001*	*Total by country*
Argentina	2	3	2	17	4	28
Australia	1	3	10	1	1	16
Bangladesh	2	1	0	2	0	5
Barbados	1	0	0	0	0	1
Belarus	0	0	0	0	1	1
Botswana	0	0	0	1	2	3
Brazil	0	7	8	13	12	40
Brunei	0	0	0	2	0	2
Cameroon	4	1	4	1	0	10
Canada	3	1	3	3	1	11
Chile	0	0	1	1	0	2
China	0	1	1	4	7	13
Colombia	0	1	0	0	0	1
Congo	0	0	1	0	0	1
Croatia	0	1	1	0	0	2
Cyprus	0	0	2	0	0	2
Egypt	1	1	1	1	0	4
Ethiopia	2	0	1	0	1	4
Estonia	0	1	0	0	0	1
Gambia	1	4	3	2	11	21
Ghana	27	9	7	7	8	58
Grenada	0	0	0	1	1	2
Guinea	1	0	0	0	0	1
Guyana	0	1	0	0	0	1
Honduras	0	1	0	0	0	1
Hong Kong	3	2	5	5	3	18
Hungary	1	0	0	1	0	2
India	1	0	0	0	3	4
Indonesia	1	1	1	0	0	3
Israel	0	0	0	1	0	1
Ivory Coast	0	0	5	3	1	9
Japan	5	6	6	6	1	24
Jordan	0	0	1	1	1	3
Kenya	1	3	3	0	1	8
Korea	4	1	4	1	2	12
Kuwait	0	1	0	1	0	2

Rejected consignments of imported meat and meat products from January 1997 to June 2001

Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*January to June 2001*	*Total by country*
Lebanon	1	1	0	0	1	3
Liberia	0	0	0	1	0	1
Liechtenstein	0	0	0	1	0	1
Malawi	0	0	0	0	1	1
Malaysia	5	8	6	5	1	25
Malta	0	0	1	0	0	1
Mauritius	0	0	0	1	1	2
Mexico	0	1	0	0	7	8
Morocco	0	0	0	0	1	1
Namibia	0	0	4	0	0	4
Nepal	0	0	0	1	0	1
New Zealand	1	4	5	5	2	17
Nigeria	9	16	12	13	9	59
Oman	1	1	0	1	0	3
Pakistan	2	0	0	1	1	4
Philippines	0	1	1	2	1	5
Poland	0	1	0	0	0	1
Qatar	0	0	1	0	3	4
Russia	1	0	0	0	0	1
Saudi Arabia	3	1	2	0	3	9
Seychelles	0	0	1	0	1	2
Sierra Leone	3	1	0	0	0	4
Singapore	2	7	19	1	1	30
South Africa	5	10	2	3	1	21
Sri Lanka	0	1	1	0	0	2
St. Lucia	0	0	0	0	1	1
St. Vincent	0	0	0	0	1	1
Switzerland	0	1	4	2	0	7
Syria	0	0	0	1	0	1
Taiwan	0	1	1	3	4	9
Thailand	3	1	7	4	3	18
Trinidad and Tobago	0	1	0	0	0	1
Tunisia	0	0	1	0	0	1
Turkey	0	1	0	2	0	3
United Arab Emirates	3	9	9	5	5	31
United States of America	17	22	24	60	38	161
Uruguay	0	0	3	4	0	7
Vietnam	0	0	1	2	1	4
Yemen	0	0	0	0	1	1
Zambia	0	1	0	0	0	1
Zaire	1	0	0	0	0	1
Zimbabwe	1	0	0	3	0	4
Total by year	119	140	175	196	149	

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to improve the controls on the import and labelling of meat. [33931]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Since April last year we have taken a range of initiatives aimed at improving our ability to prevent and detect illegal imports. These include better publicity and more effective intelligence gathering. These initiatives have been co-ordinated by officials in DEFRA, but involve other Departments such as HM Customs and Excise and the Food Standards Agency, and the local authorities who are responsible for controls at ports and airports.

The Food Standards Agency is pressing for changes to EU labelling rules to require country of origin labelling on a wider range of foods, particularly meat products. It is also pressing for changes that would prevent misleading labelling by restricting the use of terms like "produce of . . ." to those foods where the main ingredients come from, and production processes occur in, the named place or country.

Farm Produce

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of farm gate prices of farm produce are less than the cost of production. [28939]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The cost of production and the farm gate price of any particular commodity vary from producer to producer and over time. It is not possible therefore to determine a fixed proportion of the farm gate price that is attributable to the cost of production. At the whole farm level, the incidence of selling at below the cost of production is indicated by data from the Farm Business Survey. They show the incidence of negative farm incomes, where total costs exceed total output from the farm. In 1999–2000, 36 per cent. of farms in the Farm Business Survey in England had negative net farm incomes.

Sheep Annual Premium

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs why the sheep annual premium scheme application forms were changed between 2001 and 2002; how many farmers have made mistakes as a result of these changes; and whether farmers have been able to appeal against decisions based on incorrectly completed forms. [33000]

Mr. Morley: The Sheep Annual Premium Scheme (SAPS) application forms are reviewed annually to take account of any regulatory changes, and to take account of comments from producers and to see if there is any way they can be simplified. There have been no major changes from the 2001, to the 2002 forms (such as the addition or deletion of questions), however minor amendments were made to the format and wording of some questions, to assist the industry. For the 2001 scheme there were approximately 30,000 SAPS claimants, each received a questionnaire in the literature pack and was invited to comment on the scheme literature. Around 20 per cent. of applicants took the opportunity to comment, and we used these comments when drafting the 2002 scheme literature, before sending the drafts out for industry consultation over the summer. As in the past the exercise will be repeated this year, although the 2003 scheme literature should change considerably, following the reform of the Sheepmeat regime, agreed in Brussels in December 2001. The reforms have simplified the scheme, and will give us the opportunity to thoroughly review the scheme literature (which has changed only gradually since 1992).

The application window for the 2002 scheme has just closed, as a result we will not know for some time (until the claims are processed in spring) how many producers have made errors on their application forms. Staff undertake an initial check of the application forms on receipt, and any obvious errors are brought to the attention of claimants, who then have the opportunity to amend their forms, until the extended deadline for the receipt of claims on 1 March 2002. In the case of errors discovered after 1 March, while the Commission recognise the concept of 'obvious errors' in relation to the completion of application forms, it does so in a very restrictive manner. Thus, while we can accept simple cases of clerical error (eg transcription of numbers; omission and inconsistencies) we cannot extend this approach to cover errors of substance.

Producers who make an error on their claim form which subsequently affects their payment are able to appeal to the office handling their claim. They may also write to the Rural Payments Agency's Customers Relations Manager, and are of course free to write to their MP, who in turn may refer their case to the relevant Minister, or the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

Farmers

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list by administrative region in England and Wales the amounts paid to farmers in each of the last five years for *(a)* each CAP scheme and *(b)* UK schemes for which she is responsible. [27848]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Pursuant to the right hon. Member's similar question answered on 11 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1040W, to which I was only able to provide a holding answer, the amounts paid for CAP schemes in England, for the periods in question are now available in the Library of the House.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to encourage participation by her Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33551]

Mr. Morley: Campaigns, such as the annual Fair Trade Fortnight organised by the Fair Trade Foundation, help to raise consumer awareness of development issues in international trade as well as highlighting ways in which consumers can act to make a difference. The Department for International Development is providing £120,000 to the Fair Trade Foundation over three years (2001–03) in support of its efforts to target new groups through its annual Fair Trade Fortnight campaigns, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development will be attending the launch of this year's campaign on 4 March 2002.

Exmoor National Park

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will provide funds to the Exmoor national park to help with the damage caused by foot and mouth disease. [34129]

Alun Michael: For the coming financial year Exmoor national park will receive £2.93 million from Government, an increase of 13.6 per cent. on the current financial year. Considerable support has been given to rural communities to aid recovery following foot and mouth disease, including an £80 million business recovery fund and other forms of financial support which will have helped many businesses within national parks.

We are providing extra resources to all the national park authorities in England to help with the aftermath of the foot and mouth epidemic. We have already provided funds this year through the Countryside Agency to reopen rights of way in affected areas, including Exmoor.

We are confident that the resources provided will help the national parks promote a vigorous recovery in the countryside.

ESA Payments

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the time it takes for Environmentally sensitive areas payments to be made to farmers; and how many farmers are awaiting payment. [34132]

Mr. Morley: The Department aims to pay valid claims under the ESA scheme within two months of their receipt. In the most recent payment round, 89 per cent. of claims under ESA management agreements had been authorised for payment by 31 January 2002. On that date, 702 claims were awaiting authorisation for payment and these should be processed shortly.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her plans for the provision of ESA payments. [34131]

Mr. Morley: Proposed funding for the ESA scheme is set out in the England Rural Development Programme which covers the period 2000 to 2006. There are now 11,300 agreement holders under the scheme. The Department aims to make annual payments to them within two months of receiving valid claims.

Departmental Strikes

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many days were lost in strike action in her Department *(a)* in Somerset and Devon and *(b)* in the UK in 2000–01. [34130]

Mr. Morley: There were no days lost through strike action throughout 2000–01 in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (then referred to as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food).

During 2001–02, days lost due to strike action in the Department were (a) 2895 in offices in the counties of Somerset and Devon, (b) 16,201 in the UK overall.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list her Department's total expenditure by month in the financial years *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [32785]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 692W.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the *(a)* Disease Control System Database and *(b)* Veterinary Laboratory Agency foot and mouth disease case database. [33596]

Mr. Morley: Quality assurance and validation processes have been built into the routine procedures for maintaining the accuracy and completeness of both databases. Detailed guidance and training is available to all relevant staff.

A quality assurance exercise of the data within DCS is currently being carried out and whilst this is ongoing, figures extracted from DCS may be subject to revision as more information becomes available.

Animal Welfare

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what mechanisms have been put in place on the resumption of the live animal export trade to ensure the protection of the animals from cruelty. [32601]

Mr. Morley: The Government will continue to operate a twin track policy to protect the welfare of animals exported from the UK. We ensure that the rules are met while animals are within our jurisdiction and encourage other EU member states to give enforcement the same high priority. We have raised this with the European Commission and hope to see the point reflected in proposals later this year, to update and improve the current EU rules on the welfare of animals during transport.

All consignments of animals intended for export are subject to veterinary inspection in the 24 hours before loading. EU rules on health certification were amended in 2001 to include a mandatory assessment of the fitness of the animals for the journey. Consignors must complete a route plan showing how the intended journey will comply with statutory requirements for provision of feed, water and rest and maximum journey times. The pre-export check must be carried out at the farm of origin or at an approved assembly centre.

Flooding

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has taken to increase the amount spent on flood defences in 2003–04 to the levels necessary to meet her Department's standards of service. [33901]

Mr. Morley: Funding for the Department's programme for investing in flood warning arrangements and flood and coastal defences is increasing from £66 million in 2000–01 to £114 million in 2003–04. Funding for future years will be considered in the spending review process.

I have encouraged operating authorities to identify priority sites where flood and coastal erosion risk can be reduced and to submit plans so that available funds will be fully utilised to reduce that risk.

The Department's indicative standards of protection for flood and coastal defence schemes are provided as an aid to operating authorities to help in establishing the range of options to be considered. They do not represent any entitlement to protection or a minimum level to be achieved. The economic criteria for appraising schemes are that (a) the benefits outweigh the costs and (b) the most economically efficient option, commensurate with achieving an appropriate level of protection, is identified.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has taken to cap premiums imposed by insurance companies on homeowners in high-risk flood areas. [33900]

Mr. Morley: The Government do not intervene in price-setting by insurance companies. It is for the commercial judgment of individual insurance companies to set premiums according to their assessment of risk. We and the Environment Agency are working with the insurance industry so that companies have full information on the action taken to reduce flood risk so as to allow informed decisions. It remains the mutual aim of the Government and the insurance industry to ensure that affordable flood cover is available as widely as possible.

Agricultural Shows

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what agricultural shows licences farmers need to apply for; and what are the regulations governing animals at such shows. [33934]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Agricultural shows are very important to rural communities and we hope that they will be able to go ahead later this year subject to biosecurity conditions. On 5 February, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Lord Whitty of Camberwell announced details of the rules on animal movements that will operate on an interim basis during 2002. Further information on these new arrangements, including outline rules for movements to and from shows, have been made available in the Library of the House and posted on the DEFRA website at www.defraweb/footandmouth/movements/mainindex.htm. We hope to publish further details specifically on the conditions that show organisers will need to meet by the end of the month.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many agricultural shows were cancelled as a consequence of the outbreak of foot and mouth; and how many received financial compensation. [3[illegible]107]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The Department does not hold this information but according to the Association of Agricultural and Show Organisations, in excess of 309 shows are normally held each year and that last year, the vast majority of these were cancelled because of foot and mouth disease.

There is no statutory compensation for the cancellation of a show due to foot and mouth restrictions.

Sugar Beet

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from sugar beet farmers about the price of the crop in 2001–02; and what action she has taken as a result. [33933]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The basic price for sugar beet is determined by the relevant Common Agricultural Policy regime. This has kept EU white sugar prices at roughly double world levels for many years. Although the United Kingdom pressed for price reductions in last year's negotiations on renewal of the regime, the levels set by the Agriculture Council in Regulation 1260/01 for the period to 2006 remain broadly unchanged from the previous regime.

Sugar beet farmers have made no specific representations about price for 2001–02, though they have expressed concern about the sterling/euro exchange rate and about certain difficulties in the harvesting and processing of this year's crop.

Animal Movements

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the 20-day standstill rule has been amended to apply to animals that have been moved onto the farm and are not already on the farm itself. [33935]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Veterinary advice is that for biosecurity reasons, the 20-day standstill rule should continue to apply to holdings rather than individual animals although this is kept under review.

A number of exceptions to this rule are being permitted under the livestock movement regime being introduced on 11 February. Any future changes will need to ensure the continued segregation of incoming animals from the rest of the livestock in order to maintain biosecurity.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information technology difficulties have been identified in the operations of the Rural Payments Agency. [34106]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* We have had no insurmountable problems with IT in the run up to and since the formal launch of the RPA in October, though it is true that we have had some of the difficulties that one must expect when bringing two organisations together. In very brief summary these were:

> the need to link two networks and e-mail systems in a way which would look seamless to the staff;
>
> the need to connect systems based on slightly differing technologies, inherited from MAFF and IB, and to connect each group of people to the other's systems and data;
>
> maintaining old technology in the fact of increasing demand at fewer sites;
>
> accommodating action to deal with foot and mouth at the same time as building the new agency.

However, all of these have been dealt with by some upgrades, and by a good co-operative effort between RPA's staff and those of DEFRA.

Also, action is in hand to provide a unified infrastructural service for the RPA which will supersede the tactical solutions we employed in the short term. Apart from the need to develop a new, more resilient platform for RPA's set of existing operational systems, a key objective is to support a major procurement for the strategic replacement of all the operational claims management systems by the end of 2004.

Rhizomania

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on farming of the removal of protected zone status for rhizomania. [34105]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* Removal of protected zone status for rhizomania should have little impact on the development of the disease for the next five to ten years. Most outbreaks that appear in that time will result from infection which is already present in the soil. The development of the disease thereafter will depend on the actions of growers, contractors and processors, in particular in limiting the movement of soil, the principal means by which the disease is spread. Growers with known outbreaks will benefit from the lifting of statutory restrictions on their farms.

Livestock Headage Payments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what headage payments are available to *(a)* beef, *(b)* dairy, *(c)* sheep and *(d)* other livestock farmers; what is the value of each payment (i) in aggregate and (ii) per head; and what are the conditions upon which payments depend. [26000]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The information requested is as follows. For all schemes the conditions upon which payments depend are detailed in the scheme literature which is sent to producers. Copies of this literature will be placed in the Library of the House.

Rat Infestations

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated annual cost was to *(a)* agriculture and *(b)* the food industry of damage and losses as the result of rat infestations in the last 10 years. [34066]

Mr. Morley: The data required to estimate such damage and losses are not currently recorded.

Fishing Fleet

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 8 January, 2002 *Official Report*, column 769W, on the fishing fleet, if she will make a statement on *(a)* the total estimated discrepancy in kilowatt of power to be rectified on 1 July 2000 as a result of the declarations received from fishing vessels owners on 1 July 2000, *(b)* the total amount of kilowatt of power outstanding for which owners still have to acquire additional vessel capacity units and *(c)* the figures resulting from the above in relation to the totals for each of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea areas. [31456]

Mr. Morley: The total engine power discrepancy notified to Fisheries Departments by fishing vessel owners by 1 July 2000 was 50,400kW. As at 31 December 2001 vessel owners had acquired additional vessel capacity units (VCUs) equivalent to approximately 19,800kWs of this discrepancy. This leaves some 30,600kW to be corrected by the purchase of additional VCUs, the deration of engine power or a combination of the two. Vessel owners have until 31 December 2004 to do this. The figures cover the full spectrum of fishing activity. They cannot be broken down by ICES area as British domestic fishing licences authorise fishing in all relevant ICES areas.

Ear-tagging (Sheep)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the introduction of unique ear-tagging of sheep in improving traceability; and what role the 20 day standstill order has in the overall application of the ear-tagging scheme. [33373]

Mr. Morley: Sheep born or moved from their holding of birth since 1 January 2000 have only been required to bear a flock mark on an eartag or tattoo giving details of that holding of birth. It has not been possible to test the effectiveness of individual or unique identification as this has not been required.

The 20 day standstill required as part of the current FMD controls is monitored on the basis of batches of sheep moved and not on the identity of individual sheep.

Poland

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on whether Poland has accepted the terms and conditions of the acquis communautaire for fisheries within the negotiations on accession to the European Union. [33385]

Mr. Morley: EU accession negotiations for the Fisheries chapter have been provisionally completed with 10 of the 12 applicant countries. Poland and Malta have yet to conclude negotiations. Both have still to supply the EU with information regarding their preparations for meeting the acquis communautaire and discussion is still underway with the EU on derogations they have requested. It is now expected that the chapter will be concluded in the first half of 2002.

Fishing Gear

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on who is responsible for the initial authorisation of fishing gear to be used outside the Scottish 12 mile limit. [33384]

Mr. Morley: The Scottish Executive is responsible for fisheries management in the Scottish zone of British fisheries limits. This zone extends from the Scottish coast out to the 200 mile limit or to median lines with adjacent countries if that distance is shorter. Fisheries management includes regulation of fishing gear.

Livestock Movements

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the practical implications of the 20 day standstill order for stock breeding livestock farmers wishing to make applications for movement orders; and when she expects to lift the 20 day standstill order on the movement of livestock. [33372]

Mr. Morley: The Interim Regime for Livestock movements, which my noble Friend Lord Whitty announced on 5 February, will retain the 20 day standstill as the default position for movements not specified as exceptions. A significant number of exceptions are now permitted subject to conditions. These relate principally to breeding bulls and pigs, calves, sheep on tack and, as previously, all movements direct to slaughter. These provisions will be kept under review.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and

(iii) Northern Ireland, and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category *(a)*. [33679]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being in June 2001. Currently there are over 100 centrally managed IT contracts in place and it is expected that the core Department will spend around £61 million on IT systems and support this year, including an element for internal service provision. This sum excludes a contract relating to the Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network which I understand will be included in the response by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

To identify the location of registered offices for all main contracting parties would incur disproportionate costs, but a survey of the top 16 contracts, in cost terms (see table), has revealed that the registered office is in England in every case.

Contract details

Contractor	*Registered office*	*Description*	*Type of contract*	*Start date*
Lason Information Management Ltd.	England	Data capture management services	Service provision agreement	August 2000
Global Crossing	England	Wide area data networking services	Framework	May 2000
Compuware Ltd.	England	Uniface software licensing and support	Support agreement	April 2000
International Computers Ltd.	England	IT supply, maintenance and support services	Framework	April 1999
Sema Group UK Ltd.	England	Applications development services	Framework	April 1999
Sherwood International Group Ltd.	England	Applications development services	Framework	April 1999
SAS Software Ltd.	England	SAS software licences	Support agreement	January 1999
Vodafone Corporate Limited	England	Mobile communication services	Framework	1998
Computer Associates	England	Network licences	Support agreement	March 1988
Oracle Corporation UK Ltd.	England	Consultancy and education services	Service provision agreement	May 1997
Oracle Corporation UK Ltd.	England	Gold software support service	Support agreement	May 1997
Fujitsu Siemens Computers Ltd.	England	Unidata software licensing and support	Support agreement	February 1997
PC World Business Direct	England	Computer supplies/products	Framework	1996
Orion Media Marketing Ltd.	England	Computer supplies/products	Framework	1996
Abacus Direct Marketing and Computer Services Ltd.	England	Processor controlled keying services	Service provision agreement	July 1996
Siemens Communications Ltd.	England	Telephone systems and services	Framework	November 1993
British Telecommunications Plc	England	Leased data circuits	Framework	May 1990

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Group Lotus (Redundancies)

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement concerning the proposed redundancies at Group Lotus in the South Norfolk constituency; and if she will take steps to safeguard the technical research capacity of Group Lotus. [35283]

Mr. Wilson: I regret the announcement made by Group Lotus on 6 February of plans for up to 275 redundancies over the next few months, with the exact numbers to be decided after consultations with staff. However I note that these redundancies represent only 17 per cent. of the total Lotus work force. Recent improvements in manufacturing processes and productivity made by Group Lotus have led to an excess of staff employed in the manufacturing facility and this, together with a short term slowdown in the global market for sports cars, has led to the company's decision.

I am pleased that the highly efficient Lotus car production at Norfolk of the Lotus Elise and Esprit and the GM/Opel roadster will continue at around 5,000 cars per annum. In the long term this continued commitment by Lotus to manufacture high quality niche sports cars will lead to increased sales and profitability. In addition Lotus Engineering, which is largely unaffected, will continue to provide high quality R&D and engineering consultancy services to an increasing number of automotive manufacturing clients. It is estimated that one in 10 of every cars sold in Europe have an engine developed by Lotus.

The UK's automotive design engineering community, of which Lotus is a leading example, is respected internationally for its capability and excellence. Continued success critically depends on staying at the forefront of technological advance. My Department is already helping the sector maintain this world-class position through support for best practice channelled through the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. Moreover, direct funding for cutting edge R&D is available through the Foresight Vehicle LINK Programme. Here we are supporting three projects involving Lotus and a number of new Lotus proposals are being considered. The ongoing Foresight Vehicle road-mapping work allows companies such as Lotus to help set the priorities for the next phase of the programme to ensure its continuing relevance to strategic business needs. Furthermore, the Government's draft "Powering Future Vehicles" strategy provides an opportunity for Lotus to help shape thinking over the medium to long term in one of its areas of key competence.

At European level, my Department has actively supported the inclusion of sustainable surface transport technologies in the EC sixth RTD&D Framework Programme, which is scheduled to be launched later this year. There is an indicative budget of about euro 600 million associated with this sub-theme. As with previous Framework Programmes, of which Lotus has been a beneficiary, the Government will establish a number of dedicated National Contact Points to provide information and guidance to prospective participants.

Utility Disconnections

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many households *(a)* in England and Wales and *(b)* in the Buckingham constituency have been disconnected by (i) water companies, (ii) electricity companies and (iii) telecommunications companies in each year since 1992. [32184]

Mr. Wilson: The disconnection of domestic properties for non-payment of water bills was abolished by the Water Industry Act 1999 with effect from 1 July 1999. The number of disconnections for England and Wales since 1992 is set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of domestic water disconnections for non-payment in England and Wales

	Number
1992–93	18,636
1993–94	12,452
1994–95	10,047
1995–96	5,826
1996–97	3,148
1997–98	1,907
1998–99	1,129
April-June 1999	127

Note:

Information on water disconnections collected by company

Source:

Ofwat

The number of households in Great Britain that have been disconnected for non-payment by electricity and gas companies in each year from 1992 is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of domestic disconnections for non-payment for gas and electricity in Great Britain[1,2]

	Gas	*Electricity*
1992	15,707	18,018
1993	16,068	3,700
1994	16,308	1,200
1995	14,511	838
1996	8,826	477
1997	29,771	460
1998	29,500	400
1999	22,177	373
2000	16,500	300

Notes:

1. Data for 2001 are not yet available
2. Data for England and Wales are not separately available

Source:

Ofgem

The number of households in the United Kingdom that have been disconnected for non-payment by British Telecom in each year from 1998 is given in Table 3.

Table 3: BT net disconnections for non-payment for the United Kingdom

	Average number of residential lines during period[1]	*Number of net disconnections for non-payment per 100 residential lines (disconnections minus reconnections)*[2]	*Number of net disconnections*
	(a)	*(b)*	*(a*b)/100*
January-June 1998	20,139,000	1.5	302,000
July-December 1998	20,100,000	1.5	302,000
January-June 1999	20,071,000	1.4	281,000
July-December 1999	20,065,000	1.5	301,000
January-June 1999	20,038,000	1.6	321,000
July-December 1999	19,962,000	1.6	319,000
January-June 1999	19,954,000	1.5	299,000
1998	—	—	604,000
1999	—	—	582,000
2000	—	—	640,000

[1] Market Information, http://www.oftel.gov.uk/publications/marketinfo/index.htm

[2] Oftel, http://www.oftel.gov.uk/consumer/initiatives/disc0900.htm

Note:

No data are publicly available on a regional basis or for years prior to 1998. Data refer to BT only.

Data are not available to produce numbers of disconnections for electricity, gas, water or telecommunications in the Buckingham constituency.

Company Statistics

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the work force is employed in companies that have grown 20 per cent. or more in the last four years in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* the St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* the North West RDA region, *(f)* the other RDA regions, *(g)* England and *(h)* the UK. [35418]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward, dated 12 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the percentage of the workforce that is employed in companies that have grown 20% or more in the last four years in the following areas: a) St Helen's South b) the St Helen's MBC area c) Merseyside d) Manchester e) the north West RDA region f) the RDA regions g) England and h) the UK. (35418)

The figures requested are shown in the table below:

Percentage of the workforce employed in VAT based enterprises that have grown 20 per cent. or more between 1996 and May 2001

Area	*Percentage*
St. Helen's South Parliamentary Constituency	23
St. Helen's District	30
Merseyside Metropolitan County	37
Manchester Unitary Authority	45
Greater Manchester Metropolitan County	47
North West	42
North East	46
Yorkshire and the Humber	41
East Midlands	46
West Midlands	39
East	51
London	53
South East	49
South West	41
England	47
UK	47

Source:

Office for National Statistics, Inter Departmental Business Register Criteria: Businesses live at May 2001, from the extract for the DTI Small Business Publication—"VAT registrations and De-registrations: Business Start-ups and Closures" (available free of charge on www.sbs.gov.uk), compared with their situation in 1996.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the work force was employed by *(a)* European and *(b)* other foreign companies in (i) St. Helens, South, (ii) the St. Helens

MBC area, (iii) Merseyside, (iv) Manchester, (v) the North West RDA region, (vi) the other RDA regions and (vii) England in each of the last five years. [35417]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward, dated 12 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the percentage of the workforce that is employed by (a) European and (b) other foreign companies in (i) St Helens South, (ii) the St Helens MBC area, (iii) Merseyside, (iv) Manchester, (v) the North West RDA region, (vi) the other RDA regions and (vii) England in each of the last five years. (35417)

The information requested is not available for each of the last five years. It could only be given at disproportionate cost. However, information for 2001 can be given and is shown in the table below.

Percentage employment in European (excl UK) and other foreign-owned VAT registered businesses 2001

Area	*European (excl UK)*	*Other foreign*
St. Helen's South PC	2	3
St. Helen's District	3	2
Merseyside Metropolitan County	2	2
Manchester	3	2
Greater Manchester Metropolitan County	9	3
North West	6	3
North East	3	4
Yorkshire and the Humber	3	8
East Midlands	3	4
West Midlands	6	6
East	3	7
London	4	8
South East	5	11
South West	1	4
England	4	7

Source:

Office for National Statistics Inter Departmental Business Register Criteria: Based on the extract used to produce the National Statistics publication "PA1003—Size Analysis of United Kingdom Businesses 2001" (available free of charge on the NS website www.statistics.gov.uk). The figures are based on the location of the main address of the business.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of companies in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* the St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* the North West RDA region, *(f)* the other RDA regions, *(g)* England and *(h)* the UK *(i)* started up and (ii) failed, in the last five years. [35419]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward, dated 12 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the percentage of companies in (a) St Helen's South, (b) the St Helen's MBC area, (c) Merseyside, (d) Manchester, (e) the North West RDA region, (f) the other RDA regions (g) England and (h) the UK that were (i)start-ups and (ii) failed in the last five years.(35419).

The figures for St Helen's South parliamentary constituency could only be given at disproportionate cost. However, the start-ups (VAT registrations), closures (VAT de-registrations) and stock (enterprises registered for VAT) for all counties, unitary authorities and districts in the UK requested, are available on the Small Business Service website. The web address is http://sbs.gov.uk/content/statistics/vat—2000.pdf. You will need to refer to tables 4, 5 and 6 Business Start ups and Closures: VAT Registrations and De-Registrations in 2000.

Glazing Businesses

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support her Department plans to give to small glazing businesses in Bassetlaw who will not be able to afford the local authority building control fee when the legislation comes into effect on 1 April. [33511]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

Since the middle of last year, my Department has been in discussion with the Glass and Glazing Federation (GGF), regarding the setting up of a scheme for the self-certification of compliance with the Building Regulations for replacement glazing. The GGF set up a steering committee comprising key industry representative bodies, local authorities, my Department and others, to develop rules for such a scheme. These have recently been finalised, and the scheme is known as the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme (FENSA). FENSA is open to any glazing installer who meets the relevant criteria, and has been developed to ensure that it is cost effective. Over 4,000 prospective members have completed pre-registration forms.

I will shortly lay regulations before Parliament to authorise local authorities to accept certificates from FENSA registered installers, certifying that their work complies with the Building Regulations. The scheme currently deals only with dwellings, but will be extended to non-dwellings in due course. There will be no need for any competent glazing firm to have to pay local authority building control fees for replacement glazing in dwellings, and the costs of joining FENSA are comparatively small. I believe that the development of FENSA will not only significantly cut the costs of complying with the new regulations, but will be a major step forward in consumer protection.

PILOT Advisory Group

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list *(a)* the present members of the PILOT advisory group and *(b)* former members who have subsequently left and been replaced, with the date on which this took place. [33197]

Mr. Wilson: Current PILOT members are as follows:

Brian Wilson, Minister for Energy and Industry

Lewis Macdonald, Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

George Foulkes, Minister of State, Scotland Office

Tom Botts, Country Chairman and Director Planning HSE and External Affairs. UK Shell International Petroleum Company

John McDonald, Managing Director, Texaco North Sea

Scott Urban, Regional President, BP Amoco Exploration

Tom Smith, Chairman and Managing Director, Nessco Ltd., Nessco House, Kirkhill Drive, Dyce, Aberdeen, AB2 0EU

Sir Ian Wood, Chairman and Managing Director, John Wood Group

James McCallum

Paul Blakeley, Director and General Manager, Talisman Energy UK Ltd.

Michel Contie. TotalFinaElf Exploration UK plc

Mike Mannering, Managing Director UK, Schlumberger

Mike Straughen, Managing Director, AMEC Services Ltd.

David Cassie, Managing Director, Coflexip Stena Offshore

Danny Carrigan, Scottish Regional Secretary, Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union

Jon Cunliffe, Managing Director, Finance, Regulation and Industry, HM Treasury

Stephen Hampson, Under Secretary, Economic and Industrial Affairs, Scottish Executive

Dinah Nichols, DEFRA

Joan MacNaughton, Director General, Energy

Geoff Dart, Director, OG, DTI

David Warren, Director, Business Group, Trade Partners UK

Nick Starling, Director of Safety Policy, Safety Policy Directorate, Health and Safety Executive

Iain Todd, Oil and Gas, DTI

Angela Latta, Oil and Gas, DTI.

Previous PILOT members with their date of leaving are as follows:

Helen Liddell MP, February 2001

Peter Hain MP, July 2001

Wendy Alexander MSP, June 2001

Alisdair Morrison MSP, December 2001

Henry McLeish MSP, May 2000

Malcolm Brinded, Shell UK, October 2001

Steve Marshall, BP Amoco, August 2001

Anna Walker, DG Energy, DTI, October 2001

Jim Campbell, DTI, June 2000

Godfrey Robson, Scottish Executive, June 2000

Dave Smith, Conoco, November 2000

Iain Craig, Enterprise Oil, January 2001

Sir Steve Robson, Permanent Secretary HM Treasury, December 2000

Francis Gugen, Amerada Hess, May 2000

John Rhodes, BTI, February 2000

Alan Jones, BP Amoco, April 2000.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will provide details of when the PILOT advisory group is due to report; and if she will place copies of related documentation in the Library. [33194]

Mr. Wilson: PILOT produced its 2000 End of Year Report in early 2001; the 2001 report is scheduled for publication in March 2002.

Both of these reports are/will be available from the PILOT website www.pilottaskforce.co.uk.

Oil and Gas Task Force

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the members of the Oil and Gas Task Force *(a)* at the time it was established, and *(b)* at the time it was replaced by PILOT. [33196]

Mr. Wilson: The following list details all members of the Oil and Gas Industry Task Force throughout its duration.

Member	
Chairman:	
John Battle MP	Minister for Energy and Industry, DTI (replaced by Helen Liddell MP)
Vice Chairman:	
Lord McDonald	Minister for Business and Industry Scottish Office (replaced by Brian Wilson MP)
Members:	
Mike Bowyer	Managing Director, PES International Ltd.
Malcolm Brinded	Managing Director, Shell UK Exploration and Production, Country Chairman Shell UK
Tom Smith	Chairman and Managing Director, Nessco Ltd.
Sir Ian Wood	Chairman and Managing Director, John Wood Group plc, Chairman Scottish Enterprise, Chairman IEP Oil and Gas Exports Advisory Board
Bobby Buirds	Regional Officer, Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU), Secretary IUOOC
Syd Fudge	Chief Executive, Kvaerner Oil and Gas Ltd., Chairman OCA,
Francis Gugen	Managing Director, Amerada Hess Ltd., Chairman CRINE
Mark Hope	Director, Enterprise Oil, Chairman Brindex, Vice President UKOOA
Alan Jones	Regional President, BP Amoco, Hon. Treasurer UKOOA
James McCallum	President, Global Marine Integrated Services Europe, Chairman SPN
John McDonald	Managing Director, Texaco (UK) North Sea Ltd.
Anna Walker	Director General, Energy, DTI
Dinah Nichols	Director General, DETR (Environmental Protection)
Geoff Dart	Director OG, DTI
John Rhodes	Director, IEP
Godfrey Robson	Under Secretary, Scottish Office
Assessors:	
Jim Campbell	Director IEP
Julian Thomson	Group Manager, Marketing and Communications, Stolt Comex Seaway Ltd.
Secretary:	
Keith Mayo	Deputy Director IEP

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will provide details for *(a)* the Oil and Gas Task Force and *(b)* PILOT of (i) the terms of reference of these advisory groups, (ii) the occasions on which meetings have taken place and (iii) the outcomes and recommendations which have (A) resulted and (B) will result from these meetings and the work of the advisory group; and if she will place copies of related documentation in the Library. [33195]

Mr. Wilson: The information requested is as follows:

(a) (i) Oil and Gas Industry (OGITF) Task Force Terms of Reference.

The task force will bring together Government Departments and the oil and gas industry to develop mutual understanding of the key issues both short term and over the next 10 years, including for example, technology development, environmental policies and knowledge management. Working within the parameters set by Government policy, the economic situation, and sustainable development the task force will:

develop strategies for reducing the cost base of UK oil and gas operations against the background of low oil prices, the prospects for world demand, the mature nature of the North sea and conditions in other UKCS areas;

examine and prioritise initiatives aimed at improving the competitiveness of the UK industry;

make specific recommendations by summer 1999 for actions to be taken by the industry or Government.

(ii) OGITF meetings

27 January 1999

23 February 1999

31 March 1999

28 April 1999

11–12 May 1999

26 May 1999

29 June 1999

5 October 1999

1 December 1999.

(b) (i) PILOT Terms of Reference

To be an exemplar of the way that industry, Government, and the work force can work together to improve competitiveness arena.

To monitor the progress of Oil and Gas Industry Task Force (OGITF) initiatives and provide strategic support, guidance and mentoring as and when required.

To provide strategic leadership and a high level, pan-industry forum to address and resolve pan-industry issues.

To provide a pan-industry forum to identify and develop new initiatives to improve UK oil and gas industry competitiveness as and when required.

To be recognised as the most successful, productive and collaborative community of stakeholders improving the health of UK's oil and gas sector.

(ii) PILOT Meetings

1 February 2000

15 May 2000

26 July 2000

4 October 2000

17 January 2001

19–20 March 2001

25 June 2001

17 October 2001

16 January 2002.

The OGITF made its recommendations to the Secretary of State in September 1999 in its final report 'A Template for Change'. PILOT produced an end of year report in early 2001 with the next scheduled for publication in March 2002. These and all papers and minutes for OGITF are/will be available on the PILOT website www.pilottaskforce.co.uk

Regulatory Reform

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government will respond to the report of the Better Regulation Task Force on sector regulators; for what reason the response has been delayed beyond the target of 60 days; and what representations she has received from the task force in this respect. [31024]

Ms Hewitt: The Government response is being published today and I have placed a copy in the Libraries of the House. This task force report was unusual in the way it covered a number of different sectors and it was necessary to discuss the response with the relevant economic regulators and co-ordinate it across several Government Departments.

Arms Exports

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the British companies which have received export licences to export arms and army-related equipment to *(a)* Qatar, *(b)* United Arab Emirates, *(c)* Bahrain and *(d)* Oman in each year since 1995; and if she will make a statement. [34084]

Nigel Griffiths: Information on export licences issued to particular British companies is commercially confidential, and is exempt from disclosure under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Details of all export licences issued are published by destination in the Government's annual reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 annual reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 annual report will be published as soon as possible.

Apprenticeships

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls are taking apprenticeships within the construction industry in England and Wales. [33559]

Mr. Wilson: The spring 2001 Labour Forces Survey estimates that 47,000 people are currently doing recognised trade apprenticeships in construction. This is almost twice the number undertaking apprenticeships in 1996. It is not possible to split the figures down by gender because the sample size is too small. The survey also shows that of those currently working in construction, 800,000 people have completed or are still on apprenticeship schemes, of these 6,000 are female. The figures should be treated as indicative and are likely to be underestimates, as people taking apprenticeships tend to be young and mobile and do not always show up on surveys.

Nuclear Reactors

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether the recent discovery of radiolytic corrosion in the graphite moderators of UK Magnox reactors will result in premature closures; [34002]

(2) if he will make a statement on the recent events leading to the closure of the nuclear reactors at *(a)* Chaplecross and *(b)* Calder Hall; [34003]

(3) what discussions he has had with his colleague the Secretary of State for Health regarding safety actions which the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate will undertake in relation to graphite depletion in UK Magnox reactors. [34001]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL has announced its strategy for the Magnox stations including maximum operating lifetime limits for each station. Details are set out in the company's annual report and accounts for 2001. Subject to annual reviews, and provided it remains safe and economic to do so, BNFL intends to operate each of the reactors up to a 50 year lifetime. This means the latest closure date for the four reactors at Calder Hall falls between 2006 and 2008 and for the four at Chapelcross the latest closure dates fall between 2008 and 2010. It is a matter of commercial judgment for BNFL as to whether or not any factors might arise which might make it uneconomical to continue operating any reactor up to its maximum lifetime limit.

The phenomenon of graphite weight loss (referred to in my hon. Friend's questions as radiolytic corrosion and graphite depletion) in Magnox reactors, resulting from the irradiation and heating of the graphite during reactor operation, is well known to both BNFL and HSE's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII). This affects most of the Magnox stations and is monitored closely to ensure that it does not lead to any problems of safety significance. Graphite weight loss is not a significant issue for the reactors at Chapelcross or Calder Hall as these reactors operate at a lower temperature.

At the start of the routine annual outage of Reactor 1 at Chapelcross at the end of August 2001, BNFL discovered that a number of chargepans on top of the reactor had moved out of alignment. This occurrence is related to the well-understood phenomenon of radiation-induced graphite shrinkage which is a separate matter from graphite weight loss. As the four reactors at Calder Hall are of the same design as Reactor 1 at Chapelcross, BNFL decided, in consultation with HSE, to carry out inspections of these reactors too as these reached their next scheduled outrages. All four reactors at Calder Hall are now shut down. They will not be returned to operation until BNFL and the HSE are satisfied that it is safe to do so. This includes the requirement that the issue of misaligned chargepans needs to have been effectively addressed. This is also the case for Reactor 1 at Chapelcross.

Reactors 2, 3 and 4 at Chapelcross have different design features which means that they are less susceptible to graphite shrinkage. They have not been affected by the misaligned chargepans problem. Reactor 3 at Chapelcross was shutdown in July due to the incident that took place during a fuelling outage when a failed grab in the defuelling machine led to a basket of spent fuel being dropped. Having received Consent from the HSE, BNFL has now restarted Reactor 3. Reactor 2 at Chapelcross is operating and Reactor 4 was shut down at the end of January for its planned annual maintenance outrage. Currently, BNFL is awaiting approval from the HSE to resume refuelling operations at Chapelcross.

Matters relating to nuclear safety fall to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Neither the issue of graphite weight loss nor that of graphite shrinkage has been discussed with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Pallets

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the change in the size of the UK pallet market in the last four years. [25341]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Department has made no such assessment. However I would be happy to address any particular concern that the hon. Member may wish to raise.

Public Holidays

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what calculations she has made of the cost to public funds of an additional day's public holiday in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Wales only, *(c)* Scotland only and *(d)* England only. [34908]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* There has been no cost assessment made of the financial implications to the public purse resulting from an additional day's public holiday throughout the United Kingdom nor individually for Wales, Scotland and England.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what figures she has collated on the number of paid bank holidays employees are entitled to in each European Union country; what plans the Government have to increase the number of paid bank holidays in the UK; and if employees will be eligible to a paid bank holiday for the forthcoming Queen's Golden Jubilee. [34948]

Alan Johnson: Employees have no statutory entitlement to payment for bank holidays in the UK. Therefore, whether they are eligible for payment in respect of the Queen's golden jubilee holiday will depend on their contract of employment.

There are no plans to increase the number of bank holidays in the UK, and we do not collate figures on the number of paid bank holidays in each member state of the EU.

Eurozone

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessments she has made of the impact of Britain's employment laws on *(a)* the loss of jobs in manufacturing industry and *(b)* the transfer of UK jobs to countries in the Eurozone in the last five years. [34836]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The information is as follows:

(a) The Department publishes Regulatory Impact assessments for all proposals for legislation before they are introduced. There is no evidence to suggest that employment legislation has affected the level of manufacturing employment.

(b) It is not possible to estimate how many jobs have moved from the UK to other countries in the EU or from other EU countries into the UK. However the UK continues to remain an attractive location for inward investment. Almost a quarter (24 per cent.) of all FDI in Europe goes to the UK compared to 14 per cent. for Germany and 11 per cent. for France (1999).

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her implementation of the end of Life Vehicles Directive; and whether she intends to make it apply retrospectively on vehicle manufacturers. [32980]

Mr. Wilson: The responses to our consultation paper on options for implementing the Directive are now being assessed, along with the recommendations and conclusions of the Trade and Industry Committee. The Government are working to transpose and implement the Directive in accordance with the dates and options specified in the text, and without putting UK business at a disadvantage. In the Government's view, the Directive's provisions are not legally retrospective.

Electricity Imports

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much electricity was imported from France into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [32982]

Mr. Wilson: Imports of electricity from France to the United Kingdom, for the years 1997 to 2001 are as follows:

	GWh
1997	16,558
1998	12,547
1999	14,484
2000	14,267
2001	10,563

Note:

The figure for 2001 is provisional.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list her Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32800]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 692W.

Enron Europe

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what submissions have been received by the Government from Enron Europe since May 1997 that have been made publicly available. [31934]

Mr. Wilson: In common with other participants in the energy markets, Enron has made submissions to the Government on various issues, including public consultations. Details of all the submissions made could be collected only at disproportionate cost. However, it is DTI practice to place a summary of responses to public consultations in the Libraries of the House and, except where companies made submissions in confidence, copies of submissions are available on request.

Energy Reserves

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how long UK *(a)* coal, *(b)* oil and *(c)* gas reserves are expected to last. [35608]

Mr. Wilson: In the Coal Authority's evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union on 12 November 2001, coal reserves at existing UK mines were assessed in 2001 at around 220 million tonnes, equivalent to about seven years of UK coal production at 2000 production rates. The evidence also said that there was a further known potential of 380 million tonnes and, in addition, currently unaccessed deep mine and opencast resources potentially provide many years of future production at present levels.

Detailed estimates of oil and gas reserves on the UK continental shelf are given in the Brown Book (Development of UK Oil and Gas Resources 2001). The extent to which these reserves might be produced depends on a number of factors, including prices and costs relative to other oil producing areas. It is therefore difficult to make accurate predictions, but if all the discovered reserves given in the Brown Book were to be developed they represent some 11 years of oil production and 14 years of gas production at rates seen in 2000. If in addition, estimates of as yet undiscovered reserves are also considered, UK oil reserves represent between 13 and 29 years of production and UK gas reserves represent between 17 and 29 years of production, although the upper estimates are unlikely. In practice, production levels will fall and reserves will last longer. Indeed, a Pilot target is to produce 3 Mboed (million barrels of oil equivalent per day) in 2010 against about 4.5 Mboed in 2000.

Green Technologies

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to promote the take-up of green technologies. [33737]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's aim is for the UK to become a leading player in the new markets for green energy and products, waste minimisation, recycling and re-use. Support for the take-up of green technologies is provided through a wide range of activities. The main ones to which DTI contributes directly are:

The Sustainable Technologies Initiative offers grants for the development of new, more sustainable technologies. The total funding available from Government exceeds £18 million, of which £10 million is contributed by DTI, and £8 million is contributed through the science budget by research councils.

The Envirowise programme is jointly funded by DTI and DEFRA and is helping UK companies increase their competitiveness through the introduction of resource efficiency techniques and cost-effective cleaner technology. Support for the current phase is some £31 million by the two Departments.

DTI has committed £12.5 million over three years to the Waste and Resources Action Programme.

Promoting more sustainable technologies and practices in construction is a key objective of my Department's £15 million construction research and innovation programme.

The Government are providing substantial support to industry for the development of renewable forms of energy.

Introducing the new Renewables Obligation, exempting renewables from the Climate Change Levy and protecting existing Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) contracts will together create a long-term market incentive for renewables worth over £1 billion per year by 2010.

We are underpinning the obligation with direct Government funding for renewables worth over £260 million between 2001 and 2004. We are setting up extensive capital grants programmes, in particular for offshore wind and energy crops projects, initiating a major photovoltaics demonstration programme, and boosting research and development.

We recently introduced an order to allow locational flexibility for NFFO 3, 4 and 5 projects that have not yet been commissioned. This will allow more appropriate locations to be found in order to overcome problems in securing planning permission.

We have initiated studies of each UK region's capacity to generate electricity from renewable sources. Once all these assessments are completed, it is expected that specific regional targets for renewable energy will be adopted across the UK.

The Government are also exploring the scope for upgrading the electricity distribution system to enable the UK's huge renewable energy resources to be exploited to the full. For example, we have commissioned an initial study of the feasibility of an underwater cable to connect parts of the western seaboard of the UK directly to the National Grid.

The Department is also working with other Government Departments on activities such as the Carbon Trust and the Green Technology Challenge.

Retention Systems

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the impact of the system of retention on smaller construction companies; and if she plans to change the system of retention; [30569]

(2) what estimate she has made of the amount of retentions held back in the construction industry in each of the last 10 years; [30571]

(3) which local authorities operate a retention system in their building programmes. [30570]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The Government do not collect data on the use of retentions by construction clients or suppliers. Retentions are a common contractual agreement between the parties resulting from decades of adversarial relationships between the players in the industry. We are taking a range of steps to address the root causes of the distrust. Through the Rethinking Construction initiative, run in partnership by Government and the construction industry, we have developed and disseminated policies that promote a culture change in the industry and across clients. These are based on partnering and long-term relationships between the parties where they co-operate to maximise efficiency and benefits, and to drive waste out of the project.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department intends to take to ensure CHP is excluded from the obligation base for the Government's renewable energy obligation. [35386]

Mr. Wilson: Responses to the Statutory Consultation on the Renewables Obligation included the suggestion that excluding electricity from good quality combined heat and power (CHP) installations from the total electricity sales figures on which the Renewables Obligation was based might be an effective means of supporting CHP.

In the event, this suggestion was not pursued, on the basis of clear legal advice that it would be going beyond the powers conferred by Parliament (ultra vires) to use an Obligation intended to promote renewable energy to promote other forms of energy generation.

DEFRA is developing, in close collaboration with other Departments, a draft CHP Strategy which will set out the measures needed to achieve the CHP target of at least 10,000 megawatts of good quality CHP by 2010. This will be issued for consultation shortly.

BNFL

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with British Nuclear Fuels in respect of improving the safety and security of buildings B302 and B302.1 at Sellafield. [32290]

Mr. Wilson: None. I have received advice from officials on the safety and security of civil nuclear installations, including those at Sellafield. Officials have had discussions with BNFL. Safety and security precautions at nuclear sites are kept under regular review.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 618W, on BNFL, if she will list *(a)* those bodies which provided the independent advice on BNFL liabilities and *(b)* the contracts entered into with those advising the Department. [34686]

Mr. Wilson: The Department received advice on BNFL's liabilities from Andersen, Arthur D Little, Credit Suisse First Boston, Deloitte and Touche, HSBC, Slaughter and May and Lane Clark and Peacock.

With the exception of the contract entered into with Arthur D Little, which asked the firm specifically to review the methods used by BNFL when quantifying its liabilities, the contracts entered into with the remaining firms sought advice on a number of issues, including liabilities.

These contracts were awarded following best departmental practice which involved obtaining competitive tenders and, where applicable, following EU procurement rules.

Energy White Paper

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date she will issue the Energy White Paper. [34048]

Mr. Wilson: Energy policy issues will be further canvassed in the PIU report. No decision has yet been taken on the form of any responses to that review.

Staff Payments (Commercial Negotiations)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice Ministers in her Department have sought from the head of her Department regarding the propriety of members of their personal staff receiving payments from companies that are involved in commercial negotiations with her Department; and if she will make a statement. [34420]

Ms Hewitt: It is the responsibility of Ministers to ensure that no conflict of interest, or apparent conflict of interest arises between their personal affairs and their ministerial responsibilities, as set out in the Ministerial Code. Details of advice given by officials to Ministers are not disclosed.

Mineworkers' Compensation

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much compensation was paid to former mineworkers in Nottinghamshire in respect of *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger in (i) December 2001 and (ii) January 2002. [34689]

Mr. Wilson: The following table details compensation paid in Nottinghamshire:

£ million

	(i) December 2001	*(ii) January 2002*
(a) Respiratory disease compensation	1.8	0.9
(b) Vibration White Finger compensation	2.4	4.8

Retail Fuels Market

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the size of the road transportation retail fuels market in each nation of the UK was in *(a)* ultra low sulphur diesel, *(b)* unleaded petrol, *(c)* four star petrol and *(d)* liquefied petroleum gas in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2000. [35068]

Mr. Wilson: Not all of the information requested is available. The available data are given in the table.

Retail sales of road transportation fuels

Thousand tonnes per annum

Fuels	*England and Wales*[1]	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*
1998				
DERV fuel	5,916	564	122	6,602
Of which:				
ultra low sulphur diesel[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	702
Unleaded petrol	15,355	1,148	338	16,841
4-star/lead replacement petrol[3]	4,301	225	69	4,595
Liquid petroleum gas[4]	n/a	n/a	n/a	4
1999				
DERV fuel	6,478	566	93	7,137
Of which:				
ultra low sulphur diesel[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	6,066
Unleaded petrol	17,253	1,247	281	18,781
4-star/lead replacement petrol[3]	2,478	117	34	2,629
Liquid petroleum gas[4]	n/a	n/a	n/a	8
2000				
DERV fuel	6,925	462	76	7,463
Of which:				
ultra low sulphur diesel[2]	6,925	462	76	7,463
Unleaded petrol	18,048	1,094	269	19,411
4-star/lead replacement petrol[3]	1,394	51	17	1,462
Liquid petroleum gas[4]	n/a	n/a	n/a	22

[1] Separate data on retail sales in Wales are not available.

[2] Data are not available on retail sales of ultra low sulphur diesel (ULSD) in 1998 and 1999 broken down by nation. These years cover the period when it was replacing, and co-mingling with, ordinary diesel or DERV fuel at retail stations. By 2000 all supplies entering the retail market were of ULSD.

[3] Four-star leaded petrol was phased out at the end of 1999. As such, the data provided include sales of lead replacement petrol as it was replacing, and co-mingling with, leaded petrol at retail stations.

[4] Although increasing rapidly, the use of liquid petroleum gas as a road fuel is still relatively minor at the moment, and so a breakdown by nation is not available.

Source:

Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics: Energy Trends, September 2001 edition.

Oil Suppliers and Retailers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the steps her Department takes to monitor the fairness of the contractual relationship between oil suppliers and retailers in non-competition issues. [35069]

Mr. Wilson: My Department does not monitor contracts between oil suppliers and retailers.

More generally, however, I am discussing with the oil industry whether and how relationships in the supply chain might be improved.

Road Transport Fuels

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 669W, on rural petrol stations, when she expects to announce the more effective mechanisms for the supply of road transport fuels. [35191]

Mr. Wilson: As I said in my earlier answer of 10 December 2001 to my hon. Friend, I am considering whether there is a case for putting in place more effective mechanisms to support the objectives discussed by my hon. Friend. This is a complex matter, on which it is likely to take some time to reach a conclusion.

Fair Trade Goods

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 169W, on Fair Trade goods, (1) if she will review during Fair Trade Fortnight the amount of fairly traded goods used in her Department; [35455]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 682W, if she will review and increase the amount of fairly traded goods purchased by her Department during Fair Trade Fortnight. [35917]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 969W.

Building Firms

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if there is a professional organisation that has a list of building firms that are reputable. [34688]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI has developed the Quality Mark scheme to enable householders to quickly and easily identify reputable and competent construction firms. The scheme ensures that Quality Mark tradesmen are technically competent, possess relevant qualifications and display financial probity and registers them for the public to use.

The Quality Mark scheme includes various customer care measures, such as a code of practice and an effective complaints system. There is also a scheme warranty that provides protection against defects in workmanship for six years after completion of works.

Pilots are operating in Birmingham and Somerset and the scheme has been extended to contractors in Leicestershire and east Kent. So far 138 builders have been awarded the Quality Mark and over 200 are in the assessment pipeline. The scheme is currently undergoing evaluation, and a report will be made to Ministers shortly.

DTI's national register, Constructionline, is operated under a public-private partnership by Capita Business Services Ltd. It was set up to reduce the cost to both firms and clients of repeated information handling at the initial stage of tendering for work. Public and commercial sector clients who use Constructionline gain access, free, to a single, nationwide list of approved construction firms. Constructionline assesses firms against commercially accepted standards to show that they have the capacity and capability to carry out the types and size of work for which they wish to tender. Firms pay a fee, close to cost, for registration and annual review on a sliding scale based on turnover. There are more than 10,000 firms registered with Constructionline and 13,330 licensed clients. Client access to the data, whether to individual firms' records or to source a project list of approved firms, rose by 73 per cent. in the year to January 2002.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Road Accidents

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries were caused by road crashes in the Metropolitan Police area in 2001; and at what estimated cost to public funds. [31018]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

In 2000, the most recent calendar year for which figures are available, there were 292 deaths and 5,847 serious injuries on roads in the Metropolitan police area.

An estimate of the full cost to public funds is not available. However, it is estimated that accidents involving death or serious injury in the Metropolitan police area in 2000 resulted in around £60 million of hospital, ambulance and police costs. This estimate includes any costs related to less seriously injured casualties in these accidents. Costs to public funds will also include social security payments and damage to public property which cannot be estimated.

Jury Trial

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on trial by jury; and if he will make a statement. [32367]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government are committed to jury trial for those cases that warrant it. Sir Robin Auld's review of the criminal courts, the report of which was published last October, made a number of recommendations with major implications for trial by jury. The Government are considering the report and will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Drug Awareness Programmes

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contribution he plans that coroners' courts will make to drug awareness programmes. [32369]

Beverley Hughes: Data from inquest cases can assist in providing a firm baseline for measuring the effectiveness of drug prevention strategies. The Government action plan to prevent drug-related deaths, announced last November, undertook to increase information from coroners' reports and to provide best practice guidance and training to coroners by March 2003.

Media reporting of inquests into drug-related deaths can bring home to the public the dangers involved in misusing drugs. At least one coroner has sought to encourage senior school children to attend such inquest hearings.

Extradition

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with United States officials about the potential extradition of terrorist suspects to the USA. [33609]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* I discussed extradition in general terms at meetings with Mr. John Ashcroft, the United States Attorney-General, on 12 December 2001; and Congressman F. James Sensenbrenner, Chair of the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives on 17 January 2002.

The United States is an important extradition partner and officials routinely have to discuss individual cases with their authorities, as the need arises. We also keep our extradition relations with them under general review.

Youth Referrals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people aged under 16 years have been referred to local authority social services departments by criminal courts over the last five years in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Devon. [34499]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The Home Office Court Proceedings Database does not contain the information requested.

Volunteering

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to encourage people to take part in volunteering activity. [34562]

Angela Eagle: The Government have set themselves a target of making 1 million more people active in their communities by 2004. The active community unit has made significant investment in projects and initiatives aimed at encouraging people to take part in voluntary activity and making it easier for them to do so. Timebank, the Community Channel, Do-It and other initiatives have been established in partnership with media organisations. We are investing £19 million in the experience corps. Mentoring projects have been established with funding announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in January 2001.

English Language

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those known to have settled in the United Kingdom in the last 10 years is fluent in the English language. [34674]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* There are no recent, reliable figures about the number of people who have settled in the United Kingdom within the last 10 years who are fluent in English. We do not routinely ask people applying for settlement about their linguistic ability.

In 2002, some 125,090 people were accepted for settlement. Some of them will have English as their first language and others will have developed a degree of fluency by virtue of the time they have spent here before becoming eligible for settlement.

Racial Attacks

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he collates on the ethnic origin of the *(a)* perpetrators and *(b)* victims of racially motivated attacks; and if he will make a statement. [34678]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The Home Office collects information on the ethnic origin of victims and perpetrators through the British Crime Survey. The most recent findings relating to racially motivated crimes were published in October 2001 in Home Office Research Study Number 223, 'Crime, Policing and Justice: the experience of ethnic minorities'.

A new statistical return covering the offence group, age, gender and ethnic appearance of victims of racist crimes was introduced from 1 April 2001 in police forces. The first returns are expected at the end of this financial year and will be published by the Home Office in its annual publication, 'Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System'.

Sentencing

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 666W, to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) how many persons *(a)* under and *(b)* over 18 participated in the on-line consultation on the Fairer Sentencing website; how many were students; and what evidence he has of the representative nature of those participants. [34779]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* As indicated in the Introduction to the overview of the responses to consultation on the Halliday report that I announced on 4 February, over 1,200 attempts were made at the quiz on the Fairer Sentencing website, and about 100 messages posted on the debate forum. In addition, over 120 e-mails have been received, some of which have come through that website. Those who participated in this way were not asked to give any personal information though a very small number did so. Access to the on-line debating facility was available to all with access to the Internet through this website. Its availability was publicised widely and was designed to enable a wider section of the public to contribute to the debate. The consultation was not intended to be a scientifically based opinion survey but a means of extending the consultation more widely than the usual route of contact with criminal justice system professionals and known interest groups. The total number of written correspondence received in response to the public consultation exercise on the Halliday report was 185, which includes correspondence from those connected with the Criminal Justice System and members of the public.

Coroners Duties (Deaths Overseas)

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of local coroners relating to UK nationals who die abroad. [32372]

Beverley Hughes: Coroners in England and Wales must hold an inquest into a death overseas if the body is brought into their jurisdiction, the death reported, and the circumstances are those in which an inquest would be required if the death had occurred here.

Police Retention

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of police officers *(a)* retired from, *(b)* left for other reasons from and *(c)* was recruited to each police force in each year since 1997. [34780]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The information provided relates to financial year data and is given in the table.

Latest figures as at 30 September 2001, showed that 6,160 officers left the service in the previous 12 months. This represents 4.9 per cent. of the total police strength of the 43 forces in England and Wales. Within this total, 3,931 officers retired and the remainder left for other reasons including resignations, transfers to forces outside England and Wales, dismissals and deaths.

During the 12 months to 30 September 2001, 9,020 officers were recruited, this is 3,694 or 69 per cent. more than the previous year and the most since 1979. This represents 7.2 per cent. of the total strength.

Police officer retirements, other wastage and recruitment 1997 to 2001

Police officer retirements[1]: number and proportion of total strength

	April 1997-March 1998		*April 1998-March 1999*		*April 1999-March 2000*		*April 2000-March 2001*	
Police force	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	124	4.2	80	2.7	104	3.5	109	3.6
Bedfordshire	46	4.3	49	4.7	39	3.8	31	3.0
Cambridgeshire	34	2.6	46	3.6	37	3.0	28	2.2
Cheshire	82	4.0	61	2.9	67	3.3	62	3.1
City of London	38	4.6	27	3.5	29	4.0	26	3.7
Cleveland	25	1.7	53	3.7	53	3.8	65	4.6
Cumbria	45	3.9	36	3.2	50	4.6	41	3.9
Derbyshire	77	4.3	50	2.8	36	2.0	37	2.0
Devon and Cornwall	111	3.7	96	3.3	112	3.9	108	3.7
Dorset	88	6.7	45	3.5	49	3.8	54	4.0
Durham	51	3.4	32	2.0	32	2.1	35	2.2
Dyfed Powys	25	2.5	20	1.9	31	3.0	30	2.8
Essex	100	3.4	96	3.3	99	3.5	75	2.6
Gloucestershire	56	5.1	51	4.6	36	3.2	35	3.0
Greater Manchester	329	4.7	282	4.1	235	3.5	239	3.5
Gwent	32	2.6	28	2.2	49	3.9	43	3.4
Hampshire	70	2.0	67	1.9	129	3.8	107	3.1
Hertfordshire	51	2.9	45	2.6	67	3.8	48	2.5
Humberside	83	4.1	64	3.2	76	3.9	74	3.9
Kent	89	2.7	79	2.5	102	3.2	103	3.1
Lancashire	111	3.4	75	2.3	78	2.5	105	3.2
Leicestershire	59	3.0	47	2.4	46	2.3	56	2.8
Lincolnshire	33	2.8	49	4.3	58	5.2	45	3.7
Merseyide	151	3.6	112	2.7	116	2.8	124	3.0
Metropolitan police	983	3.8	1,065	4.1	815	3.2	686	2.8
Norfolk	66	4.6	47	3.4	45	3.3	49	3.5
North Wales	46	3.3	62	4.5	49	3.5	60	4.2
North Yorkshire	38	2.8	29	2.2	51	4.0	55	4.2
Northamptonshire	44	3.8	16	1.4	25	2.2	26	2.2
Northumbria	151	4.0	115	3.0	103	2.7	91	2.4
Nottinghamshire	92	4.0	82	3.7	67	3.0	75	3.3
South Wales	136	4.6	139	4.7	105	3.6	131	4.2
South Yorkshire	92	2.9	100	3.2	100	3.2	104	3.3
Staffordshire	126	5.5	69	3.1	51	24	50	2.3
Suffolk	51	4.3	26	2.2	37	3.2	52	4.6
Surrey	73	4.5	50	3.0	54	3.0	52	3.7
Sussex	128	4.3	127	4.5	107	3.8	106	3.7
Thames Valley	123	3.3	92	2.5	109	2.9	91	2.5
Warwickshire	45	4.9	42	4.6	25	2.8	33	3.6
West Mercia	69	3.4	71	3.5	79	4.2	114	5.8
West Midlands	294	4.1	203	2.8	184	2.6	158	2.1
West Yorkshire	163	3.2	142	2.9	153	3.2	158	3.3
Wiltshire	48	4.2	45	3.9	40	3.6	33	2.9
Total for all 43 forces	4,678	3.7	4,112	3.3	3,929	3.2	3,804	3.1
Total including secondments	4,678	3.7	4,112	3.3	3,929	3.2	3,804	3.0

[1] Retirements include ordinary and medical retirements

Other police officer wastage: number and proportion of total strength

Police force	*April 1997-March 1998*		*April 1998-March 1999*		*April 1999-March 2000*		*April 2000-March 2001*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	24	0.8	24	0.8	42	1.4	51	1.7
Bedfordshire	21	1.9	14	1.3	19	1.8	51	4.0
Cambridgeshire	34	2.6	20	1.6	17	1.4	42	3.2
Cheshire	20	1.0	11	0.5	23	1.1	23	1.1
City of London	35	4.2	31	4.0	21	2.9	29	4.1
Cleveland	16	1.1	25	1.8	6	0.4	16	1.1
Cumbria	11	0.9	24	2.1	16	1.5	28	2.7
Derbyshire	16	0.9	9	0.5	11	0.6	11	0.6
Devon and Cornwall	18	0.6	15	0.5	22	0.8	22	0.7
Dorset	20	1.5	19	1.5	26	2.0	15	1.1
Durham	28	1.8	10	0.6	26	1.7	18	1.1
Dyfed Powys	7	0.7	5	0.5	8	0.8	19	1.8
Essex	57	1.9	26	0.9	70	2.5	66	2.3
Gloucestershire	9	0.8	9	0.8	17	1.5	12	1.0
Greater Manchester	51	0.7	64	0.9	61	0.9	65	0.9
Gwent	18	1.5	22	1.8	19	1.5	15	1.2
Hampshire	87	2.5	70	2.0	61	1.8	80	2.3
Hertfordshire	44	2.5	46	2.7	48	2.7	69	3.6
Humberside	29	1.4	30	1.5	19	1.0	61	3.2
Kent	50	1.5	70	2.2	54	1.7	53	1.6
Lancashire	24	0.7	24	0.7	33	1.0	34	1.0
Leicestershire	34	1.7	47	2.4	23	1.2	16	0.8
Lincolnshire	41	3.4	12	1.1	9	0.8	15	1.2
Merseyide	27	0.6	24	0.6	29	0.7	33	0.8
Metropolitan police	578	2.2	660	2.5	662	2.6	412	1.7
Norfolk	22	1.5	17	1.2	12	0.9	13	0.9
North Wales	9	0.6	10	0.7	7	0.5	15	1.0
North Yorkshire	14	1.0	15	1.1	15	1.2	7	0.5
Northamptonshire	13	1.1	44	3.9	13	1.2	28	2.4
Northumbria	53	1.4	45	1.2	48	1.3	45	1.2
Nottinghamshire	21	0.9	28	1.3	25	1.1	21	0.9
South Wales	17	0.6	27	0.9	26	0.9	30	1.0
South Yorkshire	32	1.0	44	1.4	37	1.2	34	1.1
Staffordshire	35	1.5	27	1.2	30	1.4	25	1.2
Suffolk	13	1.1	28	2.4	19	1.7	24	2.1
Surrey	46	2.9	32	1.9	26	1.5	40	1.9
Sussex	53	1.8	74	2.6	78	2.8	80	2.8
Thames Valley	65	1.7	44	1.2	80	2.1	81	2.2
Warwickshire	21	2.3	13	1.4	13	1.4	21	2.3
West Mercia	30	1.5	29	1.4	23	1.2	42	2.2
West Midlands	152	2.1	138	1.9	143	2.0	161	2.2
West Yorkshire	69	1.3	56	1.1	56	1.2	65	1.3
Wiltshire	15	1.3	10	0.9	26	2.3	32	2.9
Total for all 43 forces	1,979	1.6	1,992	1.6	2,019	1.7	2,010	1.6
Total including secondments	1,979	1.6	1,992	1.6	2,019	1.6	2,010	1.6

[1] Retirements include ordinary and medical retirements

Total police officer wastage: number and proportion of total strength

Police force	*April 1997-March 1998*		*April 1998-March 1999*		*April 1999-March 2000*		*April 2000-March 2001*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	148	5.0	104	3.5	146	5.0	160	5.3
Bedfordshire	67	6.2	63	6.1	58	5.6	72	7.0
Cambridgeshire	68	5.3	66	5.2	54	4.4	70	5.4
Cheshire	102	5.0	72	3.5	90	4.5	85	4.2
City of London	73	8.8	58	7.5	50	6.8	55	7.8
Cleveland	41	2.8	78	5.5	59	4.2	81	5.8
Cumbria	56	4.8	60	5.3	66	6.1	69	6.6
Derbyshire	93	5.2	59	3.4	47	2.6	48	2.6
Devon and Cornwall	129	4.4	111	3.8	134	4.7	130	4.4
Dorset	108	8.2	64	5.0	75	5.7	69	5.1
Durham	79	5.2	42	2.7	58	3.7	53	3.3
Dyfed Powys	32	3.2	25	2.4	39	3.8	49	4.6
Essex	157	5.4	122	4.2	169	6.0	141	4.9
Gloucestershire	65	5.9	60	5.4	53	4.8	47	4.0
Greater Manchester	380	5.5	346	5.1	296	4.4	304	4.4
Gwent	50	4.1	50	4.0	68	5.4	58	4.6
Hampshire	157	4.5	137	3.9	190	5.6	187	5.4
Hertfordshire	95	5.5	91	5.3	115	6.5	117	6.1
Humberside	112	5.5	94	4.8	95	4.9	135	7.0

Total police officer wastage: number and proportion of total strength

Police force	*April 1997-March 1998*		*April 1998-March 1999*		*April 1999-March 2000*		*April 2000-March 2001*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Kent	139	4.3	149	4.7	156	4.9	156	4.7
Lancashire	135	4.1	99	3.1	111	3.5	139	4.3
Leicestershire	93	4.7	94	4.7	69	3.5	72	3.5
Lincolnshire	74	6.2	61	5.4	67	6.0	60	5.0
Merseyide	178	4.2	3.6	3.2	145	3.5	157	3.8
Metropolitan police	1,561	6.0	1,725	6.6	1,477	5.8	1,098	4.4
Norfolk	88	6.2	64	4.6	57	4.1	62	4.4
North Wales	55	3.9	72	5.2	56	4.0	75	5.2
North Yorkshire	52	3.8	44	3.3	66	5.1	62	4.7
Northamptonshire	57	4.9	60	5.3	38	3.4	54	4.7
Northumbria	204	5.4	160	4.2	151	4.0	136	3.5
Nottinghamshire	113	4.9	110	4.9	92	4.2	96	4.2
South Wales	153	5.1	166	5.6	131	4.5	161	5.1
South Yorkshire	124	3.9	144	4.5	137	4.3	138	4.3
Staffordshire	161	7.0	96	4.3	81	3.7	75	3.5
Suffolk	64	5.4	54	4.5	56	4.9	76	6.7
Surrey	119	7.4	82	4.9	80	4.5	92	4.5
Sussex	181	6.0	201	7.1	185	6.6	186	6.5
Thames Valley	188	5.0	136	3.6	189	5.1	172	4.6
Warwickshire	66	7.1	55	6.1	38	4.2	54	5.8
West Mercia	99	4.9	100	4.9	102	5.4	156	8.0
West Midlands	446	6.2	341	4.7	327	4.5	319	4.3
West Yorkshire	232	4.5	198	4.0	209	4.3	223	4.6
Wiltshire	63	5.4	55	4.8	66	5.9	65	5.8
Total for all 43 forces	6,657	5.3	6,104	4.9	5,948	4.9	5,814	4.7
Total including secondments	6,657	5.2	6,104	4.8	5,948	4.8	5,814	4.6

[1] Retirements include ordinary and medical retirements

Police officer recruitment: number and proportion of total strength

Police force	*April 1997-March 1998*		*April 1998-March 1999*		*April 1999-March 2000*		*April 2000-March 2001*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	138	4.6	142	4.7	104	3.5	184	6.1
Bedfordshire	49	4.5	36	3.5	37	3.6	82	7.9
Cambridgeshire	65	5.0	46	3.6	23	1.9	134	10.3
Cheshire	94	4.6	112	5.4	36	1.8	108	5.4
City of London	34	4.1	18	2.3	0	0.0	29	4.1
Cleveland	71	4.8	0	0.0	68	4.8	71	5.0
Cumbria	79	6.8	34	3.0	23	2.1	31	3.0
Derbyshire	66	3.7	52	3.0	79	4.4	103	5.7
Devon and Cornwall	179	6.0	57	2.0	74	2.6	172	5.9
Dorset	129	9.8	44	3.4	87	6.7	100	7.4
Durham	123	8.1	106	6.8	51	3.3	83	5.2
Dyfed Powys	42	4.2	50	4.9	54	5.2	58	5.5
Essex	124	4.2	96	3.3	93	3.3	181	6.2
Gloucestershire	34	3.1	64	5.8	59	5.3	89	7.6
Greater Manchester	437	6.3	217	3.2	286	4.2	389	5.6
Gwent	39	3.2	61	4.9	82	6.5	63	4.9
Hampshire	201	5.8	117	3.4	152	444	191	5.6
Hertfordshire	78	4.5	79	4.6	167	9.5	110	5.7
Humberside	88	4.4	48	2.4	91	4.7	98	5.1
Kent	119	3.7	120	3.7	174	5.4	269	8.1
Lancashire	135	4.1	55	1.7	99	3.1	164	5.0
Leicestershire	118	6.0	88	4.4	67	3.4	108	5.3
Lincolnshire	61	5.1	6	0.5	34	3.0	119	9.9
Merseyide	181	4.3	234	5.6	41	1.9	178	4.4
Metropolitan police	1,200	4.6	1,629	6.2	994	3.9	1,276	5.1
Norfolk	84	5.9	28	2.9	43	3.1	90	6.3
North Wales	48	3.4	59	4.2	79	5.6	119	8.2
North Yorkshire	65	4.8	17	1.3	10	0.8	66	5.1
Northamptonshire	57	4.9	29	2.5	19	1.7	93	8.0
Northumbria	275	7.3	233	6.1	121	3.2	226	5.9
Nottinghamshire	111	4.8	22	1.9	104	4.7	134	5.9
South Wales	168	5.6	183	6.1	124	4.2	286	9.1
South Yorkshire	145	4.6	130	4.1	128	4.0	183	5.7
Staffordshire	239	10.4	31	1.4	22	1.0	62	2.9
Suffolk	76	6.4	57	4.8	17	1.5	65	5.7
Surrey	116	7.2	138	8.3	183	10.3	240	11.6
Sussex	135	4.5	109	3.8	101	3.6	206	7.2
Thames Valley	276	7.3	153	4.1	190	5.1	237	6.4

Police officer recruitment: number and proportion of total strength

Police force	*April 1997-March 1998* *Number*	*Percentage*	*April 1998-March 1999* *Number*	*Percentage*	*April 1999-March 2000* *Number*	*Percentage*	*April 2000-March 2001* *Number*	*Percentage*
Warwickshire	67	7.3	50	5.5	59	6.6	85	9.2
West Mercia	79	3.9	109	5.4	15	0.8	92	4.7
West Midlands	444	6.2	466	6.4	255	3.5	553	7.4
West Yorkshire	203	3.9	17	0.3	61	1.3	212	4.4
Wiltshire	71	6.1	49	4.3	29	2.6	75	6.7
Total for all 43 forces	6,543	5.2	5,391	4.4	4,535	3.7	7,414	6.0
Total including secondments	6,543	5.2	5,391	4.3	4,535	3.7	7,414	5.9

[1] Retirements include ordinary and medical retirements

Travellers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what figures he has collated on the number of court orders obtained by local authorities to evict travellers from public parks and open spaces in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [32465]

Mr. Denham: Figures for the number of court orders obtained by local authorities to evict travellers from public parks and open spaces are not collated centrally.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of applicants to the Criminal Cases Review Commission have the assistance of a solicitor. [32480]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The results of the Commission's latest six-monthly survey to 30 September 2001, showed that 51 per cent. of applicants, whose cases were under review, had some form of legal representation.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will advise the Criminal Cases Review Commission to give priority to cases of women crown court conviction applicants who are in custody and have young children. [32497]

Beverley Hughes: The Commission's priority-ranking group already receives and considers requests from such applicants.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women convicted of murder are the subject of applications to the Criminal Cases Review Commission. [32501]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested, and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However following the introduction of an electronic case database from 1 April 2001 recent data is available. During 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001, the Criminal Cases Review Commission received five applications concerned with women convicted of murder.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions of *(a)* men and *(b)* women there have been for offences involving domestic violence in the last 12 months. [32122]

Beverley Hughes: Offences involving domestic violence are not identifiable on the Home Office Court Proceedings database as no specific statute covers such offences.

Prosecutions brought might range from common assault to homicide depending on the level of violence, and as the circumstances of the offences for which prosecutions are brought are not collected centrally, offences involving domestic violence cannot be distinguished from other offences within these categories.

Despite the lack of centrally collated statistics, there are justified concerns that incidents of domestic violence too often fail to result in prosecutions. We have introduced a number of measures to reduce the attrition rate for domestic violence offences and to bring more offenders to justice.

These include: Guidance for prosecutors issued by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in November and to police in 2000 encouraging them to work closely together to enhance evidence gathering, reducing the reliance on the victim's evidence. A number of the Crime Reduction Programme Violence Against Women projects are supporting women through the Criminal Justice System and aiming to empower women to use both civil and criminal remedies. The Metropolitan police service and Crown Prosecution Service are examining a number of domestic violence homicides that have taken place, in an attempt to establish where agency responses might be improved to prevent similar tragedies, and any lessons to be learned by the Criminal Justice System. Our attrition target is to bring 100,000 more offenders to justice. Given that domestic violence accounts for almost a quarter of all violent crime, a significant number of those offenders will be domestic violence perpetrators.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to force sex offenders to notify the authorities if they are travelling abroad for eight days or less; and if he will make a statement. [32137]

Beverley Hughes: The Sex Offenders (Notice Requirement) (Foreign Travel) Regulations 2001 made under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, require sex offenders subject to the requirements of the

Sex Offenders Act 1997 (the register) to notify the police if they intend to travel abroad for a period of eight days or longer. These came into force on 1 June 2001.

The qualifying period for notification of travel abroad was the subject of discussion during the review of the Sex Offenders Act 1997. The review included representatives of the police, probation and social services, and children's charities. The conclusion reached was that a qualifying period shorter than eight days would result in an unwieldy, unresponsive and consequently less effective, system for the police to administer.

We will be keeping the effectiveness of the Sex Offenders Act under review over the years to come but we have no plans to change this aspect of the system at this stage.

The United Kingdom remains one of only four countries which has a register of sex offenders and one of only two which requires registered sex offenders to notify travel abroad.

Child Pornography

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions by courts in the United Kingdom there have been for the *(a)* production and *(b)* distribution of child pornography material in the last 12 months. [32121]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Offences of producing or distributing pornography are not directly identifiable on the Home Office Court Proceedings database. The available information, relating to possessing, taking or making indecent photographs, or pseudo-photographs, of children under the Protection of Children Act 1978 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988 or for possessing obscene material for gain under the Obscene Publications Act 1959, is shown in the table. These statistics relate to England and Wales in 2000. Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The number of defendants convicted at all courts for offences relating to child pornography England and Wales 2000[1]

Offence	*Statute*	*Total convicted*
Possessing obscene material for gain	Obscene Publications Act 1959 s.2 as amended by the Obscene Publications Act, 1964 sec.1	81
Take or to make indecent photographs, or pseudo-photographs, of children	Protection of Children Act 1978 sections 1, 6 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 sec. 84	218
Possession of an indecent photograph, or pseudo-photograph, of a child	Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1988 sec. 160 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 secs. 84(4) and 86(1)	77

[1] Staffordshire police force were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates' courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and so are excluded from this table.

Policies and Actions

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Cynon Valley constituency, the effects on the Cynon Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [27856]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office is working with individuals and communities to build a safe, just and tolerant society enhancing opportunities for all and in which rights and responsibilities go hand in hand and the protection and security of the public are maintained and enhanced. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office annual reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office annual report 2000–2001, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime is contained in the publication: "Recorded Crime, England and Wales, 12 months to 31 March 2001", can also be found in the Library.

These statistics provide information for six common offences down to CDRP (Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships) and BCU (Basic Command Units) level. The figure for total recorded crime is only provided at police force level and so covers South Wales police as a whole. Figures for March 1997 compared to March 2001 show that South Wales police had seen the two biggest falls in overall recorded crime, of 26 per cent., of any police force in England and Wales.

A number of Home Office initiatives funded under the Crime Reduction Programme will have a specific impact on crime levels in the Cynon Valley. Many of the Crime Reduction Programme projects and other funding streams listed benefit the Rhondda Cynon Taff unitary authority and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership that cover Cynon Valley and the other two valleys that make up the Rhondda Cynon Taff area:

Crime Reduction Programme

Targeted Policing Initiative: A multi-agency project, liaising with five children's homes in the Rhondda Cynon Taff area, to tackle absenteeism, the development of criminal behaviour and vulnerability of youngsters—£500,000.

Violence Against Women: a £11,706 domestic violence project in Rhondda Cynon Taff.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV): A total of £725,405 has been awarded to six CCTV projects in Rhondda Cynon Taff. Three of these are specific to the Cynon Valley area; Aberdare Town Centre project—£175,000; a Hirwaun project covering a residential area, car parks and community facilities—£79,105 and £31,500 for a residential area and shops project in Penywaun.

Other Funding Streams

Under the "Small Retailers in Deprived Areas" initiative, £30,000 has been awarded to a Rhondda Cynon Taff scheme of which seven shops in the Cynon Valley area will receive a share. In addition, the Rhondda Cynon Taff Crime and Disorder Reduction

Partnership have had £201,200 made available to them under the Communities Against Drugs Initiative, and £30,036 under the Partnership Development Fund.

Police Numbers in South Wales

Police numbers in the South Wales police are have also increased since 1997. On 30 September 2001 the force had 3,241 police officers. This is a record number of officers and 265 more than the force had in March 1997. The deployment of resources to Cynon Valley and other parts of the South Wales police area is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. Civilian support staff in South Wales on 30 September was 1,268–63 more than in March 1997.

Further information on the Home Office and its policies is published on its website. (www.homeoffice.gov.uk).

Hacking

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in 2001 attempts were made to gain unauthorised access to computers in his Department by hacking; and of those how many were successful. [32739]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* No cases of computer hacking were detected in 2001.

Police

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have finished their basic training course and are waiting a start date; and if he will make a statement. [33588]

Mr. Denham: I understand that no police officers who have completed their basic training course are kept waiting for a date to return to their force.

Lost/stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34211]

Angela Eagle: The following items valued at less than £50 each have been reported as lost or stolen from the Home Department in the last four years.

Home Office—items valued at less thah £50 each which have been reported stolen or lost

Description	*Amount*
2000–01	
HMPS—Fraudulent obtaining of medication	£33.12
HMPS—Theft of prisoners music cassettes	£9.00
HMPS—Dressing gown missing	£25.00
HMPS—Watch missing from property	£15.00
HMPS—Theft of prisoners property from cell	£12.32
Stolen magazine	£3.30
HMPS—Stolen phonecard	£5.00
HMPS—Canteen bag went missing, later found empty with phone cards missing	£16.00
HMPS—Inmate's canteen stolen	£14.80
1999–2000	
HMPS—Theft of cash	£40.00
Use of Agency Fuel card to obtain petrol	£40.00
1998–99	
HMPS—Missing telephone/answer machine Cleland House	£25.00
1997–98	
Computer memory stolen	£30.00
Computer mouse missing	£22.00
Keyboard and mouse missing	£40.00

Spouses (Permanent Residence Applications)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken to process permanent residence applications for spouses of UK residents is; and what the average time is in each quarter since January 1997. [33970]

Angela Eagle: I regret that there are no published data on decision times for individual types of settlement applications. Our aim is to decide all straightforward applications within three weeks. Due to the exceptionally high number of applications received in 2001, especially in recent months, and process changes which are being introduced to improve our longer term performance, it is at present taking up to seven weeks to decide an application. We are working to reduce this to three weeks as soon as possible.

Policy Checklist

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a copy of his Department's policy checklist in the Library; and what status this checklist has in the decision making process of the Department. [33632]

Angela Eagle: I am placing a copy of the policy development checklist in the Library. The checklist is available to Home Office staff on the Department's intranet site and aims to promote good practice and offer practical advice on how best to develop and deliver policy successfully.

Fundamentalist Audio Tapes

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will take steps to prevent the further sale, distribution and copying of the audio tapes, 'No peace with the Jews', 'History repeats itself' and 'Jihad'; and if he will make a statement; [34065]

(2) if he will make a statement about what action he proposes to take concerning the audio tape, No peace with the Jews, and its producer, details of whom have been supplied to him. [34093]

Angela Eagle: It is an offence under Part III of the Public Order Act 1986 to incite racial hatred, including through the distribution, showing or playing of recorded material which is threatening, abusive or insulting and intended or likely to stir up racial hatred. Part III also includes a power of forfeiture of written or recorded material where a person has been convicted of an offence of inciting racial hatred.

In the first instance it is the responsibility of the police to decide whether there are sufficient grounds to launch a criminal investigation and that of the Crown Prosecution

Service to decide whether there is sufficient evidence to bring a prosecution. The Metropolitan police are investigating the allegations regarding these audiotapes.

Victim Support

Mr. Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on the victim support network; and if he will encourage local authorities to assist the scheme financially and provide further financial assistance to the service. [33751]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Since 1997 we have more than doubled the Home Office grant to Victim Support, to £25 million per annum. This has enabled them to develop and extend the work done by their existing community based schemes and to replicate in magistrates courts the excellent witness support service already provided at all Crown court centres.

It is for local authorities to decide what their spending priorities are and whether and to what extent they feel able to fund the Victim Support schemes in their area.

Asylum Seekers (Kosovo)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of people from Kosovo who are claiming political asylum in the United Kingdom. [34038]

Angela Eagle: I regret that it is not possible to identify separately Kosovars within the available statistics for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). FRY is comprised of Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro but the majority of FRY applications are thought to be from Kosovars.

Information on the number of applications for asylum lodged by nationals of FRY between January 1996 and September 2001 is shown in the table.

Applications[1,2] received for asylum in the United Kingdom (UK) from nationals of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), excluding dependants, January 1996 to September 2001

Period	*Applications*
1996	400
1997	1,865
1998	7,395
1999	11,465
2000[3]	6,070
January—September 2001[3]	2,330

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five.

[2] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January 1999 and March 2000.

[3] Provisional figures.

The number of asylum applications from nationals of FRY which are currently awaiting initial decision on their asylum applications, and the number awaiting the outcome of appeal determinations, is not available, and would be available only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case files. Information on asylum applications and initial decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will present data for the final quarter of 2001, and will be available from 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Voluntary Sports Clubs

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many voluntary sports clubs are registered with the Charity Commission, broken down by nation and region of the United Kingdom. [34341]

Angela Eagle: This is a matter for the Charity Commission, as the Government Department that registers charities in England and Wales. The chief Charity Commissioner will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Unlicensed Vehicles

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to police forces on the prosecution of individuals who fail to pay road fund licence. [25138]

Mr. Denham: Responsibility for taking action in possible cases of Vehicle Excise Duty evasion lies with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). The role of the police is mainly limited to notifying the DVLA of suspected untaxed vehicles which have been seen either parked or driven on public roads. Police and traffic wardens undertake such detection and reporting as part of their day to day duties. During 2000–01 the police and traffic wardens sent over 1.5 million VED offence reports to the DVLA. DVLA in turn took successful action against 727,000 evaders, resulting in the recovery of £85 million.

Property Offences

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the prison population is made up of those convicted of property offences. [34914]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 February 2002]*: The proportion of the prison population made up of those convicted of property offences, that is burglary, robbery, arson, taking and driving away, handling stolen goods, criminal damage and other thefts is 39 per cent.

Young Offenders

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the five most common offences were for which young offenders were brought to trial in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [34006]

Beverley Hughes: The available information relates to persons aged 10 and under 18 proceeded against at magistrates courts in England and Wales and is for 2000. Data for 2001 will be published in the autumn.

The five most numerous offence categories are:

Offence proceeded against	*Number*
Theft from shops	11,907
Using vehicle uninsured against third party risks	10,664
Summary criminal or malicious damage	10,437
Common assault and battery	7,307
Assault occasioning actual bodily harm	6,043

Criminal Defence Service

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with the Government's plans for pilots for a criminal defence service; and if he will make a statement. [31440]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

I believe that this question refers to the pilots of the Public Defender Service (PDS). The Criminal Defence Service is the name of the overall scheme through which criminal defence services are provided. It covers a variety of flexible ways of providing services, of which the PDS is one, in order to achieve quality and value for money.

PDS offices opened in Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Swansea and Birmingham on 14, 17 and 21 May and 11 July 2001 respectively. As part of the first phase of the PDS pilot, the Legal Services Commission plans to open a fifth office in Cheltenham in April 2002 and a sixth shortly after that. The location of the sixth office has yet to be settled. A programme of research will begin shortly, which will evaluate the PDS and make recommendations for its future.

HEALTH

Overseas Treatment (Lütterhaus Hospital)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the total cost to the NHS of the knee replacements to be carried out on three patients from West Sussex at the Lütterhaus Hospital in Germany in February, including travel costs and accommodation costs; and if he will make a statement. [32876]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The information requested is commercially confidential.

Air Ambulances

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government plans to fund air ambulances throughout Britain once their funding from the Automobile Association finishes. [34964]

Ms Blears: We are currently in discussion with air ambulance charities.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expected cost to public funds is of ensuring that by the end of 2005 the maximum waiting time for an out-patient appointment will be three months and for in-patients, six months. [16252]

Mr. Hutton: Health expenditure for the period 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be determined as part of the 2002 spending review, which is due to conclude in summer 2002.

Primary Care Trusts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment his Department has made of the state of preparedness from primary care groups becoming primary care trusts. [19291]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* There are currently 164 primary care trusts in operation.

A further 136 proposals have been approved with 19 more proposals being considered to become operational on 1 April 2002.

The estimated total of PCTs operating from 1 April 2002 is expected to be around 300.

The process for approving applications for primary care trust status is contained in Health Service Circular 1999–167. In approving applications to establish PCTs my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State needs to be satisfied that four key criteria are met. These are:

The benefits of what will be achieved.

The degree of support for the proposal.

The 'fitness' of the proposed organisation to deliver.

The impact on other organisations.

These criteria must be demonstrated in the PCT proposal. PCTs are established after full and open consultation locally, giving every opportunity for views and concerns to be expressed and addressed.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average *(a)* income of and *(b)* number of patients treated by an acute hospital in England and Wales was in the last financial year. [15290]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available at hospital level. Figures have been provided on a trust basis.

The table shows figures for acute trusts in England in 2000–01. The hospital activity data are based on finished consultant episodes of in-patient care for acute consultant specialties; this does not represent the number of individual patients treated as this information is not available.

The income data show the total income for each trust as a whole (for example, not only acute care). For each trust, total income has been given, but the primary care trust values are 'gross operating costs' because they do not show income in the same way as trusts, however, they are still comparable.

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) and total income by trust for acute specialities NHS hospitals, England 2000–01

Trust	*Acute care FCEs*	*Total Income £000*
Royal Surrey County hospital NHS trust	36,764	87,492
East Somerset NHS trust	29,428	54,053
Bradford hospitals NHS trust	94,277	142,126
Doncaster Royal Infirmary	73,303	108,071
Southend hospital NHS trust	71,547	112,589
The Royal National Orthopaedic NHS trust	7,684	43,222
North Middlesex hospital NHS trust	36,117	86,050
The Hillingdon hospital NHS trust	31,279	95,657
Kingston hospital NHS trust	45,269	107,302
Taunton and Somerset NHS trust	57,133	135,489
Royal National hospital for rheumatic diseases	2,355	10,352
West Dorset general hospitals NHS trust	40,111	70,497
Nuffield Orthopaedic NHS trust	9,651	44,793
Walsall hospitals NHS trust	44,018	88,293
Wirral hospital NHS trust	74,999	142,159
The Cardiothoracic Centre Liverpool NHS trust	12,078	41,454
Royal Liverpool childrens NHS trust	27,186	78,628
Christie hospital NHS trust	32,498	68,428
Bedford hospitals NHS trust	36,509	69,794
Ealing hospital NHS trust	27,373	67,137
Luton and Dunstable hospital NHS trust	46,194	85,936
South Tees Acute hospitals NHS trust	100,838	173,604

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) and total income by trust for acute specialities NHS hospitals, England 2000–01

Trust	*Acute care FCEs*	*Total Income £000*
Sheffield children's hospital	17,963	41,712
Royal United hospital Bath NHS trust	60,389	104,609
Poole hospitals NHS trust	50,849	88,601
Milton Keynes general hospital	34,141	63,661
Basildon and Thurrock general hospital	50,257	101,882
Eastbourne hospitals NHS trust	42,269	107,619
Frimley Park hospital NHS trust	52,738	89,787
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch hospitals NHS trust	77,220	101,983
Royal Cornwall hospitals NHS trust	99,638	146,996
Aintree hospitals NHS trust	69,981	132,185
Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHS trust	4,444	22,318
Liverpool women's hospital NHS trust	16,173	39,762
Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery NHS trust	5,997	26,249
Wrightington hospital NHS trust	7,911	19,609
Scunthorpe and Goole hospitals NHS trust	41,383	66,522
Barnsley District general hospital	49,593	71,976
Rotherham general hospitals NHS trust	40,062	91,882
Chesterfield and north Derbyshire	54,048	76,668
West Middlesex University NHS trust	25,126	73,519
Bromley hospitals NHS trust	50,346	140,982
Havering hospitals NHS trust	58,568	129,296
Papworth hospital NHS trust	14,736	46,924
Peterborough hospitals NHS trust	56,493	89,107
James Paget hospital NHS trust	42,430	82,909
Ispwich hospital NHS trust	59,420	107,090
West Suffolk hospital NHS trust	48,482	70,753
Brighton Healthcare NHS trust	51,702	141,724
Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS trust	37,545	66,510
Gloucestershire Royal NHS trust	53,922	101,580
Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS trust	84,202	140,492
Portsmouth hospitals NHS trust	111,296	232,522
Royal Berkshire and Battle hospitals NHS trust	62,504	136,950
Lewisham hospital NHS trust	33,282	97,484
Mayday healthcare NHS trust	36,154	101,456
South Warwickshire general hospital	44,704	59,806
Mid Staffordshire general hospital	45,414	97,295
North Staffordshire hospital NHS trust	119,431	193,823
Burton hospitals NHS trust	39,110	67,068
Good Hope hospital NHS trust	47,180	71,544
Countess of Chester hospital NHS trust	52,154	79,393
The Kings Mill centre for health	66,338	74,933
Plymouth hospitals NHS trust	97,750	188,822
Walsgrave hospitals NHS trust	85,153	205,640
Warrington hospital NHS trust	51,422	78,899
Whittington hospital NHS trust	35,288	85,941
The Princess Royal hospital NHS trust	29,059	43,770
Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt orthopaedic and DH	7,615	32,077
The Royal Wolverhampton hospital	76,693	125,448
Carlisle hospital NHS trust	36,477	67,545
City hospitals Sunderland NHS trust	74,285	140,439
Hereford hospitals NHS trust	31,636	52,659
George Eliot hospital NHS trust	36,531	56,785
Birmingham Women's Healthcare NHS trust	11,598	43,232
City hospital NHS trust	57,087	117,877
Royal Shrewsbury hospitals NHS trust	53,072	80,280
Norfolk and Norwich healthcare NHS trust	118,136	156,358
North Manchester Healthcare NHS trust	48,045	111,810
Tameside and Glossop Acute Services NHS trust	45,670	62,769
Blackpool Victoria hospital NHS trust	76,639	133,028
Swindon and Marlborough NHS trust	45,539	91,032
North Hampshire hospitals NHS trust	32,431	85,233
Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust	30,702	72,379
Dudley group of hospitals NHS trust	64,092	144,195
Newham Healthcare NHS trust	37,146	79,567
Kettering general hospital NHS trust	51,488	92,364
Northampton general hospital NHS trust	63,389	109,332
Stoke Mandeville hospital NHS trust	31,223	70,349
Great Ormond Street hospital for children NHS trust	21,822	132,649
Moorfields eye hospital NHS trust	21,638	43,910
Medway NHS trust	41,279	94,128
The Queen Victoria hospital NHS trust	10,162	22,685
Worthing and Southlands hospitals NHS trust	48,673	84,135
The Royal East Sussex NHS trust	36,474	64,653

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) and total income by trust for acute specialities NHS hospitals, England 2000–01

Trust	*Acute care FCEs*	*Total Income £000*
The Royal Marsden hospital NHS trust	30,151	86,576
Birmingham children's hospital	23,441	91,388
The Manchester children's hospital	30,001	69,378
Mid Essex hospitals NHS trust	59,748	120,239
The Princess Alexandra hospital	36,475	90,535
Homerton hospital NHS trust	31,947	82,002
Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS trust	78,580	204,824
Pindersfield and Pontefract hospital	78,815	141,434
Royal Orthopaedic hospital NHS trust	11,021	30,200
Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS trust	24,769	130,828
Southern Derbyshire acute hospital	98,446	164,053
Ashford and St. Peter's hospitals NHS trust	29,604	111,223
Morecambe Bay hospitals NHS trust	72,327	129,982
Northwick Park/Central Middlesex	50,928	189,457
Chase Farm Wellhouse NHS trust	67,975	152,511
Epsom/St Helier NHS trust	70,202	174,284
East Kent hospitals NHS trust	109,905	247,128
Southport and Ormskirk NHS trust	50,136	86,709
Hull and East Yorkshire hospital	110,824	212,895
United Lincolnshire hospitals NHS trust	120,448	199,080
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS trust	70,093	155,350
West Hertfordshire hospitals NHS trust	66,202	163,440
Worcestershire acute hospitals NHS trust	80,116	173,566
The United Bristol Healthcare NHS trust	82,729	225,073
Northern general hospital NHS trust	61,663	178,477
The Royal Free Hampstead hospital	59,356	266,340
Central Manchester healthcare trust	64,323	222,543
Nottingham City hospital NHS trust	91,768	186,897
Central Sheffield University hospital	96,914	202,664
Nottingham University hospital	84,046	190,179
Addenbrooke's NHS trust	87,612	217,513
Southampton University hospital	95,232	239,382
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS trust	80,448	403,301
St Mary's hospital NHS trust	56,040	186,056
St George's Healthcare NHS trust	61,202	223,195
King's Healthcare NHS trust	56,718	236,398
South Manchester University hospitals NHS trust	83,990	180,652
Salford Royal Hospitals NHS trust	51,846	123,398
Barts and the London NHS trust	85,561	328,379
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University hospital NHS trust	83,169	196,874
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS trust	52,342	195,039
The Hammersmith hospitals NHS trust	67,224	273,738
Leeds teaching hospitals NHS trust	178,932	504,292
University hospital Birmingham	70,041	228,410
University College London hospitals NHS trust	58,018	341,910
The Newcastle upon Tyne hospital	149,187	332,014
Oxford Radcliffe hospital NHS trust	102,235	300,442
University hospitals of Leicester NHS trust	181,443	346,083
Total	8,004,613	18,216,628
Average	186,154	423,643

Notes:

Finished consultant episodes data

An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one healthcare provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

FCE figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Income data:

2000–01 income figures remain provisional and are subject to continuing audit by the National Audit Office.

Source:

Primary Care Trust Summarisation Schedules 2000–01

NHS Trust Summarisation Schedules 2000–01

NICE

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place with *(a)* representatives of NICE, *(b)* representatives of patients' groups, *(c)* representatives of professional groups, *(d)* representatives of the pharmaceutical industry, *(e)* representatives of health authorities and trusts and *(f)* other health organisations as part of the preparatory work in relation to the review of NICE; and if he will make a statement. [20157]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* As part of routine business we have held a number of discussions on this subject, particularly with the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the pharmaceutical industry.

We expect shortly to issue a consultation document on aspects of the NICE appraisal process. The document will be limited in scope, taking account of the review already undertaken in the Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry and the current inquiry by the Health Select Committee.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which countries in the EU allow children to be given single inoculations for measles, mumps and rubella. [24263]

Yvette Cooper: As far as we are aware, all European Union countries recommend measles, mumps and rubella vaccine as the safest way to protect children.

We are not aware of any EU country where the health service routinely offer parents a choice of MMR or single vaccines against measles, mumps and rubella.

Like the United Kingdom, EU countries prevent the use of licensed vaccines, including single vaccines.

NHS Staff (Disciplinary Action)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many disciplinary actions took place in 2001 involving NHS staff in allegations of *(a)* racism and *(b)* sexism. [24326]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The Department does not routinely collect information regarding the disciplinary proceedings carried out in national health service organisations. Disciplinary action is a matter for local employers. National health service employers have a responsibility to investigate alleged breaches of acceptable standards by staff, and to consider whether any disciplinary action is required as a result of such allegations.

Traditional Medicines Directive

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the impact upon the United Kingdom health products industry of the lack of provision in the proposed Traditional Medicines Directive for products which are combinations of herbs with nutrients; [29432]

(2) what legislative provision he plans to propose to secure the continued availability of products which are combinations of nutrients with herbs but which are *(a)* not foods and *(b)* unlikely to fall within the provisions of the forthcoming Traditional Medicines Directive; [29433]

(3) what recent assessment has been made of how products which are combinations of herbs with nutrients may achieve compliance with the proposed Traditional Medicines Directive. [29522]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Some products containing herbal ingredients and nutrients may currently be sold under food law. Where, however, products containing herbal ingredients and nutrients as active ingredients are classified as medicines, they require a marketing authorisation before being placed on the market. The regulatory position of such products would remain unaffected by the proposals for a directive on traditional herbal medicinal products which have been adopted by the European Commission.

The Commission's proposals for a directive are, as anticipated, restricted to traditional herbal medicines. Mixtures of herbal and other active ingredients would therefore fall outside the scope of the directive. We will need to give consideration to the criteria for determining the circumstances in which ingredients would be regarded as active.

The proposed directive contains provision for a later review which would consider the possibility of extending traditional use registrations to other categories of medicinal products. Our current assessment is that an extension of the proposed system for traditional use registrations to other categories of traditionally used medicines would be insufficient to cover a significant proportion of herbal and nutrient combination products. It would require an additional change in European legislation to permit on the market those herbal and nutrient combination products classified as medicines for which neither evidence of traditional use nor efficacy, as required for a marketing authorisation, could be demonstrated. Our current priority remains to secure an effective regulatory regime for traditional herbal remedies.

Medical Errors

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients within the NHS have *(a)* died and *(b)* been injured as a result of user error of medical equipment in each of the last five years. [29776]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The national health service reports incidents involving medical devices to the Medical Devices Agency (MDA) who maintain a database of reported incidents.

The MDA has successfully promoted the adverse incident reporting system over this period. There has been an increase in the total number of reports received from 5,380 in 1997 to 7,896 in 2001. Therefore, these figures do not necessarily indicate an increase in the number of incidents occurring, rather the results of the strenuous efforts taken by the MDA to improve incident reporting.

From the MDA's database the number of patients within the NHS that *(a)* died and *(b)* been injured as a result of user error of medical equipment in each of the last five years is given in the table.

		2001	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
(a)	User error incidents involving a fatality	7	0	2	0	0
(b)	User error incidents involving an injury	45	21	7	3	3

The National Patient Safety Agency will be working closely with the MDA in the reporting and sharing of information on adverse incidents involving medical devices. This collaboration will serve to enhance patient safety by learning from errors involving medical devices and in this way help reduce harm to future patients.

KPMG

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contracts his Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31319]

Ms Blears: The Department has six contracts with KPMG for the financial year 2001–02, to date. This includes five small contracts with individual values of £11,720, £1,283, £1,012, £18,898 and £1,499. The sixth is an on-going framework contract, managed by national health service estates on behalf of the Department, for which it is not possible to give a final value but where expenditure to date is £0.97 million.

Personal Information

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to ensure that no personal information about NHS patients will be disclosed by Ministers, and officials acting on their behalf, beyond that which has been made public as a result of steps deliberately taken by the patients themselves, or with their explicit consent. [31381]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* Disclosure of personal information is regulated by legislation and, where the information concerned is held in confidence, by common law obligations. In many circumstances it would be unlawful to disclose such information without the consent of the individual concerned unless the information is already in the public domain. Ministers and officials are aware of their responsibilities. However, there may arise circumstances where, in the broader public interest and subject to tests of necessity and proportionality, disclosure is both lawful and appropriate, for example where failure to do so might place others at significant risk.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that no information relating to NHS patients of a sensitive nature, covered by Schedule 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998, will be processed other than in accordance with Schedule 3 of that Act. [31380]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* Guidance issued by the Department makes it clear that the processing of sensitive patient information must be in accordance with schedules 2 and 3 of the Data Protection Act 1998. Responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 rests with each national health service body or other data controller as defined by that Act.

Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire Health Authority

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors were employed in the NHS in the Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire health authority (i) in May 1997 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [32687]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff by qualification and practice nurses and practitioners (excluding GP retainers) and medical and dental staff working in the Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire health authority area as at 30 September of each year

Headcount

Category	*1997*	*2000*
All Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting staff	3,120	3,620
Of which:		
Qualified	2,820	3,220
Unqualified	300	400
Practice Nurses	240	270
All Practitioners (excluding GP retainers)[1]	310	330
Of which:		
Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[2]	300	310
All Medical and Dental Staff[3]	540	670

[1] All practitioners (excluding GP retainers) include UPE's, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (para 52 SFA) and PMS Others. GP retainers were collected for the first time in 1999, in 2000 there were 11 in the Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire health authority area.

[2] Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs) includes GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

[3] Excludes Medical Hospital Practitioners and Medical Clinical Assistants, most of whom are also GPs working part-time in hospitals.

Notes:

1. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
3. Due to rounding totals may not equal sum of component parts.
4. 2000 figures are those currently available.
5. 2001 figures will be released shortly.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.
Department of Health General and Personal Medical services Statistics.

Health Authority Chairmen

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list health authority chairmen in England and Wales. [31663]

Ms Blears: The information requested is in the table.

	Health authority
Existing HA chairs to 31 March 2002	
Cllr. M. Morris	Salford and Trafford
Cllr. S. Taylor	Nottingham
Cllr. B. Harrison	Manchester
Dr. C. Varlaam	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth
Dr. J. O'Brien	Northumberland
Dr. S. Kay	Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich
Dr. S. Lawrence	Leeds
Lord Lofthouse of Pontefract	Wakefield

	Health authority
Major General R. Keightley	Dorset
Miss C. Andrew	Coventry
Miss M. Barrett	Cambridgeshire
Mr. A. Bullen	South Lancashire
Mr. A. Maden	Bury and Rochdale
Mr. A. Sexton	North Essex
Mr. A. Tolhurst	North Nottinghamshire
Mr. A. Wenban-Smith	Birmingham
Mr. A. Williamson	North and East Devon
Mr. B. Betterton	North Cumbria
Mr. C. Creswick	Gloucestershire
Mr. D. Fathers	Doncaster
Mr. D. Murray	South Staffordshire
Mr. F. Hucker	Oxfordshire
Mr. F. Ludlow	Sefton
Mr. F. Stewart	East Kent
Mr. G. Healey	Leicestershire
Mr. I. Pirnie	Morecambe Bay
Mr. J. Alston	Norfolk
Mr. J. Lewis	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove
Mr. J. Mills	Sunderland
Mr. J. Pitts	Solihull
Mr. J. Powell	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow
Mr. J. Rudd	South Derbyshire
Mr. K. Marsh	Dudley
Mr. M. Brereton	North Staffordshire
Mr. M. Brookes	South Essex
Mr. M. O'Riordan	Sandwell
Mr. M. Van Der Schalk	West Surrey
Mr. N. Humphreys	North and Mid Hampshire
Mr. P. Bingham	Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire
Mr. P. Brokenshire	Redbridge and Waltham Forest
Mr. P. Carr	Newcastle and North Tyneside
Mr. P. Gillibrand	Southampton and SW Hants
Mr. P. Smallridge	West Kent
Mr. P. Smith	Stockport
Mr. R. Berry	Bradford
Mr. R. Lingham	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly
Mr. R. Wing	East Riding
Mr. S. Cussons	South Cheshire
Mr. S. Sharma	Calderdale and Kirklees
Mr. T. Dowell	Avon
Mr. T. Mackriel	Wolverhampton
Mr. T. McCabe	West Pennine
Mr. T. Waites	Tees
Mr. W. Darling	Gateshead and South Tyneside
Mrs. A. Cook	North Derbyshire
Mrs. C. Moore	Herefordshire
Mrs. C. Rollinson	East Surrey
Mrs. E. Owen	Shropshire
Mrs. H. Nellis	Bedfordshire
Mrs. J. Barrie	Somerset
Mrs. J. Cravos	Worcestershire
Mrs. J. Garlick	Wigan and Bolton
Mrs. J. Greensmith	Liverpool
Mrs. J. Leverton	South and West Devon
Mrs. J. Reay	Kingston and Richmond
Mrs. J. Spicer	Suffolk
Mrs. K. Reade	East Lancashire
Mrs. K. Riddle	Sheffield
Mrs. L. Liptrott	North Cheshire
Mrs. M. Keyworth	South Humber
Mrs. M. Oldfield	Rotherham
Mrs. M. Pearce	Wirral
Mrs. M. Woodcock	Walsall
Mrs. N. Giubertoni	St. Helen's and Knowsley
Mrs. N. Saunders	West Sussex
Mrs. P. Acklam	Barnsley
Mrs. S. Wrigley	North Yorkshire
Mrs. V. Darbyshire	North West Lancashire
Ms A. Millett	Wiltshire
Ms C. Hay	Hillingdon
Ms I. Short	Buckinghamshire
Ms J. Hunt	Camden and Islington
Ms L. Smith	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham
Ms M. Saunders	Barnet, Enfield and Haringey
Ms S. Young	Barking and Havering
Ms T. Letts	Croydon
Professor E. Murphy	East London and The City
Sir R. Tilt	Northamptonshire

	Health authority
New HA chairs (from 1 April 2002)	
Mr. Ian White	Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire
Mr. M. Brookes	Essex
Mr. S. Francis	Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire
Mrs. Marcia Saunders	London North Central
Professor Elaine Murphy	London North East
Miss Jane Kelly	London North West
Mrs. Linda Smith	London South East
Mr. James Cochrane	London South West
Mrs. Judith Greensmith	Cheshire and Merseyside
Mrs. Kath Reade	Cumbria and Lancashire
Mr. Phillip Smith	Greater Manchester
Mr. T. Waites	County Durham and Tees Valley
Professor D. Johns	North and East Yorkshire and North Lincs
Mr. P. Carr	Northumberland, Tyne and Wear
Sir Alistair Graham	West Yorkshire
Mr. Peter Bingham	Hampshire and Isle of Wight
Miss Kate Lampard	Kent and Medway
Mrs. Teri Hawksworth	Surrey and Sussex
Mrs. Jane Betts	Thames Valley
Mrs. Anthea Millet	Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire
Mrs. Jane Barrie	Dorset and Somerset
Mrs. Judy Leverton	South West Peninsula
Sir Richard Tilt	Leicestershire, Northampton and Rutland
Mrs. Kathryn Riddle	South Yorkshire
Mr. Arthur Sandford	Trent
Mrs. Elisabeth Buggins	Birmingham and the Black Country
Mr. Michael Brereton	Shropshire and Staffordshire
Mr. Charles Goody	Coventry, Warks, Herefordshire and Worcs

Buckinghamshire Health Authority

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the Buckinghamshire health authority area benefited from the hospital travel costs scheme in each year since 1997; and what the total cost was to public funds in each year. [32190]

Ms Blears: This information is not collected centrally.

Complaints

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many written complaints the Buckinghamshire health authority has received concerning treatment received in accident and emergency departments in each year since 1997; [32188]

(2) how many written complaints by hospital patients have been received by the Buckinghamshire health authority in each year since 1997. [32187]

Ms Blears: Information is collected at trust not health authority level. Information on complaints, including accident and emergency services, is contained in "Handling Complaints: Monitoring the NHS Complaints Procedures" statistical report. Copies are available in the Library.

Assaults

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff employed by the Buckinghamshire health authority were assaulted by patients in each of the last five years; and how many people were successfully prosecuted. [32192]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Dental Health

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to improve education of parents and children on dental health; and if he will make a statement. [32688]

Ms Blears: Health authorities are responsible for oral health promotion and currently they attach particular importance to ensuring that oral health is covered in initiatives like Sure Start, Health Action Zones and Healthy Living Centres. Last June, to complement this work, we launched our "Brushing for Life" scheme, which targets families with young children in the 21 areas where dental decay is highest. When carrying out developmental checks, health visitors demonstrate good tooth brushing practice and give the families a free pack containing a tube of fluoridated toothpaste, a toothbrush and a leaflet on oral hygiene.

Fluoridation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment has been made of the effectiveness of fluoridation schemes; and if he will make a statement. [32689]

Ms Blears: The report, "Systematic Review of Water Fluoridation", published by the University of York in October 2000, confirmed that fluoridating water helps to reduce tooth decay, but also identified the need for more good quality research. We have asked the Medical Research Council for advice on how the evidence base might be strengthened and their report is expected in spring 2002.

Redundancies

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of staff redundancy packages arising as a consequence of organisational change in the NHS, broken down by region, since 1996. [32138]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not hold details of staff redundancy costs by region arising as a consequence of organisational change in the national health service.

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contracts his Department has had since 1997 with *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture for (i) accountancy, (ii) audit and (iii) consultancy work; and what staff have been seconded (A) to his Department from and (B) from his Department to these firms. [32422]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has let two contracts to Arthur Andersen since 1997 and one very small value contract with Accenture, which ended in February 2001. Records do not indicate whether the contracts were for (i) accountancy, (ii) audit or (iii) consultancy work.

The Medicines Control Agency has a long-term IT operational support contract with Accenture (and previously with Andersen Consulting).

The Purchasing and Supply Agency has one long-term contract with Arthur Andersen for audit services, which terminates in March 2002, and has let one short contract with them for consultancy work since 1997. The agency has one current contract with Accenture, for consultancy work, beginning January 2002 and terminating in March 2002.

Records held centrally in the Department indicate that there have been no secondments between this Department and these firms, in either direction.

Ambulance Crews (Assaults)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many ambulance crew members had to take sick leave owing to being assaulted while on duty in each of the last 10 years; [33038]

(2) how many ambulance crew members are on sick leave owing to being assaulted while on duty; [33039]

(3) how many ambulance crew members were assaulted while on duty in each of the last 10 years. [33040]

Ms Blears: Information on level of sickness absence resulting from violence at work, by individual staff group, is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by individual national health service employers. Data on violent incidents and sickness absence involving all staff in the NHS were not collected on a national basis prior to 1998.

The Department conducted a survey of NHS trusts in England in 1998–99. The survey found that, on average, seven violent incidents were recorded each month per 1,000 staff. This is equivalent to approximately 65,000 violent incidents against NHS trust staff each year. Details of the survey can be found in Health Service Circular 1999/229: "Managing Violence, Accidents and Sickness Absence in the NHS", a copy of which is in the Library.

The average sickness absence rate for staff directly employed by NHS ambulance trusts in 1999 was 6.6 per cent.

Stakeholders

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 629W, on the NHS Reform Bill, how he defines the term key local stakeholder. [33528]

Mr. Hutton: Stakeholders are identified locally but would be expected to include frontline health community organisations and their local partners, patients and the public. Key stakeholders are likely to include:

National health service trusts;
Primary care trusts;
Strategic health authorities;
Voluntary organisations;
Local authorities;
Patients representatives;
Professional and staff representatives; and
Others deemed appropriate in the local context.

National Alcohol Strategy

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the work on the National Alcohol Strategy commenced; at what stage the work is at present; when it is expected to be published; and if he will make a statement. [33379]

Ms Blears: The White Paper "Our Healthier Nation" (1999) set out that the Government, local organisations, the voluntary sector and the drinks industry would need to take action to successfully tackle alcohol misuse.

The Department is working on a consultation paper for the strategy which will:

draw in contributions from the bodies and organisations mentioned;

review progress to date;

outline a programme for the future.

The NHS Plan sets out the timetable for publishing and implementing the strategy. The plan says that the Department will be implementing the strategy by 2004 and we are well on the way to achieving this target.

Public Appointments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been appointed by him to official bodies and NDPBs coming under the aegis of his Department in the last three years; and who they were. [33351]

Ms Blears: Information on all appointments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the Department's public bodies at 1 April 2001 is included in the Department of Health Public Appointments annual report 2001, copies of which were sent to all hon. Members on 26 January. Copies are also available in the Library. Appointments made to national health service trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts have since 1 April 2001 been the responsibility of the NHS Appointments Commission. Terms of office of those appointed to public bodies vary, but most are for four years.

Dental Practice Board

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the remit is of the Dental Practice Board; what the objectives of the Dental Practice Board are; who sets the objectives; how the performance of the Dental Practice Board will be monitored; and what the budget of the board is. [32833]

Ms Blears: The Dental Practice Board is a statutory NHS body with responsibilities for vetting treatment claims from, and paying remuneration to, dentists providing general dental services and certain personal dental services under the NHS.

Its objectives are mainly to ensure that payment claims are accurately processed, that dental treatments and payments are monitored for probity and quality, including independent professional scrutiny by dentists employed within its Dental Reference Service, and to provide appropriate information on dental payments and the provision of services. The Secretary of State for Health and the National Assembly for Wales set the objectives of the Dental Practice Board.

The Department of Health on behalf of the Secretary of State monitors the performance of the Dental Practice Board for Health and by the National Assembly for Wales.

The core administrative budget for the Dental Practice Board for the year 2001–02 is:

	£
Capital	
England	703,000
Wales	37,000
Revenue	
England	21,358,000
Wales	1,124,000

NHS Activity Levels

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the activity levels were in the quarter to *(a)* September 2000 and *(b)* September 2001 for (i) new attendances at accident and emergency departments, (ii) first out-patient attendances, (iii) general and acute elective hospital spells and (iv) general and acute non-elective spells. [33499]

Mr. Hutton: The activity levels for quarter to *(a)* September 2000 and *(b)* September 2001 for (i) new attendances at accident and emergency departments, (ii) first outpatient attendances, (iii) general and acute elective hospital spells and (iv) general and acute non-elective spells are outlined in the table.

Attendances and hospital spells in England

million

	2000[1]	*2001*[1]
Accident and emergency first attendances	3,321	3,341
General and acute out-patient first attendances	2,763	2,795
Hospital spells—general and acute	2,282	2,293
of which:		
Elective	1,308	1,305
Non-elective	.974	.988

[1] July to September

Diabetes

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the national health service framework for diabetes will receive additional dedicated funding centrally. [33666]

Jacqui Smith: Funding for the Diabetes National Service Framework is being considered as part of our spending review, together with other priorities. We shall set milestones in the delivery strategy for the framework, to be published this summer, based upon the resources that will be available.

Prescribing

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to convene the New Prescribing Advisory Committee. [33501]

Ms Blears: We are considering whether to establish a new advisory committee under the Medicines Act 1968 or whether to ask an existing committee, such as the Committee on Safety of Medicines, to make recommendations to Ministers on which prescription only medicines may be prescribed by new groups of prescribers. We are seeking the advice of the Medicines Commission and the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to announce his timetable for commencing section 63, on the extension of prescribing rights, of the Health and Social Care Act 2001; [33502]

(2) when he expects to extend prescribing rights to registered optometrists. [33500]

Ms Blears: As a first step towards implementing the provisions of section 63 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, the Department and the Medicines Control Agency plan to undertake a joint public consultation in the spring on proposals to introduce supplementary prescribing for nurses and pharmacists. We will consider extending prescribing responsibilities to other health professions in the light of developments on these proposals.

Care Homes (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has received from *(a)* the Laing and Buisson surgery and *(b)* other sources on the number of (i) care home closures and (ii) care home bed losses on the Isle of Wight in each year since 1997. [33003]

Ms Blears: The table shows the Department's figures for the number of nursing and residential homes and beds on the Isle of Wight since 1997.

	Residential care homes	*Residential care home beds*	*Nursing homes*	*Nursing home beds*
1997	160	2,115	17	457
1998	153	2,124	17	456
1999	144	2,073	17	445
2000	142	2,092	15	391
2001	134	2,010	13	356

Source:

Department of Health statistics

The Laing and Buisson Market Survey, 2001, does not break information down by local authority.

Care Homes (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new care homes have been registered in Portsmouth, South since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [33592]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of new home registrations in Portsmouth is not available. The number of care homes and places for each year since 1997 is given in the tables. Information on residential care and nursing care is not available on consistent boundaries.

Table 1: Number of residential care homes and places in Portsmouth unitary authority, 1997 to 2001— at 31 March

Number

	Residential care homes	*Residential care places*
1997[1]	[2]—	[2]—
1998	163	1,891
1999	166	1,852
2000	153	1,737
2001	138	1,596

Table 2: Number of nursing[3] care homes and beds in Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority, 1997 to 2001— at 31 March

Number

	Nursing care homes	*Nursing care beds*
1997[1]	64	1,708
1998	63	1,718
1999	66	1,784
2000	66	1,636
2001	61	1,689

[1] The number of homes in 1997 refers to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997

[2] Not available

[3] General and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics. Includes dual registered homes, therefore the number of residential homes and nursing homes should not be added together

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns

NHS Appointments Commission

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people who had been appointed to a position within the NHS by the NHS Appointments Commission had declared a political interest, broken down by political parties in 1997; and what proportion of the total number of appointees this represents for each political party; [33729]

(2) how many people who have been appointed to a position within the NHS by the NHS Appointments Commission have declared a party political interest. [33730]

Ms Blears: Appointments made by the national health service Appointments Commission since it was established on 1 April 2001 until 6 February 2002 are given in the table.

	Health authorities	*National health service trusts*	*Primary care trusts*	*Total*
Conservative	1	15	16	32
Labour	2	133	53	188
Liberal Democrat	2	23	11	36
Independent	0	4	5	9
Other	0	3	0	3
No political activity declared	18	365	132	515
Total	23	543	217	783

Long-term Care

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute beds were blocked last year in Oxfordshire owing to a shortage of long term care places. [33586]

Jacqui Smith: Management data for year ending 2000–01 suggest that, in relation to patients aged 75 and over, on any given day during 2000–01 Oxfordshire health authority had 22 delayed discharges due to a patient waiting for a nursing or residential care home placement. The health authority had 82 delays in total and a rate of delayed discharge of 13.4 per cent.

Paramedics

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the pay of paramedics in the Ambulance Service; and if he will make a statement. [33051]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 282–83W.

Christchurch Health Centre

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken to market the former Christchurch Health Centre premises since March 2001; and if he will make a statement. [33640]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* A marketing exercise for Christchurch Health Centre was conducted in March 2001 and a buyer has been identified. Terms have been agreed subject to contract and valuation report and solicitors have been instructed to complete the sale of the Department's leasehold interest in the property.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people with MS likely to present themselves for assessment by a neurologist with a view to getting a disease-modifying drug on the NHS; and when they will have been assessed. [34116]

Ms Blears: All patients with relapsing remitting multiple sclerosis (MS), and those with secondary progressive MS in which relapses are the dominant feature, are eligible under the scheme for treatment on the national health service if they meet criteria developed by the Association of British Neurologists (ABN).

It has been estimated that the total number of patients of England and Wales who fall within the ABN criteria might range between 7,500 and 9,000. The scheme starts to operate on 6 May 2002. It is anticipated that it might take 18 months to initiate all eligible patients on the scheme.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 410W, upon what estimates on the rate of transmission of the smallpox infection his Department has based its containment strategy. [33334]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The Department has commissioned work from the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research regarding transmission rates of smallpox infection. Results of this work were recently published in the scientific journal, *Nature.* Transmission rates will vary with the particular circumstances of the outbreak of any disease. Estimates of transmission rates range from four to six in a community acquired infection in modern settings, to the higher levels of 10 to 12 in circumstances where the outbreak has taken some time to be fully recognised and appropriate infection controls implemented.

Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the London regional office will conclude its review of the Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust in respect of its management of in-patient waiting lists; and if he will publish the findings. [32665]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Epsom and St. Helier National Health Service Trust validates both its active and suspended list on a regular basis and is confident that their waiting lists are robust and accurate. Further validation was carried out by the trust itself as a result of being identified as having a suspension rate greater than 10 per cent. Epsom and St. Helier was not identified as having adjusted inappropriately its waiting list figures.

The regional office conducts robust validation of waiting list data from trusts and health authorities including following up any irregularities. The regional office does not consider that there is any reason to review waiting list information at Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust. The Audit Commission has indicated that it will conduct a further audit of trusts whose suspension rate is higher than 10 per cent., as a matter of course.

Adoption and Fostering

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to propose amendments to the legislation regarding adoption and fostering of children. [34352]

Jacqui Smith: An Adoption and Children Bill is currently before Parliament. The Bill will overhaul the outdated Adoption Act 1976 and modernise the existing legal framework for domestic and intercountry adoption. It will implement the proposals in the White Paper, "Adoption: a new approach", published in December 2000, which require primary legislation and underpin our drive to improve the performance of the adoption service and promote greater use of adoption. The Bill will also help deliver our target of an increase of 40 per cent., and if possible 50 per cent., in the number of looked after children who are adopted.

The Adoption and Children Bill was introduced and published on 19 October 2001. It received its Second Reading in the House of Commons on 29 October and has been considered by a Special Standing Committee. We also intend to develop new regulations and guidance on adoption as part of its programme to implement the Bill.

We have also introduced new regulations and national minimum standards for fostering, to which all fostering service providers will be required to adhere. The new regulations were introduced in January and we are about to publish the standards. Both will come into force in April. They will apply in all settings, whether council, voluntary or independent, in England, creating a level playing field across the foster care sector and ensuring that service users can be confident that fostering service providers are operating to good standards.

We are committed to taking action to ensure good quality services and thereby promote better placements for children and young people and reduce the potential of abuse and harm to children in foster care. Introducing a new regime of registration and inspection for fostering providers is an important part of our wider programme to improve services and outcomes for looked after children.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32321]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* No employees[1] of *(a)* the Department and *(b)* the Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them since 1997–98.

[1] his does not include staff brought in on secondment from other organisations who may have private medical insurance provided for them as part of the terms and conditions of their own employers.

Home Care Packages

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to increase the number of home care packages for the elderly; and if he will make a statement. [34136]

Jacqui Smith: We are providing increased resources to local councils to fund personal social services, including the promoting independence grant, the carers grant, and the building care capacity grant, which can be used to increase the number of home care packages for older people. The provision of home care is an important element in the assessments of performance made by the social services inspectorate.

Physiotherapists

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many of the extra therapists by 2004 announced in the NHS plan will be physiotherapists; [34022]

(2) how many extra physiotherapists will be trained in each of the years from 2001 to 2004 as part of the NHS plan target to provide 4,450 more therapist and other key health professional training places each year by 2004. [34023]

Mr. Hutton: The targets to provide 6,500 more therapists and other health professionals and 4,450 more therapist and other key health professional training places by 2004, have not been broken down into the different professions.

Between 1999 and 2001 the number of allied health professionals increased by 3,400. A third (1,140) of this total increase was made up of physiotherapists. We would expect this proportion to remain broadly the same across the rest of the plan period.

Between 1999–2000 and 2000–01 the number of physiotherapy training commissions increased by 127 (9 per cent.) and are projected to rise by a further 91 in 2001–02 (a total increase of 16 per cent. on the 1999–2000 baseline). We are working with work force development confederations to determine the split in the remainder of commissions. Early projections suggest an increase of at least 280 more training commissions for physiotherapy by 2003–04 (the largest increase in the professions covered). Recommendations on the final allocation will be made by the work force numbers advisory board later in the year and will take into account supply and demand information for physiotherapy.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the research which he has commissioned into the health effects of mobile telephones includes transmitter masts. [34641]

Yvette Cooper: The mobile telephone health research (MTHR) programme announced recently follows from the publication of a report in May 2000 by an independent expert group on mobile phones under the chairmanship of Sir William Stewart FRS, FRSE on "Mobile Phones and Health". Radio signals from handsets were identified as a research priority because local exposures of people using phones are in general appreciably higher than exposures to the whole body from mobile phone masts. In both cases, however, exposures need to comply with exposure guidelines.

The first group of proposals agreed for funding by the programme management committee has generally related to the areas of research identified in the Stewart report. Although the main focus of much of the funded research relates to the use of mobile phones, in practice many of the experimental studies will also be valuable in providing evidence on any possible effects on people of exposures to radiofrequency (RF) radiation from mobile phone masts. The agreed programme includes a study on exposures from the newer types of mobile phone masts that are being introduced in urban areas. Details of research now approved for funding are given on the MTHR website at www.mthr.org.uk.

A second call for proposals was issued last year with a deadline for submission of outline proposals of 25 January 2002. The aim of this call was to extend the range of research being carried out in the MTHR programme. One aim of this call was to seek further proposals for volunteer studies that will examine possible effects of RF exposure of people. The proposals have yet to be considered but it is expected that some of the proposals will be of direct relevance to exposures to RF radiation from mobile phone masts.

Radiotherapy

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was for radiotherapy in the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust area on *(a)* 1 January 1999, *(b)* 1 January 1997, *(c)* 1 January 2002 and *(d)* 1 February 2002; and what was the national average at these times. [34670]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

After-surgery Care

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that *(a)* primary care trusts and *(b)* acute trusts put in place systems which provide care and support for patients who are discharged from hospital following day surgery. [34072]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 7 February 2002]: The professional bodies produce clinical guidelines on the provision of a service. The Royal College of Surgeons' "Guidelines for Day Case Surgery" recognises the importance of post-operative care for day case patients. The guidelines set out the importance of meticulously planned post-operative care from the immediate period after the operation, through discharge, and up to the patient being seen for follow-up in out-patients. This system stresses the importance of patients having a number to call in case of a medical problem, and confirms that good communication between the hospital and the person's general practitioner is vital in monitoring the recovery of the patient.

The departmental adviser on surgery, Professor Ara Darzi of Imperial College, has been asked to examine the use of day surgery over the coming months. Day surgery holds the key to faster, more convenient treatment for patients and less waiting for patients.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy on the European Directive on dietary supplements. [35053]

Yvette Cooper: We are firmly committed to the view that, in the interests of consumer choice, the law should allow food supplements, which are safe and properly labelled to be freely marketed. The proposed directive would establish a framework for harmonised controls on vitamin and mineral content of food supplements and introduce a number of useful labelling measures.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts that will provide digital hearing aids in accordance with his announcement of December 2001. [34999]

Jacqui Smith: Health communities interested in joining the modernising hearing aid services project in 2002–03 are about to be invited to declare their interest. Decisions on the sites which best fulfil the selection criteria will be made quickly thereafter and a list of those sites will be announced at that time.

Medical Education (Investment)

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of each regional NHS budget is earmarked for *(a)* medical, *(b)* higher and *(c)* further education capital investment; what investment in medical education other than new medical schools is being made in England; and if he will make a statement. [35202]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The table shows health authorities' initial revenue resource limit allocations for 2001–02 aggregated on a regional basis. It also shows *(a)* the revenue sums added to initial allocations to support undergraduate medical education (the Service Increment for Teaching—SIFT) and postgraduate medical education (the Medical and Dental Education Levy—MADEL) and *(b)* capital made available in 2001–02 to support the increase in medical student numbers recommended by the Medical Workforce Advisory Committee in 1997. Medical education at universities is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council.

£000

Region	*2001–02*[1]	*SIFT*	*MADEL*	*SIFT Capital*
Northern and Yorkshire	4,899,449	48,257	106,061	0
Trent	3,789,888	64,223	81,939	308
Eastern	3,689,071	17,611	70,261	2,358
London	6,043,669	212,010	194,932	0
South East	6,012,626	35,397	126,850	0
South West	3,556,776	18,970	72,780	2,046
West Midlands	3,906,084	26,425	80,091	1,731
North West	5,259,820	63,486	104,432	1,414

[1] Initial revenue allocation

In 1998 we accepted the main recommendation of the Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee that medical school intake should be increased by about 1,000 places per annum. The NHS Plan announced an increase of up to 1,000 further places by 2005. By 2005 the annual intake to medical schools in England is planned to have increased by 2,145 over 1997 levels. Of these new places 1,225 will be situated in existing medical schools and 920 in new medical schools and centres.

Nursing and Midwifery Student (Funding)

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of nursing and midwifery students in the latest year for which figures are available had no access to student loans, university hardship funds and NHS hardship grants as a result of being on diploma courses. [35203]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Approximately 87 per cent. of national health service-funded students currently studying nursing and midwifery are undertaking the diploma level programme. Whilst these students are not eligible for student loans, university hardship funds or NHS hardship grants, they receive a higher level of basic bursary than those studying at degree level. The financial support available to each student is dependent on the individual's circumstances. Overall, while the nature and source of funding differs, the overall package of support available to the two groups is comparable.

Midwifery and Nursing

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government plans to take to bring about parity between diploma and degree students of midwifery and nursing. [35204]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The diploma and degree in nursing and midwifery are courses with different academic attainment that both lead to eligibility to register as a qualified nurse or midwife. We have no plans to change the two different routes of nurse training.

Medical Education

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government takes to encourage and finance the continuing professional development and education of consultants and GPs. [35205]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The General Medical Council places a duty on all doctors to keep their knowledge and skills up to date throughout their working lives. National health service budgets include provision for investment in continuing professional development for all NHS staff groups. For general practitioners this takes the form of a postgraduate education allowance of up to £2,700 which is payable annually to general medical service GPs undertaking accredited training to further their continuing professional development (CPD). A similar allowance is payable to personal medical service GPs through their contractual arrangements.

We are also taking steps to encourage and formalise participation in CPD through the introduction of appraisal systems for NHS doctors. A new system of appraisal for GPs is to be introduced this year. An appraisal system for hospital consultants was introduced from April 2001. Both systems are professionally driven and led. GP appraisal will be organised and funded by primary care trusts but the appraisals themselves will be undertaken by suitably trained GPs. Consultant appraisal is organised and funded by the NHS employer but the appraisals themselves will be undertaken by suitably trained doctors. The objective of appraisal is to support the doctor concerned in identifying his/her personal and professional development needs and providing a personal development plan to address them which will in turn focus the doctor's continuing professional development over the year to come.

An additional £20 million is being invested in 2001–02 to support and encourage the development of all health professionals, including consultants and GPs, with more to come in the next couple of years—a further £30 million has been agreed for CPD activity in 2002–03.

Breast Cancer

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* hospital trusts which have not achieved the Government target for all breast cancer patients to wait no longer than one month between diagnosis and treatment by December 2001; [34691]

(2) how many breast cancer patients in each of the last 12 months waited more than one month between diagnosis and treatment, broken down by health authority area; and what the total was in February 1997. [34692]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The data requested are not available. The target of a maximum wait of one month from diagnosis to first definitive treatment for breast cancer came into effect on 31 December 2001. Central monitoring began on 1 January 2002 and data will be published later in the year.

Dentists

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists have opted out of the NHS in each year since 1997. [34790]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Available information covers the number of dentists leaving the general dental service (GDS) in England and is shown in the table for the years 1996–97 to 2000–01.

The number of leavers covers all reasons for leaving the GDS including final retirement from dental work, moves to other parts of the national health service and dentists taking career breaks as well as those who left to practice solely privately. Figures from 1998–99 onwards are inflated by the transfer of some dentists from the GDS to some personal dental service (PDS) pilots. The total number of dentists includes principals on a health authority list, assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

General dental service (GDS): Number of dentists who left the GDS from 1996–97 to 2000–01, England

Year	*Principals*	*Assistants*	*Vocational trainees*	*Total*
1996–97	692	64	78	834
1997–98	738	85	77	900
1998–99[1]	761	106	105	972
1999–2-00[1]	780	157	95	1,032
2000–01[1]	875	181	136	1,192

[1] Figures affected by the transfer of some dentists from the GDS to the PDS

Tobacco

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the harm caused to nicotine users of *(a)* using oral tobacco and *(b)* smoking cigarettes; [34906]

(2) what advice he received from *(a)* the Chief Medical Officer, *(b)* the Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health and *(c)* other public health experts regarding the public health implications of the ban on oral tobacco products agreed in Article 8 of EU Directive 2001/37/EC. [34904]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Tobacco use is harmful to human health, both in oral forms and when smoked. Smoking tobacco is associated with various cancers, lung disease, cardiovascular disease and peptic ulcers. There are fewer data on which to appraise the full range of health risk from oral tobacco but it is associated with development of cancer in humans, notably mouth cancers. Oral use of tobacco produces blood nicotine levels, which are comparable to those of cigarette smokers.

The Department has not sought advice from the Chief Medical Officer or the Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health on the public health implications specific to the ban on oral tobacco products agreed in Article 8 of European Union Directive 2001/37/EC. In the United Kingdom in general there is no recent tradition of oral tobacco consumption but there is a tradition of use of oral products among some ethnic minority communities. The Department has a programme of work on tobacco use in ethnic minorities, which will address this issue with appropriate expert advice.

Care Home Beds (Wycombe)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement in the change on the number of care home beds in the Wycombe constituency since 1997. [35342]

Ms Blears: Information for the Wycombe constituency is not centrally available. The number of residential and nursing care homes and beds in Buckinghamshire is shown in the table.

Number of residential and nursing care homes and beds in Buckinghamshire[1], *1997 to 2001*[2]*—at 31 March*

	Residential care homes		*Nursing care homes, hospitals and clinics*	
	Homes	*Places*	*Homes*	*Places*
1997	134	2,438	55	1,735
1998	163	3,253	57	2,054
1999	170	3,383	55	1,966
2000	178	3,399	57	1,896
2001	172	3,426	60	1,951

[1] Buckinghamshire as defined prior to local government reorganisation on 1 April 1997. Figures for 1998 onwards are for the redefined Buckinghamshire county council[1] plus Milton Keynes unitary authority.

[2] The number of nursing homes and beds in 1997 refers to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health annual returns

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many episodes of in-patient care were purchased by the NHS in London in the independent mental health sector in the last year for which figures are available. [35090]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 8 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 663W.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what work has taken place on child and adolescent mental health services for the Children's National Service Framework; [35086]

(2) if he will list the meetings scheduled for the External Working Group on child and adolescent mental health services in the Children's National Service Framework; and when its work is expected to be complete; [35084]

(3) pursuant to the answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 674W, on mental health, when the first meeting between his Department and the Department for Education and Skills to develop the mental health module of the Children's National Service Framework is scheduled to take place. [35230]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The first two meetings of the child and adolescent mental health External Working Group of the Children's National Service Framework have been set for 5 March and 24 April. The initial meeting will be primarily concerned with scoping the programme of work for the group. We envisage there will be at least two further meetings of the group this year. The Department for Education and Skills will be represented at a senior level on the group.

The module on acute health services is scheduled to report to Ministers later this year the others will follow thereafter.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 750W, on mental health, how much capital expenditure has been profiled in respect to the DSPD unit at *(a)* Rampton and *(b)* Broadmoor, and, in each case, when it is profiled to be spent. [35231]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* New dangerous and severe personality disorder (DSPD) persons units at Rampton and Broadmoor will deliver 140 places for DSPD persons by 2004. These are complex schemes, involving major innovations both in design, and in the approach to service delivery.

At Rampton the profiled capital spend is £20.7 million, of which £500,000 will be spent by the end of this financial year 2001–02. The remainder will be spent in 2002–03 and 2003–04. The unit is planned to be completed in 2003, and to open in the autumn of 2003.

Work on the unit at Broadmoor is at an earlier stage of development, and work to profile the capital spend is in hand. However, it is on target to open in 2004.

Clinical Depression

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of *(a)* adults, *(b)* children and young persons and *(c)* adults over 65 years have clinical depression at the latest date for which figures are available. [35082]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 8 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 663–64W.

Tilt Report

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the first patient to move out of a hospital as a result of the Tilt report. [35079]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Some patients have already moved into placements that have been partially funded from the money provided as a result of the Tilt report. The Tilt funding represents a contribution towards the achievement of the NHS Plan commitment to move up to 400 inappropriately placed patients out of the high security hospitals by 2004 but is not intended to cover the full costs.

Air Ambulances

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he issues on the circumstances in which an air ambulance is more appropriate than its terrestrial equivalent for the transfer of patients to hospital; [35200]

(2) if he will list the air ambulances available to the health services in each nation of the UK indicating the areas they cover. [35199]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* There are currently 12 charitably funded air ambulance services operating in England. These are:

Cornwall
Kent
West Midlands
Devon
North East England
Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire

Essex
North West England
Thames Valley
Dorset and Somerset
West Yorkshire
East Anglia.

In addition the helicopter emergency medical service covers London within the M25 motorway. There are also helicopter air ambulance services provided in the form of joint operations with the police in both Sussex and Wiltshire.

The charities are responsible for the number of aircraft provided and national health service ambulance trusts are responsible for calling out air ambulances to emergencies in accordance with locally agreed protocols. No central guidance has been issued.

Provision of air ambulance services in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved Administrations.

General Practitioner Lists

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he takes to ensure that children are not removed by general practitioners from their lists due to medical and lifestyle decisions by their parents. [35212]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* General practitioners have always had the right to remove patients from their list without giving a reason, just as patients have the right to withdraw from a doctor's list without giving reasons. We strongly support the General Medical Council in their guidance "Duties of a Doctor" which makes clear it is unacceptable to discriminate against patients on grounds of lifestyle, culture, beliefs, race, colour, sex, sexuality, age, social status or perceived economic worth.

Northwood and Pinner Community Hospital

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of Northwood and Pinner community hospital; and what plans he has received from the Hillingdon primary care trust for the development of facilities for general practice on the site. [34597]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Proposals for the future of Northwood and Pinner community hospital will emerge from strategic plans currently being developed in line with priorities identified within the Hillingdon local modernisation review. At this stage there are no firm proposals for the Northwood and Pinner community hospital site. Any proposed changes will form the subject of a formal public consultation.

Care Homes

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to raise the personal expenses allowance in care homes. [34694]

Jacqui Smith: Decisions on the level of the personal expenses allowance for people in residential care for April 2002 will be announced soon.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Global Conflict Prevention Pool

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects funded from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool since its establishment, indicating for each project the relevant countries and the total cost. [34469]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

A report on the activities of the pool in its first year will be published at the end of this financial year and will describe the programmes funded by the global pool. In the financial year 2001–02, a total of £60 million was allocated to the global pool, most of which is divided among the following 10 priority areas:

The Balkans
Central and Eastern Europe
EU Civilian Crisis Management
Indonesia and East Timor
The Middle East and North Africa
The OSCE
Russia and the former Soviet Union
Small arms and light weapons
South Asia
Strengthening the UN.

The global pool also funds some conflict prevention related activity outside these areas for which funding was pre-committed when the pool was set up in April 2001.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what assistance Her Majesty's Government *(a)* is providing and *(b)* has provided since 1990 to primary education in Zimbabwe; [34530]

(2) what assessment she has made of the availability of teachers in Zimbabwe in each year since 1990; [34528]

(3) what assessment she has made of the availability of *(a)* primary and *(b)* post primary education in Zimbabwe in each year since 1990. [34527]

Hilary Benn: DFID has assisted a number of reviews of the education sector in Zimbabwe in the last 10 years. Between 1979 and 1996, Zimbabwe made major achievements in increasing equity and access to education. The number of primary schools doubled—from 2,321 to 4,659—as did enrolment figures which rose from 1.24 to 2.49 million children. The number of secondary schools increased by 763 per cent. from 177 to 1,528, and enrolment increased by 923 per cent. to around 0.75 million. Since 1990, UK assistance in this sector has been modest, with projects aiming to improve the quality of teacher training and to localise the examination curriculum.

Zimbabwe still has a strong education system in comparison to most other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The net enrolment rate for primary education is currently 85 per cent. and in 1996, the last year for which statistics are available, 79 per cent. of primary school children continued on to secondary school. There are currently an estimated 104,000 teachers in Zimbabwe, the overwhelming majority of whom are trained graduates. However the education system is weakening, as are other social services, as a result of falling public spending; the rapidly rising costs of fees, books and paper; the impact of HIV/AIDS; and emigration of qualified personnel. DFID is currently assisting a study of the impact of HIV/AIDS on education.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the supply of staple foodstuffs in Zimbabwe in each year since 1990. [34526]

Hilary Benn: Maize is the staple foodstuff of Zimbabwe. DFID monitors crop forecasts through the SADC Famine Early Warning System, which also gives historical production data as follows:

Maize production

	(thousand metric tonnes)
1991	1,586
1992	361
1993	2,012
1994	2,326
1995	840
1996	2,609
1997	2,192
1998	1,418
1999	1,520
2000	2,040
2001	1,476

Zimbabwe experienced very lean years in 1992 and 1995 when the rains failed. Maize production in these years was far short of the national requirement of around 2 million tonnes needed for human and animal consumption. The shortfall in national production in 2001, which was only 1.47 million tonnes, owes more to economic problems and disruption of farming than to climatic causes.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the names of staff who have been seconded to her Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and Civil Service grades within her Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35834]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is as follows:

Staff seconded to DFID from private sector since May 1997

Number of Staff	*Organisation*	*Civil service grade and responsibilities*	*Salary paid by*	*Start and end dates*
4	Natural Resources Institute (NRI)	3 x A1 (former HCS Grade 6) 1 x A2 (former HCS Grade 7) natural resources research and advisory duties	NRI	3 x pre-1997 to April 1999 1 x February 1999 to April 2000
1	Marconi	3 x A2 imfundo project team project planning responsibilities in the education sector	Companies	May to October 2000
1	Virgin One			
1	Cisco Systems			

Voluntary Service Overseas

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what help she intends to give to Voluntary Service Overseas in relation to the insurance premiums payable by them in the aftermath of 11 September; [34876]

(2) what discussions she has had with Voluntary Service Overseas and other voluntary organisations about insurance premiums. [34884]

Hilary Benn: DFID has not been approached by either Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) or by other voluntary organisations about additional insurance premiums payable by them in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. This is a matter for VSO and the insurance companies.

DFID already provides VSO with over £23 million a year under a three-year Partnership Programme Agreement worth £71.5 million.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what legal costs have been incurred by her Department in each of the last four years. [34346]

Hilary Benn: Our records show that DFID has incurred legal costs totalling £230,972 in 1999–2000, £271,228 in 2000–01, and £249,030 in 2001–02 to date. The records for 1998–99 do not readily distinguish legal costs from other running costs—a disproportionate effort would be required to produce the information requested.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the publications issued by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34202]

Hilary Benn: The main DFID publications for each year are listed in our departmental reports to Parliament for 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001, which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

All DFID publications are free of charge unless otherwise indicated. This is in line with DFID's commitment to openness, as well as to raising awareness and understanding of development issues.

Due to the disproportionate cost involved we are not able to provide the full level of details requested. We have an actively managed database of over 11,000 organisations and individuals who have asked to be informed about new publications, and also use supplementary distribution channels for material which is likely to be of interest to specific audiences. DFID's overall expenditure on publications in each of the last four years was as follows:

	£000
1997–98	166
1998–99	347
1999–2000	570
2000–01	639

The increase in expenditure in each of the last three years reflects both the expansion in the range of material which we now make publicly available, and also the increased demand for this material.

Burundian Rebels

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the Government are taking to monitor the activities of the Burundian rebel groups operating from refugee camps on the Tanzanian border. [33983]

Hilary Benn: The Government of Tanzania continues to insist that Burundian rebels are not using refugee camps in Tanzania as a base for their actions. The refugee camps on the Tanzanian border with Burundi are run by UNHCR. They provide us with regular reports on the situation in them and take all reasonable steps to ensure that the activities in the camps are consistent with their status. We will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Botswana

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 311W, on Botswana, what action she has taken to secure water access for the San bushmen of South Africa. [34574]

Hilary Benn: The Government of South Africa recognises the rights of access to basic water supply and sanitation in its 1996 Constitution and, through its Free Basic Water Policy, aims to make available 6,000 litres of water per month per household free of charge. This policy is motivated on the grounds that water is a basic service which is essential for health and that affordability should not constrain the access of poor and vulnerable people to this service. This policy applies to all disadvantaged and vulnerable groups within South Africa, including the San.

DFID is providing assistance to the South African Department for Water Affairs and Forestry, to support their water services sector programme, with the goal of enhancing the livelihoods of marginalised groups through the creation of access to sustainable water and sanitation services.

Burkina Faso

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the new partnership for African development in relation to Burkina Faso. [34650]

Hilary Benn: The new partnership for African development (NEPAD) is an Africa-wide initiative that does not focus on specific countries. NEPAD has set up teams to work on five areas, which are: capacity building on peace and security; economic and corporate governance; infrastructure; central bank and financial standards; and agriculture and market access. Burkina Faso is not a member of the NEPAD steering committee or implementation committee. If Burkina Faso implements the principles set out by NEPAD, it should also benefit from the faster progress in development and poverty reduction that will ensue.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funds her Department provides to the Government of Burkina Faso. [34648]

Hilary Benn: We do not have a substantive development programme in Burkina Faso. However a small amount of funding is allocated for small-scale grants to developmentally worthy activities. Last year £19,000 was provided in this way to fund a food security project. The EC maintains a large development assistance programme. In 1999 (the last year for which we have details) this amounted to £33.93 million, the UK imputed share of which was approximately £6.3 million.

Malawi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she is providing to people affected by floods in Malawi. [34651]

Hilary Benn: The Government of Malawi has not requested assistance. Flooding in low lying areas of the Shire Valley is seasonal and specific to a few areas. However my Department has contributed £3.5 million to the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF), a public works programme which has a particular focus on remedial measures in flood prone districts. Income derived from the programme by the local population provides an alternative source of income when flooding occurs.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department has provided to the Jawand district of Afghanistan since 11 September. [34647]

Hilary Benn: DFID assistance for emergency food provision in Afghanistan is channelled through the UN World Food Programme (WFP), which has received £6 million from my Department since September 2001. Needs have been met in most areas, but there remain pockets of unmet need in places difficult to access due to poor weather and insecurity. WFP is deploying helicopters into the country to assess the condition of hungry families as quickly as possible in such isolated areas, including Jawand district in Badghis province. This is one of the most seriously drought-affected and inaccessible areas, where WFP reports that food access is precarious.

Because the area is extremely difficult to access in the winter, six months' worth of wheat, or 300 kilograms per family, were distributed in Siah Sangh town in Jawand district in early January. WFP is gearing up to move in other food items as soon as possible. By early January, 5,000 tons of food had been delivered to Jawand province, to a total of 15,000 households, or roughly 90,000 people.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 13 February 2002

NORTHERN IRELAND

Organised Crime

6. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent successes there have been against organised crime in Northern Ireland. [33138]

Jane Kennedy: As chair of the Organised Crime Task Force, I pay tribute to the operational agencies for their many successes in the fight against organised crime. Let me quote just a few recent examples:

> On 9 January 2002, 8.4 million cigarettes were seized at Belfast docks. This success comes on top of the largest ever UK seizure of illegal cigarettes on 8 November 2001, when 42.5 million cigarettes were seized at Warrenpoint.
>
> In recent weeks, customs has seized 42,500 litres of illicit fuel in two operations—a fuel laundering plant in south Armagh and an illegal fuel storage bunker in County Tyrone.
>
> In the past two months alone, 12 people have been arrested for money-laundering or tax evasion offences and two for armed robberies; on 22 January two men were jailed for extortion offences.

Such success demonstrates that the Government are determined to tackle organised crime activity wherever it rears its ugly head. While such activity is a regrettable part of Northern Ireland's past and present it cannot become part of the future.

22. **Mr. Luke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to tackle *(a)* extortion and *(b)* trade in counterfeit goods. [33154]

Jane Kennedy: In Northern Ireland we are seeking to tackle and confront extortion and trade in counterfeit goods through the co-ordinated efforts of the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) which I chair.

The OCTF provides a multi-agency approach to tackling the range of organised criminal activity that exists in Northern Ireland, and to optimise our approach members are drawn from HM Customs and Excise, PSNI and NIO, as well as others.

28. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on levels of crime arising from cross border smuggling. [33160]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force has identified high levels of cross border smuggling. The details can be found in the task force's threat assessment for 2001–02. Good co-operation between the PSNI, the Garda and other agencies has resulted in a number of successes against smugglers. These successes include the seizure of 80 million cigarettes in Dundalk, and the seizure of 42,500 litres of fuel from a fuel laundering plant in South Armagh.

Terrorist Victims

7. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the Government have done to compensate victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [33139]

17. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what support the Government have given to the victims of terrorist violence in Northern Ireland in the last five years. [33149]

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what support his Department is providing for victims of violence. [33158]

Mr. Browne: More than £1.5 billion has been spent in compensation for criminal injuries and damage since 1968–69. It is not possible to break these figures down into terrorist-related and other crime. We anticipate that this year the bills for criminal injuries and damage compensation to victims of crime in Northern Ireland will be £55 million and £9 million respectively.

19. **Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action the Government are taking to assist people who have been the victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland. [33151]

Mr. Browne: Over £18.25 million has been allocated to support victims of the troubles in Northern Ireland: major elements include funding for the Northern Ireland memorial fund; funding for victims groups in Northern Ireland; support for the development of the Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation; support for victims of the troubles living in Great Britain and a contribution towards the devolved Administration's strategy implementation fund.

Army Watch Towers

8. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of the removal of army watch towers on the security situation since July 2001. [33140]

Jane Kennedy: After the act of decommissioning by PIRA, the reduced level of threat in October allowed the chief constable to make a number of further normalisation moves including the demolition of two towers in the south Armagh area. Intelligence-led policing and good cross border co-operation has resulted in a number of successes against the activities of dissident republicans. As a result of a continued lowering of the threat the chief constable announced on 22 January a further tranche of normalisation measures.

Police Recruitment

9. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recruitment to the Northern Ireland police force. [33141]

Jane Kennedy: Over 150 new recruits, appointed on a 50 per cent. Catholic, 50 per cent. non-Catholic basis, have now taken up training posts with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and appointments are continuing. The first tranche of recruits will finish training in April 2002. It is encouraging to note that the most recent recruitment competition has attracted over 4,500 applicants, of whom an unprecedented proportion of 38 per cent. are Catholic.

Electoral Fraud

10. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements are being put in place to prevent electoral fraud at the next election in Northern Ireland. [33142]

18. **Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements are being put in place to prevent electoral fraud at the next election in Northern Ireland. [33150]

Mr. Browne: The next scheduled election in Northern Ireland is the Assembly election on 1 May 2003. It is our intention that all the measures proposed by the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, which will provide the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland with additional functions to address the problem of electoral fraud there, will be in force for that election.

War Graves

11. **Mr. Salter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to ensure that the graves of Ulster soldiers who died in the first world war are not affected by plans to extend Paris Charles de Gaulle airport. [33143]

Dr. John Reid: I met a senior representative from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on 11 December to express my concern that the building of a proposed third airport for Paris could affect a number of Somme war graves.

The French authorities have not yet defined the final boundaries of the airfield for this airport, but have assured the Commonwealth War Graves Commission that all war graves in the area will be treated with the greatest respect.

Violent Crime

12. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the level of violent crime during the past year. [33144]

Jane Kennedy: During the period 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001, 20,626 violent crimes were recorded in Northern Ireland, compared with 19,034 recorded in the same period the previous year. This represents an increase of 8.4 per cent. During the same period, the clearance rate for violent crime dropped from 56.2 per cent. to 40.9 per cent., a decrease of 15.3 per cent.

Please note that the statistics for the calendar year 2001 are provisional and caution should therefore be exercised when comparing same with the previous year which are finalised.

Policing

13. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet representatives of the police and security services to discuss the policing situation. [33145]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State meets regularly with the Chief Constable, the GOC and his senior security advisers when a range of security issues including policing are discussed.

US Co-operation

14. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance is being provided by the United States Government and their agencies to assist the Police Service of Northern Ireland in combating crime. [33146]

Dr. John Reid: Both the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and I have on-going contact with a range of authorities on policing matters. My recent visit to the US gave me a particular opportunity to do this.

I was especially interested to hear of the American approach to organised criminals and the mafia culture. Through the Organised Crime Task Force, we were already adopting the New York approach of establishing multi-agency groups to tackle specific crime problems or particular criminal gangs. The idea is simple but effective—identify the problem and put together the agencies who can tackle it.

I am also delighted that joint FBI/PSNI training was restored in December by President Bush and I am convinced that this type of co-operation and training with US law enforcement agencies will contribute to our commitment of ensuring an effective and efficient police service in Northern Ireland.

Human Rights

15. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent action the Government have taken to improve human rights in Northern Ireland. [33147]

Mr. Browne: The introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998 played a major role in safeguarding human rights throughout the UK as a whole, including Northern Ireland. The Human Rights Act puts human rights at the heart of policy making and operations for all public authorities and means that all public authorities, including courts and the police, must act compatibly with the convention rights. It gives further effect throughout the UK to the rights and freedoms set out in the ECHR and provides the basis for a new culture of rights and responsibilities.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 restricts the Northern Ireland Assembly's powers to ensure it can only pass legislation that is compatible with convention rights and requires all NI Ministers and Departments to act compatibly. The Act also created the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission whose remit includes making sure laws and practices conform to the European convention, promoting awareness of human rights and offering advice and guidance to individuals. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is currently considering the scope for a Bill of Rights to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.

The report of the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland (the Patten report) recommended that there should be a comprehensive programme of action to focus policing in Northern Ireland on a human rights based approach.

The setting up in 2000 of the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland, an independent impartial police complaints system. This was set up under the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

The Independent International Decommissioning Commission exists to remove the tools of terrorism, which has been the biggest source of denial of basic human rights in Northern Ireland over the past 30 years.

The Criminal Justice Review Group recommended that human rights be made central to the justice system. In formulating their recommendations, the review group looked not only at the European convention on human rights, but also at 15 other international human rights standards and instruments. The entire review was drafted with these principles in mind.

Good Friday Agreement

16. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the economic and social impacts of the Good Friday agreement on Northern Ireland. [33148]

Dr. John Reid: The Belfast agreement has had a positive impact on many aspects of life in Northern Ireland. The economic and social benefits are perhaps some of the most noticeable to arise from the agreement. Increased investor confidence has led to growth in the retail, construction and manufacturing sectors, helping to keep the economy buoyant and unemployment at a low level. While at the same time, more young people are staying to make their way in Northern Ireland society, now rooted firmly in the principles of individual rights and equality of opportunity for all.

24. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what aspects of the Good Friday agreement remain to be implemented. [33156]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Mr. Casale), *Official Report*, columns 191–92.

21. **Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in implementing the Belfast agreement in the last six months. [33153]

Dr. John Reid: Significant progress has been made. The devolved institutions are stabilising following the election of a new First and Deputy First Minster. The SDLP have signalled their support of the new policing arrangements, leading to the establishment of the Police Board and subsequent unanimous agreement by that board on a new badge for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The IRA have carried out a significant act of decommissioning involving ammunition, arms and explosives. We must now build on these developments to ensure that the implementation of the agreement continues on all fronts.

Parades Commission

20. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will bring forward legislation to permit televising of meetings of the Parades Commission. [33152]

Jane Kennedy: We have no plans to legislate for the televising of internal meetings of the Parades Commission.

The operation of the Parades Commission and the legislation under which it was established is currently being reviewed by Sir George Quigley.

Road Safety Campaigns

23. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent road safety campaigns the police service of Northern Ireland has mounted in schools; and if he will make a statement. [33155]

Jane Kennedy: Road safety education is a key element of the PSNI strategy to reduce death and injuries on the roads. It forms an integral part of the PSNI community safety programme. The road safety message is delivered to schoolchildren ranging from Key Stage 1 (young primary) to Key Stage 4 (15 to 18 year-old).

Because the driving behaviour of young male drivers is a matter of concern in Northern Ireland, the PSNI has developed a multi-agency roadsafe roadshow for Key Stage 4 schoolchildren. In addition to the police service, the fire service, various elements of the medical service, a voluntary group and seriously injured victims make contributions. The PSNI is currently developing a teaching resource pack to build upon the success of the roadsafe roadshow.

Decommissioning

25. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on decommissioning of terrorist weapons. [33157]

Jane Kennedy: The IICD reported on 23 October that it had witnessed the IRA putting a quantity of arms, ammunition and explosives completely beyond use. The IICD described this as a significant event. This move by the IRA was historic and gives the clearest possible signal that it is moving away from violence for good. It is imperative that we now see further progress in the transition away from violence. All paramilitary groups should now build on this very significant progress.

Real IRA

27. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to combat the Real IRA; and if he will make a statement. [33159]

Jane Kennedy: There is a daily exchange of security information between the Garda and the RUC, and the security forces on both sides of the border co-operate frequently in planned and co-ordinated operations against the activities of dissident republicans. In the last year 42 dissidents have been arrested within the two jurisdictions.

Government Structures

29. **Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the legislative and Government structures and institutions operating in Northern Ireland. [33161]

Dr. John Reid: Since devolution in December 1999 local politicians have acted with great commitment, integrity and energy to represent their constituents' needs, and the needs of Northern Ireland more generally, in a fair and effective manner on issues of real concern to ordinary people. Since the election of a new First and Deputy First

Minister last autumn the devolved institutions have continued to stabilise, which I believe demonstrates the widespread support that devolution has throughout Northern Ireland, on all sides of the community. In addition, the structures put in place to develop North-South co-operation continue to function smoothly. All of this contributes to the normalisation of politics and society in Northern Ireland—a development which the Government are committed to giving their wholehearted support.

Golden Jubilee

30. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee in Northern Ireland. [33162]

Dr. John Reid: Responsibility for arrangements to celebrate Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee falls to the devolved Administration. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is co-ordinating plans for community celebrations throughout the Province. To date, over 300 events and projects have been planned.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to change the *(a)* departmental expenditure limit and *(b)* administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36575]

Dr. John Reid: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Northern Ireland Office DEL will be increased by £36,363,000 from £1,078,374,000 to £1,114,737,000 and the gross administration costs limits will be increased by £21,336,000 from £138,069,000 to £159,405,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

	£
Resources	
Change	31,973
New DEL	1,056,836
of which:	
Voted	1,056,836
Non-voted	0
Capital	
Change	4,390
New DEL	57,901
of which:	
Voted	57,901
Non-voted	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

The DEL shown in the Main Estimate was overstated by £4,947,000;

the take up of End Year Flexibility of £28,818,000 of which £16,896,000 relates to administration costs which cover prison officer redundancy payments, increased costs associated with elections in Northern Ireland, the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Political Talks and Forensic Science Northern Ireland;

the take up of Departmental Unallocated Provision of £9,767,000;

net transfer £1,148,000 to the Northern Ireland Executive;

net transfer of £2,217,000 to UK Departments which covers £2,200,000 to the Court Service for transferred functions, £213,000 to the Home Office for Criminal Cases Review Commission and £4,000 for our contribution to the Group European States Against Corruption, £33,000 to the Cabinet Office for fast streamers and £233,000 from Home Office Legal Advisers Branch;

a virement of £1,700,000 to current from capital.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

the take up of End Year Flexibility of £5,014,000;

the take up of Departmental Unallocated Provision of £576,000;

increase of £500,000 from Capital Modernisation Fund;

a virement of £1,700,000 from capital to current.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore added to the planned total of public expenditure.

The Departmental Expenditure Limit for the Northern Ireland Executive in 2001–02 will be increased by £244,287,000 from £5,758,005,000 to £6,002,283,000. The increases reflect:

the take up of End Year Flexibility of £234,842,000;

£4,426,000 in respect of the Capital Modernisation Fund;

£4,278,000 in respect of Agri-Monetary Compensation;

£1,893,000 for costs incurred in dealing with foot and mouth disease—of which £1,000,000 is in respect of Business Rate Relief, £398,000 Assistance for Rural Businesses and £495,000 for Charitable Match Funding;

£164,000 for the Evidence Based Policy Fund;

transfer of £50,000 from the Department for Work and Pensions;

net transfer of £1,148,000 from the NIO;

transfer of £2,130,000 to Department of Health;

transfers of £284,000 to the Scottish Executive;

transfer of £18,000 to the National Assembly for Wales;

transfer of £25,000 to the Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency;

transfer of £59,000 to the Inland Revenue;

transfer of £7,000 to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

These increases will be offset by a charge on the Departmental Expenditure Limit Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

DEFENCE

Service Personnel (Recognition on Retirement)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to recognise formally the contribution made by armed forces personnel at the point at which they retire from active service. [25357]

Mr. Ingram: All service personnel can qualify for a long service and good conduct medal after 15 years of exemplary service, with a bar awarded after a further 15 years. Other medals are awarded to those who have distinguished themselves through exceptional service or bravery. There is no single arrangement in the armed forces for recognising service at the point of retirement though all three provide a certificate of the qualifications gained in service and, subject to the satisfactory completion of service, a character reference which can be used in seeking further employment. Those completing at least five years' service are also entitled to resettlement training which increases in recognition of greater length of service. As part of the Veterans' Initiative, and in cooperation with representatives of the veterans' organisations, we are also looking at the feasibility and merits of a "Veterans' Identity Card" which would allow recognition (and real benefits) of the special status of those who have given service to the country in the armed forces.

Fair Trade

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33539]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is in touch with the Department for International Development which leads on this issue and which is providing £120,000 to the Fair Trade Foundation over three years (2001–03) in support of its efforts to target new groups through its annual fair trade fortnight campaigns. We do not, however, have plans for direct participation in the event.

Defence Expenditure

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what UK defence expenditure was in each of the last 10 years, broken down by region and expressed as expenditure per head of population. [33951]

Mr. Ingram: A breakdown of defence expenditure by region is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I have tasked my officials to examine the data held to see if a broad indication of regional expenditure can be provided.

Information on UK defence expenditure for each of the last 10 years, and as expenditure per head of population, is outlined in the table.

	Total UK Defence expenditure (£ million)[1]	*UK mid year resident population (£000)*[2]	*UK Defence expenditure/head (£)*
1991–92	24,438	57,814	423
1992–93	22,910	58,013	395
1993–94	22,757	58,198	391
1994–95	22,562	58,401	386
1995–96	21,517	58,612	367
1996–97	22,345	58,807	380
1997–98	21,610	59,014	366
1998–99	22,475	59,237	379
1999–2000	22,549	59,501	379
2000–01	23,538	59,756	394

[1] UK defence expenditure figures are the "Adjusted Defence budget" taken from table 1.3 of UK Defence Statistics 2001. The figures are VAT inclusive and at current prices. The "Adjusted Defence Budget" takes account of major definitional changes in defence spending and of major transfers of responsibility to and from Government Departments to provide figures on a consistent basis. Figures exclude receipts from the sale of the married quarters estate that were appropriated onto the defence votes.

[2] UK mid-year population estimates are taken from table 2.1 of the Office for National Statistics' "Monthly Digest of Statistics—January 2002".

Afghanistan

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what continuing role he plans for the armed forces in Afghanistan. [34041]

Mr. Hoon: We have made our campaign objectives clear, including to bring Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda to justice and to ensure that the link between Afghanistan and terrorism is broken for good. The United Kingdom is also contributing to, and currently leading, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul.

So far, some 1,700 British troops have deployed to Kabul out of a total of about 3,500 troops from 15 countries. Although we plan to hand over command of the ISAF by the end of April and reduce the number of British troops involved, we will continue to contribute to the force. We will also continue to support the Coalition's efforts under Operation Enduring Freedom to deal with the surviving al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants in Afghanistan.

TSC 503 Satellite System

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the introduction of the TSC 503 satellite system. [34400]

Dr. Moonie: The UK's TSC 503 satellite system provides a transportable satellite communications ground terminal system compatible with UK Skynet, NATO and US military satellites.

The TSC 503 terminal system has a significantly increased data transfer capability compared to the current SATCOM terminals.

So far, about half the terminals have been delivered and training of service personnel is taking place. Full operational capability is planned by the end of this year.

Army Establishment

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the Army is manned to peace establishment. [34491]

Mr. Ingram: The strength of the whole Army (as at 1 January 2002) is around 94 per cent. of the current peacetime unit establishment requirement.

British Forces Post Office (Afghanistan)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 13W, on Afghanistan, if he will publish the reduced rates under the BFPO number registered for parcels to be sent to Afghanistan; and what is the average number of deliveries of post per month to BFPO numbers relating to Afghanistan. [35818]

Mr. Ingram: The BFPO numbers applicable to operations in Afghanistan are BFPO 767 Muscat and BFPO 768 Thumrait, BFPO 761 Shalalah having closed on 21 January.

Mail is flown from the UK to Muscat six times per week whence it is carried by road, a two hour journey, to Thumrait. Mail for Kabul is then flown from Thumrait daily by the Royal Air Force. A total of 1,000 kg per day is despatched to Muscat and 475 kg per day forwarded to Kabul. As this is a recent service monthly averages are not available.

A full parcels service (up to 30 kg) is not available, but small packets up to 2 kg are sent at a maximum cost of £6.56.

Premature Voluntary Release

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many PVR applications have been made by personnel from *(a)* 5, *(b)* 11, *(c)* 25, *(d)* 43 and *(e)* 111 Squadrons in each of the past five years. [35652]

Mr. Ingram: The number of applications for premature voluntary release from the RAF Air Defence Squadrons, in each of the last five years is shown as follows:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
5 Squadron					
Officers	2	0	1	0	0
Airmen	3	2	2	8	5
11 Squadron					
Officers	1	0	0	0	0
Airmen	0	4	2	2	5
25 Squadron					
Officers	1	1	0	0	0
Airmen	2	4	6	5	4
43 Squadron					
Officers	3	0	1	1	0
Airmen	3	6	5	3	6
111 Squadron					
Officers	0	1	1	0	0
Airmen	4	2	2	7	7

[1] Figures up to 1 January 2002

Departmental Bodies (Security)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action will be taken against those departmental bodies which fail to take adequate security measures in their establishments. [35609]

Dr. Moonie: Depending on the circumstances of the case, a range of informal, formal, administrative, disciplinary and even criminal options would be considered and pursued as appropriate.

A range of control processes is in place to ensure that adequate security measures are taken. There is a regime of security surveys, inspections and audits operating in the Ministry of Defence. Standards and policy are set centrally, with advice and guidance provided to departmental bodies to enable them to carry out their security responsibilities.

Pilots

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* establishment pilot posts and *(b)* pilots there are in (i) 5, (ii) 11, (iii), 25, (iv), 43 and (v) 111 Squadrons. [35651]

Mr. Ingram: The table details the number of established pilot posts and the number of pilots there are in 5 Squadron, 11 Squadron, 25 Squadron, 43 Squadron and 111 Squadron. These figures are as at 31 December 2001.

Squadron	*Establishment*	*Current manning*
5	18	12
11	18	13
25	18	14
43	19	15
111	19	16

MOD Security (Private Contractors)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations have been made by the Ministry of Defence to private defence contractors on increasing security measures. [35614]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not provide defence contractors with advice on security measures. This is the responsibility of the Security Service who, for those contractors undertaking particularly sensitive contracts, provide oversight and advice on specific threats and counter-measures.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made in the use of private security contractors to guard Ministry of Defence establishments since 11 September. [35612]

Dr. Moonie: Since the events of 11 September 2001 there has been no change to the Ministry of Defence policy for the use of private security contractors to provide unarmed guarding to some parts of the Defence Estate.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many private security contractors are employed in guarding Ministry of Defence establishments; and if he will list them. [35611]

Dr. Moonie: There are 16 private security contractors employed in unarmed guarding of the Ministry of Defence establishments. They are:

Initial Security Ltd.

Tyco (formerly known as Thorn)

Reliance Security Ltd.

Legion Security plc

Chubb Guarding Services Ltd.

Serco

Securicor Guarding Ltd.

RCO Support Services Ltd.

Galago Ltd.

Centuryan Security Ltd.

Medway Ports

Securitas (UK) Ltd.

Dardan Security Ltd.

ISS Support Services Ltd.

Securi-Guard Ltd.

Solo Security Services Ltd.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much has been spent on timber for the refurbishment of the MOD building; [35692]

(2) what action was taken by his Department to ensure that timber procured for the refurbishment of the MOD Building was sourced *(a)* sustainably and *(b)* legally; [35691]

(3) how much certified timber has been used in the refurbishment of the MOD building; and what proportion of the total timber purchased for this refurbishment this represents. [35690]

Dr. Moonie: The minimum amount of timber will be used in the project so as to comply with current industry (notably fire) standards. The total cost is estimated by the construction contractor to be in the region of £500,000.

Ministry of Defence policy is that all timber or timber products should be procured from sustainable and legal sources. This is reflected in the PFI contract with Modus Services plc for the redevelopment of Main Building and is in turn in Modus's contract with the construction contractor, Skanska Whitehall.

All timber used in the redevelopment will therefore be from a certified sustainable source.

HMS Coventry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will commission a ship named HMS Coventry. [34920]

Mr. Ingram: There are many worthy and suitable names deserving of recognition when consideration is given to naming ships. Although there are no immediate plans to use this name, Coventry with her six antecedents and 10 battle honours will certainly merit consideration in the future.

QinetiQ

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to remove Ministry of Defence police from QinetiQ establishments before the organisation's proposed flotation. [35613]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Police Federation (DPF) has been consulted concerning the proposal to withdraw the Ministry of Defence police officers from three QinetiQ operated sites: Pendine, Shoeburyness and West Freugh. The consultation was concluded on 25 January 2002, and the withdrawal date has been provisionally set for 31 July 2002. However, I have agreed to meet with representatives of the DPF to discuss this on 12 March.

Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft project. [36175]

Mr. Ingram: The Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft (FSTA) is planned to replace the RAF's fleet of VC10 and TriStar air to air refuelling/air transport aircraft towards the end of the decade. The current fleet is based at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire. Bids for this prospective PFI programme were received from two consortia in July 2001. Both bidders have proposed the continued use of RAF Brize Norton as the main operating base for the FSTA fleet and our negotiations with them are proceeding on this basis. Subject to satisfactory progress in these negotiations, we expect to decide later this year whether PFI offers the best value for money and, if it does, which of the two consortiums is our preferred bidder.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of the expenditure of her Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30099]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

In the period 1 July 1999 to 31 March 2000, the cost of newspapers, magazines and periodicals purchased centrally by the Department was £9,096. In 2000–01, the cost was £13,639.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32004]

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to change the Scotland departmental expenditure limits for 2001–02. [36574]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland departmental expenditure limit (DEL) will be reduced by £76,755,000 from £17,173,692,000 to £17,096,937,000.

The DEL reduction takes account of the following:

a reduction of £50,000,000 arising from the Scottish Transport Group pension disbursement;

a reduction of £32,000,000 to offset a draw forward of EU structural funds agreed in the previous year;

a reduction of £1,000,000 following a revision to the capital modernisation fund allocation announced in the winter supplementary estimate;

an increase of £3,000,000 for the active communities initiative;

an increase of £13,804,000 for costs relating to the Lockerbie trial;

an increase of £661,000 for some additional policing in the wake of 11 September;

an increase of £600,000 to support tourism following foot and mouth disease;

an increase of £1,235,000 for rural business recovery;

increases of £1,528,000 from match funding for charitable donations to the Addington fund for foot and mouth disease.

The DEL reduction also includes the following transfers to and from other Government Departments, amounting to a net reduction of £11,883,000. These are:

net transfers of £84,000 from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES);

net transfers of £8,540,000 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA);

a transfer of £1,075,000 from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP);

a transfer of £73,000 to the National Assembly for Wales;

net transfers of £4,696,000 from the Home Office;

a transfer of £284,000 from the Northern Ireland Executive;

net transfers of £26,489,000 to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

All of these changes relate to the resource budget, and the capital budget of £100,000 is unchanged.

An addition to the Scotland DEL for 2002–03 of £13,619 million will be made in respect of adjustments allowed for in the statement of funding policy, in relation to the impact of local authorities' decisions regarding council tax and rents on council tax rebate for 2000–01 and 2001–02.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Ishtiaq Ahmed

Harry Cohen: To ask the Solicitor-General for what reason the Crown Prosecution Service is citing public interest immunity as a ground for not disclosing a document requested in the case of Mr. Ishtiaq Ahmed, HMP Coldingley; and if he will make a statement. [34466]

The Solicitor-General: The case of Mr. Ishtiaq Ahmed is presently before the Court of Appeal following a referral by the Criminal Cases Review Commission. A directions hearing is scheduled to take place on 21 February 2002. The court will deal with the question of disclosure when it gives directions on the future conduct of the case.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Appointments Commission (Roadshows)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council when the House of Lords Appointments Commission will announce the timetable for the next round of roadshows and destinations. [34566]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Appointments Commission is still considering its timetable for regional events, and will make an announcement as soon as it has reached a decision.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last met officials from the UN regarding the Global Fund for AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. [34949]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development meets regularly with representatives of the UN and its specialised agencies to discuss a range of issues, including progress on the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria (GFATM). My officials have been instrumental in getting the fund set up effectively and have worked in close co-operation with WHO, UNAIDS and many others. The UK has a seat on the GFATM board along with WHO and UNAIDS who are both ex officio members.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of levels of tuberculosis in the Badghis province of Afghanistan; and what action is being taken to treat those with tuberculosis. [34952]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development is not aware of any quantitative assessment by humanitarian agencies of levels of tuberculosis in Badghis province. However as one of the most vulnerable regions of Afghanistan, levels of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis are likely to be significant.

My Department has allocated significant funds to agencies working to improve disease surveillance and the provision of emergency health supplies, while assisting the rehabilitation of health facilities—in particular to build up the capacity of the Afghan Interim Administration's Ministry of Public Health. This includes £5 million to the World Health Organisation, £8 million to UNICEF, £5 million to the Red Cross movement, as well as support to local and international non-governmental organisations.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action was taken by her Department to ensure that timber procured for the recent refurbishment of the International Development building on 1 Palace street was sourced *(a)* sustainably and *(b)* legally. [35678]

Hilary Benn: The contractual documentation as specified by my Department for the refurbishment work on 1 Palace street, included our standards for the use of sustainable sources of hardwood, timber products and plywood. This required all such procurement to be carried out in accordance with standards set by the Building Research Environmental Evaluation Assessment Methodology (BREEAM) in relation to materials and the environmental implications of materials selection.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much has been spent on timber for the recent refurbishment of the International Development building on 1 Palace Street. [35677]

Hilary Benn: Approximately £350,000 was spent on timber as part of this refurbishment.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much certified timber has been used in the recent refurbishment of the International Development building on 1 Palace Street; and what proportion of total timber purchased for this refurbishment this represents. [35676]

Hilary Benn: The following volumes of timber were used in the project.

	Volume
Softwood carcassing timber	6,000m
Softwood plaster grounds	2,500m
Veneered doors	590
Softwood timber battens	2,800m
Protection boards	1,250
Battens to protection	8,000m
Miscellaneous timber	1,100m

Of the above, around 98 per cent. was certified. The remainder represents a small number of hardwood doors, which we were required to use within the Grade II listed section of the building under the relevant planning regulations. These doors were obtained from existing stocks from managed forests.

EU Overseas Development Assistance

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much per year has been spent in euros at current exchange rates on overseas development assistance as defined by the DAC by *(a)* the EU and *(b)* the EU and the 15 member states, in each of the last five years. [34680]

Hilary Benn: The latest available data on the EC and the member states' overseas development assistance (oda) are for 2000. The data show a slight increase in EU-wide ODA flows despite a gradual decline in the European Commission's ODA expenditure.

Total net ODA (ecu/euro current prices)

Billion

	EC	*EC + member states*
1996	ecu 5.7	ecu 19.9
1997	ecu 5.5	ecu 19.8
1998	ecu 5.4	ecu 19.8
1999	euro 5.2	euro 20.4
2000[1]	euro 4.5	euro 21.4

[1] Provisional.

Source:

OECD DAC online database.

TREASURY

Tax Credits (Fraud)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 515W, how many of the 28 prosecutions for tax credit fraud concerned tax credits obtained to the value of *(a)* less than £1,000, *(b)* £1,000 to £4,999, *(c)* £5,000 to £9,999 and *(d)* more than £10,000; and if he will give the same breakdown for the seven prosecutions which resulted in a custodial sentence. [35256]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is as follows:

Prosecutions:

(a) less than £1,000—nil

(b) £1,000 to £4,999—20

(c) £5,000 to £9,999—5

(d) more than £10,000—3

Custodial sentences:

(a) less than £1,000—nil

(b) £1,000 to £4,999—2

(c) £5,000 to £9,999—2

(d) more than £10,000—3.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of applications for tax credits have been identified as high risk for fraud or non-compliance by the Inland Revenue since the inception of tax credits; and how many of the applications so identified turn out to be fraudulent or non-compliant. [32643]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Since the introduction in October 1999 of working families tax credit (WFTC) and disabled person's tax credit (DPTC), 60,614 applications were identified as being appropriate for further investigation up to December 2001. This equates to around 1 per cent. of the total number of applications received for tax credits during the same period. From this number, 9,665 investigations proved instances of fraudulent/non-compliant activity.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much compensation has been *(a)* paid and *(b)* ordered to be paid as a result of the prosecutions for working families tax credit fraud. [35165]

Dawn Primarolo: Three compensation orders have been made by the courts, totalling £6,020. There has also been one confiscation order, to the value of £100,000.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements are in place for the mutual exchange of relevant information with overseas authorities regarding tax credit fraud. [35173]

Dawn Primarolo: The United Kingdom has a number of agreements with overseas authorities allowing the exchange of information relating to tax or social security matters. Where relevant, such information can be used to combat tax credit fraud.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 515W, how many of the seven custodial sentences were for *(a)* less than six months, *(b)* six to 12 months and *(c)* more than 12 months; and what the length of the longest custodial sentence was. [35255]

Dawn Primarolo: Of the seven custodial sentences: *(a)* three were for less than six months; *(b)* there were none between six and 12 months; and *(c)* the remaining four sentences were for over 12 months. The longest sentence was for two and a half years.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans there are to amend the Office for National Statistics departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36860]

Ruth Kelly: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Office for National Statistics DEL will be increased by £495,000 from £197,350,000 to £197,845,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £6,540,000 from £184,631,000 to £191,171,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table.

	£
Resources	
Change	6,540,000
New DEL	191,970,000
of which:	
Voted	191,118,000
Non-voted	852,000
Capital	
Change	−6,045,000
New DEL	5,875,000
of which:	
Voted	5,875,000
Non-voted	0

The increase in the resource element of the DEL is due to two factors. Firstly, there is a transfer of £6,000,000 from Capital DEL to Resource DEL so that ONS has the appropriate level of cover in the budget to meet this year's spending pressures.

Secondly, a transfer to ONS of £585,000 administration costs from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in relation to work to develop the Neighbourhood Statistics programme is partially offset by a transfer of £45,000 administration costs from ONS to the Department for Education and Skills in respect of data development work associated with the same programme.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the £6,000,000 transfer to Resource DEL referred to above. It also includes a transfer of £45,000 capital from ONS to the Department for Education and Skills in respect of data development work associated with the Neighbourhood Statistics programme.

An increase of £5,108,000 of Annually Managed Expenditure is required in respect of provision for early retirement costs.

The net increase in the DEL will be offset by transfers and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans there are to change HM Customs and Excise departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36859]

Mr. Boateng: The HM Customs and Excise DEL will be reduced by £30,000 from £1,128,571,000 to £1,128,541,000 and the administration costs limit reduced by £30,000 from £950,783,000 to £950,753,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table.

		£
	Resource	*Capital*
Change	−30,000	—
New DEL	1,038,529,000	90,012,000
Of which:		
Voted	1,033,529,000	89,012,000
Non-voted	5,000,000	1,000,000

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from a decrease in administration costs of £30,000 transferred to DEFRA in respect of the CAP export licensing Invest to Save Budget.

There is therefore, no addition to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans there are to change HM Treasury's departmental expenditure limits and administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36861]

Ruth Kelly: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary, HM Treasury's DEL will be increased by £3,020,000 from £244,845,000 to £247,865,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £1,000,000 from £106,689,000 to £107,689,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

		£
	Resources	*Capital*
Change	1,020	2,000
New DEL	230,788	17,077
Of which:		
Voted	201,417	16,777
Non-voted	29,371	300

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the take up of administration costs EYF (£1,000,000) to meet the additional costs of the Treasury's planned programme of work, including set-up costs for the investment in the Troika insurance company and the funding of the PUK call-off contract; take up of programme costs EYF (£100,000) to meet the increased demand for UK coins; and a transfer of £80,000 programme expenditure from the OGC to the National Assembly for Wales for an e-pilot project the NAW is carrying out on behalf of the OGC.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from a further reclassification of programme expenditure EYF to capital provision (£2,000,000) for the service relating to the indemnity and insurance cover HM Treasury has offered to aviation companies in the wake of the events of 11 September. The cover is in the form of a loan note with the Troika Insurance Company Ltd.

The increases will be offset by a change to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Student Loans

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will change the rules governing entitlement to working families tax credit so that student loans are not counted as income. [34866]

Dawn Primarolo: We have no plans to disregard completely student loans within working families tax credit.

Tax Credits Bill

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the administrative cost of the transfer of functions to the Treasury and the Inland Revenue under the provisions of clauses 45 and 46 of the Tax Credits Bill. [35181]

Dawn Primarolo: The transfer of child benefit to the Inland Revenue will provide parents with a more streamlined system of support, by ensuring child benefit and the new child tax credit are run by a single organisation.

There will be only minor changes in child benefit rules when responsibility moves to the Inland Revenue and existing staff and IT systems will be transferred. We anticipate that the administrative costs of transfer will be minimal.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to keep a record of the persons falling within the provisions of subparagraph 2(b) of paragraph 9 of Schedule 5 of the Tax Credits Bill who may be supplied with information relating to tax credits, child benefit or guardian's allowance for health; and if he plans to make the record publicly available; [35179]

(2) what functions relating to health he expects to be prescribed under the provisions of subparagraph 2 of paragraph 9 of Schedule 5 of the Tax Credits Bill; and when he expects draft regulations to be available. [35177]

Dawn Primarolo: The provisions of paragraph 9 of Schedule 5 will allow the Inland Revenue to provide information to the Department of Health and equivalent Departments within Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and persons providing services to those departments to enable them to carry out the functions specified in the Tax Credits Bill. Information will be provided to assist them in identifying families on low income who are entitled to free access to certain health services.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlay the decision to transfer the functions of the Department for Work and Pensions in respect of child benefit and guardian's allowance to the Treasury under clause 45 of the Tax Credits Bill. [35185]

Dawn Primarolo: The Prime Minister announced in June last year the transfer to the Treasury and Inland Revenue of responsibility for child benefit and guardian's allowance, after careful consideration of the best way to administer support for children when the new tax credit for families with children is introduced.

We believe that parents will get the best service if a single organisation administers child benefit and guardian's allowance alongside the child tax credit. The Social Security Select Committee supported this view in their second report on the integrated child credit published on 22 March 2001

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of paragraph 2 of Schedule 4 of the Tax Credits Bill (as amended) on the amount of overpaid child benefit and guardian's allowance which is recovered. [35169]

Dawn Primarolo: The power to recover overpayments of child benefit by deduction from other benefits is used in only a small minority of cases. It is estimated that removing this power will have a minimal effect on recoveries of overpaid child benefit.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effects of the provisions of *(a)* Clause 52 and *(b)* Clause 53 of the Tax Credits Bill on the number of persons receiving child benefit. [35168]

Dawn Primarolo: The current estimate is that the numbers affected by these provisions will be minimal.

The purpose of these changes is to make some minor adjustments to the rules on entitlement to child benefit, in order to align the rules with those proposed for child tax credit.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to consult *(a)* employers and *(b)* other interested parties on the issuing of notices by the Board of the Inland Revenue under Clause 42 of the Tax Credits Bill (as amended). [35172]

Dawn Primarolo: Informal consultation with employers and other groups is continuing on a range of points relating to the introduction of the new tax credits, including the issue of notices by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he expects the provisions of Schedule 5 of the Tax Credits Bill to be used in tackling fraud and non-compliance. [35175]

Dawn Primarolo: Yes. Schedule 5 to the Bill enables information provided to, or by, the Inland Revenue to be used to provide a joined-up service to claimants, and to help tackle fraud and non-compliance.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effects of the transfer of the functions of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions under Section 80 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 to him as a result of subsection (1)(c) of Clause 45 of the Tax Credits Bill. [35171]

Dawn Primarolo: This provision, part of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, provides the Secretary of State with the power to make regulations to offset payments akin to child benefit paid in another member state against child benefit paid for the same child in the UK. The power under the Act is not currently exercised. In common with the other functions relating to policy on entitlement to child benefit, the tax credits Bill transfers the power, which relates solely to child benefit, to the Treasury.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance he plans to give to the Board of the Inland Revenue or any person providing services to it about the use and disclosure of information under the provisions of paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 5 of the Tax Credits Bill. [35176]

Dawn Primarolo: Staff responsible for pooling information under these provisions will have clear instructions and adequate training to ensure that such pooling is within the scope of the provisions, and meets the twin objectives of providing a joined-up service to customers and countering non-compliance.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many staff he expects to be employed by the Treasury in order to discharge the functions transferred to it under Clause 45 of the Tax Credits Bill;

and how many staff he expects to be transferred to the Treasury from *(a)* the Department for Work and Pensions and *(b)* the Northern Ireland Office as a result of Clause 45; [35170]

(2) how many staff he expects to be employed by the Inland Revenue in order to discharge the functions conferred on it by Clause 46 of the Tax Credits Bill; and how many staff he expects to be transferred to the Inland Revenue from *(a)* the Child Benefit Centre, *(b)* the Department for Work and Pensions and *(c)* the Northern Ireland Office as a result of this provision. [35184]

Dawn Primarolo: Currently around 2,200 staff in the Department for Work and Pensions, Child Benefit Centre in Great Britain and 150 staff in the Department for Social Development, Child Benefit Office in Northern Ireland work on the administration of child benefit. To ensure that their expertise is not lost on the transfer of responsibilities, these staff will move to the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Inland Revenue has for training those who will discharge the appellate functions transferred to it under the provisions of Clause 46 of the Tax Credits Bill. [35182]

Dawn Primarolo: The Tax Credits Bill transfers responsibility for the administration of child benefit to the Board of Inland Revenue. However, child benefit will remain a social security benefit and any appeals relating to child benefit decisions will continue to be heard under the existing arrangements—in the first instance, by the Appeals Service.

The Government will, of course, ensure that members of appeal tribunals continue to receive training to allow them to discharge their responsibilities appropriately.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to make regulations under Clause 54 of the Tax Credits Bill in relation to the carrying out of functions relating to tax credit, child benefit and guardian's allowance by job centre staff other than those in a Jobcentre Plus. [35166]

Dawn Primarolo: My officials are working closely with those in the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Social Development in Northern Ireland to ensure that any regulations to be made under clause 54 of the Tax Credits Bill will allow all appropriate staff, regardless of the administrative framework within which they work, to carry out specified functions relating to tax credits, child benefit and guardian's allowance.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the IT systems of *(a)* the Inland Revenue, *(b)* the Department for Work and Pensions and *(c)* the Northern Ireland Office concerned in the use of information under the provisions of Schedule 5 of the Tax Credits Bill. [35174]

Dawn Primarolo: The relevant Departments are already working to ensure that information can be exchanged as necessary between their respective IT systems.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to keep a record of persons falling within the provisions of sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 10 of Schedule 5 of the Tax Credits Bill who may be supplied with information relating to tax credits, child benefit or guardian's allowance. [35178]

Dawn Primarolo: The provisions of sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 10 of Schedule 5 will allow the Inland Revenue to provide information held in relation to child benefit to the Department for Education and Skills, and persons providing services to that Department, to enable them to carry out the functions specified in the Bill. This will enable the new 'Connexions Service' to identify and assist young people who need help in finding alternative work, education or training.

The provision replicates a power provided in the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to keep a record of persons providing services to the Inland Revenue in connection with the provision of tax credits who fall within the provisions of paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 5 of the Tax Credits Bill; and if he plans to make the record publicly available. [35180]

Dawn Primarolo: The provisions about persons providing services to the Inland Revenue enable the Inland Revenue's IT partners to pool information for Inland Revenue purposes in the same way as that information could be pooled if it was held directly by the Inland Revenue itself. Information about major companies providing services to the Inland Revenue, such as its IT partners, is already publicly available.

NIRS2

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent so far on rectifying the problems with the NIRS2 computer system, broken down by year. [35286]

Dawn Primarolo: Payments for the NIRS2 computer system have been made in accordance with the contract. This includes any reduction attributable to service failure. No additional charges have been incurred for rectifying problems with NIRS2.

Share Option Taxation

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the changes made to the taxation of share options since 1 May 1997. [32927]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Employee share schemes are at the centre of the Government's productivity and enterprise agenda. Since 1 May 1997 we have made the following changes to encourage greater use of share schemes and to ensure flexibility and fairness in the tax treatment of employee share options.

Finance Act 1998: extension of the definition of "long options" from seven to 10 years.

6 April 1999: alignment of national insurance treatment of share options with the PAYE rules. The Social Security Act 1998 introduced an amendment to the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992.

Finance Act 2000: introduction of Enterprise Management Incentives to help small companies recruit and retain the staff they need to grow.

28 July 2000: introduction of a concession to allow employers to agree with their employee option holders that the latter would bear the whole or part of the employer's national insurance charge on exercise of their options. The Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000.

Finance Act 2001: improvements to the Enterprise Management Incentives.

From 11 May 2001: a further concession to allow companies which had granted options between April 1999 and May 2000 to cap their NIC liabilities. The Social Security Contributions (Share Options) Act 2001.

1 January 2002: Statutory Instrument 3799/2001 doubled the gross asset test for companies to qualify for Enterprise Management Incentives from £15 million to £30 million.

Millionaires

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of millionaires in the UK in each year since 1990. [34569]

Dawn Primarolo: The available information is as follows:

Number of UK millionaires

	Thousand
1995	80
1996	100
1997	140
1998	[1]160
1999	[1]180

[1] Provisional

The figures are based on marketable wealth and include all assets but exclude occupational and state pension rights.

Means-tested Benefits

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of people in receipt of a means-tested benefit also paid tax in each of the last six years. [20455]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is in the table.

Proportion of people in receipt of a means-tested benefit who also paid tax

Year	*Percentage*
1995–96	31
1996–97	32
1997–98	28
1998–99	28
1999–2000	24

Notes:

1. These estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors for region, council tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and variability because of non-respondents.
2. The means tested benefits included in the table are income support, jobseeker's allowance (income based), housing benefit, council tax benefit, family credit (working families tax credit from October 1999), and disability working allowance (disabled persons tax credit from October 1999).
3. Information is not yet available for 2000–01.

Source:

Family Resources Survey

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Train Routes (London)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action is being taken to encourage local authorities in partnership with business operators and Transport for London to develop proposals for new train routes. [27706]

Mr. Jamieson: Responsibility for developing proposals for new train routes rests with the Strategic Rail Authority and Transport for London. Local authorities, business operators and other interests are consulted in that process.

Bus and Rail Integration

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to allow bus companies to co-ordinate their services to improve integration of bus services with rail services. [28130]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* A number of operators already provide co-ordinated bus services that connect with rail services, and offer through tickets to cover the combined bus and rail journey. This is something that we wish to encourage and I understand from the Office of Fair Trading that there is no reason under competition legislation why a bus operator should not schedule its services so as to co-ordinate with train timings.

The Government are committed to delivering better integration between different modes of transport in order to ensure long-term improvements for the travelling public. We expect to see further progress towards integration between modes as a result of the increased investment provided under our 10-year plan for transport.

Central Railway

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the Strategic Rail Authority's conclusions of its high-level review of the Central Railway Company's proposals. [29238]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Strategic Rail Authority's view is currently being considered by Ministers.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the people working on the development of a company limited by guarantee to bid for Railtrack; [30234]

(2) what professional advisers have been recruited to advise the team developing the company limited by guarantee to bid for Railtrack; and on what terms. [30233]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is funding the bid costs of CLG team and their advisers. These include Ian McAllister, Adrian Montague and Iain Coucher, UBS Warburg, Linklaters and Alliance, Jarvis Rail and Arup. The bid team will draw on other expertise and advice as it deems necessary.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on compensation for Railtrack shareholders, indicating how much compensation will be paid and when payment will be made. [34430]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 30 January 2002 to the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), *Official Report*, columns 320–21W. The timing of any payment would form part of the arrangements for ending administration.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether it is his policy that Railtrack and its successor will have to operate within existing budgets established for Control Period 2. [35797]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 861W.

Plymouth-London Rail Service

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority about making a three-hour journey time between Plymouth and London a strategic objective within the 10-year plan. [30710]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan sets out how it will deliver the key rail targets as set out in the Government's 10-year plan. Schemes that will benefit the south-west can be found on the SRA website at www.sra.gov.uk.

Transport Statistics (Deaths)

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the statistics for death for each mode of transport for *(a)* the EU and *(b)* this country measured by (i) distance covered and (ii) time spent travelling (A) now, (B) five years ago and (C) 10 years ago. [32073]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not readily available in the form requested. Some information is available on fatality rates per passenger kilometre. Figures for GB are published in the 'Transport Statistics Great Britain' series. Figures for the EU are published in the 'EU Energy and Transport Figures, Statistical Pocketbook' series. However different definitions and methodologies may mean that they are not directly comparable.

Strategic Rail Authority

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 863W, on the Strategic Rail Authority, how much money has been allocated in total; and on what basis it will be allocated and in which financial year. [31536]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answers to him on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 323–24W and 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 729W.

The Strategic Rail Authority has discretion, within its total funding provision, to allocate funds to mitigate commercial risk. The total funds used for that purpose will not be known until individual negotiations on special purpose vehicles are concluded.

Coastguard Helicopters

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many helicopters are based at each coastguard station south of a line from the Wash to Liverpool Bay; and what the target response times are for coastguard helicopters. [31802]

Mr. Jamieson: Declared Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopters are strategically located around the United Kingdom according to coverage requirements; they are not based at coastguard stations although some are based close to them. South of a line from the Wash to Liverpool Bay, SAR helicopters are based at:

Base		*Hours standby*
Wattisham, Suffolk	MOD—RAF	24
Lee on Solent, Hampshire	MCA—HMCG	24
Portland, Dorset	MCA—HMCG	[1]12
Culdrose, Cornwall	MOD—RN	24
Chivenor, Devon	MOD—RAF	24
Valley, North Wales	MOD—RAF	24

[1] 0900–2100 standby

At each base there is a primary helicopter and crew prepared for emergency response. In addition, at RAF SAR helicopter units, when available, a second aircraft and crew maintains a one-hour standby from 0800 to Evening Civil Twilight or 1800, whichever is the later, but not later than 2200 local time.

The criteria for SAR helicopter coverage require that a SAR helicopter should take off as quickly and safely as possible, normally within 15 minutes by day and 45 minutes by night, from receiving notification of the incident by the appropriate Rescue Co-ordination Centre. SAR helicopters should be capable of reaching all very high and high risk areas and 75 per cent. of all medium risk areas within the UK Search and Rescue Region within 60 minutes of take-off.

London Underground

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the meetings he has had in the last 10 months with the Health and Safety Executive to discuss safety on the London underground. [32170]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers and officials meet the Health and Safety Executive on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues including safety on the London underground.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the PPP contracts as drafted will allow lowering of the current standards of disabled access being provided by London Underground Ltd. when carrying out new building and refurbishments. [33784]

Mr. Jamieson: The PPP contracts will require the infrastructure companies to comply with all London Underground standards, including for disabled access, when carrying out new building and refurbishments. The PPP will result in real improvements to the accessibility of the Underground.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions why the new draft public-private partnership contracts grant the infrastructure companies the right to challenge London Underground Ltd.'s implementation of its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Part 3, access to goods and services. [33783]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground and the Government remain committed to improving accessibility of the Underground and the modernisation plans will result in real improvements. The contracts require the infrastructure companies to comply with the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations and to carry out other works specified by London Underground to improve accessibility. London Underground can also require the companies to carry out additional improvements, which could have significant cost implications.

The contract therefore provides for London Underground and infrastructure companies to agree on such plans. In the event of disagreement, London Underground can require the work to be done unless the infrastructure company can show that no reasonable person could interpret the requirements of the DDA in the way proposed by London Underground.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on revenue to London Underground of delay in implementing the proposed public-private partnership; and if he will make a statement. [34043]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground does not believe that the timing of the implementation of the public-private partnership has had any effect on revenues.

Road Schemes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the written answer of 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 578W, if he will list *(a)* road schemes included in the first full local transport plans which have an element of private capital, *(b)* road schemes included in the first annual progress reports which have an element of private capital and *(c)* roads in the targeted programme of improvements which has an element of private capital. [32911]

Mr. Jamieson: None of the schemes in the three categories listed currently has an element of private capital.

Motorway Accidents

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many motorway accidents involving heavy goods vehicles there were in each of the last five years; and how many of such accidents involved foreign-owned and operated vehicles. [33268]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of personal injury motorway accidents involving heavy goods vehicles is as follows.

Injury road accidents on motorways[1] involving HGVs[2]

Year	Number
1996	1,796
1997	2,000
1998	2,109
1999	2,342
2000	2,416

[1] Includes motorway standard A roads

[2] Goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes

Reliable information on the number of accident involving foreign heavy goods vehicles is not available.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for the provision of additional tracks between Borough Market Junction and Metropolitan Junction on the channel tunnel route from Charing Cross to Orpington; and what is the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works. [32994]

Mr. Byers: The Thameslink 2000 project includes the provision of two additional tracks between Borough Market and Metropolitan Junction thus relieving the two track bottleneck over the Borough Market viaduct.

Railtrack have applied for powers under the Transport and Works Act 1992 to carry out this project and the inspector's report is currently under consideration. Until I have taken my decision on that application it would be inappropriate for me to comment on likely future start and completion dates.

However, Railtrack estimate that the project would take about five years to complete.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33232]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* There is no central register kept of all television purchases. The Department and its agencies have purchased 39 analogue televisions and six digital televisions over the last 24 months.

There is no central guidance on the purchase of televisions; it is for the purchaser to adhere to central purchasing procedures and achieving best value.

National Rail Summit

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason no National Rail Summit took place in 2001; and when the next National Rail Summit is due to take place. [33926]

Mr. Jamieson: Two summits were held in 1999 and 2000 but there was never any intention to hold them on an annual basis. There are no current plans to hold further National Rail Summits.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34215]

Dr. Whitehead: The following information has been extracted from records held centrally.

	Department		*Agencies*		*NDPBs*	
Item	*Number*	*Value (£)*	*Number*	*Value (£)*	*Number*	*Value (£)*
1998–99						
Audio visual equipment	—	—	1	50	—	—
Other equipment	—	—	1	40	—	—
Protective clothing	—	—	1	40	—	—
1999–2000						
Mobile telephones	—	—	1	50	—	—
Pager	—	—	1	50	—	—
Other equipment	—	—	1	28	4	100
2000–01						
Laptop computer	—	—	—	—	1	25
Mobile telephones	—	—	*19	0	—	—
Pager	—	—	11	545	—	—
2001–02						
Mobile telephones	1	50	*21	0	—	—
Audio visual equipment	—	—	1	35	—	—

Note:

Items have been valued at cost, current worth or replacement cost depending on the circumstances of the individual case. Recoveries from perpetrators or others, such as insurance claims, have been netted off. For example the losses marked '*' have been replaced by the contractor at no cost to the agency.

City of York Council

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money the Government have contributed to City of York council in cash terms in each year since it was created as a unitary authority; and how much the increase was each year in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms. [34681]

Dr. Whitehead: York unitary authority have reported the following Government funding.

Revenue Grants paid into General Fund Revenue Account (GFRA) and Capital Grants

£000

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*Outturn 1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*Budget 2001–02*
Revenue Support Grant	36,598	38,597	39,274	39,478	36,900	40,309
Redistributed Non-domestic Rates	41,981	39,451	41,267	44,995	51,078	50,021
Specific grants inside AEF	3,305	3,128	4,113	6,185	10,977	13,631
Revenue Grants paid into GFRA[1]	81,884	81,176	84,654	90,658	98,955	103,961
Capital Grants[2]	2,461	1,768	1,694	1,881	2,974	3,149
Government contribution	84,345	82,944	86,348	92,539	101,929	107,110
Increase on previous year (cash terms)	—	−1,401	3,404	6,191	9,390	5,181
Increase on previous year (real terms)*	—	−3,882	1,056	4,010	7,623	2,569

* Real terms calculated using the GDP deflator.

Sources:

[1] 1996–97 to 2000–01 Revenue summary returns. 2001–02 GFRA budget estimates return.

[2] 1996–97 to 2000–01 Capital outturn returns. 2001–02 Capital estimate returns.

Passenger Rail Travel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the Government's target for growth in passenger rail travel is predicated on a growth in off-peak travel. [34613]

Mr. Jamieson: The assumptions underpinning the targets in "Transport 2010: The Ten Year Plan" are set out in the accompanying document "Transport 2010: The Background Analysis", copies of which are available in the Library and on my Department's website, www.dtlr.gov.uk.

E-democracy

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those local authorities who have undertaken interactive e-democracy projects. [34750]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not held centrally. Results of the Best Value Performance Indicator 157 to be published later this year will give an indication of the percentage of council information available online as at 1 April 2002.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the e-Envoy on electronic democracy. [34751]

Dr. Whitehead: We are working jointly with the Office of the e-Envoy and others to develop policy on e-democracy, including e-voting, and intend to consult on our wide-ranging proposals later this year.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of e-democracy projects undertaken in *(a)* the UK Parliament, *(b)* other parliaments and *(c)* local authorities; and if he will list them. [34748]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department, with the Office of the e-Envoy and others, are developing e-democracy in the United Kingdom. The Government intend to consult on their wide-ranging proposals later this year. In drawing up these proposals, we are considering lessons to be learned from the best examples of e-democracy projects that have taken place in the UK Parliament, other parliaments and in local authorities, which include the following:

UK Parliament

The All Party Domestic Violence Group on-line consultation (Womenspeak).

The Social Security Select Committee inquiry into tax credits.

Elected representatives websites.

Other Parliaments

The Scottish Parliament's on-line petitions and discussion groups.

The National Assembly for Wales' on-line consultation for ICT strategy.

The European Parliament—on-line petitions and citizen's mailbox.

The Aboriginal Canada website.

Dutch Parliament—e-voting.

US Presidential elections 2000—remote internet voting.

Elected representatives websites.

Local authorities

Young Camden website.

Young Citizen's project—Lewisham.

Online referenda in Bristol and Croydon and other voting pilots.

The Kalix Radslag deliberation (Sweden)—on-line consultation and discussion.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with local authorities in respect of e-democracy projects. [34749]

Dr. Whitehead: As we announced to the House on 5 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 829–32W, in consultation with the Office of the e-Envoy, the Electoral Commission and the Local Government Association, we have approved 30 local authorities to run electoral modernisation pilot schemes in the May 2002 local and mayoral elections. The Electoral Commission will be providing support and advice to pilot authorities throughout the pilot programme.

My Department liaised closely with those authorities in the consideration of their applications and this process will continue in order to draw up the necessary parliamentary orders which need to be in place by 25 March 2002.

E-Democracy

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what measure he intends to take to ensure that a gender perspective is taken into account in introducing e-democracy; [34747]

(2) what measures he is taking to ensure that women are consulted in the *(a)* formulation and *(b)* content of the Government's e-democrary policy.

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Following the creation of the Cabinet Committee on e-democracy, policy proposals on how to strengthen the democratic process through the use of the internet and other electronic means are being developed. The policy proposals will be subject to a wide public consultation later this year, plans for which are currently being prepared.

Access and diversity issues will be looked at as part of the consultation's examination of inclusion in the democratic process and how e-democracy can help to address these issues. The development of e-democracy will be explored with individuals and groups, including women's groups. Women will be encouraged to respond to the consultation as a whole, and their contributions will be taken into account in the final policy.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which civilian airports in the UK service large aircraft with more than four flights in an hour. [34631]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no standard definition of a large aircraft. Four flights an hour corresponds approximately to 25,000 flights annually. The latest available figures are for the year to end October 2001. Those UK airports at which there were more than 25,000 flights[1] in this period are as follows:

[1] Includes all civilian scheduled and charter air transport movements (except air taxis) by UK and foreign airlines. Flights such as positioning, training, private, corporate and military are excluded.

Aberdeen

Belfast City

Belfast International

Birmingham

Bristol

East Midlands

Edinburgh
Gatwick
Glasgow
Heathrow
Leeds/Bradford
Liverpool
London City
Luton
Manchester
Newcastle
Southampton
Stansted.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many complaints about aircraft noise his Department received in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* each of the previous four years, broken down by airport or geographical area. [35186]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is not held comprehensively in the form requested and to collect it exactly as specified would entail disproportionate cost. Letters from the public (and telephone calls when a written response was provided) about aircraft noise matters generally, excluding responses to consultations and co-ordinated campaigns, were received in each year as follows:

Airport	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Heathrow	146	188	159	100	221
Gatwick	16	17	15	15	11
Stansted	87	102	70	243	53
Birmingham	10	6	6	4	2
Bournemouth	6	21	6	8	3
Bristol Lulsgate	1	—	—	1	7
East Midlands	—	1	2	27	19
Edinburgh	1	1	1		1
Glasgow	1	—	—	—	—
Liverpool	3	4	—	—	5
London City	1	6	—	—	3
Luton	5	16	32	16	4
Manchester	3	2	2	2	9
Manston	—	1	51	7	3
Oxford	5	12	2	6	5
Plymouth	—	2	—	—	1
Others	271	182	104	107	89

Most of these letters, e-mails and telephone calls were about specific aspects of Government policy, the airport's noise controls, or both. Many complaints about noise matters are, however, dealt with by each individual airport. Some airports regularly publish their own summary statistics of complaints or inquiries.

Travellers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives on the welfare considerations to be considered in the application for and enforcement of a possession order by a local authority to evict travellers from unauthorised occupation of public parks and open spaces. [34898]

Ms Keeble: Guidance is included in the Good Practice Guide on Managing Unauthorised Camping published in 1998. A copy of the Guidance is available in the Library of the House.

As the hon. Member will know, my Department in conjunction with the Home Office are currently revising the 1998 Guidance. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1188W.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings Ministers of his Department have had with members or officials of South Ribble borough council since June 2001. [35012]

Dr. Whitehead: I met members and officials from South Ribble borough council on 26 June 2001. Since then, there have been no meetings between DTLR Ministers and officials and members from South Ribble borough council.

Global Crossing

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what function has been played within the railway industry by Global Crossing; [34939]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* Ernst and Young, *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority and *(c)* the HSE on the potential impact on the railway industry of the collapse of Global Crossing; [34943]

(3) what effect the collapse of Global Crossing *(a)* has had and *(b)* is likely to have upon the rail network; and what steps his Department (i) has taken and (ii) will be taking in response to its collapse; [34942]

(4) what discussions *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority have had since 1997 with (i) Railtrack and (ii) the Rail Administrators regarding the work of (A) Racal Telecom and (B) Global Crossing within the railway industry; [34947]

(5) what steps the *(a)* SRA, *(b)* HSE and *(c)* Railway Administrators (i) have taken and (ii) will be taking in response to the collapse of Global Crossing. [34941]

Mr. Jamieson: Global Crossing supplies telecom and associated services to the UK rail industry. I understand that the company have assured their European customers that service provision will be unaffected while it seeks to re-structure its finances in the United States.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) on what dates discussions took place between the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry between May 1997 and December 1999 regarding the sale of Racal Telecom to Global Crossing; [35000]

(2) what representations he has received from *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* the (Shadow) Strategic Rail Authority, *(c)* the Health and Safety Executive, *(d)* Racal Telecom, *(e)* Global Crossing, *(f)* the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions and *(g)* the Competition Commission between May 1997 and December 1999 regarding the sale of Racal Telecom to Global Crossing; [34970]

(3) on what dates discussions took place between the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions between May 1997 and December 1999 regarding the sale of Racal Telecom to Global Crossing; [34972]

(4) on what dates discussions took place between the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions and his Department and *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* the (Shadow) Strategic Rail Authority, *(c)* the Health and Safety Executive, *(d)* Racal Telecom, *(e)* Global Crossing and *(f)* the Competition Commission between May 1997 and December 1999 regarding the sale of Racal Telecom to Global Crossing; [34971]

(5) on what dates discussions took place between the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and his Department and *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* the (Shadow) Strategic Rail Authority, *(c)* the Health and Safety Executive, *(d)* Racal Telecom and *(e)* Global Crossing between May 1997 and December 1999 regarding the sale of Racal Telecom to Global Crossing; [35002]

(6) what representations were received from *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* the (Shadow) Strategic Rail Authority, *(c)* the Health and Safety Executive, *(d)* Racal Telecom, *(e)* Global Crossing and *(f)* the Department of Trade and Industry between May 1997 and December 1999 regarding the sale of Racal Telecom to Global Crossing; [35001]

(7) what assessment was made by his Department of the impact of the sale of Racal Telecom to Global Crossing in November 1999 on its delivery of functions related to the railway, with specific reference to *(a)* economic aspects and *(b)* safety critical functions. [34937]

Mr. Jamieson: The sale of Racal Telecom to Global Crossing was a commercial matter for the two private companies concerned, not my Department.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will outline the safety critical functions within the railway industry for which Global Crossing has had responsibility; [34969]

(2) what *(a)* safety warnings, *(b)* enforcement notices and *(c)* prosecutions have been placed upon Global Crossing (formerly Racal Telecom) by the Health and Safety Executive regarding safety offences related to the railways between (i) May 1997 and October 1999 and (ii) November 1999 and January 2002; [34946]

(3) what timetable for safety work on the railways has been agreed between Racal Telecom and *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* the HSE and *(c)* his Department since December 1995; [34945]

(4) if he will list the requirements contained in the contract Global Crossing has had with Railtrack with regard to *(a)* its safety function, *(b)* a timetable for the improvement of safety critical functions and *(c)* other functions related to the running of the railway network; [34968]

(5) what the timetable is for the implementation of safety critical improvements agreed by Racal Telecom since December 1995; and what progress has been made towards these targets. [34940]

Mr. Jamieson: Racal Telecom (now Global Crossing) have a contractual arrangement with Railtrack, which is a commercial matter between the companies. There are no agreements between Racal Telecom/Global Crossing and either the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or my Department. Global Crossing supplies telecom and associated services to the British rail industry. Railtrack as infrastructure manager retains overall responsibility for safety. HSE advise that there have been no prosecutions against Racal Telecom or Global Crossing since 1 April 1999, or enforcement notices since 1 April 2001. HSE data from before this date are not available without incurring disproportionate cost.

Railway Assets

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been undertaken by his Department of the valuation of railway assets within British Rail Telecommunications plc sold by the Government to Racal Telecom in December 1995. [34944]

Mr. Jamieson: British Rail Telecommunications Ltd. was sold by the British Railways Board for £132.75 million. My Department has made no such assessment since the sale.

Staff Retention

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60; and in respect of how many his Department and agencies assume responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [34787]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The number of staff who left the service of this Department in the year ended 31 March 2001 is 318: 277 left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60: and DTLR(C) have assumed responsibility for making payments until retirement age (60) for nine ex-members of staff, who left during the financial year 2000–01.

Parallel information on the Department's executive agencies is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to ring-fence the funding for the Housing Corporation's rural programme. [35058]

Ms Keeble: We have no plans to do so. We have doubled the target for the number of dwellings which the Housing Corporation's rural programme will deliver in small rural settlements (those with a population of 3,000 or less), from 800 approvals in 2000–01 to 1,600 a year by 2003–04.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional funding he intends to provide to support the building of affordable housing on brownfield sites *(a)* in England and *(b)* in rural areas. [35057]

Ms Keeble: We are increasing investment in affordable housing in England through the Housing Corporation to over £1.2 billion by 2003–04, almost double the level in 2000–01. The Corporation has a target to deliver 65 per cent. of this housing in regeneration areas.

Any additional funding to support the building of affordable housing in England will be considered as part of the Spending Review 2002.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35934]

Dr. Whitehead: The number of alleged cases identified as work related stress over the last three years in my Department are:

	Number
1998–99	13
1999–2000	20
2000–01	39

There have been two cases, which were the subject of a stress-related claim against the Department; both are now closed, as the cases were unproven. No compensation has been paid to date for claims of work related stress. The Department does not have details of the days lost and associated cost for work related stress absence.

The Department has a Stress at Work policy in place, which is supported by practical guidance issued to all staff on dealing with the issue. DTLR is committed to meeting the targets for reducing the number of working days lost due to work related injuries and ill health arising from the Government's Revitalising Health and Safety initiative.

The reply does not include the Department's agencies.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35351]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35882]

Dr. Whitehead: There are currently 33 members of DTLR(C) staff (out of 3,532 as at 1 January 2002) who have signed agreements to disapply the 48 hour per week working hours limit.

Officials are currently involved in assessing the effect of the Working Time Regulations on my Department's staff. In addition, my Department is carrying out a staff survey, part of which focuses on work loads/stress etc. The results from these two surveys will inform the discussion on any action that may be appropriate.

The reply does not include the Department's agencies.

Cyclists (Safety)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the requirements for cyclists to *(a)* use lights after dark and *(b)* wear cycling helmets. [35295]

Mr. Jamieson: The Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 require any pedal cycle used on the roads between sunset and sunrise to have a front lamp, a rear lamp and a red rear reflector. The lamps must be lit and unobscured. There is no legal requirement for cyclists to wear a cycle helmet. However the Highway Code advises cyclists wear a cycle helmet.

Passenger Transport Authorities

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the commitment required by members of passenger transport authorities in terms of frequency of attendance and hours. [35312]

Ms Keeble: It is up to Passenger Transport Authority members to determine the frequency of their meetings and the consequent time commitment required.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on recommended methods of selection of local councillors to sit on Passenger Transport Authorities. [35311]

Ms Keeble: Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs) are composed of councillors from districts within the PTA area. The members of each council nominate representatives from among their number.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the Passenger Transport Authorities' performance in consulting passengers and their representatives about their plans. [35313]

Ms Keeble: Passenger Transport Authorities are required by the Transport Act 2000 to prepare, in conjunction with the relevant Metropolitan district councils, a joint local transport plan (LTP) for their area.

Our guidance to authorities on LTPs makes clear the importance of participation with both the local community and key stakeholders in the development of the objectives and strategies for the LTP. Our guidance on LTP Annual Progress Reports (APRs) also refers to the need for on-going consultation during the implementation of the LTP. Evidence of authorities' efforts in this respect forms part of our consideration of the overall quality of LTPs and APRs.

Railway Industry (State Aid)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he has received a response from the European Commission on the Railtrack State Aid application; and if he will make a statement. [35799]

Mr. Jamieson: The European Commission announced on 13 February that State Aid clearance has been given for Government to make loans or to guarantee commercial loans made to Railtrack plc in administration.

The Government intend to notify Railtrack plc that it should use reasonable endeavours to secure commercial banking facilities, guaranteed by the Secretary of State, to refinance the outstanding advances made under the loan facility, together with interest, thereby removing the direct call on taxpayers' money.

Departmental Resources and Initiatives (Surrey)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the financial resources and initiatives sponsored by his Department in the last 12 months for Surrey which are additional to Government SSA grants. [35804]

Dr. Whitehead: Government Grant Support to Surrey county council for Revenue Expenditure in addition to General Grants distributed by formula in 2001–02 consists of:

	£
Rural Bus Subsidy Grant	779,797
Rural Bus Challenge	150,000
Supporting People Implementation Grant	354,881

HGV Accidents

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road traffic accidents in England and Wales involved a heavy goods vehicle in each year since 1995. [35617]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of injury accidents in England and Wales involving goods vehicles of over 3.5 tonnes maximum permissible gross vehicle weight is shown as follows:

	Number
1995	11,714
1996	11,684
1997	12,333
1998	12,484
1999	13,053
2000	13,046

Figures for 2001 are not yet available and no information is available regarding damage only accidents involving heavy goods vehicles.

Hospitality Events

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list those functions, engagements and events which he, his Ministers, officials and advisers have attended which have been wholly or partly sponsored, funded, and promoted by the British Airports Authority since 1997; [35657]

(2) if he will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35699]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is not available in the form requested.

Archaeological Services

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the level of expenditure on archaeological services by local authorities in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01. [35664]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not available centrally.

Ports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect the proposed Directive on Market Access to Port Services would have upon the monopoly that UK port owners hold upon pilotage in their ports. [35869]

Mr. Jamieson: Our aim in relation to pilotage provisions in the proposed Directive is to preserve the integrated approach to safety management promoted by the Port Marine Safety Code. There is nothing in the proposed text that is inconsistent with the Code or the present regulatory functions of competent harbour authorities under the Pilotage Act 1987.

Under the Commission's proposals these authorities may in certain circumstances be required to include a tendering process in deciding what contractual arrangements are appropriate for the provision of the pilotage service. Pilots' organisations have told us that they oppose introducing the principle of competition into pilotage, and they support the European Parliament's proposal to exclude pilotage from the Directive.

Park Homes

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce legislation to improve conditions for park home owners. [35553]

Ms Keeble: Proposals for legislation to amend the control regime for park homes were included in the recommendations of the Park Homes Working Party. Following consultation, we issued our response to the Working Party's report on 29 November last year, and placed copies of it in the Library of the House. This gives a detailed response to each of the Working Party's recommendations and indicates how we intend to take them forward.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with the National Park Homes Campaign Group. [35554]

Ms Keeble: We have had no discussions with the National Park Homes Campaign Group.

Regeneration

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce a scheme to accredit the skills of the community involved in regeneration projects. [35552]

Ms Keeble: We are committed to ensuring that the skills of community residents involved in neighbourhood renewal work are accredited and recognised. The Learning and Development Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, to be published in spring 2002, will consider how best to achieve this as part of its work to ensure that everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal has the skills, knowledge and support they need to help them succeed.

Teenagers

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has held with local authorities with regard to improving facilities for teenagers. [35618]

Dr. Whitehead: Regarding English local authorities, Ministers and officials in DTLR and other Departments have frequent discussions with local authorities about the provision of services to their residents, including teenagers and other children.

Community Strategies

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason he has made it a statutory duty for county councils to prepare community strategies. [35425]

Ms Keeble: The duty in section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000 was introduced to confer on all principal councils (including county councils, district councils and unitary authorities) the statutory authority to develop strategies which promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom. This measure forms part of the Government's wider initiative to modernise local government.

Local Planning

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of removing the link between county councils and land use planning and *(a)* public service agreements, *(b)* local transport plans, *(c)* education development plans, *(d)* social services plans, *(e)* library plans, *(f)* waste management strategies and *(g)* community safety. [35429]

Ms Keeble: The Government do not propose to remove the link between county councils and land use planning. Partly because of the functions referred to by the hon. Member, the Planning Green Paper seeks views on the role that county councils can continue to play in the preparation of planning strategies at the regional and sub-regional level, and in assisting district councils with the preparation of Local Development Frameworks.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many tiers there are in the planning system and how many are proposed in the Green Paper. [35427]

Ms Keeble: Planning Guidance is produced at the national and regional level. In two-tier local authority areas plans are prepared at county level (structure plans) and by district authorities (local plans). In single-tier areas unitary authorities either produce a plan which incorporates both county and district plan functions (unitary development plans) or prepare a joint structure plan and a local plan.

Under our proposals set out in the Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change", we propose to simplify the existing arrangements by abolishing the structure plan tier of plans. They will be replaced, together with unitary development and local plans, by a new single level of plan called a Local Development Framework to be prepared by district and unitary authorities.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on how the Green Paper's proposals on planning will improve integration with other strategies and plans. [35428]

Ms Keeble: The Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" sets out proposals for better integrated and more effective planning at both strategic and local levels. The new statutory Regional Spatial Strategy will take full account of the spatial planning aspects of other relevant regional strategies and provide the longer term planning framework for Regional Development Agencies and other regional stakeholders.

At the local level local authorities are already required to produce community strategies to provide an integrated approach to the improvement of the economic, social and environmental well being of their areas.

The core policies of the proposed Local Development Framework will help deliver the land use and development aspects of the Community Strategy, with action plans integrated with other initiatives, such as those for regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) for what reason the Green Paper on planning proposes county councils have no statutory role in planning; and what role county councils will have in promoting sustainable development; [35426]

(2) for what reason the Planning Green Paper states that boundary overlaps make county level planning no longer appropriate. [35430]

Ms Keeble: The Green Paper recognises the continuing need for strategic planning at regional level and for local planning to be undertaken as close to local communities as possible. It proposes abolition of structure plans but invites comments on whether the counties should have a role in assisting the regional, district and unitary authorities in preparing their plans (para 4.37). We propose that mineral and waste planning should continue to be a county function. In addition, county councils will continue to have responsibilities for other functions which bear upon sustainability such as countryside management and the preparation of local transport plans.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason he proposes to end the county councils' role in the development system. [35592]

Ms Keeble: The Government do not propose to end the county councils' role in the development planning system. We are seeking views on the future planning role of the county councils in addition to their continuing responsibility for minerals and waste planning.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what reasons underlie his proposal to remove from the statutory consultees for planning decisions groups concerned with environmental protection or local interest which do not have a role in health and safety; and by what means he will ensure that the views of local people are taken into account in planning decisions. [35431]

Ms Keeble: We are concerned that the present arrangements for consulting expert bodies on planning and other cases are not working as effectively as they might. The distinction between statutory and non-statutory consultees has become blurred and consultation can often be a source of delay. One option proposed in our consultation paper "Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change" is to clarify the basis of determining whether bodies should be statutory consultees and reduce their number. Decisions about which bodies might in future be statutory consultees will be made in the light of the consultation. The consultation paper also contains a number of proposals to promote better engagement of local communities in shaping the future development of their areas.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action has been taken to identify where the delays in the planning process are; and if he will publish a list of *(a)* the average time taken to decide on planning applications by district, unitary and county councils and *(b)* the average time taken for Ministers to decide on call in decisions in the last 12 months. [35432]

Ms Keeble: The Government have reviewed the planning system and published a Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" which sets out a range of measures and proposals to deliver a faster, simpler, more accessible planning system for business and local communities.

The average time for local authorities to decide planning applications in 2000–01 was 11.7 weeks. Detailed information for each local authority is published in "The Best Value and Audit Commission Performance Indicators Actual Outturn Data 2000–01".

Performance on the issuing of called-in applications is measured as the proportion decided within 13 and 20 weeks of receiving the Inspector's Report. In 2001–02, 61 per cent. of called-in planning applications were decided in 13 weeks and 73 per cent. were decided in 20 weeks.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 913W, on fair trade goods, if he will review and increase the amount of fairly traded goods purchased by her Department during Fair Trade Fortnight. [35921]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department's procurement policy is about the achievement of value for money. The Department does not have a specific policy requiring the purchase of Fair Trade goods. Purchasing Officers are expected to consider each case on its merits with particular regard to the need for any products purchased to represent value for money.

The Department supports the sale of Fair Trade products including tea and coffee and confectionery including chocolate and cereal bars, which have been introduced in the staff restaurants. Declarations have been obtained from the contractor that the products sold are Fair Trade.

Opencast Mining

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to increase protection for communities adversely affected by opencast mining. [35637]

Ms Keeble: Planning policies for Wales are the responsibility of the National Assembly.

Revised and strengthened policy for coal mining in England, including opencast working, was published in March 1999 in Minerals Planning Guidance Note 3. This sets out a policy presumption against the development of coal extraction sites. However, such development can be permitted if the proposal is environmentally acceptable or can be made so through the use of planning conditions or obligations, or, where this is not the case, where there are local or community benefits which clearly outweigh the adverse impacts. This is the means by which any possible adverse effects on communities from opencast mining proposals should be tested, and suitable mitigation measures applied in those cases where, with such action, the development could be made acceptable. In accordance with general planning policies, such measures, in the form of planning conditions or obligations, should be necessary, precise, relevant to planning, enforceable, directly relevant both to the development proposed and the avoidance of the adverse effects they are intended to prevent or reduce, and reasonable in all other respects. The Government consider that, within the normal operation of the planning system, these are matters best assessed by the local communities and local authorities who know the area best, and are most directly affected.

We have no plans to change this policy framework.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and civil service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35829]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The table sets out details of secondments from the private sector into DTLR since its inception in June 2001. I am unable to provide the names of staff seconded to this Department without their written consent.

Secondments into DTLR since June 2001

Identity	*(a) Parent organisation*	*(b) Responsibilities and civil service grades*	*(c) Organisation responsible for paying salary*	*(d) Start and end dates of secondment*
1.	ADFC Ltd.	G7—Local Government	ADFC Ltd.	3 September 2001 to date
2.	Home Group Ltd.	SEO—Urban Policy	Home Group Ltd.	4 February 2002 to date
3..	Accord plc	G7—Local Government	Accord plc	3 September 2001 to date
4.	SERCO Ltd.	G7—Local Government	SERCO Ltd.	11 June 2001 to date
5.	Savage Crangle Partners	AA—Local Government	Savage Crangle Partners	19 October 2001 to date
6.	BT	G7—Neighbourhood Renewal	BT	24 September 2001 to date
7.	PricewaterhouseCooper	G7—Local Government	PricewaterhouseCooper	3 September 2001 to date
8.	Babtie Group	G7—Local Government	Babtie Group	3 September 2001 to date
9.	PEP Ltd.	G7—Neighbourhood Renewal	PEP Ltd.	18 June 2001 to date

Metropolitan and East London Lines

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which *(a)* Metropolitan line and *(b)* East London line stations will be refurbished (i) between 2002 and 2005 and (ii) between 2006 and 2007 and (iii) from 2008; and when it is estimated that the final one will be completed. [35828]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* London Transport's plans for modernisation of the tube are designed to deliver a comprehensive upgrade of the whole network as quickly and efficiently as possible. London Transport is currently consulting the Mayor and Transport for London on the plans following its announcement on 7 February that it is minded to proceed. I expect London Transport to publish detailed information on the station refurbishment programme following that consultation.

Structure Plan (Lincolnshire)

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether there is a structure plan for Lincolnshire; and what the status is of the draft Lincolnshire structure plan. [34974]

Dr. Whitehead: The Lincolnshire structure plan was approved in 1981. Policies on population, housing, settlement, employment and shopping have been amended and the plan period extended to 2000 through Structure Plan Alterations Nos. 1 and 2 in 1991 and 1994.

Lincolnshire county council published a revised Deposit structure plan in January 1998 and progressed through to the adoption phase in December 2000. However, the Secretary of State directed the county council not to adopt the structure plan until he had decided how to proceed following the council's refusal to comply with his direction to modify Policy 4 on Accessibility to include reference to reducing the need to travel in particular by private car to bring the policy into line with national planning policy in PPG13 Transport.

The Secretary of State is currently considering whether to withdraw the direction to modify and allow the council to adopt the structure plan. In the interim the uncontested policies and proposals in the emerging structure plan have considerable weight in the consideration of planning matters in the county.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when he intends to provide an answer to the question from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight of 15 October 2001, Ref 7191; [35521]

(2) when he intends to provide an answer to the question from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight of 15 October 2001, Ref 7190. [35522]

Dr. Whitehead: The questions were not answered because they were withdrawn by the hon. Member on 4 October.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to change the Departmental Expenditure Limit and administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36526]

Mr. Byers: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' Departmental Expenditure Limits for 2001–02 will change as follows.

(a) the DTLR Main Programmes DEL will be increased by £103,081,000 from £12,121,782,000 to £12,224,863,000 and the DTLR administration costs limit will be increased by £3,037,000 from £715,335,000 to £718,372,000 and the DTLR HSE administration costs limit will be increased by £1,000,000 from £196,232,000 to £197,232,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	168,983
New DEL	4,913,833
Capital	
Change	–65,902
New DEL	7,311,030

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) The changes for Request for Resources 1 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £44,812,000 comprising £30,751,000 for Regional Development Agencies and £14,061,000 for the London Development Agency. An increase of £2,479,000 from Request for Resources 4 comprising £1,385,000 for Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency administration costs (partly offset by receipts shortfall of £705,000); £244,000 for the Rent Service administration costs; and £850,000 for fire prevention publicity. A net decrease of £81,111,000 resulting from the following inter-departmental transfers: £30,000 from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for seabed vehicle; £189,000 for Ordnance Survey from Invest to Save budget; £13,000 from the Scottish Executive to Neighbourhood Renewal Unit; net transfer of £79,000,000 to Department of Health consisting of a transfer for bedblocking (£80,000,000) partially offset by transfer for rough sleepers (£1,000,000); £1,781,000 to Department for Work and Pensions for benefit agency staff (£1,631,000) and for work carried out on "section 30" grant (£150,000); net transfer of £372,000 to Lord Chancellor's Department; £95,000 to Home Office for joint funded special grants programme project; and £95,000 to Department for Education and Skills for resident consultancy project. A transfer of £17,704,000 to the capital element of the DTLR DEL.

(ii) The changes for Request for Resources 2 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £49,400,000 comprising £19,400,000 for National Air Traffic Services PPP consultancy costs; £15,000,000 for financial assistance to airlines for losses arising from the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA; and £15,000,000 for payments to administrators of Railtrack plc (in administration). Transfer of £9,994,000 from Request for Resources 4 comprising £1,567,000 to Maritime and Coastguard Agency for administration costs (£127,000), additional pension costs (£440,000) and emergency towing vessels (£1,000,000); £2,653,000 to Highways Agency for administration costs; and £5,774,000 to Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency for administration costs. A net increase of £12,455,000 resulting from the following inter-departmental transfers: a transfer of £16,800,000 from the Scottish Executive to reflect part of the effect on ScotRail of the Rail Regulator's Review of Access Charges (£12,800,000), and to reflect the operation of the ScotRail performance regime (£4,000,000); £333,000 for Civil Service Reform; £25,000 from Northern Ireland Office (Department of the Environment) to Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency; £3,435,000 to Ministry of Defence to refund Royal Flight contribution; £800,000 to Department for Education and Skills for training costs; and a net transfer of £468,000 to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs consisting of research (£413,000), the site specific advice programme (£147,000) partially offset by transfers for fishing vessels (£92,000). A net transfer of £10,910,000 from non-voted provision for financial assistance to airlines for losses arising from the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA (£10,000,000); Maritime and Coastguard Agency emergency towing vessels (£1,000,000), partially offset by transfer of £90,000 receipts to non-voted provision. A transfer of £17,441,000 from the capital element of the DTLR DEL.

(iii) The changes for Request for Resources 4 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £1,000,000 for Health and Safety Executive administration costs. Transfer of £2,479,000 to Request for Resources 1 in respect of Rent Service Executive Agency administration costs (£244,000); Planning Inspectorate Agency administration costs (£1,385,000); and Fire Services (£850,000). Transfer of £9,994,000 to Request for Resources 2 in respect of Maritime and Coastguard Agency administration costs (£567,000); Highways Agency administration costs (£2,653,000); Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency administration costs (£5,774,000); and to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency for towing vessels (£1,000,000). A decrease of £7,189,000 resulting from the following inter-departmental transfers: Machinery of Government transfers to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (£6,294,000); to Office for National Statistics for neighbourhood statistics (£585,000); and to Cabinet Office for Government Office for London (£300,000) and recruitment of fast streamers (£10,000). Transfer of £5,900,000 from non-voted provision for Health and Safety Executive.

(iv) Provision within the non-Voted resource element of the DTLR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £133,774,000. This reflects a technical reclassification of the Commission for New Towns and Urban Regeneration Agency as non-departmental public bodies (£162,711,000 and £81,600,000); partially offset by transfers to Department of Work and Pensions from Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (£57,796,000); and machinery of government changes transfers to Department for Trade and Industry (£40,200,000) and Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (£5,641,000). £6,900,000 non-voted provision will be transferred to Request for Resources 2 (£1,000,000) and Request for Resources 4 (£5,900,000)

(v) As a result of the changes to Requests for Resources 1, 2 and 4 the DTLR administration provision has been increased by £4,782,000 from £957,147,000 to £961,929,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(vi) The changes for Request for Resources 1 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £54,112,000 comprising Regional Development Agencies (£23,176,000) and London Development Agency (£30,936,000). A transfer of £30,000,000 to Request for Resources 2 for a loan to the Highways Agency; a transfer of £519,000 from Request for Resources 4 for the Rent Service Executive Agency (£362,000) and the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency (£157,000). A net increase of £4,813,000 resulting from the following inter-departmental transfers: £2,500,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund for choice based lettings; from Department of Trade and Industry to Regional Development Agencies for land and property (£1,506,000); from Capital Modernisation Fund to Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency (£702,000); from Invest to Save Budget for Ordnance Survey (£15,000); and from Department for Work and Pensions to the Rent Service Executive Agency (£90,000). A transfer from resource provision of £17,704,000.

(vii) The changes for Request for Resources 2 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £1,000,000 for Transport Direct. A transfer of £30,000,000 from Request for Resources 1 for a loan to the Highways Agency. A transfer of £4,181,000 from Request for Resources 4 to Driver and Vehicle and Licensing Agency for electronic service delivery. An increase of £12,821,000 resulting from the following inter-departmental transfers: from Capital Modernisation Fund to Driving Standards Agency for hand held computers (£2,800,000); from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (£345,000); and from Scottish Executive a net transfer of £9,676,000 for Rosyth/Zeebrugge water freight grant (£10,969,000) partly offset by transfer for freight facilities grant (£1,293,000). Transfer from non-voted provision of £44,000,000 in respect of loan to Highways Agency (£39,000,000) and the Doncaster North bridge project (£5,000,000). Transfer to resource provision of £17,441,000.

(viii) The changes for Request for Resources 4 are as follows:

A machinery of government transfer of £487,000 to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. A transfer of £519,000 to Request for Resources 1 for the Rent Service Executive Agency (£362,000) and the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency (£157,000). A transfer of £4,181,000 to Request for Resources 2 for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. An additional receipt of £1,000,000 for sale of land at Mandela Road.

(ix) Provision within the non-Voted capital element of the DTLR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be decreased by £181,424,000. This reflects a technical reclassification of the Commission for New Towns and Urban regeneration Agency as non-departmental public bodies (£93,757,000 and £17,557,000); machinery of government change transfer to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (£16,200,000); net transfers to Request for Resources 2 of £53,910,000 including £9,910,000 transferred to resource.

(b) the DTLR Local Government DEL will be increased by £1,100,000 from £37,040,189,000 to £37,041,289,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	+1,100
New DEL	36,951,370
Capital	
Change	—
New DEL	89,919

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from a machinery of government change transfer of £1,100,000 from the Home Office.

Mesothelioma (Compensation)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he will take to help sufferers from mesothelioma who, as a result of the recent judgment of the Court of Appeal in the Fairchild case, are unable to obtain compensation from their former employers through the courts. [36527]

Mr. Byers: The compensation scheme administered by the Department under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 will be used to make payments to qualifying sufferers from mesothelioma who are affected by the judgment of the Court of Appeal in the Fairchild case.

This is a terrible disease and it would be wrong for employees, former employees and their families to be left without help as a result of this court judgment. As an interim measure, I am extending the compensation scheme my Department operates for sufferers of respiratory industrial diseases to cover qualifying employees. I am discussing with colleagues in government what further action might be taken in the longer term in response to the Fairchild judgment.

Electoral Modernisation

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions further to his announcement on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 829W, on local authorities who have been approved to run electoral modernisation pilot schemes in the May 2002 local elections, what other authorities have been approved to run schemes; and if he will make a statement. [36971]

Mr. Raynsford: I am pleased to announce that Middlesbrough council will join the 13 other local authorities to pilot an all postal ballot at local and mayoral elections this May.

I announced the other successful pilots for the May 2002 local elections on 5 February, when I gave the go-ahead for 30 councils to pilot new ways of voting and counting. These included testing early voting, all postal ballots and mobile ballot kiosks. Over half will explore innovative ways in which people can vote electronically including via the internet.

The pilot programme aims to build on the successes of earlier pilots—in the 2000 local elections—and explore other techniques to make the voting process simpler, accessible and more efficient for the electorate. We are particularly keen to engage younger voters and feel the new innovations will help.

In addition I have agreed that Kerrier district council who is due to hold a by-election for a casual vacancy can pilot an all postal ballot on that occasion.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Al-Yamamah Arms Agreement

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission how many copies of the 1992 National Audit Office report about the Al-Yamamah arms agreement were produced. [35029]

Mr. Alan Williams: 10 copies of the 1992 National Audit Office report on the Saudi Arabian Airforce Project—known as project Al-Yamamah—were produced.

The report looked at the use of taxpayers' money by the Ministry of Defence in relation to the project. It referred to confidential arrangements between the governments of the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia. The report was not published because publication would have breached that pledge of confidentiality.

The then PAC chairman (now Lord Sheldon) was quoted as saying after he and the then senior Conservative member of the PAC had considered the report in private in February 1992:

> "I did an investigation and I find no evidence that the [MOD] made improper payments. I have found no evidence of fraud or corruption. The deal . . . complied with Treasury Approval and the rules of government accounting."

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33244]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 58W.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans there are to change the Cabinet Office departmental expenditure limit and the administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36855]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Subject to parliamentary approval of the spring supplementary estimate the Cabinet Office DEL (resources and capital) will be increased by £54,599,000 from £348,264,000 to £402,863,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased from £246,753,000 to £267,704,000.

Within the DEL change the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	50,647
New DEL	315,096
of which:	
Voted	306,349
Non-voted	8,747
Capital	
Change	3,952
New DEL	87,767
of which:	
Voted	87,767
Non-voted	—

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from transfers from other Departments for Machinery of Government changes and other arrangements, additional provision for key priorities and improving public services and for improving security and communications systems following the events of 11 September.The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from transfers from other Departments for Machinery of Government changes and other arrangements and a reallocation from resource to capital.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers or charged to the DEL reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Lost/stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34220]

Mr. Leslie: Two items with a value equal to or less than £50 were reported stolen or lost within the last four financial years. Both incidents occurred in 1997–98.

Corresponding figures for the 2001–02 financial year have yet to be collated.

Kitchen equipment: £20

Foreign currency: £50.

Charity Law Reform Advisory Group

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Charity Law Reform Advisory Group is due to publish its conclusions. [35334]

Mrs. Roche: his is not a matter for the Government. The Charity Law Reform Advisory Group, was set up by NCVO—National Council for Voluntary Organisations. The conclusions for the group were published as a consultation document "For the public benefit?" in January 2001. Their consultation period ended on 31 July 2001.

Government Office for the West Midlands

David Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people are directly employed by the Government office for the west midlands; and how many equivalent full-time posts this represents. [34807]

Mrs. Roche: 263 people are directly employed by the Government office for the west midlands. This represents 250 full-time equivalent posts.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment has been made of the effect of the working time directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35885]

Mr. Leslie: The standard terms and conditions of service for staff employed by the Cabinet Office and its agencies are within the limits set by the working time regulations. Those employees whose duties require them to work in excess of 48 hours on a regular basis are asked to sign an opt-out agreement. 170 members of staff have signed such an agreement.

Persistent working in excess of 48 hours per week is discouraged. My Department is committed to reducing the number of employees who are required to work long hours (by adjusting working hours or re-designing jobs) to an absolute minimum commensurate with meeting their operational needs. Work/life balance policies are in place to give managers greater flexibility in reducing the number of excess hours worked.

E-democracy Projects

Margaret Moran: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list local authorities which have undertaken interactive e-democracy projects. [32222]

Mr. Leslie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), on 13 February 2002.

Civil Servants

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of senior civil servants have previously been employed *(a)* in the private sector, *(b)* in local government administration and *(c)* in Government Offices for the Regions. [32906]

Mr. Leslie: Comprehensive information is not held centrally on what proportion of senior civil servants have previously been employed in *(a)* the private sector, *(b)* local government administration and *(c)* Government Offices for the Regions.

The table shows the number and proportion of people recruited through open competition to the senior civil service, by their previous employment sector, for the last five years.

Year	*Civil service*		*Other public sector*		*Private sector*		*Total*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
1996–97	32	33.3	37	38.5	27	28.1	96	100.00
1997–98	27	32.5	36	43.4	20	24.1	83	100.00
1998–99	32	29.9	44	41.1	31	29.0	107	100.00
1999–2000	55	34.8	59	37.3	44	27.8	158	100.00
2000–01	77	38.1	98	48.5	27	13.4	202	100.00

The proportion of senior civil servants working in Government Offices for the Regions posts at 1 April 2001 was around 1.6 per cent.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public Bodies (Chairmen)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the appointments made by her Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* taskforces; and if she will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33895]

Tessa Jowell: The information follows, but does not include details on appointments to bodies sponsored by my Department where my role is to advise on appointments made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister or, through him, by Her Majesty the Queen. My Department also does not collect details on political affiliation.

Body	*Name*	*Term of appointment*	*Remuneration (£)*
Chairs of non-departmental public bodies			
Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection	John Tusa	3 September 1999 to 2 September 2003	0
Advisory Council on Libraries	John Hicks	1 January 1999 to 31 December 2002	0
Arts Council of England	Gerry Robinson	1 May 1998 to 31 January 2001 and 1 February 2001 to 31 January 2004	0
British Film Institute	Sir Alan Parker CBE	1 January 1998 to 3 August 1999	0
British Film Institute[1]	Joan Bakewell	4 August 1999 to 30 September 2002	0
British Library	Lord Eatwell	1 September 2001 to 31 August 2006	32,010
British Tourist Authority	David Quarmby	1 June 1999 to 31 May 2003	41,930
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Lord Holme	1 October 1999 to 22 October 2001	50,990
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Lord Dubs	1 February 2001 to 31 January 2004	50,990
Commission for Architecture and the Built Heritage	Sir Stuart Lipton	20 August 1999 to 19 August 2002	30,000 (not taken)
The Community Fund	Lady Brittan CBE	10 May 1999 to 9 May 2002	25,000
Culture South West	Adrian Vinken	29 September 1999 to 28 September 2002	0
East of England Regional Cultural Consortium	Graham Creelman	28 September 1999 to 27 September 2002	0
East Midlands Regional Cultural Consortium	Venu Dhupa	6 October 1999 to 5 October 2002	0
English Heritage	Sir Neil Cossons	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2005	54,000
English Tourism Council	Alan Britten	12 July 1999 to 11 July 2002	37,440
Film Council	Sir Alan Parker CBE	30 July 1999 to 29 July 2002	0
Football Licensing Authority	Clive Sherling	28 August 1999 to 31 March 2001 and 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2003	13,105 (up to April 2001. Nil thereafter)
Gaming Board for Great Britain[2]	Peter Dean CBE	1 July 2001 to 30 June 2006	41,020
Geffrye Museum	Richard Hunting	1 January 2000 to 31 December 2002	0
Horniman Museum	Donald Kirkham CBE	23 September 1999 to 22 September 2003	0
Horserace Betting Levy Board[2]	Robert Hughes CBE	1 September 2001 to 31 August 2004	48,250
Horserace Totalisator[2]	Peter Jones	1 August 2000 to 31 July 2003	83,553
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	John Lee	21 October 1998 to 20 October 2001	0
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	Professor Laurie Wood	21 October 2001 to 20 October 2004	0
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	David McDonnell	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2005	0
National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts	Lord Puttnam CBE	9 July 1998 to 8 July 2001 and 9 July 2001 to 8 July 2004	22,660
National Lottery Commission[3]	Brian Pomeroy	1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	33,026
National Lottery Commission[3]	Dame Helena Shovelton	1 April 2000 to 4 October 2000	33,026
National Lottery Commission[3]	Lord Burns	5 October 2000 to 4 October 2001	33,026
National Lottery Commission[3]	Harriet Spicer	5 October 2001 to 4 October 2003	33,026

Body	*Name*	*Term of appointment*	*Remuneration (£)*
New Opportunities Fund	Baroness Pitkeathley OBE	3 July 1998 to 2 January 2002 and 3 January 2002 to 2 January 2005	24,133
North East Regional Cultural Consortium	George Gill	29 September to 26 September 2002	0
North West Regional Cultural Consortium	Felicity Goodey CBE	28 September 1999 to 27 September 2002	0
Public Lending Right Advisory Committee	Michael Holroyd CBE	7 August 1997 to 6 August 2000	0
Public Lending Right Advisory Committee	Clare Francis	7 August 2000 to 6 August 2003	0
Public Lending Right Registrar	Dr. James Parker	1 August 2001 to 31 July 2006	48,706
QUEST	Keith Oates	1 July 1999 to 22 March 2000	0
QUEST	Sheila Forbes	1 November 2000 to 31 October 2003	0
Resource	Lord Evans CBE	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2003	31,800
Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art	Sir John Guinness CB	1 December 1998 to 30 November 2001 and 1 December 2001 to 30 November 2003	0
South East Regional Cultural Consortium	Professor Sir David Watson	28 September 1999 to 27 September 2002	0
Spoliation Advisory Panel	Sir David Hirst	13 April 2000 to 12 April 2004	5,631
Sport England	Trevor Brooking CBE	7 July 1998 to 11 April 1999 and 12 April 1999 to 11 October 2002	25,205
Theatres Trust	Sir John Drummond CBE	1 April 1998 to 31 March 2001 and 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	0
Treasure Valuation Committee	Prof Norman Palmer	3 May 2001 to 2 May 2006	0
UK Sport	Sir Rodney Walker	7 July 1998 to 18 September 2001 and 19 September 2001 to 18 September 2003	36,705
West Midlands Regional Cultural Consortium	Baroness Crawley	30 September 1999 to 29 September 2002	0
Yorkshire and Humber Regional Cultural Consortium	Chris Heinitz	28 September 1999 to 8 January 2001	0
Yorkshire and Humber Regional Cultural Consortium	Clive Leach CBE	27 March 2001 to 26 March 2004	0

[1] From 1 April 2000 the BFI ceased to be an NDPB, and became a second tier body funded by the new NDPB, the Film Council.

[2] Before the changes in the Machinery of Government in June 2001, appointments to these NDPB's were the responsibility of the Home Office.

[3] The position of Chair rotates on an annual basis, with the choice made by members of the Commission.

Chairs of commissions

See National Lottery Commission in table.

Chairs of public inquiries

None.

Chairs of agencies

Royal Parks Advisory Board

Hilary Lade—1 June 1999 to 30 May 2002

Remuneration nil

Chairs of taskforces

Information on the number, remit and membership of taskforces, ad-hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000 and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 13 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report: "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews", was issued in October 2001. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Sport England

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money has been allocated by Sport England to *(a)* Bradford, *(b)* Leeds, *(c)* Sheffield, *(d)* Manchester and *(e)* Hull. [33950]

Mr. Caborn: The total amount of lottery funding awarded by Sport England to each of these cities is as follows:

£ million

City	*Funding awarded*
Bradford	4.3
Leeds	26.8
Sheffield	42.1
Manchester	120.1
Kingston upon Hull	1.5

Commonwealth Games

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much Government funding is being made available to Manchester to support the Commonwealth Games. [34763]

Mr. Caborn: The Government announced on 2 July 2001 up to £30 million in support for the Games. This was part of the £80 million in additional funding and £25 million contingency fund for the Games made up of funds from Manchester city council, Sport England and Government announced on the same day. We have also given a further £10.5 million towards the costs of the opening and closing ceremonies. This brings Government assistance to the Games to a total of £40.5 million.

Gambling

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate she has made of the impact on the number of public houses if the number of gaming machines is restricted as recommended by the Budd report; [34742]

(2) what estimate has been made of the impact on employment in the gaming machine industry if the recommendations of the Budd report are agreed. [34741]

Mr. Caborn: We have made no estimates. The Government published the report of the independent Gambling Review Body, chaired by Sir Alan Budd, in July last year and have been considering all the comments on it received since then. These include representations which argue that there would be adverse consequences for the gaming machines industry and the licensed trade if the Government were fully to implement the report's recommendations about gaming machines in pubs.

I expect that we will be in a position to announce our conclusions within the next two months.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with her counterparts in the Home Office and what assessment she has made of the constitutional, administrative and financial implications for community amateur sports clubs seeking charitable status under the terms outlined in the Treasury consultation paper, "Promoting Sport in the Community". [34512]

Mr. Caborn: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have discussed these issues with the Home Office. However, I am fully aware of the concerns of many sports clubs about the possible implications of applying for charitable status under the Charity Commission's proposals (as outlined in "Promoting Sport in the Community"). These issues have been considered in detail by the DCMS Tax Working Group, which includes representatives of my Department, Sport England, the Central Council of Physical Recreation and other interested bodies, and I shall be discussing them with John Stoker of the Charity Commission when I meet him on 12 February.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer from the Minister for Sport of 17 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 473W, on sports clubs, if she will publish evidence to support his statement that the majority of local authorities grant 100 per cent. rate relief. [35190]

Mr. Caborn: No detailed figures exist for the numbers of clubs currently receiving discretionary rates relief from local authorities. My answer of 17 January to the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) was based on general information provided to DCMS by sport's representative bodies in the course of discussions before, and since, the issue of the Treasury's consultation document, "Promoting Sport in the Community", in November 2001.

Sport Funding

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will provide an analysis for the money provided to sport in the UK since 1977, broken down by source; and what her plans for future expenditure are. [34479]

Mr. Caborn: The main Exchequer and lottery funding provided to sport in England is as follows. Funding for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a devolved matter and is an issue for those Administrations.

£ million

	GBSC	*ESC*	*UKSC*	*SM(E)*	*Lottery*	*Other Exchequer*
1977–78	11.50	—	—	—	—	—
1978–79	15.20	—	—	—	—	—
1979–80	15.58	—	—	—	—	—
1980–81	19.29	—	—	—	—	—
1981–82	21.03	—	—	—	—	—
1982–83	28.00	—	—	—	—	—
1983–84	27.12	—	—	—	—	—
1984–85	28.60	—	—	—	—	—
1985–86	30.11	—	—	—	—	—
1986–87	37.35	—	—	—	—	—
1987–88	37.15	—	—	—	—	—
1988–89	38.41	—	—	—	—	—
1989–90	41.88	—	—	—	—	—
1990–91	44.75	—	—	—	—	—
1991–92	46.70	—	—	—	—	—
1992–93	48.60	—	—	1	—	0.9
1993–94	50.60	—	—	2.9	—	0.9
1994–95	48.90	—	—	3.3	48.88	0.9
1995–96	49.25	—	—	3.7	255.21	0.9
1996–97	28.17	15.24	4.00	3.2	263.94	0.9
1997–98	—	33.73	11.80	3.2	302.92	0.9
1998–99	—	33.29	11.60	3.2	252.26	0.9
1999–2000	—	34.50	12.60	3.37	212.48	0.9
2000–01	—	34.6	12.6	3.37	223.47	1.475
2001–02	—	39.6	17.6	3.43	224	5.475
2002–03	—	49.7	19.6	3.43	[1]202	10.980
2003–04	—	74.6	19.6	3.43	[1]188	35.485
2004–05	—	—	—	—	[1]185	0.960
2005–06	—	—	—	—	[1]185	—

[1] Figures for 2002–03 onwards are estimates

Notes:

GBSC = Great Britain Sports Council

ESC = English Sports Council

UKSC = United Kingdom Sports Council (established in September 1996 and became fully operational in January 1997)

SM(E) = Sportsmatch(England) (Established in November 1992 Sportsmatch allocation paid by Sport England from 1999–2000)

GBSC funding directed towards England and GB-wide issues

FLA = Football Licensing Authority

Other Exchequer includes Commonwealth Games, the Football Licensing Authority, the Volunteering in Sport initiative, funding for the British Chess Foundation, and funding towards children's play.

1. Additional funding includes £14.2 million in 2001–02, £24.3 million in 2002–03 and £34.7 million in 2003–04, which will be distributed to Specialist Sports Colleges. Funds will be distributed by DFES to individual sports colleges. This scheme was announced July 2000.

2. In addition there are also a number of sport funding programmes which are funded through the New Opportunities Fund:

£581 million in England will be provided through the PE and Sport Programme. All funding will be committed by 2005. Announced by Prime Minister in September 2000. Local education authorities will act as lead organisations in submitting applications to the New Opportunities Fund;

£30 million for England to be administered by Sport England via the Playing Fields and Community Green Spaces scheme. It is planned that all funding will be committed by 2005. Scheme commenced in April 2001;

£9 million is to be delivered by Barnardo's and Children's Play Council through the Better Play Grant programme. Planned that all funding will be committed by 2003;

£38.75 million to be committed by 2003 through the Activities for Young People programme. Distributed by NOF to lead organisations in 47 Connexions areas. Launched in August 2001;

£25.5 million to be committed by 2004 through the Out of School Hours Sport Activities scheme. This will be distributed through partnership between NOF and Sports Councils;

£130 million to be distributed through the Space for Sport and Arts scheme 2003–04. Grants paid to local education authorities by Sport England which is administering the scheme. The scheme was announced in March 2001.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the value was of the *(a)* National Lottery and *(b)* Treasury contribution to (i) Sport England, (ii) UK Sport and (iii) other such funded sporting bodies in (A) 1997–98, (B) 1998–99, (C) 1999–2000 and (D) 2000–01. [34768]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
(a) National Lottery				
Sport England	268,223,735	211,013,692	188,916,494	195,066,428
UK Sport	0	0	16,496,000	20,123,262
(b) Treasury				
Sport England	33,725,000	33,289,000	33,873,000	37,973,000
UK sport	11,800,000	11,600,000	12,600,000	12,600,000
The FLA	900,000	900,000	900,000	925,000

Lottery Funding (Distribution)

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will announce the names of the 50 areas to be targeted in the effort to ensure equitable regional distribution of lottery funding; and what criteria her Department is using to determine the areas. [35433]

Mr. Caborn: The initiative will target deprived areas which have fared relatively badly from lottery funding. The decision on which areas the initiative will support is a matter for the Community Fund and New Opportunities Fund. The full list of areas to benefit has yet to be finalised but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to be in a position to make an announcement shortly.

Libraries

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many libraries have *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed since 1997. [34921]

Dr. Howells: The number of library openings and closures is not held centrally. However, the total number of libraries in England between 1996–97 and 1999–2000 was:

	Number
1996–97	3,083
1997–98	3,053
1998–99	3,037
1999–2000	3,031

Note:

The figures reflect branch and central libraries only. They do not include mobile libraries or special services provided by English library authorities to senior citizens' homes and others in sheltered housing schemes. In 1999–2000 the figures for these two types of provision were, respectively, 440 mobiles and 14,617 outlets in institutions.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding was given to libraries to increase the range of their services in the last 12 months. [34922]

Dr. Howells: Core funding for public libraries is provided through the Environmental Protection and Cultural Services (EPCS) Block. In the latest Local Government Financial Settlement (for 2002–03) the funds for this block were increased by 4.2 per cent., a real terms increase of 1.7 per cent.

It is for local authorities to decide how much of their EPCS funding to allocate to their libraries in line with their statutory duty to provide library services that are comprehensive and efficient.

Specific project funding of over £2.3 million has been made available in 2000–01 through the joint DCMS/Wolfson Foundation Public Libraries Challenge Fund.

Through the New Opportunities Fund Community Access to Lifelong Learning Programme £120 million of lottery funding is being made available to enable all public libraries to offer public internet access and ICT learning facilities by December 2002.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Transitional Funding

Mr. Daisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list by local education authority and for each financial year for which the present grant maintained transitional funding arrangements have been in operation *(a)* the level of transitional grant payable by the local education authority to former grant maintained schools and *(b)* the level of grant paid by the Department to the local education authority towards meeting the cost. [28888]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The information requested is set out in the following table. No grant was payable by the Department in respect of transitional funding for former grant-maintained schools in the financial year 1999–2000. Comprehensive figures for the financial year 2001–02 are not yet available.

Transitional funding for former grant-maintained schools, by LEA

£

		1999–2000	*2000–01*	
	LEA	*Transitional Funding*	*Transitional funding*	*DfEE grant*
302	Barnet	71,031	530,634	195,885
800	Bath and NE Somerset	0	176,783	120,106
820	Bedfordshire	885,955	768,730	407,874
303	Bexley	95,848	44,174	37,034
330	Birmingham	1,642,412	1,692,411	1,025,975
889	Blackburn with Darwen	34,672	0	0
350	Bolton	184,475	259,095	190,428
837	Bournemouth	0	578,784	293,882
380	Bradford	147,960	0	0
304	Brent	2,123,836	2,299,839	995,431
305	Bromley	1,392,578	783,673	581,622
825	Buckinghamshire	761,590	793,965	288,901
351	Bury	35,346	17,575	16,954
381	Calderdale	65,817	12,696	12,696
873	Cambridgeshire	688,107	323,530	195,964

Transitional funding for former grant-maintained schools, by LEA

£

	LEA	1999–2000	2000–01	
		Transitional Funding	Transitional funding	DfEE grant
202	Camden	291,273	108,754	19,240
875	Cheshire	69,279	142,966	58,816
892	City of Nottingham	190,075	65,362	65,362
874	City of Peterborough	504,672	62,835	60,937
879	City of Plymouth	108,504	77,238	49,615
908	Cornwall	24,074	0	0
306	Croydon	500,640	652,682	405,598
909	Cumbria	649,980	388,718	198,556
831	Derby	225,299	0	0
830	Derbyshire	269,787	175,616	128,227
878	Devon	122,660	256,891	202,821
371	Doncaster	0	0	0
835	Dorset	55,256	62,010	30,728
332	Dudley	60,516	58,637	58,637
307	Ealing	594,335	310,791	260,371
811	East Riding of Yorkshire	140,971	103,829	29,416
308	Enfield	80,452	119,981	119,172
881	Essex	950,631	769,272	630,844
916	Gloucestershire	662,130	191,671	191,671
203	Greenwich	84,453	115,942	24,592
204	Hackney	40,160	6,039	6,039
876	Halton	128,574	41,673	41,673
205	Hammersmith and Fulham	187,471	315,634	100,010
850	Hampshire	1,528,892	842,926	527,765
309	Haringey	102,843	0	0
310	Harrow	57,105	53,737	40,388
311	Havering	36,160	0	0
919	Hertfordshire	1,186,804	880,096	585,439
312	Hillingdon	211,838	481,515	192,612
313	Hounslow	53,507	0	0
207	Kensington and Chelsea	320,136	178,120	99,445
886	Kent	1,573,338	429,705	322,950
314	Kingston-upon-Thames	205,874	171,245	57,363
382	Kirklees	0	0	0
340	Knowsley	145,282	147,431	52,585
208	Lambeth	1,290,889	3,290,324	653,913
888	Lancashire	460,342	418,547	196,887
383	Leeds	7,047	50,955	48,533
856	Leicester City	0	0	0
855	Leicestershire	142,928	147,873	123,545
209	Lewisham	124,228	107,826	29,306
925	Lincolnshire	1,736,810	726,020	500,963
341	Liverpool	236,785	28,608	18,954
821	Luton	518,253	492,626	284,149
352	Manchester	0	0	0
887	Medway	0	39,815	39,815
315	Merton	102,048	65,718	63,267
826	Milton Keynes	1,720,803	1,140,724	367,308
316	Newham	0	97,518	67,692
926	Norfolk	290,250	674,673	527,581
392	North Tyneside	29,430	0	0
815	North Yorkshire	14,009	27,152	3,072
928	Northamptonshire	0	0	0
929	Northumberland	4,412	493	493
891	Nottinghamshire	241,444	204,787	106,176
931	Oxfordshire	14,212	0	0
836	Poole	0	0	0
851	Portsmouth	106,441	25,600	18,174
870	Reading	160,112	288,276	128,445
317	Redbridge	36,118	100,035	41,613
354	Rochdale	0	50,393	38,649
857	Rutland	51,266	36,622	10,883
355	Salford	142,434	101,789	41,316
333	Sandwell	174,859	74,434	54,019
373	Sheffield	n/a	694,477	214,427
893	Shropshire	50,261	81,801	62,413
871	Slough	40,048	24,876	10,926
334	Solihull	11,525	0	0
933	Somerset	174,827	235,726	65,257
852	Southampton	36,860	43,883	43,883

Transitional funding for former grant-maintained schools, by LEA

£

		1999–2000	*2000–01*	
	LEA	*Transitional Funding*	*Transitional funding*	*DfEE grant*
882	Southend	459,236	49,719	46,170
210	Southwark	210,422	29,184	25,957
860	Staffordshire	141,638	149,237	138,410
861	Stoke	29,437	144,425	71,418
936	Surrey	1,816,620	1,145,033	540,039
319	Sutton	186,052	0	0
866	Swindon	369,963	197,579	196,778
357	Tameside	10,098	25,408	25,408
894	Telford and Wrekin	0	0	0
883	Thurrock	55,824	80,996	51,327
880	Torbay	127,842	151,976	82,767
211	Tower Hamlets	0	0	0
358	Trafford	551,626	0	0
335	Walsall	156,050	193,182	130,414
320	Waltham Forest	634,230	638,143	241,662
212	Wandsworth	1,992,248	2,322,908	636,380
937	Warwickshire	352,368	770,093	349,159
869	West Berkshire	234,476	150,876	97,074
938	West Sussex	23,921	51,545	19,735
865	Wiltshire	86,110	211,455	164,937
868	Windsor and Maidenhead	102,045	154,079	66,864
344	Wirral	207,686	229,985	177,210
872	Wokingham	7,616	17,988	12,540
336	Wolverhampton	445,066	268,721	170,163
885	Worcestershire	40,033	31,986	14,317

Notes:

The figures relating to 1999–2000 derive from information provided by local education authorities, through the budget statements produced by them under section 52 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and in response to subsequent inquiries by the Department.

n/a—indicates that figures are not available.

The figures for 2000–01 are derived from LEAs' section 52 budget statements, modified where necessary in the light of information subsequently provided by LEAs in connection with their grant claims; and from the Department's grant records.

Mr. Daisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list by local education authority and for each financial year for which present arrangements have been in operation the former grant maintained schools with protected funding receiving transitional funding of more than 5 per cent. of their protected funding, indicating in each case *(a)* the level of transitional grant and *(b)* the transitional grant as a percentage of the protected funding. [28889]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The information requested for the financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is set out in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library. Comprehensive figures for the financial year 2001–02 are not yet available.

LEAs (Repairs)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 447W, on LEAs (Repairs), if she will categorise the estimated cost of repair or renewal work needed for each local authority by *(a)* priority 1, *(b)* priority 2 and *(c)* priority 3 work. [32896]

John Healey: The following table summarises school premises condition information derived from the asset management plan data provided by local education authorities. Priority 1 covers urgent work; Priority 2 shows work needed within two years; Priority 3 is for work needed within three to five years. Costs have been adjusted to current prices and take account of regional variations in pricing levels.

The figures are derived from data supplied by LEAs over the past two years, based on surveys carried out mainly in 1999 or early 2000. Over £5.5 billion of capital funding has been made available by the Department from 1999–2000 until 2001–02, enabling LEAs and schools to tackle a significant proportion of the school repair and renewal needs which had built up over many years. A further £6.3 billion will be available from 2002–03 to 2003–04.

£ million

AMP condition data	*Priority 1*	*Priority 2*	*Priority 2*
Barking and Dagenham	0.2	3.8	0.4
Barnet	7.1	32.9	5.0
Barnsley	0.8	23.3	11.7
Bath and North East Somerset	3.2	8.8	7.4
Bedfordshire	0.1	29.2	14.3
Bexley	5.4	10.9	12.3
Birmingham	34.2	56.6	43.7
Blackburn with Darwen	1.2	7.4	6.0
Bolton	1.0	25.4	23.0
Bournemouth	1.8	6.6	9.2
Bracknell Forest	0.7	7.7	2.8
Brent	2.6	6.8	24.8
Brighton and Hove	0.0	11.7	10.1
Bristol, City of	5.5	35.3	30.4
Bromley	5.7	3.3	18.6
Buckinghamshire	2.4	25.7	31.7
Cambridgshire	1.5	29.3	33.2
Camden	4.9	1.1	7.5
Cheshire	1.4	16.4	31.2
Cornwall	0.0	25.2	39.3
Coventry	2.9	14.2	17.0
Croydon	7.6	9.0	2.3
Cumbria	0.7	10.9	43.3
Darlington	0.1	8.0	10.9
Derby, City of	14.7	9.4	19.5

£ million

AMP condition data	*Priority 1*	*Priority 2*	*Priority 2*
Derbyshire	3.0	90.0	50.5
Devon	3.2	37.7	45.1
Doncaster	0.0	10.2	60.4
Dorset	3.0	20.6	32.3
Durham	0.1	59.1	45.9
Ealing	16.4	13.1	7.0
East Riding of Yorkshire	1.0	29.0	52.1
East Sussex	5.9	16.0	11.3
Enfield	2.1	23.5	23.5
Essex	16.5	95.9	51.8
Gateshead	3.2	6.0	7.5
Gloucestershire	1.8	30.5	13.1
Greenwich	7.4	22.5	3.4
Hackney	3.3	18.5	9.2
Halton	2.1	1.5	14.3
Hammersmith and Fulham	3.1	7.5	6.5
Hampshire	7.6	93.5	147.2
Harrow	2.1	8.3	8.8
Hartlepool	1.1	8.0	6.8
Havering	6.1	15.5	25.3
Herefordshire	0.0	10.4	4.7
Hertfordshire	5.0	39.6	39.1
Hillingdon	3.4	11.1	10.7
Hounslow	2.0	14.4	12.2
Isle of Wight	1.9	6.3	7.3
Kensington and Chelsea	2.8	1.4	2.9
Kent	6.2	70.4	43.2
Kingston-upon-Hull, City of	0.0	24.2	28.1
Kingston-upon-Thames	5.4	8.7	7.0
Kirklees	25.5	18.0	41.6
Knowsley	1.5	7.4	25.8
Lancashire	18.2	167.5	79.0
Leeds	22.8	56.3	61.9
Leicester, City of	0.1	22.7	16.8
Leicestershire	4.0	38.0	30.5
Lewisham	2.9	14.4	24.8
Lincolnshire	10.0	12.0	12.7
Liverpool	21.2	21.1	16.2
Luton	2.1	11.2	13.4
Manchester	35.8	10.0	45.7
Medway	0.1	10.0	13.8
Merton	0.0	12.5	6.2
Milton Keynes	0.3	7.6	20.3
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	0.9	35.9	33.8
Newham	9.7	10.0	24.9
Norfolk	11.8	35.6	27.7
North-East Lincolnshire	6.2	32.3	6.9
North Lincolnshire	2.7	5.1	10.3
North Somerset	5.7	15.2	5.5
North Tyneside	0.8	13.1	18.9
North Yorkshire	3.9	11.2	28.9
Northamptonshire	2.4	21.4	40.6
Northumberland	0.0	32.8	18.9
Nottingham	1.0	26.1	25.7
Nottinghamshire	3.5	48.5	58.2
Oldham	0.1	34.4	26.3
Oxfordshire	0.0	53.6	10.6
Peterborough	8.1	9.7	14.1
Plymouth	5.7	15.4	18.8
Poole	0.0	4.5	11.4
Portsmouth	0.0	10.3	10.3
Reading	3.0	11.7	4.7
Redbridge	0.3	13.9	19.2
Redcar and Cleveland	0.0	15.7	11.6
Rochdale	12.7	15.8	25.9
Rotherham	19.9	15.7	27.6
Rutland	0.5	1.3	2.0
Sandwell	0.3	17.9	6.2
Sefton	5.9	33.9	11.3
Sheffield	12.8	22.5	35.8
Shropshire	0.7	11.4	13.1
Slough	5.5	7.3	5.9
Solihull	2.9	5.7	13.9
Somerset	0.0	27.9	24.3
South Gloucestershire	5.1	12.6	15.7
South Tyneside	0.0	16.4	14.2
Southend-on-Sea	0.0	4.4	8.2
Southwark	0.9	13.9	9.1
St. Helens	0.3	5.8	17.8
Staffordshire	0.0	43.3	40.0
Stockport	8.3	8.1	56.7
Stockton-on-Tees	17.3	12.2	17.2
Stoke-on-Trent	22.0	42.2	0.5
Suffolk	13.2	9.7	19.2
Sunderland	26.6	15.3	12.3
Surrey	0.6	49.7	18.9
Sutton	1.0	10.4	4.7
Swindon	7.4	20.4	15.9
Tameside	3.1	19.5	10.8
Telford and Wrekin	7.1	7.7	20.1
Thurrock	0.2	6.8	11.8
Torbay	2.2	4.8	4.2
Tower Hamlets	0.3	10.2	17.5
Trafford	7.2	1.9	29.2
Wakefield	11.1	24.9	36.0
Walsall	7.6	40.0	16.5
Waltham Forest	1.7	12.6	13.5
Wandsworth	0.7	40.1	9.1
Warrington	3.6	9.2	13.4
West Berkshire	5.5	7.1	4.6
West Sussex	4.2	27.1	45.1
Westminster	4.3	8.1	12.0
Wiltshire	0.0	36.3	20.5
Windsor and Maidenhead	2.3	7.4	22.8
Wirral	35.4	6.7	17.7
Wokingham	6.2	16.8	1.7
Wolverhampton	10.6	17.3	15.7
Worcestershire	1.5	38.7	20.2
Total	710.4	2,844.4	2,827.6

Note:

Fifteen authorities are currently reviewing their assessments.

More work is needed to confirm the data, but initial broad estimates are that these authorities' needs amount to £55 million, £250 million and £330 million of Priority 1, 2 and 3 work respectively.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many contracts were let by her Department and agencies for which she is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33846]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total underspend in her Department was on *(a)* capital and *(b)* non-capital expenditure in each financial year since May 1997. [34029]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The split into capital and non-capital is shown in the table.

£ million

Year	Current underspend	Capital underspend	Total underspend
2000–01	343	1,111	1,454
1999–2000	129	699	828
1998–99	55	604	659
1997–98	25	335	360

The total underspends for 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are calculated against the departmental expenditure limits (including programmes funded from the windfall tax), whereas the underspend for 1997–98 is calculated against the old control total.

Since 1998–99 Departments have been allowed to carry forward any DEL budget provision that is not spent in one year into the following year. More limited end year flexibility applied before this date. The change in carry forward has enabled the Department to better manage its resources and the Secretary of State uses this mechanism to deploy resources under her control where they are most needed and to ensure spending is profiled to maximise value for money.

Study Leave

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the results of the statistical impact of "Right to Time Off for Study" for 16 to 17-year-olds have been published. [34094]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: No. This information is not collected centrally.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the publications issued by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34203]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: It is not possible to list each new publication issued by the Department since 1997 without disproportionate expense. Within the Department's advertising and publicity budget, the total spend on publications since April 1997 is £8 million, broken down as follows:

	£ million
1997–98	2.1
1997–99	0.8
1999–2000	2.8
2000–01	2.3

The figures do not include spending by the Department's agencies.

New Schools

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 720W, how much capital funding was provided for new school places in each education authority since 1997. [34656]

John Healey: We do not hold information in the form requested before 1998–99. The allocation of borrowing approvals to local education authorities for the provision of new school places from 1998–99 until 2002–03 is shown in the table. Local education authorities will be able to confirm actual investment in the provision of school places.

Capital funding for new school places

£000

Local education authority	1998–99	1999–200	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	Total
Barking and Dagenham	632	530	0	2,274	0	3,436
Barnet	1,196	0	0	0	0	1,196
Barnsley	79	0	0	0	0	79
Bath and North East Somerset	120	0	528	1,340	1,943	3,931
Bedfordshire	1,731	2,547	1,981	7,278	1,323	14,860
Bexley	3,259	2,175	2,110	4,404	0	11,948
Birmingham	110	0	0	0	1,379	1,489
Blackburn with Darwen	0	0	0	0	45	45
Blackpool	0	5,291	1,397	4,230	0	10,918
Bolton	1,088	913	591	0	0	2,592
Bournemouth	751	1,472	0	0	0	2.223
Brent	0	1,070	3,010	0	1,658	5,738
Brighton and Hove	1,876	3,316	0	765	951	6.908
Bromley	0	1,198	0	0	0	1,198
Buckinghamshire	4,579	5,372	2,490	1,822	4,203	18,466
Bury	0	4,198	0	0	0	4,198
Calderdale	930	0	1,238	341	1,086	3,595
Cambridgeshire	4,614	6,792	8,563	9,648	12,358	41,975
Camden	496	290	806	0	500	2,092
Cheshire	2,332	2,707	5,018	1,685	2,925	14,667
Cornwall	3,217	6,793	6,579	6,557	5,922	29,068
Croydon	351	1,070	0	2,871	0	4,292
Cumbria	1,844	2,764	3,388	3,420	2,142	13,558
Derby	993	532	0	1,629	291	3,445
Derbyshire	476	1,728	1,079	2,683	7,054	13,020
Devon	3,682	7,526	4,648	16,563	23,246	55,665
Doncaster	0	2,002	0	141	0	2,143
Dorset	1,460	586	2,624	2,063	2,108	8,841

Capital funding for new school places

£000

Local education authority	*1998–99*	*1999–200*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*Total*
Dudley	321	2,266	1,736	0	0	4,323
Durham	0	0	765	0	0	765
Ealing	502	1,614	0	932	1,649	4,697
East Riding of Yorkshire	4,148	9,087	3,333	1,239	6,459	24,266
East Sussex	3,139	2,208	4,172	4,113	10,949	24,581
Enfield	5,347	0	0	5,589	18,998	29,934
Essex	4,182	6,661	10,462	11,782	7,608	40,695
Gloucestershire	2,109	7,767	12,942	5,159	7,501	35,478
Hackney	3,205	0	0	5,001	0	8,206
Halton	0	506	100	0	0	606
Hampshire	2,037	7,885	5,661	8,699	11,210	35,492
Haringey	2,100	2,141	2,210	7,647	10,458	24,556
Havering	0	0	0	3,303	0	3,303
Herefordshire	1,490	3,083	58	570	2,054	7,255
Hertfordshire	2,165	1,779	3,675	4,345	6,589	18,553
Hillingdon	1,068	0	6,644	0	2,651	10,363
Hounslow	1,419	0	0	0	648	2,067
Isle of Wight	1,930	3,955	3,497	2,399	3,379	15,160
Kent	1,043	11,664	16,639	21,971	41,915	93,232
Kirklees	953	563	2,476	2,019	816	6,827
Knowsley	1,228	0	0	1,086	0	2,314
Lancashire	1,130	3,367	2,656	235	801	8,189
Leeds	405	1,814	2,639	1,804	1,210	7,872
Leicestershire	1,419	3,693	911	4,033	1,333	11,389
Lewisham	0	0	0	0	10,201	10,201
Lincolnshire	1,311	6,746	11,208	5,496	1,551	26,312
Luton	0	0	0	0	1,935	1,935
Manchester	0	0	0	0	1,572	1,572
Medway	0	851	9,842	4,832	7,990	23,515
Milton Keynes	7,758	4,074	1,604	8,263	0	21,699
Newcastle upon Tyne	314	0	0	0	0	314
Newham	4,468	3,750	1,887	899	13,154	24,158
Norfolk	3,039	3,209	7,729	5,761	10,012	29,750
North Lincolnshire	0	0	226	390	209	825
North Somerset	1,336	0	1,582	0	992	3,910
North Tyneside	229	734	1,605	1,232	0	3,800
North Yorkshire	2,395	3,926	5,552	5,952	8,017	25,842
Northamptonshire	3,266	4,563	6,350	2.561	7,299	24,039
Northumberland	359	957	280	900	0	2,496
Nottinghamshire	332	0	0	1,059	2,301	3,692
Oldham	1,008	0	0	0	0	1,008
Oxfordshire	5,945	4,036	5,048	9,055	9,254	33,338
Peterborough	0	1,855	0	460	0	2,315
Plymouth	0	0	0	0	6,987	6,987
Poole	0	0	0	0	290	290
Portsmouth	537	838	0	0	0	1,375
Reading	376	0	3,400	0	0	3,776
Redbridge	27	4,761	3,123	580	0	8,491
Richmond upon Thames	2,945	0	0	0	0	2,945
Rotherham	608	675	0	5,510	608	7,401
Salford	0	0	0	0	2,292	2,292
Sandwell	0	986	0	0	0	986
Sefton	0	459	578	643	1,280	2,960
Sheffield	209	1,624	2,954	0	0	4,787
Shropshire	1,157	1,135	2,438	2,132	279	7,141
Slough	0	0	110	576	197	883
Solihull	2,089	1,829	2,441	4,886	0	11,245
Somerset	430	1,349	4,262	3,142	1,345	10,528
South Gloucestershire	929	2,716	4,671	2,949	1,126	12,391
Southampton	451	2,315	1,164	0	0	3,930
Southend-on-Sea	0	0	3,577	1,441	1,440	6,458
Southwark	0	0	0	785	0	785
Staffordshire	1,753	10,690	10,867	6,382	2,100	31,792
Stockport	149	2,166	4,594	0	0	6,909
Stoke-on-Trent	0	0	1,213	2,185	0	3,398
Suffolk	3,659	8,500	7,892	8,013	11,765	39,829
Sunderland	0	0	1,800	152	0	1,952
Surrey	1,236	90	12,093	7,451	11,720	32,590
Sutton	2,228	2,208	5,768	0	4,661	14,865
Swindon	653	0	0	0	19,074	19,727
Tameside	259	298	187	0	0	744

Capital funding for new school places

£000

Local education authority	*1998–99*	*1999–200*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*Total*
Telford and Wrekin	909	1,340	2,716	902	7,731	13,598
Thurrock	42	1,079	5,023	0	0	6,144
Torbay	1,504	1,286	1,477	645	0	4,912
Trafford	239	548	4,203	0	0	4,990
Wakefield	0	4,677	607	0	0	5,284
Walsall	0	353	0	0	602	955
Waltham Forest	1,527	948	0	1,108	1,826	5,409
Wandsworth	426	1,481	0	0	0	1,907
Warrington	211	623	4,451	2,643	1,764	9,692
Warwickshire	1,662	1,542	832	838	918	5,792
West Berkshire	633	0	2,206	0	2,102	4,941
West Sussex	1,260	2,386	1,253	3,278	7,467	15,644
Westminster	0	0	0	0	3,700	3,700
Wigan	0	4,137	885	0	8,426	13,448
Wiltshire	2,629	646	2,822	4,312	2,133	12,542
Windsor and Maidenhead	909	0	0	341	0	1,250
Wokingham	415	1,154	4,168	1,999	747	8,483
Wolverhampton	0	0	343	0	0	343
Worcestershire	2,988	7,575	2,574	3,125	4,422	20,684
York	5	0	0	0	90	95
Total	143,970	238,040	286,231	274,518	386,941	1,329,700

Note:

These figures show new allocations of basic need funding for additional school places. This funding is delivered over three years in a 35 per cent./50 per cent./15 per cent. split. The figures do not, therefore, correspond to the funding received by local education authorities in these years

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by her Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34995]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Individual Learning Accounts

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills from whom she received advice concerning possible abuse of the Individual Learning Accounts scheme prior to its commencement; and what response was given by her Department. [35210]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* My Department actively engaged a wide range of key stakeholders in the development of the Individual Learning Accounts programme. For example, a number of seminars were held with learning providers in 2000, prior to the introduction of the National Framework for Individual Learning Accounts, and these continued into 2001. At these and other similar events and meetings providers expressed a wide range of opinions which helped inform and shape the development, implementation and presentation of ILA policy.

Educational Maintenance Allowance (Lincolnshire)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many recipients of an educational maintenance allowance there are in North East Lincolnshire; and what assessment she has made of the impact of the allowance on encouraging 16 to 18-year-olds to stay in full-time education. [35319]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: As of the 1 February 2002, 478 students in North East Lincolnshire have received at least one payment of educational maintenance allowance (EMA) this academic year.

The DfES has commissioned the Centre for Research in Social Policy to conduct a rigorous evaluation of EMAs which is now in its third year of data collection. First year findings have already been published and these early findings show that EMA appears to have raised participation in further education. The statistical analysis estimates an average gain in participation in pilot areas compared to control areas, among EMA eligible young people, of around 5 percentage points.

Internet Training (North-West)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of teachers have received training for the internet in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* the North West RDA area, *(f)* the other RDA areas and *(g)* England. [35422]

John Healey: Training for the Internet is covered by the nationally run New Opportunities Fund (NOF) Information and Communications Technology (ICT) teacher training programme. Schools have until the end of March this year to sign up for the NOF training and over 95 per cent. have already done so.

The information relating to the numbers of teachers who have completed the training is not available by the regional areas requested. However, the figures available as at 31 December 2001 show that 83 per cent. of all teachers in England have registered for, or are currently undertaking, the NOF training and 52 per cent. of all teachers have completed it. Teachers may have also undertaken locally organised training in the use of the internet but figures are not collected on these training schemes centrally. All newly qualified teachers entering the profession will have received training in the use of the internet as part of their initial teacher training.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in her Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [35938]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information is not held by my Department in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Procedures put in place to reduce work related stress include:

Training events on stress management available to all staff;

An interactive on-line package to help with recognition and prevention of stress;

An Employee Assistance Service which includes an advice and counselling service;

An Occupational Health Service that provides practical advice on occupational health issues; and

A wide range of initiatives providing practical advice and tips to individuals on techniques to deal with stress and maintain a healthy work life balance.

My Department is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all its employees. Arising from the Government's Revitalising Health and Safety initiative, it is also committed to meeting targets for reducing the number of working days lost due to work related injuries and illness. This includes ensuring that work practises are safe and free from any hazards to health and that effective occupational health policies and good health management practices are developed.

No compensation has been paid to employees specifically for work related stress in any of the last three years.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what criteria local Learning and Skills Council chairs are to be remunerated for part-time input. [36010]

Margaret Hodge: No criteria have been agreed. The current Education Bill includes a clause that would give the Secretary of State for Education and Skills the power to agree terms of remuneration.

FE Colleges

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to reduce the audit burden on further education colleges. [36012]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 134–35W.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the criteria under which provider reviews are carried out by the Learning and Skills Council in further education colleges. [36026]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for the reviews of their providers, which include further education colleges. The proposed aims, key areas and evidence requirements for performance reviews were posted on the LSC's website in early September 2001. Views from colleges and other providers, as well as other stakeholders, were sought by December 2001. Drawing on this evaluation, the LSC are publishing a consultation document in early March 2002, which will outline their proposals to simplify and refine the performance review process. Following the consultation, the refined arrangements will be published in autumn 2002.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which schools broken down by LEA applied for specialist status but were not among the successful applicants announced on 5 February. [36016]

Mr. Timms: A list of schools, by LEA, which applied for specialist status in the October 2002 competition, which were not among the successful applicants announced on 5 February 2002 is provided in the following tables.

Schools unsuccessful in their application for specialist status in the October 2001 competition by LEA

LEA	*School*	*Specialism*
Barking and Dagenham	Sydney Russell School (The)	Technology
Bedfordshire	St. John's School	Technology
Bedfordshire	Wootton Upper School	Arts
Birmingham	Castle Vale School	Arts
Birmingham	Fairfax School	Arts
Birmingham	Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre	Language
Blackburn with Darwen	Our Lady and Saint John RC High School	Arts
Bolton	Canon Slade School	Arts
Bolton	Harper Green School	Arts
Bracknell Forest	Garth Hill School	Technology
Buckinghamshire	Waddesdon CE School	Arts
Cambridgeshire	Bassingbourn Village College	Technology
Cheshire	Malbank School and Sixth Form Centre	Arts
Cheshire	Wilmslow High School	Arts
Cornwall	Looe Community School	Arts
Coventry	Coventry Blue Coat CE School	Arts

Schools unsuccessful in their application for specialist status in the October 2001 competition by LEA

LEA	*School*	*Specialism*
Croydon	Norbury Manor High School-Girls	Language
Cumbria	Morton School (The)	Arts
Cumbria	Thorncliffe School	Sports
Derbyshire	John Port School	Technology
Devon	St. Peter's C of E High School	Language
Doncaster	Campsmount School	Technology
Doncaster	Rossington High School	Sports
Dudley	Redhill School	Arts
Durham	Moorside Community College	Technology
Durham	Shotton Hall School	Arts
Enfield	Lea Valley High	Sports
Essex	Rainsford High School	Arts
Gloucestershire	Heywood Community School	Sports
Gloucestershire	Whitecross School	Language
Halton	Heath School (The)	Technology
Hammersmith and Fulham	Fulham Cross School	Language
Hampshire	Brookfield Community School	Language
Hampshire	Park Community School	Arts
Hampshire	Vyne Community School (The)	Arts
Harrow, London Borough of	Hatch End High School (joint with) Nower Hill High School	Arts
Havering, London Borough of	Abbs Cross School	Arts
Havering, London Borough of	Emerson Park School	Arts
Havering, London Borough of	Frances Bardsley School for Girls (The)	Arts
Havering, London Borough of	Gaynes School	Language
Herefordshire	John Kyrle High School (The)	Technology
Hertfordshire	Rickmansworth School	Arts
Hertfordshire	Roundwood Park School	Arts
Hertfordshire	St. Michael's Catholic High School	Language
Hertfordshire	Watford Grammar School for Girls	Arts
Hillingdon, London Borough of	Uxbridge High School	Technology
Kensington and Chelsea, London Borough of	Sion Manning RC Girls School	Arts
Kent	Astor School	Arts
Kingston upon Thames	Coombe Girls' School	Language
Lancashire	Parklands High School	Language
Lancashire	St. Theodore's RC VA High School	Sports
Leeds	Priesthorpe School	Sports
Leeds	Roundhay School	Technology
Leicestershire	Hind Leys Community College	Technology
Leistershire	Brookvale High School (joint with) Groby Community College	Language
Liverpool	Shorefields Technology School	Technology
Manchester	Saint Paul's Catholic High School	Technology
Medway	Upbury Manor School	Arts
Merton	Bishopsford Community College	Arts
Merton	Raynes Park High School	Technology
Middlesbrough	St. David's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School	Technology
Newcastle upon Tyne	St. Mary's Catholic Comprehensive School	Arts
Norfolk	Cliff Park High School	Sports
Norfolk	Hellesdon High School	Technology
Norfolk	Hewett School	Arts
Norfolk	Sprowston High School	Arts
Norfolk	St. Clement's High School	Technology
Norfolk	Wymondham High School	Arts
North Lincolnshire	High Ridge School	Sports
North Tyneside	Marden High School	Arts
North Yorkshire	Lady Lumley's School	Technology
North Yorkshire	Richmond School	Arts
Northamptonshire	Kingsbrook School	Language
Nottinghamshire	All Saints' RC School (joint with) The Brunts School	Arts
Nottinghamshire	Magnus CE School (The)	Arts
Nottinghamshire	South Wolds School	Language
Peterborough	Bretton Woods Community School	Arts
Reading	Highdown School	Technology
Redbridge	Chadwell Heath Foundation School (The)	Arts
Shropshire	Belvidere School	Technology
Shropshire	Corbet School (The)	Technology
Shropshire	Ludlow Church of England School	Technology
Shropshire	Thomas Adam School (The)	Arts
Solihull	Langley School	Arts
Southend on Sea	Prittlewell School (The)	Technology
Staffordshire	Blackfriars School (Special) (joint with) Madeley High School	Technology
Staffordshire	Blake High School (joint with) Kingsmead School	Technology
Staffordshire	Chase Terrace High School	Technology
Stockport	Marple Hall School	Sports

Schools unsuccessful in their application for specialist status in the October 2001 competition by LEA

LEA	*School*	*Specialism*
Stockton on Tees	Blakeston Community School	Sports
Stoke on Trent	St. Margaret Ward Catholic High School and Sixth Form	Arts
Suffolk	Mildenhall Upper School	Technology
Suffolk	Sudbury Upper School	Arts
Surrey	Thamesmead School	Arts
Sutton	Glenthorn High School	Arts
Telford and Wrekin	Phoenix School	Sports
Trafford	Altrincham Grammar School-Boys	Language
Trafford	Altrincham Grammar School-Girls	Language
Wandsworth	Battersea Technology College	Arts
Warwickshire	Aylesford School	Language
Warwickshire	Stratford Upon Avon Grammar-Girls	Language
West Berkshire	John O'Gaunt School	Technology
West Essex	Burnt Mill School (joint with) Stewards School	Arts
Wigan	Mornington High School	Arts
Windsor and Maidenhead, RB of	Newlands Girls' School	Technology
Wirral	St. Anselm's College (joint with) Upton Hall School, FCJ	Technology
Wokingham	Bulmershe School (The)	Sports
Wokingham	Maiden Erlegh School	Arts
Wokingham	Waingel's Copse School	Arts
Worcestershire	Kingsley College	Arts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by what criteria the latest round of schools to achieve specialist status was chosen. [36017]

Mr. Timms: Applications for specialist school designation in the October 2001 competition were assessed against the published criteria set out in the guidance documents for Arts, Language, Sport and Technology College applicants. Copies of these have been placed in the Library.

Education Funding

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding allocation is made to the Learning and Skills Council for the education of 14 to 16-year-olds; and when the funding is approved. [36019]

John Healey: In the financial year 2001–02, none of the Learning and Skills Council's budgets is specifically targeted at 14 to 16-year-olds in school years 10 and 11. £23 million, however, has been allocated for Education Business Link (EBL) activities. These activities will prepare young people for the workplace and adult life by building effective partnerships between schools and business to enhance the delivery of key skills and the national curriculum. EBL funding is aimed at all school children but includes a commitment for all Key Stage 4 pupils to experience at least two weeks' work experience.

In the financial year 2002–03 funding for EBL has been subsumed into the LSC's Youth Programmes Budget of £2,708.493 million. This funding will be increased before the start of the financial year to include funding for the "Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16-year-olds" programme. The aim of this programme is to support the development activity necessary to extend vocational options for young people at Key Stage 4 of the national curriculum, in line with commitments in the White Paper: "Schools: Achieving Success" (July 2001).

There are, of course, in addition to 14 to 16-year-olds in years 10 and 11, large numbers of 16-year-olds being educated in FE colleges and school sixth forms. FE college funding for the financial years 2001–02 and 2002–03 is included in a number of LSC budgets and school sixth form funding in a separate, new LSC budget for 2002–03.

The LSC is advised of its funding for each financial year in the preceding December by means of a grant letter. It is informed of any new funding throughout the year as this becomes available.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to converge funding streams for all post-16 provision. [36031]

John Healey: We consulted extensively about funding arrangements for post-16 education and training. Planning and implementing these new systems to meet the Government's learning targets is the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council which has published its corporate plan for the period to 2004 and its plans for developing post-16 funding systems for 2003–04 onwards. The council plans to introduce a common funding approach for 2003–04 in line with our consultations in 1999, 2000 and 2001. Progress to date has been good with development of a consistent national funding system this year for work based learning. Progress in 2002–03 will continue with the development of new funding arrangements for further education and the council's assumption of responsibility for school sixth form funding. We are committed to work with the council to further develop funding systems, to ensure that funding follows the learner and facilitating the development of a rational and coherent approach to funding different forms of post-16 provision.

Excluded Pupils

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of excluded children in authorities with city technology colleges were admitted to such colleges in each of the past three years. [36021]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available centrally.

Course Completion Rates

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment has been made of the comparative completion rates of on-line learning and those who attend further education colleges. [36029]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information collected does not allow a robust comparison of completion rates of students who study on-line with those who attend further education colleges.

Further Education (Rural Areas)

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact of transportation issues on further education in rural areas. [36030]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In 2001 we have commissioned a study into transport services and support for students in further education. This highlighted the difficulties in travelling to school and college experienced by students including those in rural areas. Some students do suffer from both a lack of transport services and high costs.

In response to this, we introduced a clause in the current Education Bill in order to revise section 509 of the Education Act 1996 and to clarify the duty on LEAs. This together with new requirements on the Learning and Skills Council and Further Education Institutions will result in more effective transport services and support for students of 16–19. We are also reviewing the transport support available to older students.

I have also made available an additional £9 million to 76 LEAs from April 2002 to help them to develop and test the most effective approaches to providing transport support in both urban and rural areas.

Ministerial Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list each of the overseas trips made by herself and other members of her ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30171]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 707w.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32008]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) departmental expenditure limit (DEL[1]) for financial year (FY) 2001–02 is £1,018,976,000. FCO projected departmental salary cost[2] for FY 2001–02 is £306,594,875 approximately 30.09 per cent. of the overall DEL.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34162]

Mr. MacShane: The total cost to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for accountancy services for each of the years in question was as follows:

	£
1997–98	267,431
1998–99	1,002,628
1999–2000	181,720
2000–01	384,391
2001 to date	69,937

Lost/stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34216]

Mr. MacShane: A small number of personal effects have been reported lost or stolen from the FCO estate during the last four years. The estimated replacement value of all items is under £50.

Cayman Islands

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions since 27 November 2001 the Government of the Cayman Islands has been requested information on taxes by *(a)* the United States and *(b)* the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [34625]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information is as follows:

(a) None.

(b) None.

The Cayman Islands signed a tax information exchange agreement with the US Government on 27 November 2001. This does not come into effect until January 2004 for criminal matters, and January 2006 for civil and administrative matters. It will not enable the UK to request tax information from the Cayman Islands.

Enron

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Ministers in his Department met representatives of Enron between 11 October 1999 and 7 June 2001; what the reasons for the meetings were; and what follow-up action was taken as a result. [34663]

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[1] DEL figure quoted is FCO Gross voted Resource DEL in "Request for Resources 1" (Promoting internationally the interests of the UK and contributing to a strong world community).

[2] Departmental salary cost figure quoted is the combined total of the estimated UK based Paybill spend and the estimated Locally Employed (LE) Paybill spend.

Mr. Straw: There were no official meetings held between FCO Ministers and representatives of Enron during this period.

English Teaching (Senegal)

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests the British Council have received to increase the provision of English teaching in Senegal since 1997; and what response the Government have made. [35014]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council has provided English language training for approximately 300 Senegalese schoolteachers for each of the past three years. This followed a request for increased training from the Senegalese Ministry of Education. The council has also provided training requested by the Ministry of Finance and the Senegalese Youth Council. An English language training centre was established in Dakar in 1997. The centre provides a high quality training programme to fee-paying students.

The British Council also works in partnership with the BBC and four local radio stations to sponsor the transmission of BBC English in four major cities outside Dakar.

There is substantial demand for English Language Teaching throughout Francophone Africa. The British Council is examining how this demand might be met with the resources available to it.

Detainees

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the conditions inside prisons in Afghanistan holding UK prisoners. [34936]

Mr. Bradshaw: Continuing security risks to our staff travelling outside Kabul and limited capacity place practical limits on what activities we are currently able to undertake in Afghanistan.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to assist in providing information to relatives in the UK about the condition of detainees who are British nationals held in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. [34935]

Mr. Bradshaw: Following the visit of British officials to the three detainees in Guantanamo Bay, Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials passed messages from the detainees to their families about their health. Officials are in regular contact with those family representatives who wish to be in contact. The ICRC remains the most appropriate body for passing messages to and from the detainees. The organisation has a special role under the Geneva Conventions to do so. The ICRC also has a presence on the base in Guantanamo Bay and is permitted to visit each detainee privately.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affai[illegible] the International Committee of the Red Cross has access to all places of detention in Afghanistan. [34934]

Mr. MacShane: The ICRC have informed us that they have access to all known places of detention in Afghanistan, both those under the control of the Afghan authorities and those under the control of US forces.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what logistical support is being offered by Her Majesty's Government to the Afghan Government to assist in the detention of prisoners. [34932]

Mr. Bradshaw: HMG are not offering any logistical support to the Afghan Government to assist in the detention of prisoners. However, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development gave her on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 913W—question number 33607.

Opium Poppy Control Agents

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he anticipates the evaluation of the fungus, pleospora papaveracea, will be communicated to him by the United Nations Drugs Control Project; whether it is being used prior to the communication of the research results; and if he will make a statement. [34896]

Mr. MacShane: It is expected that the research, set up by the UNDCP in 1998, to establish the potential of pleospora papaveracea as an opium poppy control agent will not be evaluated until later this year. Pleospora, which is a naturally occurring fungus, has not been used as a means of eradicating poppy cultivation. The research programme ended in the summer of 2001.

Colombia

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the activities of the paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia in relation to human rights abuses in Colombia; and if he will make a statement. [34892]

Mr. MacShane: We receive regular reports from the British embassy in Bogota, the Colombian Government, NGOs and others about the murderous activities of the so-called Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). The AUC commits a large proportion of the human rights abuses in Colombia.

We continue to urge the Colombian Government to strengthen their efforts to combat paramilitaries, including the AUC, and to take concrete action to dismantle such groups by arresting, prosecuting and punishing those involved. I raised this problem with the Colombian Government during a visit to Colombia last October.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the activities of Dyncorp in recruiting mercenaries for action in Colombia in relation to the Government's policy with regard to that country; and if he will make a statement. [34890]

Mr. MacShane: We have made no assessment of the activities in Colombia of Dyncorp, which is a privately owned US company. Central to our policy towards Colombia is the promotion and protection of human rights, and support for the peace process instigated by President Andres Pastrana.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what involvement British embassy officials in Bogota have in protecting and ensuring the safety of UK citizens who are *(a)* in the Peace Brigades International in Colombia and *(b)* prepared to try to shield Colombian citizens from violence; and if he will make a statement. [34891]

Mr. MacShane: As I made clear in my written answer on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 885W, we strongly support the activities of human rights workers in Colombia, including representatives of Peace Brigades International (PBI). I met a number of human rights defenders, including PBI, during my visit to Colombia last October.

PBI routinely inform the British embassy in Bogota of their travel and accompanying plans, which the embassy checks against the information available to them to determine if an exceptional risk is involved. Should the embassy have such information they would advise PBI not to travel to that location. Embassy staff have given PBI their personal mobile telephone numbers and are thus available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The embassy has intervened to assist PBI in gaining access to key Colombian officials.

The Colombian Government have a protection programme for their nationals who are at severe threat from illegal armed groups. The Colombian Government provide bodyguards, protected vehicles and equipment to protect the homes and offices of human rights workers, and trade union leaders.

Gibraltar

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Gibraltar. [35192]

Peter Hain: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply given by the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 28–29.

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the visits to Gibraltar by Ministers in his Department since June 2000. [35269]

Peter Hain: I visited Gibraltar in September 2001.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many official EU observers were admitted to Zimbabwe by *(a)* 3 February and *(b)* 5 February; and when each invitation requesting their presence from President Mugabe was received. [35101]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Four EU representatives, were deployed in Zimbabwe by 3 February, as the first phase of the EU observation mission. Three of these officials were already in Zimbabwe, while the fourth arrived on 3 February. The leader of the EU Mission, Pierre Schori, arrived in Zimbabwe on 10 February but has not yet received accreditation. An official letter to the EU about the deployment of observers from Foreign Minister Mudenge, was sent on 4 February.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 722, on which day the four representatives to which he referred arrived in Zimbabwe. [35228]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Three of the EU representatives have been in Zimbabwe for some time. The fourth arrived on 3 February.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 722, on Zimbabwe, for what reasons British observers are not included in the EU observation mission. [35227]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The selection of members of EU electoral observation teams is the responsibility of the European Commission.

Burma

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet Tan Sri Razali Ismail to discuss the situation of the Karen people in Burma. [35791]

Mr. Bradshaw: Tan Sri Razali Ismail is doing an excellent job as the United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy to Burma. The Foreign Secretary met him last year and assured him of our full support for his efforts to promote national reconciliation among all the peoples of Burma. Foreign Office officials remain in regular contact with him.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions he plans to take against the Burmese Government over their treatment of the Karen people in Burma. [35790]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK has been at the forefront of the international community's efforts to press for human rights, national reconciliation and democracy in Burma. The EU Common Position on Burma contains measures targeting the military authorities (such as a visa ban and asset freeze on regime members, an arms embargo, a ban on items that can be used for torture and a ban on non-humanitarian assistance). In addition we do not encourage trade, investment or tourism with Burma. In response to concerns over forced labour, the European Commission suspended Burma's Generalised System of Preferences trading privileges in 1997. These measures will remain in place until there is firm evidence of political progress in Burma.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations his Department has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* others regarding the situation of the Karen people in Burma. [35787]

Mr. Bradshaw: Records are only available to show the number of letters we receive about Burma issues in general. However the plight of the Karen people is a consistent theme in letters the Foreign Office receives from hon. Members and members of the public. Since January 2001, the Foreign Office has received over 200 letters about Burma from Members of Parliament and over 1,800 letters from members of the public.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress made by the United Nations Special Envoy to Burma. [36009]

Mr. Bradshaw: Since the beginning of 2001 there has been a modest improvement in the political and human rights situation in Burma. Mr. Razali Ismail is doing an excellent job in promoting national reconciliation in Burma.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the humanitarian situation of refugees who have left Burma and set up camp in Sangklaburi, Thailand. [35789]

Mr. Bradshaw: The closest camp to Sangklaburi is Ban Don Yang. It hosts around 3,900 refugees. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who provide assistance to the refugees there believe the conditions are generally satisfactory, though not perfect as it is quite isolated and very close to the border. Foreign diplomatic staff including from the British embassy in Bangkok also visit the camp.

DfID has significantly increased UK funding this year for the UN High Commission for Refugees, the International Commission for the Red Cross and the Burmese Border Consortium for their work with Burmese refugees.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* Karen, *(b)* Karenni and *(c)* Shan people are estimated to have left Burma following their treatment by the Burmese military. [35788]

Mr. Bradshaw: Just over 125,000 Burmese refugees live in camps on the Thai/Burmese border, nearly all of whom are from Karen and Karenni states, although exact figures on ethnic background are not kept. In addition there are a large number of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand. Again exact figures are not known, but estimates range form 500,000 to 2 million.

Common Agricultural Policy Budget

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate has been made of the annual cost to the CAP budget of paying to *(a)* Poland and *(b)* the other accession candidate countries, one-quarter of the value of direct payments normally made to EU farmers. [35320]

Peter Hain: The Commission recently presented a framework paper for financing EU enlargement up to 2006. The framework includes a proposal to phase-in direct payments for new member states at a starting level of 25 per cent. in 2004 rising to 35 per cent. in 2006. For the period 2004–06, the Commission estimate the cost of this to be euro 2.6 billion for up to 10 new member states. No estimate of the cost for individual member states is given.

Heads of State (Visits)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visits to the United Kingdom, other than to Northern Ireland, have been carried out by the President of the Irish Republic since 1997; and how they were categorised. [35332]

Mr. MacShane: Since 1997 the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, has carried out eight working visits to the UK, other than to Northern Ireland. She has also carried out a number of private visits, on which the FCO does not keep records.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how visits by foreign heads of state are categorised; who decides this; and what criteria are applied. [35341]

Mr. MacShane: Visits by foreign heads of state are categorised as State, Guest of Government, Working or Private.

State visits are at the invitation of Her Majesty the Queen, on the advice of the Royal Visits committee. Guest of Government visits would usually be at the invitation of the Prime Minister, on advice from an inter-departmental visits committee. Working or private visits take place on the initiative of the visitors or at the invitation of third parties.

Ian Stillman

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact his consular officials have had with Ian Stillman; and on what dates. [35861]

Mr. Bradshaw: Mr. Stillman was visited by consular officials on 5 September 2000, 5 December 2000, 21 February 2001, 16 July 2001 and 5 September 2001. He was due to be visited on 19 December 2001, but was having dental treatment in Shimla. The next visit is due on 19 March.

Consular staff in New Delhi and London have been in frequent contact with Mr. Stillman's family and lawyer. My noble Friend Baroness Amos met the family on 5 February 2002.

Visitor Visas

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people were issued with visit visas in *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan, *(c)* Bangladesh, *(d)* Ghana, *(e)* Nigeria, *(f)* Malaysia, *(g)* Jamaica, *(h)* Zimbabwe and *(i)* Kenya in 2001. [35549]

Mr. Bradshaw: Non-settlement visas issued in the posts mentioned during 2001 (the majority of which were made by visitors) were as follows:

	Number
India	177,756
Pakistan	76,507
Bangladesh	15,712
Ghana	31,604
Nigeria	77,861
Malaysia	1,745
Jamaica	3,139
Zimbabwe	[1] 1,926
Kenya	19,870

[1] To November 2001

European Union

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made concerning reforming the decision making process of the European Union. [35638]

Peter Hain: The Government are in favour of reform which makes the EU more efficient and effective in delivering the benefits citizens expect. The Convention on the Future of Europe, which starts on 28 February, will begin a debate on how best to achieve these goals. The Government have not sought to prejudge the work of the Convention by making detailed representations at this stage.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals on the future distribution of competences between the European Union and its member states the Minister for Europe, in his role as the Government's representative on the Convention on the Future of Europe, will be making to the Convention on the Future of Europe; and if he will make a statement. [35850]

Peter Hain: I welcome the opportunity the Convention on the Future of Europe gives us to look at who does what. The complexity of the present situation is undesirable. We will work towards a solution which gives us flexibility and transparency.

European Single Sky

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the Government will be making to the European Council at Barcelona on the creation of the single sky in Europe; what effect they will have on Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [35852]

Peter Hain: The Lisbon strategy calls for completion of the Single European Sky by 2004. Proposals designed to achieve this are currently under negotiation. The Spanish Presidency has not yet made clear whether this issue will be discussed at the Barcelona European Council. The UK is committed to Single Sky. It offers the best route to overcoming delays and congestion caused by the structural problems in Europe's Air Traffic Management (ATM) system. It will also improve safety, and provide the necessary framework for future air traffic growth.

With regard to the effect of these proposals on Gibraltar, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 811W. There have been no further discussions with Spain on this matter.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on United Nations Security Council resolution 1291 (2000) in respect of the orderly withdrawal of all foreign forces from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in accordance with the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement; when it is anticipated all foreign troops will leave; and if he will make a statement. [35241]

Mr. MacShane: Since the adoption of resolution 1291 Namibia has withdrawn all its troops from the DRC. All other foreign parties to the conflict have withdrawn some of their forces. We welcome these withdrawals. But we will continue to press all parties to withdraw all their troops in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Crown Dependencies

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the model Order in Council that his Department has developed for the purpose of criminalising terrorism financing in the Crown Dependencies; and if he will make a statement. [34624]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

All the Crown Dependencies, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, already have their own strong anti-money laundering legislation. United Kingdom legislation against terrorism financing does not extend to the Crown Dependencies; they are all, however, preparing further domestic anti-terrorism legislation, which includes new provisions to counteract terrorism financing.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31778]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1129–30W.

Departmental Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33203]

Mr. Wills: There have been no inward or external secondments between the listed companies and this Department in any of the years specified.

Cabinet Papers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will introduce proposals to amend restrictions on the timing of the release of Cabinet papers. [33123]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The release of Cabinet papers which have been preserved as public records of historical interest is subject to the provisions of the Public Records Act 1958 as amended by the Public Records Act 1967. There are no current proposals to amend these provisions.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

BCCI

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the total costs paid to *(a)* the liquidators of BCCI and *(b)* their legal advisers since 5 July 1991. [13639]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The latest report and accounts prepared by the liquidators and submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry show that the total of remuneration drawn by the liquidators in the period from 5 July 1991 to 15 January was US$267 million. The total paid in respect of legal fees in that period was US$145 million.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the payment of Insolvency Service fees by the liquidators of BCCI and the services provided by the Insolvency Service in return for that payment to the English creditors. [31049]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The latest report and accounts prepared by the liquidators and provided to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, show that, in the period 5 July to 15 January 2001 a total of US$13.2 million was paid in fees to the Insolvency Service. Regulations and Fees Orders determined the rates at which these fees were charged on moneys paid into the Insolvency Services Account. Such fees are appropriated in aid of the Department's vote.

Export Licences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for each year since 1997, what is the *(a)* average and *(b)* upper decile time taken to determine (i) an export licence and (ii) a 680 application. [25387]

Nigel Griffiths: The processing of Form 680 applications for the advance approval for promotion prior to formal application for an export licence is the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence.

The Export Control Organisation (ECO) sets out the Government's commitment to exporters in a Service and Performance Code (available on its website (www.dti.gov.uk/export.control). Where, as in almost all cases, it is necessary for a Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) application to be circulated to other Government Departments the aim is to provide a response to 70 per cent. of cases within 20 working days, except in special circumstances. Details of performance in processing SIEL applications against the target are published in the Government's annual report on strategic export controls, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Prior to the introduction of the ECO's current computer database during 1999, information on the average time taken to process a SIEL application was not recorded. It would therefore entail disproportionate cost to establish the average and upper decile time taken to process a SIEL application between 1997 and 1999.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 10 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 305–06W, for details of the average time taken to process a SIEL application in 2000. The upper decile time taken to process a SIEL application in 2000 was 53 working days.

The average time taken in working days to process a SIEL application whose processing was completed in 2001 is as follows:

	Working days
Mode	13
Median	18
Mean	31
Upper decile	59

Any comparison of the average and upper decile time taken to process a SIEL application between 2000 and 2001 would not provide for an accurate reflection of the Government's performance, given the Export Control Organisation's success in finalising a number of long standing cases during 2001, which are not reflected in previous years' figures. The figures do not take account of periods during which applications were referred back to exporters for further information. These occur, for example, when the nature or end user of the goods requires further clarification.

It would entail disproportionate cost to establish the average and upper decile time taken to process all Open Individual Export Licence applications since 1997.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether it is the procedure of officials in her Department to advise companies who have applied for export licences that are likely to be refused, to withdraw the licence application prior to formal refusal. [35031]

Nigel Griffiths: There are no procedures in place to advise companies to withdraw licence applications prior to a refusal decision being made.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what percentage per year of export licence applications for dual use goods were circulated to other Departments for consultation, broken down by the export categories and countries of destination for the export licence applications in the last 12 months. [32272]

Nigel Griffiths: Where items are deemed licensable and not covered by an Open General Licence, all export licence applications for dual use items are circulated to other Government Departments for consultation. The number of export licence applications covering dual use items, together with their description or rating, is published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls.

The 2001 annual report will be published as soon as possible.

Pakistan Ordnance Factories

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on the agreements between Royal Ordnance and Pakistan Ordnance Factories prior to 1987 that permitted POF to produce APFSDS ammunition under licensed production in Pakistan; and what the state of these licensed production agreements is; [32279]

(2) if she will make a statement on the licensed production agreements negotiated between Royal Ordnance and Pakistan Ordnance Factories from 1975 to 1987. [32271]

Nigel Griffiths: It would be inappropriate to comment on any such agreement entered into during the time of a previous Administration. In any case this is a matter between Royal Ordnance and Pakistan Ordnance Factories.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent requests she has received from Pakistan Ordnance Factories for permission to export munitions, manufactured under licensed production agreements agreed with Royal Ordnance prior to 1987, to third countries. [32278]

Nigel Griffiths: An export licence is not required from the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation to export items from Pakistan to a third country.

Broadband

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the RDA broadband fund has been allocated; which RDAs have published their broadband strategy; and which RDAs have implemented their strategies. [35441]

Mr. Alexander: The UK broadband fund has been allocated to the English Regional Development Agencies and the devolved Administrations on the basis of their need for broadband coverage. We announced allocations on 9 October 2001. RDAs will publish their corporate plans which will set out their aims, objectives, operations and key performance targets. The decision on whether or not to publish their broadband strategies is a matter for each RDA.

Debt Management Companies

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will take steps to review the regulation of fees and commission charged by debt management companies. [35713]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In December the Director General of Fair Trading issued guidelines to debt management companies to ensure they deal fairly and openly with consumers. The guidelines require consumers to be given adequate and clear information on cost and the service provided before they enter into a contract.

Company Directors (Remuneration)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on levels of remuneration for company directors. [35540]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1376W.

Post Offices

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Consignia about the impact on rural and urban communities of their intention to close post offices. [35635]

Mr. Alexander: None. We welcome the terms negotiated between Post Office Ltd. and the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters in relation to the urban network. The Government's formal requirement on the Post Office to maintain the rural network and prevent avoidable closures of rural post offices remains in place.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices there are in Wales; how many sub-post offices have been closed since May 1997; and if she will make a statement. [35620]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 965W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices have closed in Surrey in each of the past five years. [35811]

Mr. Alexander: I understand from Post Office Ltd. that data on the post office network are not held on a county basis.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government will present proposals regarding the urban post office network. [35300]

Mr. Alexander: Detailed discussion continues on the programme to restructure the urban post office network.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what options she is assessing for transitional financial assistance to the rural post office network; when she will announce a decision; and if she will make a statement. [35877]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 560W.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the level of take-up of the £2 million rural post office scheme; and what action she is taking to increase take-up. [35299]

Mr. Alexander: To date there have been over 500 requests for further information about the £2 million fund made available by Government to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or re-open post office facilities in rural areas. Also to date, 29 completed applications out of the 139 forms requested have been received by Post Office Ltd. and seven initiatives have been allocated funding. The scheme is promoted by rural transfer advisers from Post Office Ltd.

Television Sets

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs there were in the UK in each of the last five years in the manufacture of small and medium sized television sets. [34909]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Figures for the number of jobs in the UK in the manufacture of TV's are not available, though the British Radio and Electrical Equipment Manufacturers Association maintain data on the UK Consumer Electronics sector as a whole. Sales of high value, large screen and widescreen TV's are the main growth area of the industry, however, with 4.76 million sold in 2000 against 3.6 million in 1999, presenting manufacturers with the opportunity to move their UK production up the value chain.

Working Hours

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government are taking to help people working longer than the 48 hour working week; and if she will make a statement. [35683]

Alan Johnson: The Government have introduced the Working Time Regulations, which provide that no worker (excluding those in the transport and offshore sectors, sea fishing and junior doctors) may be required to work beyond 48 hours a week on average.

The Government are also encouraging the greater provision of flexible working opportunities which can help ease the pressure on employees to work long hours. The Government's work-life balance campaign seeks to persuade companies to introduce ways of working which meet the needs of the business and its customers while simultaneously improving the work-life balance of their employees. The Government are also particularly looking to facilitate discussion between employers and parents to consider flexible working arrangements that suit them both. It is introducing a new right, to come into force in April 2003, for parents of children aged under six, or under-18 for parents of disabled children, to request flexible working and to have those requests seriously considered by their employers.

Employment Status Consultation Paper

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government's consultation paper on employment status is due to be published; and if she will make a statement. [35305]

Alan Johnson: We are just beginning a review of employment status in relation to statutory employment rights. As part of this review, we are holding initial discussions with stakeholders, which will inform a discussion document, which we intend to publish in late spring.

Post Office Investment

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will provide a detailed breakdown of the £750 million the Government have invested in the Post Office, referred to by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 252. [35201]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 409W. In addition, £480 million has been invested by Government in the Horizon programme to automate the entire post office network.

Your Guide

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial contribution from the Scottish Executive is being sought prior to rolling-out the "Your Guide" system in Scotland. [35735]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 967W. Should the evaluation of the pilot "Your Guide" system, and the additional work on the costs and benefits of this, indicate that a national service should be rolled out, then we will work with all of the devolved Administrations to determine the form, content and funding of any future "Your Guide" service.

Consignia

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to make a decision regarding the dividend taken from Consignia this year; and what her policy on Consignia dividends is. [35480]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I would expect to take a decision on dividends after the end of the current financial year. The policy on dividends is set out in the White Paper, "Post Office Reform: A World Class Service for the 21st Century".

British Trade International

Joan Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to change the departmental expenditure limit of British Trade International for 2001–02. [36524]

Ms Hewitt: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, British Trade International's Resource DEL will be increased by £175,000 from £88,818,000 to £88,993,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	175
New DEL	88,993
of which:	
Voted	88,993
Non-voted	0
Capital	
Change	0
New DEL	248
of which:	
Voted	248
Non-voted	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from a transfer of £175,000 in resources from the Department of Trade and Industry to British Trade International in respect of two Rover Task Force projects in the west midlands.

Ofgem

Joan Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to change the departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limits for her Department and the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. [36525]

Ms Hewitt: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the Department of Trade and Industry DEL will be increased by £69,043,000 from £4,766,430,000 to £4,835,473,000 and the Administration Costs limit will be reduced by £23,020,000 from £435,345,000 to £412,325,000. This includes the impact on the DTI DEL of the Machinery of Government transfers from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which were still under consideration when the announcement was made regarding the Winter Supplementaries of both Departments.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	50,539
New DEL	4,022,145
of which:	
Voted	895,145
Non-voted	3,127,000
Capital	
Change	18,504
New DEL	813,328
of which:	
Voted	–148,330
Non-voted	961,658

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) the transfer of £40,300,000 of non-Voted DEL to reflect Machinery of Government transfers from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in respect of Regional Development Agencies;

(ii) to reflect the reclassification of the Private Finance Initiative Contract relating to the National Physical Laboratory as on-balance sheet, by transferring £11,220,000 to capital;

(iii) to transfer £1,506,000 to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for the acquisition and reclamation of strategically sited land in furtherance of the Rover Task Force diversity, modernisation and regeneration objectives;

(iv) to reclassify from capital £395,000 for the Rover Task Force Modernisation and Diversification Projects (subheads U3 and A2), of which £175,000 will be transferred to British Trade International in connection with Autosport International and Overseas Links;

(v) to record £497,531,000 of voted current receipts from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and to increase non-voted resource expenditure by an equivalent amount to reflect revised agreement on the sums to be recorded as a Machinery of Government transfer related to Regional Development Agencies;

(vi) to reclassify £650,000 from voted to non-voted DEL to reflect the funding of Regional Development Agencies via grant in aid following the above Machinery of Government changes;

(vii) to reclassify £3,010,000 from voted to non-voted DEL in connection with the funding via Regional Development Agencies of innovative schemes to establish broadband networks;

(viii) to reclassify £441,000 from voted to non-voted DEL in connection with the funding via Regional Development Agencies of regional manufacturing centres;

(ix) to reclassify £3,218,000 from voted to non-voted DEL in connection with the funding via Regional Development Agencies of Regional Supply Offices;

(x) to transfer £250,000 to the devolved Administration of Scotland in connection with the funding of innovative schemes to establish broadband networks;

(xi) to transfer £250,000 from the devolved Administration of Scotland as indemnity for costs incurred by administrators of Atlantic Telecom Group plc for costs of continuing provision of telephone services;

(xii) to increase by £900,000 the non-Voted resource DEL of Postwatch to be offset by an equivalent increase in voted licence fee receipts;

(xiii) to transfer an additional £257,000 in administration costs and £311,000 in resource (of which £50,000 to be vired to administration to reflect funding via ACAS) from the Department for Education and Skills for publicity and evaluation in relation to the Work Life Balance project to reflect Machinery of Government transfers;

(xiv) to utilise £105,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement transferred from the Department for Education and Skills for publicity and evaluation in relation to the Work Life Balance project to reflect Machinery of Government transfers

(xv) to transfer £100,000 from the Home Office in relation to the Work Life Balance project to reflect Machinery of Government transfers;

(xvi) to transfer £11,000 in administration costs from the Home Office for the administration of the Easter and British summer time; Sunday trading, street markets and Chartered Fairs Projects to reflect Machinery of Government Transfers;

(xvii) to transfer from capital £5,440,000 in connection with British Trade International to fund IT development under the ELGAR PFI contract;

(xviii) to reclassify from capital £471,000 to fund Claims Handling in the Redundancy Payments Service system upgrade;

(xix) to transfer £50,000 from the Lord Chancellor's Department in support of the Debt Advice Project;

(xx) to utilise £3,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase the External Financing Limit of British Coal Corporation to provide for compensation payments to dismissed miners.

RfR2

(i) to take up £5,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund Higher Education Innovation Fund projects;

(ii) to take up £4,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund Exploitation of Discoveries at Public Sector Research Establishments;

(iii) to take up £2,884,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase non-voted expenditure of the Medical Research Council;

(iv) to take up £2,350,000 of the non-voted Science Departmental Unallocated Provision to increase non-voted expenditure of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council;

(v) to take up £2,862,000 of the Science non-voted Departmental Unallocated Provision to increase non-voted expenditure of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils;

(vi) to transfer £334,000 of capital from the Synchrotron Radiation Source project to fund additional non-voted expenditure of £334,000 to the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils;

(vii) to take up £782,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund Science Enterprise Challenge projects;

(viii) to take up £146,000 of the Science non-voted Departmental Unallocated Provision for funding of Foresight LINK Awards.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

RfR1

(i) to reclassify £2,175,000 and make a transfer of this amount to the Department for Education and Skills for MG Rover training;

(ii) to reflect the reclassification of the Private Finance Initiative Contract relating to the National Physical Laboratory as on-balance sheet, by transferring £11,220,000 from resource;

(iii) to reclassify to resource £395,000 for the Rover Task Force Modernisation and Diversification Projects;

(iv) to record £636,558,000 of capital receipts from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and to increase non-voted resource expenditure by an equivalent amount to reflect revised agreement on the sums to be recorded as a Machinery of Government transfer related to Regional Development Agencies;

(v) to transfer £57,000 from the Department for Education and Skills for publicity and evaluation in relation to the Work Life Balance project to reflect Machinery of Government transfers;

(vi) to transfer to administration £5,440,000 in connection with British Trade International to fund IT development under the ELGAR PFI contract;

(vii) to reclassify to administration £471,000 to fund Claims Handling in the Redundancy Payments Service system upgrade;

(viii) to utilise £435,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for the Capital Modernisation Fund for the Innovative Clusters Fund for the regions, and reclassify to reflect funding via Regional Development Agencies.

RfR2

(i) increases in non-Voted expenditure of £3,000,000 by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, funded by a £3,000,000 reduction in voted provision for the Synchrotron Radiation Source project;

(ii) to take up £6,063,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement from underspends on Joint Infrastructure Fund projects to fund projects under the Science Research Investment Fund;

(iii) to take up £8,044,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase non-voted expenditure by the Medical Research Council;

(iv) to take up £1,500,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase non-voted expenditure by the Natural Environment Research Council;

(v) to transfer £334,000 from the Synchrotron Radiation Source project to fund additional resource expenditure of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils;

Also, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the departmental expenditure limit for the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets will be increased by £1,000 from £1,316,000 to £1,317,000. The Administration Costs Limit will increase by £1,220,000 from £36,130,000 to £37,350,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	1
New DEL	352
of which:	
Voted	352
Non-voted	0
Capital	
Change	0
New DEL	965
of which:	
Voted	965
Non-voted	—

All of the above increases will either be offset by inter-departmental transfers, take-up of End-Year Flexibility or use of Departmental Unallocated Provisions and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Onshore Licences

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 609W, on petroleum licensing, what decisions she has made on onshore licence awards. [36754]

Mr. Wilson: I have decided to offer 22 Petroleum Exploration and Development Licences. In addition, I will offer another two licences provided that I am satisfied by further information yet to be supplied by the applicants.

These licences cover areas the length and breadth of the country, and include acreage never previously considered for oil and gas exploration. It is encouraging to see licences going to new applicants from both the UK and overseas—there are British, Italian, Canadian and Australian companies here, as operators or as partners. The high level of interest in this Round shows that the UK's onshore oil and gas industry has a strong future.

It is particularly good to be able to offer 14 licences to companies concentrating on gas from coal mines, offering the potential for new activity in former mining communities and helping to bring new activity and jobs to former mining areas, while contributing to the UK's energy supply, and helping to meet the Government's Kyoto targets by preventing unnecessary emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. The other 10 licences show that conventional oil and gas is not being overlooked and continues to attract a high level of interest itself.

The operators on each licence, with the blocks to be covered and a brief resume of the drilling portion of the Work Programme are as follows:

Operator	*Blocks*	*Work programme (drilling only)*
Alkane Energy UK Ltd.	NX92, NX93, NY02, NY03	One firm well
Alkane Energy UK Ltd.	NT26, NT36	One firm well
Alkane Energy UK Ltd.	NS65, NS75	One firm well
Alkane Energy UK Ltd.	SK21, SK22	One firm well
Alkane Energy UK Ltd.	SJ94	One drill-or-drop well
Alkane Energy UK Ltd.	SJ18	One drill-or-drop well
Alkane Energy UK Ltd.	SE22	One drill-or-drop well
Alkane Energy UK Ltd.	S078, S079	One drill-or-drop well
Sterling Resources (UK) Ltd.	SU42	One drill-or-drop well
Sonorex Oil and Gas Ltd.	ST47, ST48	One drill-or-drop well
Northern Petroleum (GB) Ltd.	TQ75, TQ85, TQ95, TR05	One drill-or-drop well
Black Rock Resources (UK) Ltd.	SZ49, SZ59	One drill-or-drop well
Stratagas plc	SE74	Three drill-or-drop CBM wells
Stratagas plc	SJ82, SJ91, SJ92, SK11, SK02, SK12, SK21	Three drill-or-drop CBM wells and a drill-or-drop Gob Gas well
Stratagas plc	SJ48	Three drill-or-drop CBM wells
Stratagas plc	SN40	Three drill-or-drop CBM wells
Stag Energy Ltd.	SK65, SK66	One drill-or-drop well
Warwick Energy Exploration and Production Ltd.	SU40, SU30	One drill-or-drop well
Warwick Energy Exploration and Production Ltd.	SE68, SE78, SE88, SE98	Two drill-or-drop wells
Archean Energy (UK) Ltd.	TQ22, TQ32	One drill-or-drop well
Archean Energy (UK) Ltd.	SJ28, SJ29, SJ38, SJ39	One drill-or-drop well
Coalbed Methane Ltd.	NS76, NS77	One drill-or-drop well

Fire Sprinklers

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regulations exist to limit the use of fire sprinklers in listed buildings. [33509]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

Listed building consent is required to alter a listed building in any way that would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest. Listed building controls extend to all works, both external and internal, that would affect a building's special interest.

It is for local planning authorities in the first instance to decide whether consent is required in any particular case, including for works involving the installation of fire sprinklers. In appropriate cases, conditions may be attached to the grant of listed building consent requiring the preservation of particular features.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Family Visitor Appeals

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the *(a)* costs of and *(b)* income from fees charged for family visitor appeals. [27872]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The information is as follows:

(a) The cost to the Immigration Appellate authorities of family visitor appeals in the first six months of this financial year was £883,000.

(b) The net income from fees charged for family visitor appeals in the first six months of this financial year was £73,500.

Police Response Times

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision exists to inspect the standards on telephone response times in the Metropolitan police. [12539]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the service level for answering 999 emergency calls is measured at 15 minute intervals throughout the day. This is used to identify patterns and establish the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) call handling requirements.

Supervising officers dip-sample telephone calls so that quality is assured and to ensure adherence to the MPS' policies, practices and procedures. This also ensures that calls are answered within a reasonable time.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total external spend by his Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31046]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested is not available in the format requested. To provide the hon. Member with a full answer will incur disproportionate cost. I can however provide information detailing total spend on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years and also the number of consultancy firms used by my Department over this period. The aforementioned information is as follows:

Total spend on private finance initiative (PFI) consultants

	£
1998	103,563
1999	89,473
2000	2,926,936
2001	7,372,187

Number of consultancy firms used by the Home Department on PFI projects

	Number
1998	1
1999	2
2000	4
2001	5

The increase in expenditure is largely due to two projects, firstly the setting up of the Criminal Records Bureau and secondly various business change services relating to the Immigration and Nationality Department's Casework Programme to enable the improvement of case management.

Immigration Statistics

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion and number of immigration applications for *(a)* work permit holders, *(b)* people with UK ancestry, *(c)* EEA nationals and their families, *(d)* spouses, *(e)* fiancés and fianceés and *(f)* asylum seekers were decided upon in under (i) one month, (ii) two months, (iii) four months, (iv) six months, (v) 12 months and (vi) 18 months in each of the last five years; and what figures he predicts for the next two years. [30996]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not readily available.

There are currently no published data for the individual categories of immigration applications. However, our aim is to decide all straightforward applications within three weeks. Owing to the exceptionally high number of applications received in 2001, especially in recent months, and process changes which are being introduced to improve our longer term performance, it is at present taking up to eight weeks to decide an application. We are working to reduce this to three weeks as soon as possible. Information on expected processing times for straightforward cases is provided to applicants on the Immigration Nationality Directorate (IND) website at http://194.203.40.90/default.asp?PageId=113.

The requested information on asylum applications is also not readily available; however the tables show the average time taken from an asylum application to an initial decision, for initial decisions made in each year.

Corresponding calendar year information for 2000 and for 2001 is not available.

Average time (in months) to initial decision[1,2,4]

Year of decision	*Months*
1997[3]	22
1998[3]	17
1999[3,5]	35
October 2000 to September 2001[6,7]	14

[1] Excluding dependants

[2] Figures are estimates based on cases for which information is recorded

[3] Based on data from Refugee Index

[4] The average length of time (in months) is calculated from date application is lodged to the date of initial decision. and relates to the year in which the decisions were made

[5] As at the end of December 1999, excluding cases waiting an initial decision

[6] Based on data from A-CID (Asylum Cases Information Database)

[7] Provisional figures

I regret that information on predicted processing times for the next two years is not available.

Metropolitan Police

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police, *(b)* beat and *(c)* traffic officers there were in the Metropolitan police in each of the past 10 years; and what the (i) total, (ii) beat policing and (iii) traffic policing budget was in each of those years. [31020]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary collect information on the number of officers in different functions. Information on the Metropolitan police force is set out in the table. Information before 1996–97 is not available.

	Total police officers	*Patrol, or foot/car/beat patrol*[1]	*Traffic*[1]
1996–97	26,447	12,307	922
1997–98	26,094	12,159	823
1998–99	25,956	11,716	782
1999–2000	25,462	12,312	824
2000–01	24,935	10,984	686

[1] Definitions of patrol and traffic officers changed in 1999–2000

Note:

The Metropolitan police was affected by boundary changes on 1 April 2000. The effect of this was incorporated into the funding formula and the overall transfer between the forces involved was in terms of financial resources, not of officers. Because it is for police authorities and Chief Constables to decide how resources are utilised, it is not possible to say what proportion of the reduction in Metropolitan police strength between 1999–2000 and 2000–01 relates to boundary changes.

I am informed by the Commissioner that budgets have not been allocated on a functional basis that would allow identification against beat and traffic policing. The Commissioner has provided the information about net revenue budgets set out in the table.

£000

	Net revenue budget
1991–92	1,415,167
1992–93	1,523,043
1993–94	1,597,684
1994–95	1,616,511
1995–96	1,632,663
1996–97	1,667,330
1997–98	1,707,553
1998–99	1,778,238
1999–2000	1,846,564
2000–01	1,842,433
2001–02	2,040,100

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many of his Department's PFI contracts Arthur Andersen has been an adviser; and if he will make a statement. [31721]

Angela Eagle: From the information available, there are no instances in this Department where Arthur Andersen has been used as an adviser on a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to the Criminal Cases Review Commission in connection with Crown court sentencing were referred to the Court of Appeal Criminal Division in each of the last two years; and how many of them resulted in a quashing or variation of sentence. [32478]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The required information is as follows:

	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	*1 April to 31 December 2001**
Crown court sentence referrals	3	2
Quashed or varied	2	1
Waiting to be heard	1	1

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures the Criminal Cases Review Commission uses to prioritise its Crown court conviction case load. [32488]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission has a priority-ranking group that reviews all applications for priority.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what quotas there are for the numbers of cases which may be referred to the Court of Appeal Criminal Division by the Criminal Cases Review Commission in any year. [32476]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There are no quotas on the number of cases which may be referred to the Court of Appeal in any year by the Commission.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority is given by the Criminal Cases Review Commission to the crown court conviction cases of dead people. [32495]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission has a priority-ranking group that reviews all applications for priority. Cases involving applicants in custody are generally assigned higher priority than those in which applicants are at liberty or deceased, and are reviewed in date order of receipt.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to the Criminal Cases Review Commission in each of the last two years concerned sentences passed in the magistrates' courts. [32473]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested, and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However following the introduction of an electronic case database from 1 April 2001 recent data are available. Of 31 applications concerning summary convictions in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001, one was a sentence only application.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Criminal Cases Review Commission criteria are for fast-tracking Crown court conviction cases. [32490]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Cases involving applicants in custody are generally assigned higher priority than those in which applicants are at liberty or deceased, and are reviewed in date order of receipt. Priority may be given to cases in which the health of applicants or witnesses is a significant factor; or there is serious risk of deterioration of evidence, or to cases of special importance to the criminal justice system. Also once they have been identified, cases which offer little or no new evidence or argument and can be reviewed with modest caseworker effort are undertaken without further delay.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what role the Commissioners of the Criminal Cases Review Commission play in crown court conviction case reviews. [32499]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Commission members carry out some case reviews and are responsible for all final case decisions.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the crown court conviction cases of applicants dead at the time of application were fast-tracked by the Criminal Cases Review Commission in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2001; and what proportion these represented all fast-tracked cases in each of those years. [32496]

Mr. Keith Bradley: None out of 25 cases in the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, and one out of 17 cases in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001 (approximately 6 per cent).

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to the Criminal Cases Review Commission concerned crown court sentences in each of the last two years; and what proportion this is of all applications of all kinds. [32477]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested, and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However following the introduction of an electronic case database from 1 April 2001 recent data are available.

In the period 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001, 616 applications were received. 51 of these (just over 8 per cent. of the total) were sentence only applications.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the Criminal Cases Review Commission time was spent in the last two years on *(a)* the cases of people dead at the time of application, *(b)* the cases of people dead at the time of referral, *(c)* magistrates court conviction cases, *(d)* magistrates court sentencing cases and *(e)* Crown court sentencing cases. [32482]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not measure these time elements and this question could only be answered at disproportionate cost. However as few cases involve the deceased, the proportion of time spent on them is small.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many magistrates court conviction cases were referred to the Crown court in each of the last two years; and how many resulted in a quashed conviction. [32472]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission referred one case to the Crown court in the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001. This conviction was quashed. In the period 1 April to December 2001, three cases were referred and are awaiting judgment.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what role public opinion plays in the Criminal Cases Review Commission criteria for prioritising Crown court conviction cases. [32489]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Commission's policies on case priority setting have been developed with advice and comment from potential applicants, applicants and their representatives, courts of appeal, the Court of Appeal, the criminal justice system and its agencies and the Secretaries of State for the Home Department and for Northern Ireland.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Criminal Cases Review Commission processes all magistrates court sentencing cases. [32479]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Yes, the Criminal Cases Review Commission does process all magistrates court sentencing cases.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the Criminal Cases Review Commission Crown court conviction cases are fast-tracked. [32491]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested, and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However following the introduction of an electronic case database from 1 April 2001 recent data are available. The Criminal Cases Review Commission received 66 requests for priority during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001. 17 requests (26 per cent) were granted. Cases identified as requiring only modest caseworker effort were also processed faster.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the numbers of case review managers at the Criminal Cases Review Commission. [32500]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Home Secretary has provided funding to meet the Criminal Cases Review Commission's proposals in relation to its increasing numbers of case review managers. The commission considers that it has had adequate funding for the 2001–02 financial year, and is now preparing its annual business plan for 2002–03.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants about crown court convictions to the Criminal Cases Review Commission *(a)* in 2002 and *(b)* 2001 were dead at the time of the application; and what proportion of the total applications they represented. [32493]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested, and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However following the introduction of an electronic case database from 1 April 2001 recent data are available.

In the period 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001, one application out of 616 was on behalf of a deceased person.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of Crown court convictions have been referred to the Criminal Cases Review Commission in each of the last two years; in each year how many were dealt with fully; how many were in process of review at the end of that year; and how many there were upon which work had not commenced. [32486]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested, and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However following the introduction of an electronic case database from 1 April 2001 recent data are available.

The tabulation statistics include convictions in magistrates' courts and these constituted about 6 per cent. for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001.

	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	*1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001*
Cases received	799	616
Completed	1,110	881
Under review	492	375
Awaiting review	576	422

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants in Crown court conviction cases whose cases have been referred to the Court of Appeal by the Criminal Cases Review Commission were dead at the time of referral; and what percentage of total conviction referrals were represented by referrals of the cases of the dead in the last 12 months. [32494]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There have been eight cases concerning those deceased at the time of referral, and 3 per cent. (one out of 30 referrals) during the last 12 months.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Criminal Cases Review Commission has formal discussions with the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) on *(a)* policy and *(b)* jurisprudence; and which personnel from each organization take part in them. [32475]

Mr. Keith Bradley: No formal discussions on either subject have taken place.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average time *(a)* in 2002 and *(b)* 2001 from application to the issue of a referral or a minded-to-refuse letter for fast-tracked Crown court conviction cases. [32492]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested, and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Criminal Cases Review Commission processes all applications which concern Crown court sentences. [32470]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Yes, the Criminal Cases Review Commission processes all applications concerning Crown court sentences.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the time taken for the Criminal Cases Review Commission to process a Crown court conviction case to a conclusion is sufficiently short, in every case, to remedy miscarriages of justice expeditiously. [32498]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Following consultation, the commission has introduced criteria for prioritising applications and screening that allows less complex cases to be completed without delay. A backlog of accumulated cases has precluded the commission from processing other applications as speedily as would be ideal. Increased resources have been made available to the commission and the backlog has decreased considerably over the last two years and continues to do so. The number of cases under review and awaiting review peaked in 1999, since when it has been halved. The commission is committed to processing all applications with due regard to efficiency and quality.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will launch a campaign to inform British nationals that they will be prosecuted for child sex crimes committed overseas; and if he will make a statement. [33019]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are keen to do all we can to protect the public, especially children, both in the United Kingdom and abroad, from sex offenders. This is why jurisdiction was extended by virtue of Part Two of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 to allow prosecution in the United Kingdom's courts for sex offences committed by British nationals and residents abroad against children. This allows us to prosecute such cases in this country when we need to.

However, we consider it preferable wherever possible for our citizens to face trial in the country where the alleged offence was committed. That is because it is extremely difficult for the prosecuting authorities in the United Kingdom to gather sufficient evidence about an offence which took place in another country for a successful prosecution. In these circumstances, an information campaign of the kind suggested would not be appropriate. However, we will take every opportunity to warn people that they could be prosecuted in the United Kingdom for sex offences committed abroad.

Young Offenders

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support his Department *(a)* is giving and *(b)* will give in future years to the schemes for young offenders run by the Army Cadet Force leadership as outreach. [33304]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Youth Justice Board committed £60,000 to Outreach for 2000–01 and the Home Office £60,000 for 2001–02. This funding supports the project's personal development training for 12 to 14-year-olds who are considered to be at risk of involvement in crime or not properly engaged in formal education. It includes adventure pursuit activities and team building exercises in conjunction with the Army Cadet Force.

Further Home Office funding is being considered, subject to the outcome of a current independent evaluation of the project's progress.

Ministerial Briefing Unit

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the functions, establishment and annual budget of the proposed Ministerial Briefing Unit; and if he will make a statement. [32626]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Work on the Ministerial Briefing Unit in the Home Office was commissioned in 2001 and the unit came into existence on Monday 28 January 2002. Its functions are to improve the quality of Home Office information made publicly available by providing research facilities and background briefing for the Home Secretary, his ministerial team and senior officials undertaking activity outside the Department on current and emerging topics of concern.

The extra annual staff costs, including overheads, of the unit are currently £60,000. In addition, a Higher Executive Officer or Executive Officer (HEO/EO) is being recruited.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the proposed asylum accommodation centres will be constructed using the Private Finance Initiative; and if he will make a statement. [33698]

Angela Eagle: Proposed asylum accommodation centres will not be developed using the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). The Home Office has considered a number of procurement strategies for the delivery of these projects and determined that the PFI route was not appropriate in view of the urgent nature of the programme.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what consultations he will undertake with *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* providers of local services and *(c)* members of the local community before reaching a decision on the use of Throckmorton airfield as the site of a proposed asylum accommodation centre; [33061]

(2) if he intends to apply the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to the development of the proposed asylum accommodation centres; and if he will make a statement; [33064]

(3) if he will submit to Wychavon district council a full environmental impact statement in accordance with the town and country planning regulations before proceeding with a decision on the use of Throckmorton airfield as the site of a proposed asylum accommodation centre. [33062]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Home Office officials met recently with planning officials from Wychavon district council regarding the potential development of the airfield at Throckmorton. They will, in the near future and in agreement with the planning authority, embark on a consultation exercise with all relevant parties including local authorities, providers of local services and members of the local community.

The potential accommodation centre site at the Throckmorton airfield is a Crown development and as such my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary does not have to comply with the town and country planning regulations. However, an environmental impact study will be included as part of the planning notification package, to be submitted in accordance with Circular 18/84, to Wychavon district council.

The Home Office does intend to apply the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to the development of proposed asylum accommodation centres. These provisions are being applied on the basis of the urgent national need relating to the development of accommodation centres. Officials at the Home Department are currently meeting with the relevant local planning authorities on this matter.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what type of identification system will be used for residents at asylum seeker accommodation centres. [34584]

Angela Eagle: We intend that when the trial accommodation centres are opened, the new application registration card which was launched on 31 January 2002 will be issued to all new asylum seekers, including accommodation centre residents.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much spending money adult residents at asylum seeker accommodation centres will receive. [34583]

Angela Eagle: Residents will receive a small cash allowance to cover incidental expenses, the amount of which has yet to be decided.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on which part of the airfield at Throckmorton he is considering building an asylum accommodation centre. [34494]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The Home Office is currently assessing the suitability of various areas within the boundary of the Throckmorton airfield for the potential siting of an accommodation centre. Officials are in consultation with a number of parties, including the owner of the airfield and Wychavon district council, on issues which may impact on any decision on the precise siting of the potential development.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the timetable is for deciding the locations of the proposed asylum accommodation centres. [31732]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the previous answer given on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 57W.

Security Industry Authority

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Security Industry Authority will be set up. [34104]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government wish to establish the Security Industry Authority as soon as possible. To that end, we shall shortly be announcing the appointment of its Chair and Chief Executive.

Spouses (Permanent Residence Applications)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of cases of applications for permanent residence visas by spouses of UK citizens taking more than eight weeks to process at the latest date for which figures are available. [33972]

Angela Eagle: Information on the processing times for individual types of application is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only by scrutiny of individual case files, at disproportionate cost. We are currently introducing a new management information system which will provide much better information in due course on all of the applications in the system.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of postal applications for permanent residence visas for spouses of UK citizens are processed in three weeks. [33968]

Angela Eagle: We do not routinely publish average processing times for individual types of application. We aim to decide all straightforward applications within three weeks, but at present it is taking up to seven weeks due to the exceptionally high number of applications received, particularly in the latter half of 2001, and process changes which are being introduced to improve our longer term performance. We are working to reduce this to three weeks as soon as possible.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what data underlies the statement on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website that applications for permanent residence from spouses of UK citizens are taking up to six weeks on average and up to eight weeks in some cases. [33971]

Angela Eagle: Applications are normally processed in date order irrespective of category. The information on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website, which currently states that initial consideration is taking between five to seven weeks, reflects the current average length of time between the receipt of all postal applications in Croydon and their initial consideration by caseworkers. This information is regularly updated. We are working hard to continue to reduce this period back down to our target of three weeks as soon as possible.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the time taken by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to process applications for permanent residence from people who are spouses of UK residents. [33973]

Angela Eagle: We have received various representations from hon. Members and from applicants and their representatives about the current turnaround time for considering general after entry casework. No statistics are kept centrally on the number of such representations.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason applicants for permanent residence visas on the basis of being a spouse of UK citizens are advised not to send their applications more than five weeks before the previous visa expires. [33969]

Angela Eagle: One of the requirements of the relevant Immigration Rules is the completion of a period of 12 months following admission to the United Kingdom, or having been given an extension of stay for 12 months as the spouse of a person present and settled here. People who apply too early cannot meet this requirement, hence the advice in the relevant application form.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34283]

Angela Eagle: Expenditure by the Home Office on external legal costs can be split into two main areas:

(i) Litigation: This includes judicial review proceedings (eg challenges to decisions by the Immigration and Nationality Division or the Prison Service), personal injury claims, employment tribunal cases, commercial litigation and other miscellaneous disputes;

(ii) Commercial legal advice: This includes advice on procurement (eg contracts to build new prisons or the installation of new computer systems).

Home Office litigation is handled by the Treasury Solicitor's Department who also provide and/or manage external legal services on some Home Office procurement projects. Over the last four years the Home Office expenditure with the Treasury Solicitor's Department is as follows:

Year	£
1998–99	14,487,753
1999–2000	11,710,362
2000–01	16,781,326
2001–02[1]	13,809,191

[1] To date

These figures include VAT and disbursements eg Counsels' fees and fees of external solicitors. The figures are gross. They do not take account of recovered costs. Neither do they include costs paid to third parties by way of damages or compensation.

In addition the individual Units in the Home Office instruct Counsel or external solicitors direct without going through the Treasury Solicitor's Department. No central record is kept of such expenditure and to obtain such details would incur a disproportionate cost. The figures above also do not include the cost of the Home Office Legal Adviser's Branch.

Work Permits

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 532W, on the fast track work permit scheme, if he will list *(a)* the members of the panel of representatives from the technology communications and electronics sector to which he refers and *(b)* the organisations to which they belong. [34799]

Angela Eagle: The Information Technology, Communications and Electronics (ITCE) sector panel is composed of other Government Departments and relevant industry bodies and not individuals. The organisations that are represented on the ITCE sector panel are:

Association of Technology Staffing Companies

British Computer Society

Computer Software Services Association

Department of Trade and Industry

Department for Education and Skills

e-Skill National Training Organisation

Federation of the Electronics Industry

Institution of Electrical Engineers

National Training Organisation for Engineering and Manufacturing

Professional Contractor Group

Recruitment and Employment Confederation.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column 532W, on the fast track work permit scheme, if he will make a statement on the evidence adduced to justify the inclusion of Oracle database administration in the list of shortage occupations for the purposes of the fast track work permit scheme. [34800]

Angela Eagle: At the Information Technology, Communications and Electronics (ITCE) sector panel meeting held on 10 October 2001 evidence from panel members restricted the Database Specialist to Oracle Database Administrator. That in itself is under review following the ITCE meeting in January 2002 as further evidence is provided by panel members. Further information has been requested from panel members, before considering the removal of this specific shortage occupation.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown, by category, of the work permits approved under the shortage occupation category for information technology since 21 January 2000. [34797]

Angela Eagle: The number of work permits approved under the shortage occupation category for information technology since 21 January 2000 is:

	Number
Analyst programmer	2,505
Business analyst	331
Computer engineer	410
Computer programmer	1,293
Database specialist	162
Information Technology (IT) manager	172
Network specialist	304
Project manager	300
Software engineer	4,681
System analyst	2,375
Other IT related occupations[1]	7,759

[1] This category includes occupations that are on the published shortage occupation list but are not captured separately for management information purposes by the Work Permits United Kingdom computer system.

Life Sentences

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women serving life sentences in England and Wales have tariff sentences of (i) less than two years, (ii) between two and five years, (iii) between five and 10 years, and (iv) above 10 years. [34593]

Beverley Hughes: The available information, which relates to tariff periods set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for both men and women mandatory lifers is as follows: (i) less than two years—nil, (ii) between two and five years—five, (iii) between five and 10 years—463, and (iv) over 10 years—2,526. Information about tariffs for prisoners serving a life sentence for serious offences other than murder and those detained during Her Majesty's pleasure is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration Detainees (Purposeful Activities)

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reintroduce purposeful activity for the inmates of removal centres. [34743]

Angela Eagle: Persons detained at immigration removal centres are, in line with the requirements of the Detention Centre Rules 2001, provided with opportunities to take part in a wide range of purposeful activity including education, sports, physical education, arts and crafts, drama and library.

"Sport and Charity"

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses to the Charity Commission consultation paper, "Sport and Charity", were received from *(a)* voluntary sports clubs, *(b)* sports governing bodies and *(c)* the legal and accountancy professions. [34515]

Angela Eagle: This is a matter for the Charity Commission as the Government Department that registers charities in England and Wales. The Chief Charity Commissioner will write to the hon. Member and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Immigration Office (Belfast)

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the facilities available at the immigration office in Belfast, with specific reference to passport and visa services. [35035]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* There are no plans to extend the facilities available to members of the public at the Immigration Office in Belfast. Passport services for British Citizens are provided by the United Kingdom Passport Agency and for other nationalities by their relevant high commissions and embassies. Visas for entry to the United Kingdom are issued by posts overseas.

Children's Rights

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to encourage Government departments to consider the impact of new policies and legislation on children and young people. [31164]

Mr. Denham: In November, the Government published for consultation a framework for an overarching strategy for children and young people. "Building a Strategy for Children and Young People" sets out 10 principles for all children and young people's policies and services to ensure that they are centred on their best interests. Each principle has been developed to take into account the UN convention on the rights of the child and will provide a framework for the way Government Departments develop new policies and legislation.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for changes to the departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limit within his responsibility. [36365]

Angela Eagle: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Home Office Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £841,193,000 from £9,862,267,000 to £10,703,460,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £117,831,000 from £2,405,643,000 to £2,523,474,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£000

	Resources	*Capital*
Change	892,496	–51,303
New DEL	9,670,789	1,032,671
Of which:		
Voted	9,374,386	923,315
Non-voted	296,403	109,356

The increases will be offset by charges to the DEL reserve and by interdepartmental transfers. They will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

A detailed breakdown of the Spring Supplementary changes has been placed in the Library.

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the Charity Commission's departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36366]

Angela Eagle: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Charity Commission Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £700,000 from £22,792,000 to £23,492,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £700,000 from £21,483,000 to £22,183,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£

	Resources	*Capital*
Change	700,000	0
New DEL	22,163,000	1,329,000
Of which:		
Voted	22,163,000	1,329,000
Non-voted	0	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from a £700,000 increase in administration costs, in line with agreement given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

The £700,000 increase in administration costs will be met from the take up of DEL End Year Flexibility carry forward from 2000–01.

The increases will be charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Young Voters

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made since 29 October in encouraging young people to vote; and if he will make a statement. [31166]

Mr. Denham: Further to my answer on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 710W, the Children and Young People's Unit are currently extending consultation with young people to test out and develop the initial views expressed at the event on 29 October. This involves regional consultation workshops which will take place during February, a survey of around 1,100 young people, and further opportunities to respond to the survey via the unit's website. A key theme that has emerged from early consultations is the role of the media, and some specific work with young people is planned to examine this in more depth. In addition the unit has established a network of external organisations to help promote the debate about youth disengagement from democracy. The unit continues to work closely with the Electoral Commission and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and it remains my intention to produce conclusions and recommendations for further action later this year.

HEALTH

Private Health Sector

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of spare capacity in the private health sector; and if he will provide a breakdown by region. [11116]

Mr. Hutton: The major United Kingdom providers of private health care have indicated that they have spare capacity available for treating national health service patients which could increase the amount of NHS-funded work within the private sector to approximately 100,000 cases per annum.

The capacity available in the private sector varies over time and by specialty. It is for NHS commissioning organisations to investigate capacity available in the independent sector as part of planning elective capacity.

To help the NHS to find out about available capacity in the independent sector, the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency has established a secure website where independent health care providers are able to post offers of treatment for NHS patients, by hospital and clinical specialty.

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures he has collated on the number of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses employed by the private health sector. [23894]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect data about the number of doctors working in the private sector.

Between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2000 a total of 70,897 permanent and temporary qualified nursing staff were employed in private nursing homes and residential care homes. The Department does not collect information covering the number of nurses working in private hospitals and the voluntary sector.

Haemophilia Drugs

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when sufficient supplies of rcFVIII will be available to match demand from United Kingdom-resident patients requiring this treatment. [22327]

Yvette Cooper: In England and Northern Ireland, the policy is to provide recombinant clotting factors for new haemophilia patients and children under 16. Scotland and Wales are committed to providing recombinant products for all haemophilia patients. We are actively considering extending the provision of recombinant clotting factors to all haemophilia patients in England when supplies allow.

Because of the current world shortage of recombinant clotting factors, some patients across the United Kingdom have been switched from recombinant to plasma derived clotting factors as a temporary measure but this situation is improving. The Department is working with the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctors Organisation and with industry to manage available supplies.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mental health services are made available to armed services' personnel; and if he will make a statement. [22093]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Mental health services are available to armed services' personnel via the services that form part of the Defence Medical Services and/or through services provided to the general population in the national health service. We have embarked upon a radical programme of modernisation to improve access to effective treatment and care in the NHS, reduce unfair variation, raise standards and provide quicker and more convenient services across the spectrum of care. There is also current guidance relevant to war pensioners (Health Service Guidance(97)31) to ensure referrals within the NHS make specific reference to the need for treatment for the condition for which the pension was awarded.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of his policy that nobody with severe mental illness who asks for treatment should be refused; and if he will make a statement. [35513]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The National Service Framework (NSF) for Mental Health, published in September 1999, sets out national standards for mental health. The NSF contains seven overarching standards, two of which are specifically about the provision of effective services for people with severe mental illness. The standards aim to ensure that each person with severe mental illness receives the range of mental health services they need. Implementation of the NSF standards is an on-going process that should be largely completed by 2004.

Performance monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that the appropriate services are in place within that time scale.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of recruitment and retention of staff of mental health services. [35514]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Recruitment and retention of staff is a key issue for mental health services. Work is taking place on a number of issues to improve recruitment and retention, and includes:

considering the recommendations made by the Workforce Action Team on recruitment and retention;

working with the Royal College of Psychiatrists to look at recruitment and retention issues, such as the retention of senior house officers, working patterns and workload and retirement plan;

analysing the reports from the local implementation teams about recruitment and retention.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 248W, on mental health, what conclusions he has reached as to the reasons for the fall in the number of new episodes of care since 1996–97. [35484]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The reason for the fall in new episodes of care may be due to an increase in the average duration of each episode of care which rose from about three months in 1996–97 to over four months in 1999–2000. However, only cautious interpretations are possible on so small a sample of data. The full data set are available on the website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/KT240001

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of people in contact with specialist mental health services have access to crisis resolution services. [35504]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* As at 31 October 2001 local implementation teams reported that there were 52 crisis resolution teams in place out of a NHS Plan target of 335.

It is further reported via the local implementation teams (LITs) self assessment reports that 4 per cent. of LITs had complete coverage of this type of service for its population and that a further 44 per cent. of LITs had a service although it was still being developed in line with service specifications and population need.

It is not possible at this point to equate the responses to the actual populations served but it would appear that service developments currently allow for the availability of a service to almost 50 per cent. of the LIT populations.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which PFI project in mental health services have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* had contracts signed since 5 November 2001. [35511]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership National Health Service Trust was given approval to proceed under the private finance initiative on 11 February 2002 for the modernisation of mental health services.

No PFI contracts for mental health service schemes valued above £1 million have been signed since 5 November 2001. Central records are not kept for schemes below this value.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 741W, on the "Mind Out For Mental Health" campaign, whether working minds employers' tool kits are available; and what stocks there are. [35483]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Tookits can be accessed from the employer's section of the campaign website at *www.mindout.net*, and can be downloaded free of charge by users.

An order has been placed for a reprint of a further 1,000 working minds employers' toolkits. We hope that these will be available in March 2002.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for the national women's mental health strategy; and if he will make a statement on progress. [35489]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The Department will publish the women's mental health consultation document later in the year.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to launch the consultation on the black and ethnic minority mental health service users' strategy. [35496]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 554W and on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 101–05W.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health out of area admissions which were not clinically indicated there were in the latest period for which figures are available. [35505]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 January 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the number of staff supporting mental health carers has changed since he set his target. [35512]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The National Plan set a target for 2004 that 700 more staff will be recruited to increase the breaks available for carers and to strengthen carer support networks. In pursuance of this target, all regular carers of people with mental health problems will have been identified, received an assessment and have their own care support plans by April 2004. By June 2004, local support networks for these carers will have been developed.

The statutory and voluntary sector currently provide support to carers, and the Department is developing a service specification for carers support services which will be available in April against which we will measure progress.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 741W, on the "Mind Out For Mental Health" campaign, whether decisions have been made on communications expenditure for 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [35485]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Decisions have not been made on communications expenditure for 2002–03.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new graduate primary care mental health workers have been employed since he set his target. [35500]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Central information on the number of new graduate primary care mental health workers is not yet available. Funds to support the appointment of 1,000 such staff will be allocated in 2003–04.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prisons will have no mental health in-reach services by 2004. [35487]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* By March 2004, mental health in-reach services are planned to be available in the 70 or so prisons in England and Wales judged to have the greatest mental health need, of a current total of 136 establishments.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 817W, on mental health services, by what means he intends to assess whether he has reached his target that by 2004 no out of area crisis mental health admissions which are not clinically indicated take place. [35486]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The Department is working with the national health service to develop reporting lines which differentiate between crisis admissions that are appropriately referred and dealt with by out of area services and those that were not.

The development of robust crisis resolution teams nationally would allow for a degree of confidence that no admissions were occurring out of area inappropriately.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the 2001–02 budget for the National Institute for Mental Health has been spent. [35491]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* At the end of January, £373,000 had been spent on the National Institute for Mental Health.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many more community mental health staff have been employed since he set his target. [35501]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The NHS Plan sets a target for 500 more community mental health staff.

Community mental health staff are employed by the national health service, local authorities and voluntary and independent sector organisations. Data currently collected by the Department identify community psychiatry nurses but medical, therapy and social care staff working in mental health services in the community are not identified separately.

Between 1999, baseline for the NHS Plan, and 2001, the number of qualified community psychiatry nurses employed in the NHS increased from 10,552 to 12,224. In the same period all staff employed in community psychiatry increased from 12,989 to 14,905.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health early intervention teams have been established; and what his target is. [35502]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The local implementation teams submitted details on services developed in a service mapping exercise which was validated by 31 October 2001.

Based on the details in those reports there were 16 early intervention teams in place by that date out of a target for 2003–04 of 50, as set out in the NHS plan.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of whether it will be possible to meet his commitment that no prisoner with serious mental illness will leave prison without a care plan and a care co-ordinator by 2004. [35488]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Mental health in-reach services to prisons are already being established in 22 prisons in England and Wales this year. We plan to expand that to an additional 25 prisons during 2002–03, with further development during 2003–04 so that by March 2004 in-reach will be available within the 70 or so prisons judged to have the greatest mental health need.

By targeting need in this way we expect to be able to encompass within the in-reach project the 5,000 prisoners at any one time who have severe and enduring mental illness. This will ensure that they are receiving more comprehensive services while in prison, and more effective throughcare when they are released.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health crisis resolution teams have now been established; and what his target is. [35503]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The local implementation teams (LITs) submitted details on services developed in a service mapping exercise which was validated by 31 October 2001.

Based on the details in those reports there were 52 crisis resolution teams in place by that date out of a target for March 2004, of 335, as set out in the NHS plan.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made in evaluating the Working Minds programme. [35498]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* As I indicated in the reply I gave the hon. Member on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 742W, evaluation of the Working Minds programme is continuing.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mental health in-reach services in prisons are operating; and how many prisoners have such services available to them [35515]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Mental health in-reach services are being developed in 18 English prisons during 2001–02, as well as in the four Welsh prisons. Once established, these services will be available to any prisoner within those establishments who is assessed as needing the level of mental health care that in-reach offers.

We are planning to expand in-reach services during 2002–03 and 2003–04 so that by March 2004 it will be available in around 70 prisons judged to have the greatest mental health need.

Nursing Homes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many nursing homes have had their residents assessed for eligibility for Government contributions to their nursing care; [23405]

(2) what proportion of residents of nursing homes who have been assessed for Government contributions to their nursing costs have been judged as eligible to receive those payments; and in what bands of payment these residents fall. [23420]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect such data centrally on a routine basis. However, preliminary information available from regions of the position at the end of December, indicates that around 80 per cent. of the nursing homes with residents eligible for national health service funded nursing care had had their residents' needs for care determined by a registered nurse. The majority of the remainder will be completed by the end of this month.

Stroke

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of stroke patients were treated in special stroke units in each of the last five years; and what were the survival rates in each case; [24681]

(2) what have been the survival rates for stroke patients treated in non-specialist units in each of the last five years. [24682]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information requested on the percentage of stroke patients treated in special stroke units and the survival rates for stroke patients treated in non-specialist units is not collected centrally.

The Royal College of Physician's sentinel audit published in 1999 did show however, that 18 per cent. of stroke patients spent at least 50 per cent. of their time in a stroke unit. A subsequent audit in 2000 showed that this figure had risen to 26 per cent.

The National Service Framework (NSF) for Older People, published on 27 March 2001, requires 100 per cent. of all general hospitals which care for people with stroke to have a specialised stroke service, as described in the NSF stroke service model, by April 2004.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Torbay of 23 October 2001 regarding Dr. Mehta and Dexa screening services. [25952]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent on 29 January.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to help local authority social services meet charges incurred by criminal record checks from the Criminal Records Bureau. [25780]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The cost of certificates will be charged to the individual on whom the check is sought, although there is nothing to stop an employer such as a local authority reimbursing the individual if they so wish.

Medical Treatment (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients resident in England and Wales received treatment at medical facilities in Scotland in each of the last five years. [27425]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 10 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 997–98W.

Ministerial Rail Travel

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28089]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend last used the railway in connection with official duties on 14 November 2001 travelling from London to Harrogate.

All arrangements for official travel are made in line with guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial code and the accompanying guidance document "Travel by Ministers", using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the London Borough of Hillingdon there have been in each of the last five years from (i) cancer, (ii) heart disease and (iii) stroke. [28485]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Annual mortality from coronary heart disease (ICD9 410–414): Number of deaths, 1995 to 1999, all ages

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Males					
England	67,640	65,889	62,668	61,254	58,496
Hillingdon	283	284	261	276	238
Females					
England	56,246	54,903	52,182	51,211	47,964
Hillingdon	230	238	191	189	176
Persons					
England	123,886	120,792	114,850	112,465	106,460
Hillingdon	513	522	452	465	414

Annual mortality from stroke (ICD9 430–438): Number of deaths, 1995 to 1999, all ages

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Males					
England	20,632	20,822	20,275	19,994	19,314
Hillingdon	80	69	86	70	64
Females					
England	35,076	35,268	33,872	33,677	32,957
Hillingdon	124	147	153	108	118
Persons					
England	55,708	56,090	54,147	53,671	52,271
Hillingdon	204	216	239	178	182

Annual mortality from all malignant neoplasms (ICD9 140–208): Number of deaths, 1995 to 1999, all ages

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Males					
England	67,740	67,356	65,874	66,592	64,922
Hillingdon	283	292	295	282	275
Females					
England	62,087	62,119	61,278	60,943	60,240
Hillingdon	279	296	291	290	265

Annual mortality from all malignant neoplasms (ICD9 140–208): Number of deaths, 1995 to 1999, all ages

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Persons					
England	129,827	129,475	127,152	127,535	125,162
Hillingdon	562	588	586	572	540

Health Authorities (West Midlands)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the underspend or overspend was in *(a)* 1999–2000 *(b)* 2000–01 and the latest forecast figures for (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03 for each health authority in the west midlands region. [29270]

Yvette Cooper: The level of under or overspending for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is shown in the table. By the end of this financial year we expect all health authorities to live within their agreed resource limits. Where they require support at year-end this will be provided principally through brokerage from elsewhere in the national health service. This is normal practice in managing the year-end financial position of individual bodies and for the NHS overall. Information for 2003–03 is not available.

£000

Health authority	*1999–2000 Surplus/ (deficit)*	*2000–01 Over/(under) spending*
Birmingham HA	(1,899)	766
Coventry HA	(5,230)	2,263
Dudley HA	(51)	585
Herefordshire HA	822	220
North Staffordshire HA	(625)	0
Sandwell HA	(2,896)	0
Shropshire HA	(1,729)	180
Solihull HA	(133)	625
South Staffordshire HA	(4,593)	2,025
Walsall HA	(909)	577
Warwickshire HA	(8,661)	3,167
Wolverhampton HA	(2,812)	41
Worcestershire HA	(1,482)	1,199

Notes:

1. Under or overspends have been interpreted as income and expenditure surpluses or deficits in 1999–2000.

2. Following the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting, the operational financial balance has been used as a measure of under or overspending in 2000–01. All health authorities in west midlands achieved break-even or an underspend in these terms.

Source:

Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–2001

Growth Hormone Replacement Therapy

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance has been issued to health authorities regarding adult growth hormone replacement therapy; [30829]

(2) how many health authorities provide funding for adult growth hormone replacement therapy. [30830]

Jacqui Smith: Information about funding for adult growth hormone replacement therapy is not centrally available.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is currently carrying out two appraisals, human growth hormone in children which is due in April 2002, providing there are no appeals and human growth hormone in adults which is due in July 2002, providing there are no appeals.

NHS Trusts

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cumulative *(a)* surplus and *(b)* deficit was of (i) each NHS trust by region, (ii) each region and (iii) England in each year since 1997. [30761]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Whittington Hospital

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the length of time spent by Mr. Sidney Hockley in the Accident and Emergency Unit at the Whittington hospital; and if his officials contacted *(a)* Mr. Hockley and *(b)* Miss Lesley Hockley on the subject. [31647]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* Mr. Hockley was seen and treated by the medical staff throughout his stay and his nursing notes record appropriate observation and care. On the grounds of patient confidentiality it would not be appropriate to discuss this patient's care further.

No departmental officials contacted Mr. Hockley or Miss Lesley Hockley on this subject.

Intermediate Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 940W, on intermediate care, if he will publish the results of the survey showing the *(a)* current and *(b)* base line figures for each NHS region, health authority and trust and the methodology used. [32698]

Jacqui Smith: The survey of national health service intermediate care in England validated the 1999–2000 baseline and established current levels of provision using the defining criteria in the January 2001 circular (Health Service Circular 2001/01:Local Authority Circular (2001)1). In August 2001, local health and social care communities were asked to provide data for intermediate care services in place in 1999–2000, and those planned at that time for 2001–02, to enable progress in achieving the NHS Plan targets for intermediate care beds and places to be measured.

The results of the survey show that by the end of this year there will be, compared to the baseline of 1999–2000, around an additional:

2,400 intermediate care beds

6,200 non-residential intermediate care places

126,000 people in receipt of intermediate care services.

The full results of the survey, giving data by region and by health authority, are in the Library. Data by individual trust were not collected.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the European directive on dietary supplements. [32708]

Yvette Cooper: The proposed directive would establish the framework for harmonised controls on vitamin and mineral content of food supplements and introduce a number of useful labelling measures. The impact on consumer choice and the specialist food supplement sector would depend on future developments on maximum limits and lists of permitted nutrients.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned regarding the health risks to children living in close proximity to landfill sites. [32241]

Yvette Cooper: The Department, together with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency, has commissioned the following reviews and research projects on the impacts of health on landfill sites:

1. A review of existing data to assess whether substances emanating from landfill sites have potential to cause congenital malformations (birth defects).
2. A review of the known causes of congenital malformations,
3. A study of the geographical variation in overall rates of congenital anomalies and the rates of specific anomalies, and
4. Exposure assessment of landfill sites. A Government-funded study of birth outcomes and selected cancers in populations living near landfill sites, carried out by the Small Area Health Statistics Unit, was published in August 2001. A copy of the report is available in the Library and on the Department's website. Further information on the research programme can also be found on the website www.doh.gov.uk/landh.htm

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding health risks to families living in close proximity to landfill sites. [32239]

Yvette Cooper: The Department is aware of a number of research studies published in the scientific literature which investigate health outcomes in people living near landfill sites. These have been considered by the Department, which has sought advice from the independent expert advisory committee, the Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT). They felt that it was not possible to draw any definite conclusions regarding possible health effects from these studies and further research was warranted. The most recent statement by the COT is available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/landh.htm. We have commissioned a programme of work on the impacts on health of landfill sites, details of which are also available on the website, and the Department continues to monitor relevant publications.

Heart Disease

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on measures introduced since 1997 to help combat heart disease. [32539]

Yvette Cooper: We have made it clear that tackling heart disease is one of our top priorities and in March 2000, we published the National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease which sets out standards for improving prevention, diagnosis and treatment services throughout the country. A progress report, entitled "Delivering Better Heart Services", issued November 2001 is available in the Library.

Lister Hospital

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the child accident and emergency ward at the Lister hospital to be opened to patients; and if he will make a statement. [32299]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* East and North Hertfordshire National Health Service Trust has received additional funding through the reforming emergency care strategy announced last year and is in the process of recruiting five whole time equivalent nurses to staff the paediatric assessment unit at the Lister hospital. The opening of the paediatric assessment unit will be dependent on successful recruitment to these posts.

Delayed Discharge

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the rate of delayed discharge was for *(a)* patients aged over 75 years in March 1997 and *(b)* all patients in the quarter end December 2001. [33498]

Jacqui Smith: In March 1997 the rate of delayed discharge (on any one day the percentage of patients over 75 years old occupying an acute hospital bed whose discharge is delayed) was 13 per cent. The most recent data available are for September 2001 when the equivalent rate for patients over 75 was 12 per cent. and for patients of all ages 6.6 per cent.

Operations (South Humber)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were carried out in the South Humber health authority area in each year from 1992 to 2001; and how many operations were cancelled in each of those years. [33491]

Jacqui Smith: The table details the operations carried out in the South Humber health authority area in each year from 1991–2001.

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) where an operation was performed NHS hospitals, South Humber HA (formerly Grimsby and Scunthorpe DHA) 1992–93 to 2000–01

(D)HA	*Year*	*FCEs*
Grimsby and Scunthorpe DHA	1992–93	33,482
Grimsby and Scunthorpe DHA	1993–94	32,224
Grimsby and Scunthorpe DHA	1994–95	34,635
Grimsby and Scunthorpe DHA	1995–96	37,816
South Humber HA	1996–97	35,908
South Humber HA	1997–98	39,266
South Humber HA	1998–99	45,308
South Humber HA	1999–2000	47,022
South Humber HA	2000–01	52,480

Notes:

1. An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

2. Care must be taken when analysing time series data by health authority as boundaries may have changed over the years.

3. Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data, except for 1998–99 to 2000–01 which are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

The following table shows the number of operations cancelled in the South Humber health authority area for the years 1996–67 to 2000–01. Information is not available for the years prior to 1996.

Total number of last minute cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, South Humber health authority, 1996–97 to 2000–01

	2001–01	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1996–97*
Quarter 1	59	82	77	40	99
Quarter 2	80	74	80	41	66
Quarter 3	67	64	52	58	49
Quarter 4	86	113	65	54	31
Total for year	292	33	274	193	245

Note:

Data prior to 1996 are not available

Source:

DH form QMPC and QMNG

Foundation Status Trusts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether an NHS trust with foundation status which has established a joint venture company will *(a)* have to meet financial liabilities from its own budget and *(b)* have recourse to NHS material funds. [33947]

Mr. Hutton: The details surrounding the establishment of foundation hospitals have not yet been determined. The Department will work with chief executives of three star national health service trusts to examine the legal, financial, governance and accountability issues.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the funds which will be spent by NHS trusts seeking foundation status in the *(a)* current and *(b)* next financial year. [33948]

Mr. Hutton: No estimates have been made of the funds which will be spent by national health service trusts seeking foundation status. In part, this will depend upon the number of trusts making applications in each year. No trusts are seeking foundation status in the current financial year.

NHS Accommodation (London)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many units of nursing or doctor accommodation were *(a)* sold, *(b)* put up for sale and *(c)* withdrawn from sale in each of the last 10 years by NHS organisations in London. [34441]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available in respect of both property owned by NHS trusts and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The NHS Plan recognises the need for extra residential accommodation for nurses and other staff in London and we are well on course to deliver the target of 2,000 extra places for nurses and other national health service staff by July 2003.

Hospital Admissions

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many day admissions to hospitals there were in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [34074]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The numbers of day case admissions to hospitals for each year from 1991–92 to 2000–01 (the last 10 years for which data are available) are outlined in the table.

Day case admissions for national health service hospitals in England

	Day cases
1991–92	1,546,778
1992–93	1,784,091
1993–94	2,106,998
1994–95	2,490,893
1995–96	2,745,936
1996–97	2,891,685
1997–98	3,085,832
1998–99	3,420,795
1999–2000	3,592,574
2000–01	3,619,521

NHS Asset Sales

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 781–82W, on the NHS, what was the total value of the *(a)* land and *(b)* buildings and other assets disposed of by each three star NHS trust since 1997. [34573]

Mr. Hutton: The tables show the total value of *(a)* land and *(b)* buildings and other assets disposed of by each of the three star national health service trusts since 1997.

NHS trust net book value of disposals

£000

NHS trust code	*NHS trust name*	*Land*	*Buildings and other assets*
1997–98[1]			
RGT	Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	88	244
RDD	Basildon and Thurrock General Hospital NHS Trust	0	111
RCP	Bassetlaw Hospital and Community Health Service Trust	31	12
RMB	Blackburn, H'burn and Ribble Valley NHS Trust	0	5
RMR	Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	0	80
RAE	Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	0	429
RGA	Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust	0	67
RCV	Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust	1,500	3,993
RFS	Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Hospital Trust	0	409
RLN	City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust	9	27

NHS trust net book value of disposals

£000

NHS trust code	*NHS trust name*	*Land*	*Buildings and other assets*
RJR	Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RA5	East Gloucestershire NHS Trust	775	18
RDU	Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RGB	Huddersfield Health Care Services NHS Trust	32	181
RJZ	King's College Hospital NHS Trust	180	433
RC9	Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust	0	63
RQ8	Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	6,584	1,971
RM1	Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust	33	98
RNS	Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust	0	108
RBZ	Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	0	7
RGN	Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	15	42
RQW	Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	0	16
RG2	Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust	156	216
RH8	Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	0	60
RK5	Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0
RA9	South Devon Health Care NHS Trust	43	187
RE9	South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust	0	274
RBA	Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust	0	306
RGR	West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	0	16
RN1	Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	0	17
1998–99[2]			
RGT	Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	0	0
RDD	Basildon and Thurrock General Hospital NHS Trust	3,751	3,153
RCP	Bassetlaw Hospital and Community Health Service Trust	0	196
RMB	Blackburn, H'burn and Ribble Valley NHS Trust	0	8
RMR	Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	0	54
RAE	Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	834	652
RGA	Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust	0	80
RCV	Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust	0	197
RFS	Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Hospital Trust	0	65
RLN	City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust	24	106
RJR	Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RA5	East Gloucestershire NHS Trust	26	61
RDU	Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RGB	Huddersfield Health Care Services NHS Trust	22	126
RJZ	King's College Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RC9	Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust	0	19
RQ8	Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	0	255
RTX	Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust	0	266
RM1	Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RNS	Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust	0	171
RBZ	Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	0	1
RTF	Northumbria Health Care NHS Trust	0	38
RGN	Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	94	257
RQW	Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	0	11
RG2	Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust	8,273	1,577
RH8	Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	0	113
RK5	Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0
RA9	South Devon Health Care NHS Trust	108	414
RTA	South Durham Health Care NHS Trust	0	0
RE9	South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust	0	194
RTG	Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	56	364
RBA	Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust	362	1,899
RGR	West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	0	10
RN1	Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	0	39
1999–2000			
RGT	Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	0	0
RDD	Basildon and Thurrock General Hospital NHS Trust	0	439
RCP	Bassetlaw Hospital and Community Health Service Trust	0	0
RMB	Blackburn, H'burn and Ribble Valley NHS Trust	360	7
RMR	Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	0	8
RAE	Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	48	409
RGA	Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust	118	120
RCV	Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust	0	34
RFS	Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Hospital Trust	0	12

NHS trust net book value of disposals

£000

NHS trust code	*NHS trust name*	*Land*	*Buildings and other assets*
RLN	City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust	0	0
RJR	Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RA5	East Gloucestershire NHS Trust	0	20
RDU	Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RGB	Huddersfield Health Care Services NHS Trust	0	290
RJZ	King's College Hospital NHS Trust	750	1,317
RC9	Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust	95	174
RQ8	Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	0	0
RTX	Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust	0	68
RM1	Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RVW	North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust	100	799
RNS	Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RBZ	Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	108	8
RTF	Northumbria Health Care NHS Trust	0	0
RGN	Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	0	6
RQW	Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	2,400	7,408
RG2	Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust	0	81
RH8	Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	0	22
RK5	Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0
RA9	South Devon Health Care NHS Trust	119	238
RTA	South Durham Health Care NHS Trust	0	141
RE9	South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust	307	89
RTG	Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0	132
RBA	Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust	0	56
RGR	West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	16	152
RN1	Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	33	103
2000–01			
RGT	Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	0	0
RDD	Basildon and Thurrock General Hospital NHS Trust	0	6
RCP	Bassetlaw Hospital and Community Health Service Trust	0	0
RMB	Blackburn, H'burn and Ribble Valley NHS Trust	0	2
RMR	Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	0	15
RAE	Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	0	204
RGA	Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust	0	89
RCV	Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust	2,544	195
RFS	Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Hospital Trust	0	11
RLN	City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust	0	14
RJR	Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	0	0
RA5	East Gloucestershire NHS Trust	0	242
RDU	Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust	0	23
RGB	Huddersfield Health Care Services NHS Trust	0	85
RJZ	King's College Hospital NHS Trust	0	1,552
RC9	Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust	407	768
RQ8	Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	0	0
RTX	Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust	282	949
RM1	Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust	0	153
RVW	North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust	0	22
RNS	Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust	94	273
RBZ	Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	0	17
RTF	Northumbria Health Care NHS Trust	0	0
RGN	Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	100	353
RQW	Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	0	4
RG2	Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust	3,172	16,086
RH8	Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	0	28
RK5	Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust	0	115
RA9	South Devon Health Care NHS Trust	0	134
RTA	South Durham Health Care NHS Trust	0	0
RE9	South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust	81	136
RTG	Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0	216
RBA	Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust	0	5
RGR	West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	0	49
RN1	Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	0	47

[1] The following trusts were not in existence in this year:
Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust
Northumbria Health Care NHS Trust
South Durham Health Care NHS Trust
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

[2] The following trusts were not in existence in this year:
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust

Sources:
NHS Trust Summarisation Schedules 1997–98
NHS Trust Summarisation Schedules 1998–99
NHS Trust Summarisation Schedules 1999–2000
NHS Trust Summarisation Schedules 2000–01

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total income from sales of property by NHS trusts and health authorities was in each financial year since 1997–98; and what his estimate is for each of the next five years. [33307]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table. The figures for 2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04 are estimated.

£ million

Financial year	*Income from sale of property by NHS trust and health authorities*
1997–98	231
1998–99	242
1999–2000	215
2000–01	382
2001–02	141
2002–03	55
2003–04	158
2004–05	[1]—
2005–06	[1]—
2006–07	[1]—

[1] Not available

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total underspend in his Department was on *(a)* capital and *(b)* non-capital expenditure in each financial year since May 1997. [34028]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The information requested is given in the table.

£million

Year	*Capital*	*Non-capital*
1997–98	124	56
1998–99	106	177
1999–2000	220	–44
2000–01	142	550

Notes
1. Figures for 1997–98 to 1999–2000 based on Department of Health Appropriation Accounts adjusted for NHS trust non-voted expenditure.
2. 2000–01 figures are provisional and on a resource basis. They are not comparable with previous years. They include £250 million carry forward of the Department's unallocated provision.
3. A negative sign denotes an overspend on that part of the vote.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responsibility social services authorities have to identify unmet need for care and personal social services. [34361]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* Recent guidance issued by the Department "Building capacity and partnership in care" reminds councils with social services responsibilities that they should commission services on the basis of rounded assessments of current and future needs within the general population, and they should identify gaps and shortfalls in services in the context of service users' aspirations.

At a practical level, councils should take account of the numbers of people who approach them for help, and their presenting problems, but who are not eligible for council support. They will be assisted in this task through reference to the Department's statistical return "Referrals, Assessments and Packages of Care". Councils may use this information when reviewing their eligibility criteria and the services they provide.

In addition, once councils with social services responsibilities have identified needs that fall within their eligibility criteria, they should meet those needs in the most cost-effective way. Councils should monitor and review the provision of care services to individuals to ensure that services remain appropriate and suitable and that assessed needs are met.

International Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 781W, on international recruitment, if he will list those international nursing recruitment agencies which have failed to adhere to the code of practice; and where he publishes such information. [34864]

Mr. Hutton: There are no plans to publish the names of the international nursing recruitment agencies who fail to adhere to the Code of Practice. We do not plan to publish a list of those international nursing recruitment agencies who have signed up to comply with the code.

Overseas Treatment

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects anonymised data to be available to allow him to publish the cost of sending patients abroad for treatment. [34769]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The test bed scheme will finish later this year and is being evaluated. We will make further information on prices available in the light of the evaluation of the scheme.

Eating Disorders

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the 2000–01 figures for hospital admissions in respect of eating disorders. [35088]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* There were 1,700 finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of eating disorder in 2000–01. These figures have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data and therefore have a provisional status.

Care Homes

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he has published regarding items for which a deduction may be made from the personal expenses allowance by a care home; and if he will make a statement; [34695]

(2) whether deductions may be made from the personal expenses allowance for people in care homes to meet *(a)* any shortfall in fees and *(b)* items and services; [34696]

(3) if he will make it his policy that older people in care homes should not be required to contribute part of the personal expenses allowance to meet a shortfall in fees unless it is their express wish to do so. [34698]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Under National Assistance (Sums for Personal Requirements) Regulations, council-supported residents in care homes should receive a personal expenses allowance, currently standing at £16.05 per week. It is for the residents' personal use and the full amount should be made available to residents. It may not be spent on services contracted by councils from homes, and should not be spent on services to meet assessed need identified by either the council or the national health service.

Because services to meet assessed needs should be tailored to each individual's specific circumstances, it is not helpful to publish definitive lists of what the personal expenses allowance should or should not be spent on.

Subject to informed consent and prior agreement, residents may have arrangements with care home managers so that items and services, which do not form part of the contract with the council and are not part of council or NHS services to meet assessed need, are automatically paid for out of the personal expenses allowance.

Residents, except those subject to the 12 weeks property disregard or a deferred payments agreement, should not use resources either disregarded or not taken into account by the financial assessment for council-supported residential care to pay for more expensive accommodation than the council would normally fund. These resources include the personal expenses allowance. These matters are covered in guidance issued to councils.

Care home residents whose entitlement to higher rates of income supp[illegible] was preserved in 1993 also receive a personal expenses allowance through income support regulations. This allowance is meant for residents' own use on small personal items. In limited circumstances, preserved rights residents who have difficulty in meeting care home fees may be financially helped by councils. The responsibility for preserved rights cases is transferred to councils in April 2002. These residents will be entitled to the personal expenses allowance under National Assistance regulations.

Angioplasty (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the cancellation of proposed coronary angioplasty procedures for patients in North Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement. [35555]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* North Yorkshire health authority is aware that concerns have been raised about provision of angioplasty services for local residents due to a misunderstanding in communication for which the health authority took full responsibility. This position has been clarified with all cardiologists and patients. Cardiologists across North Yorkshire continue to treat patients and provide angioplasty in accordance with normal clinical practice.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will investigate the decision by North Yorkshire Health authority not to fund proposed coronary angioplasty procedures for patients who had been referred to Leeds Health Trust by consultants at York District hospital as in need of urgent treatment. [35556]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Cardiologists across North Yorkshire continue to treat patients and provide angioplasty in accordance with normal clinical practice. Whenever the procedure takes place, North Yorkshire health authority will provide the required funding. The health authority has clarified this position with all cardiologists serving local residents.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide the necessary emergency funding to North Yorkshire health authority to ensure that all patients in the county requiring coronary angioplasty procedures can leave their treatment carried out at Leeds General Infirmary. [35557]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* All patients requiring angioplasty are proceeding with their treatment in accordance with usual clinical practice. By the end of the current financial year North Yorkshire health authority is likely to have spent around £450,000 extra, treating patients in need of this procedure. Discussions are ongoing with regard to identifying resources to match the clinical need in 2002–03.

Student Midwives

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what grants are made available to student midwives. [35508]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* National health service bursaries are available to those accepted onto NHS-funded pre-registration midwifery training programmes at both diploma and degree levels.

Those undertaking the diploma-level qualification receive a non-means tested bursary (currently £5,305 (£6,232 in London)), while those on the degree-level programme receive a means tested bursary (current rate £2,098 (£2,578 in London)) and student loan. Degree-level students receive additional payments to take account of the longer length of academic year undertaken by health professional students and for both groups additional allowances are available to older students, single parents and others with dependants.

In addition the NHS meets all students' liability for a tuition fee contribution (currently £1,075) on their behalf, in full and without means testing.

With effect from September 2001 the basic bursaries were increased by 10.4 per cent. coupled with a 2.4 per cent. inflation increase in the additional allowances and other elements of the bursary scheme. This was the biggest increase since the introduction of the bursary more than 10 years ago.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements exist to help student midwives complete their courses in the event of financial hardship. [35507]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 851W, which detailed the additional support available to student nurses who experience financial hardship. The same package is available to student midwives experiencing similar difficulties.

Suicides

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in reducing the mortality rate from suicide since his target was set. [35499]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 147W.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether a date has been set to launch the suicide prevention strategy. [35506]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* We expect to publish a draft national suicide prevention strategy for public consultation in spring 2002, followed by the final agreed strategy around July 2002.

Patient Consultants (Waiting Times)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 487W, on patient consultations, what recent research his Department has carried out on the average length of patient consultation times with *(a)* GPs and *(b)* hospital consultants; and what the findings were. [24430]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not conducted any recent research on how long general practitioners or hospital consultants currently spend on consultations.

Children's National Service Framework

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has finished the timetable for the Children's National Service Framework; and if he will make a statement. [35494]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The first part of the Children's National Service Framework, standards for children receiving acute/hospital care, will be published this year. The timetable for the publication of the rest of NSF has not yet been finalised.

Asbestos

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relative health risks posed by (i) brown, (ii) blue and (iii) white varieties of asbestos. [35382]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The report of the research by HSE epidemiologists, "The Quantitative Risks of Mesothelioma and Lung Cancer in Relation to Asbestos Exposure", was published in the Annals of Occupational Hygiene on 1 December 2000. This paper evaluated the relative health risks of blue, brown and white asbestos. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Parliamentary Questions

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the written question tabled by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak on 25 October, ref. 10662. [16170]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 973W.

Correspondence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to provide an answer to the question from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight of 4 December 2001, Ref 20380. [35517]

Ms Blears: I replied to the hon. Member on 8 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1237W.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 12 October, 16 November, 12 December 2001 and 9 January 2002, relating to her constituent, Mrs. T. Shah of Cheshunt. [26778]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* A reply was sent on 29 January 2002.

Audiology Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients aged *(a)* 16 to 59, *(b)* 60 to 75 and *(c)* over 75 years were waiting for (i) hearing tests and (ii) other audiology treatment by (A) hospital trust and (B) health authority in each quarter for the last three years. [28845]

Jacqui Smith: Data on waiting times for hearing tests are not collected centrally.

Data are collected on the number of out-patients waiting over 13 weeks for 'audiological medicine'. These are shown in the table. These data are not collected in age-ranges.

Audiology in-patients are treated within the ear, nose and throat specialty. Data on the number of patients specifically waiting for audiology treatment within the ENT specialty are not collected centrally.

The "Action on ENT" initiative, which has been established as part of our modernisation strategy for the NHS, is improving access to ENT and audiology services. One element of the initiative focuses specifically on audiology, with the aim of spreading best practice to all audiology departments. Audiology departments are supported to re-design the way services are provided in order to improve access and reduce waiting times.

Number of out-patients still waiting at quarter end over 13 weeks for first out-patient appointment in audiological medicine following GP referral

Name	*September 1998*	*December 1998*	*March 1999*	*June 1999*	*September 1999*	*December 1999*
Data by trust						
Barking and Dagenham PCT	0	0	0	0	0	0
City and Hackney PCT	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central Manchester PCT	0	0	0	0	0	0
Royal Surrey County and St. Luke's Hospitals NHS Trust	118	89	87	78	68	25
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	129	126	100	132	131	297
Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0
Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham, University Hospital NHS Trust	145	169	150	147	239	98
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust	0	0	243	181	131	76
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	33	35	40	28	31	52
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital NHS Trust	29	31	30	7	2	2
St. Mary's NHS Trust	1	0	0	0	0	0
St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust	22	60	67	112	130	77
King's College Hospital NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	0	6	7	7	36	0
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust	2	0	0	0	0	1
Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	2	1	0	1	1	0
Hinchingbrooke Health Care NHS Trust	8	18	17	4	13	0
City and Hackney Community Services NHS Trust	2	3	4	1	0	1
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	1	1	0
Surrey Sussex healthcare NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0
Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	30	13	13
Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust	0	0	0	99	145	125
Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0
East and North Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0

	March 2000	*June 2000*	*September 2000*	*December 2000*	*March 2001*	*June 2001*	*September 2001*
Barking and Dagenham PCT	0	0	0	0	0	15	9
City and Hackney PCT	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Central Manchester PCT	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Royal Surrey County and St. Luke's Hospitals NHS Trust	8	18	1	5	26	32	34
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	260	144	192	303	288	377	435
Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham, University Hospital NHS Trust	55	1	3	4	2	2	3
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust	28	40	84	57	182	206	0
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	233	185
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	69	54	79	51	31	82	93
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital NHS Trust	3	17	11	17	11	19	104
St. Mary's NHS Trust	0	68	86	83	86	74	17
St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust	67	147	192	90	243	377	438
King's College Hospital NHS Trust	1	1	2	0	0	1	1
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	0	2	0	3	7	4	3
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust	0	1	1	2	0	0	1
Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Hinchingbrooke Health Care NHS Trust	0	1	0	14	0	39	0
City and Hackney Community Services NHS Trust	0	1	2	2	0	0	1
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	11	3	6	9
Surrey Sussex healthcare NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	9	39	22	14	22	28	32
Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust	113	141	137	109	76	106	120
Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	6	4
East and North Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust	0	14	10	24	15	35	37

Name	*September 1998*	*December 1998*	*March 1999*	*June 1999*	*September 1999*	*December 1999*
Data by health authority						
Hillingdon HA	10	34	91	0	0	4
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	6	6	8	8	8	21
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	3	4	7	9	9	0

Name	*September 1998*	*December 1998*	*March 1999*	*June 1999*	*September 1999*	*December 1999*
Bedfordshire HA	5	5	4	15	6	0
Berkshire HA	0	25	28	12	5	4
Buckinghamshire HA	0	1	1	1	0	0
Croydon HA	1	3	6	1	8	10
East Kent HA	0	0	1	2	0	0
West Kent HA	2	2	1	2	2	3
Kingston and Richmond HA	0	0	2	2	7	5
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	2	13	16	6	11	8
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	18	287	236	199	255	186
East Surrey HA	7	1	6	8	11	7
West Surrey HA	97	81	73	50	69	23
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	1	0	196	145	105	55
West Sussex HA	20	3	25	15	40	23
Barking and Havering HA	8	2	0	4	4	3
Brent and Harrow HA	11	14	7	31	16	22
Camden and Islington HA	40	0	31	31	31	31
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	7	9	2	3	4	3
East London and City HA	4	11	3	15	15	15
North Essex HA	0	1	1	1	1	4
South Essex HA	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manchester HA	22	14	51	53	19	20
Morecambe Bay HA	0	0	1	0	0	0
Salford and Trafford HA	1	0	1	1	0	0
Stockport HA	0	1	1	0	1	0
Oxfordshire HA	15	53	68	64	74	166
Suffolk HA	0	0	0	1	1	0
Barnsley HA	2	3	6	6	0	8
North Derbyshire HA	16	13	14	13	14	6
Southern Derbyshire HA	3	16	15	10	14	8
Doncaster HA	2	0	1	0	0	0
Lincolnshire HA	2	2	4	2	1	0
Nottingham HA	136	148	133	136	239	90
Rotherham HA	7	6	6	0	0	8
Sheffield HA	794	956	706	706	753	956
East Lancashire HA	0	0	0	0	0	0
North and Mid Hampshire HA	14	17	17	10	31	1
Southampton and SW Hampshire HA	0	0	2	1	12	0
Somerset HA	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Riding and Hull HA	0	1	1	0	0	0
Wakefield HA	0	0	0	3	0	0
Coventry HA	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Staffordshire HA	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warwickshire HA	5	5	1	2	2	54
Cambridgeshire HA	0	0	0	4	0	0
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hertfordshire HA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

	March 2000	*June 2000*	*September 2000*	*December 2000*	*March 2001*	*June 2001*	*September 2001*
Hillingdon HA	3	5	2	0	2	2	3
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	23	63	84	80	91	81	56
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	16	7	11	9	14	18	18
Bedfordshire HA	0	1	0	1	7	11	8
Berkshire HA	6	20	18	20	10	16	101
Buckinghamshire HA	0	0	1	0	2	0	1
Croydon HA	6	9	5	0	0	3	7
East Kent HA	2	1	2	0	0	1	0
West Kent HA	3	1	1	1	1	4	4
Kingston and Richmond HA	4	11	12	11	1	16	16
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	6	9	9	13	4	3	29
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	186	263	293	184	302	433	516
East Surrey HA	5	6	8	16	4	9	22
West Surrey HA	8	16	1	6	23	32	33
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	23	29	60	47	166	194	1
West Sussex HA	13	22	25	15	28	36	5
Barking and Havering HA	2	0	4	4	4	5	6
Brent and Harrow HA	17	57	20	42	37	50	47
Camden and Islington HA	78	47	65	115	97	104	143

	March 2000	June 2000	September 2000	December 2000	March 2001	June 2001	September 2001
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	1	4	7	11	9	12	14
East London and City HA	43	15	18	39	40	18	71
North Essex HA	0	6	2	8	1	3	5
South Essex HA	0	0	0	4	2	3	2
Manchester HA	4	16	3	4	14	4	5
Morecambe Bay HA	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Salford and Trafford HA	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Stockport HA	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Oxfordshire HA	68	90	55	61	68	88	4
Suffolk HA	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Barnsley HA	12	5	13	11	10	7	6
North Derbyshire HA	15	10	15	17	18	16	9
Southern Derbyshire HA	4	0	0	11	3	5	9
Doncaster HA	1	3	4	6	3	2	2
Lincolnshire HA	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
Nottingham HA	49	1	3	4	2	2	3
Rotherham HA	11	11	13	12	14	15	10
Sheffield HA	803	662	641	503	235	7	157
East Lancashire HA	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
North and Mid Hampshire HA	0	2	2	5	5	4	8
Southampton and SW Hampshire HA	1	2	0	3	3	0	1
Somerset HA	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
East Riding and Hull HA	0	1	1	2	0	0	1
Wakefield HA	1	1	2	1	1	1	0
Coventry HA	0	0	0	0	0	232	0
South Staffordshire HA	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Warwickshire HA	8	15	12	16	9	8	0
Cambridgeshire HA	1	2	0	14	0	43	0
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	78	87
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	81	88
Hertfordshire HA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	36	43
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	5

Cancer Services

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was allocated for cancer services in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; how much money is allocated for cancer services in 2002–03 in (i) the NHS Cancer Plan and (ii) the NHS Priorities and Planning Framework 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [29435]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* In 1999–2000 and 2000–01, resources for cancer services were included in general allocations to the national health service. The Department does not collect information that enables a complete figure to be calculated on the cost of a particular disease.

The time since the publication of the Cancer Plan (September 2000) has seen the biggest ever increase in funding specifically for cancer services.

In 2001–02 there was an extra £280 million made available for cancer services as promised in the Cancer Plan.

The NHS priorities and planning framework for 2002–03 earmarked a further £76 million to increase cancer spending (in 2002–03) as promised in the Cancer Plan.

NHS Pensions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow general practitioners over the age of 50 years to join the NHS pension scheme. [33494]

Mr. Hutton: General practitioners are entitled to join or rejoin the national health service pension scheme at any time until age 70, unless they are aged 50 or over and have already received benefits from the NHS scheme.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general practitioner practices, *(b)* health trusts and *(c)* health authorities paid their pension contributions late in the last period for which figures are available. [33621]

Mr. Hutton: The number of general practitioner practices, national health service trusts and health authorities who have paid pension contributions to the NHS pension scheme for England and Wales after the due date, is set out in the table.

	NHS trusts and health authorities	General practitioner practices
November 2001		
Number of participating employers	735	631
Number paid after the due date	51	40
Percentage paid after the due date	6.9	6.3
March 2001		
Number of participating employers	8,579	8,606
Number paid after the due date	1,336	1,642
Percentage paid after the due date	15.6	19.1

Smallpox Vaccine

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doses of smallpox vaccine are available in the UK. [33695]

Mr. Hutton: The Department holds a substantial strategic stock of smallpox vaccine that would be rapidly deployed in the event of an outbreak of the disease. Information about the size and location of the stock is not being put into the public domain as this is information that might be useful to terrorists.

Radiographers (Hillingdon)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many radiographers there were in the Hillingdon Health Authority in each of the last seven years. [34098]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Scientific, therapeutic and technical and staff employed in the radiography[1] areas of work within the Hillingdon health authority area as at 30 September each year

	Whole-time equivalents	Headcount
Total		
1995	40	50
1996	50	50
1997	50	50
1998	30	40
1999	30	30
2000	50	50
2001	50	50
Qualified		
1995	40	40
1996	40	50
1997	40	50
1998	30	30
1999	30	30
2000	40	40
2001	40	40
Unqualified		
1995	[2]—	[2]—
1996	10	10
1997	10	10
1998	10	10
1999	[2]—	[2]—
2000	10	10
2001	10	10

[1] Hillingdon HA does not employ any Therapeutic radiography staff

[2] = five or less and greater than zero

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Consultancy Vacancies (Cumbria)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the consultancy vacancies at the Cumberland Infirmary and the West Cumbria hospitals, indicating how long each post has been vacant. [34563]

Jacqui Smith: Data relating to consultant vacancies in the former Carlisle Hospitals National Health Service Trust and the West Cumbria Healthcare NHS Trust are shown in the table. Data related to the trusts have been supplied as information relating to individual hospitals is not collected centrally. The trusts may not directly correspond to existing trusts due to mergers occurring after the vacancy survey was conducted. The vacancy is collected on the basis that it has been unfilled for three months or more.

NHS vacancy survey, March 2001: Three month vacancy rates and numbers—Consultants

	Three month vacancy rates (percentage)	*Number of three month vacancies*
England	3.0	670
Northern and Yorkshire	3.6	110
West Cumbria Healthcare NHS Trust	0.0	[1]—
Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust	5.2	[1]—

[1] Figures based on less than 10 posts

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole-time equivalents)
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental and non-medical work force censuses (whole-time equivalent)
3. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10
4. Percentages rounded to one decimal place
5. England totals include staff from special health authorities
6. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding

Source:

NHS Vacancy Survey, March 2001

GP Consultations

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reasons underlay the decision to stop the practice of providing GP consultation automatically for those aged 75 years. [34927]

Mr. Hutton: The services that general practitioners are required to provide for all their patients are set out in the Terms of Service, schedule 2 to the National Health Service General Medical Services Regulations 1992. There has been no change to paragraph 16 which states that patients over 75, as well as receiving the full range of general medical services (GMS), are entitled to an annual health check from their GPs. In personal medical services, GPs are required to perform services equivalent in scope to those provided in GMS.

Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects the Commission for Health Improvement to complete its investigation and to report on the backlog of ultrasound tests in Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust; and if he will make a statement; [36037]

(2) when he expects the Commission for Health Improvement to complete its clinical governance review of Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust; and if he will make a statement. [36039]

Mr. Hutton: The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) plans to publish its report of its clinical governance review of Barnet and Chase Farm NHS Trust by April 2002. It intends to publish the outcome of its investigation into radiology services at the same trust in the summer.

CHI conducts routine clinical governance reviews into arrangements by NHS trusts for the purpose of monitoring and improving the quality of care. It may also carry out investigations into the management, provision or quality of health care.

If, when carrying out a clinical governance review, a matter comes to CHI's notice which it considers should be the subject of an investigation, it may decide to carry one out. In the case of its review of Barnet and Chase Farm NHS Trust, CHI has made such a decision in the light of information brought to its attention about a backlog of ultrasound tests.

Benefit Downrating (Hospital Patients)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what administration costs fall to the NHS in connection with the downrating of benefits during stays in hospital. [35579]

Mr. Hutton: It is the responsibility of individuals in receipt of social security benefits to notify their local Department for Work and Pensions office when they are admitted or discharged from hospital.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to change the departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36753]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the Department for Work and Pensions departmental expenditure limit will be increased by £40,052,000 from £7,302,415,000 to £7,342,467,000 and the administration cost limit by £56,142,000 from £4,902,843,000 to £4,958,985,000. Within the DEL change the impact on resources and capital are set out in the table:

	£
Resources	
Change	19,855
New DEL	7,111,469
Of which:	
Voted	6,084,747
Non voted	1,026,722
Capital	
Change	20,197
New DEL	230,998
Of which:	
Voted	148,071
Non voted	82,927

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) a reduction of £53,000 (administration costs) due to a transfer to the Home Office for costs in connection with the evaluation of withdrawal of benefits for offenders in breach of community penalties.

(ii) take up of end year flexibility entitlements (£7,100,000 of which £6,000,000 are administration costs) announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in Table 6 of the 2000–01 Public Expenditure Outturn Paper (Cm 5243).

(iii) a reduction of £220,000 (administration costs) due to a transfer to Lord Chancellor's Departments for costs associated with housing benefit and council tax benefit appeals.

(iv) a reduction of £50,000 (administration costs) due to a transfer to Department of Social Development (Northern Ireland) towards the administration costs associated with winter fuel payments.

(v) an increase in provision of £1,568,000 (administration costs) for the costs of administering allowance payments for work-based learning for adults in Scotland and Wales.

(vi) a net increase of £1,691,000 (administration costs) due to a transfer from Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, for expenditure on New Deal for Communities (£1,631,000), reimbursement of salary costs of Department for Work and Pensions staff performing work on behalf of the Housing Corporation (£150,000) and a transfer £90,000 to Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for implementation costs at the Rent Service.

(vii) an increase of £16,548,000 (of which £8,548,000 are administration costs) due to a transfer from Department for Education and Skills for expenditure within the Disability Rights Commission (£1,000,000), the cost of the Labour Force Survey (£1,050,000), the cost of accommodation where they are the minor occupier (£963,000), costs associated with Basic Skills (£7,000,000), a contribution towards the administrative costs of procurement (£24,000), a call on the Restructuring Fund (£6,000,000) and a transfer for costs associated with hardship payments to young people who would normally be receiving bridging allowance (£511,000).

(viii) an increase of £158,000 (other current) for the expenditure on EU Twinning funded projects.

(ix) a reduction of £20,000 (administration costs) due to a transfer to the Scottish Executive for costs associated with European Social Fund Verification and Audit Team.

(x) an increase of £9,517,000 (administration costs) from the Employment Development Fund for JobCentre Plus and New Deal for Disabled People.

(xi) an increase of £1,000,000 (administration costs) as a result of a transfer from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in connection with costs relating to the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

(xii) a reduction in provision of £32,000 (other current) as a result of a transfer to the Scottish Executive for the Glasgow Coalition.

(xiii) an increase of £1,095,000 as result of a transfer from Department of Health for the cost of collecting expenses associated with Road Traffic Accidents in England.

(xiv) an increase of £13,704,000 (of which £12,991,000 are administration costs and £713,000 grants) for expenditure associated with services supplied by Department for Work and Pensions to other Government Departments on a repayment basis.

(xv) an increase of £454,000 (of which £351,000 is administration costs and £103,000 other current) to correct an earlier transfer.

(xvi) an increase of £28,242,000 (administration costs) as result of virement from other current/grants and an increase of £13,797,000 (capital) arising from virement from other current.

(xvii) an increase in appropriation in aid of £26,202,000 (of which £14,518,000 are administration cost limit related).

(xviii) an increase of £10,294,000 (other current) to reflect an increase in the number of secondments.

(xix) a reduction of £2,900,000 (other current) as a result of a transfer to Annually Managed Expenditure.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(i) an increase of £6,400,000 (administration costs) from the Employment Development Fund for JobCentre Plus.

(ii) An increase of £13,797,000 as a result of virement.

All of these changes will either be offset by transfers or charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the quinquennial review of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority. [36752]

Mr. McCartney: I am pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Brian Davis, formerly Chief Executive of the Nationwide Building Society, to lead this review. He will assist the internal DWP team in undertaking a detailed examination of all OPRA's functions and management structures and will draw on the views and comments of key stakeholders.

The review will also draw on the findings of the Simplification Review, being undertaken by Alan Pickering, which is looking at ways of simplifying the legislation underpinning the private pensions regulatory system.

Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases have been recorded since April 2001 of employers' *(a)* failure to set up a record of when they were due to pay contributions to personal pension schemes and *(b)* failure to pay such contributions on time; how many cases have been completed; and how much has been raised in fines. [33719]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) has received reports as follows:

> 71,117 voluntary reports of employers who have failed to set up a record of payment contributions
>
> 128,965 reports of late payments. Many of these reports will relate to the same employer.

The new arrangements for reporting late payment of contributions began in April 2001. Opra's prime objective is to educate employers about their new responsibilities. Only when that fails does Opra consider sanctions. To date, Opra has written to over 35,000 employers. Opra has identified 100 employers who appear to be in serious breach and these cases will be considered for sanctions.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list for *(a)* each age after 60 and *(b)* each sex the number claiming state basic retirement pension in the last year for which figures are available. [35576]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Number of men and women receiving a basic state retirement pension at 31 March 2001, by single year age

Thousand

Age	*Female*	*Male*
All	6,880.1	4,079.9
60	220.1	—
61	250.6	—
62	260.7	—
63	268.3	—
64	273.4	—
65	280.2	259.9
66	278.4	265.1
67	271.5	255.4
68	271.1	251.0
69	277.0	252.0
70	283.8	247.9
71	272.0	237.5
72	265.1	222.2
73	255.8	210.0
74	258.8	205.2
75	250.6	196.5
76	240.0	179.6
77	239.1	167.1
78	230.4	163.4
79	231.0	152.7
80	233.4	145.9
81	200.9	123.7
82	141.0	80.8
83	125.2	70.1
84	139.3	72.6
85	129.4	63.0
86	125.7	57.0
87	111.8	47.0
88	93.8	39.4
89	80.8	30.4
90	68.3	21.2
91	57.6	17.0
92	46.7	13.1
93	37.1	9.5
94	28.8	7.2
95	22.4	4.8
96	15.7	3.0
97	11.5	2.4

Number of men and women receiving a basic state retirement pension at 31 March 2001, by single year age

Thousand

Age	*Female*	*Male*
98	9.5	1.7
99	6.1	1.3
100+	17.0	3.3

Note:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:

Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the Pensions Strategy Computer System as at 31 March 2001.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many members of occupational pensions schemes were *(a)* contracted out and *(b)* contracted in to the state pension scheme in each of the last five years. [35574]

Mr. McCartney: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	1991	*1995*
Contracted out	9.7	9.0
Contracted in	1.0	1.3
Total	10.7	10.3

Note:

All numbers are in millions

Source:

Government Actuary's Department "Occupational Pension Schemes 1991 and 1995".

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his statement of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 665, on pensions and benefits, if he will make a statement on his assessment of the reasons for the decline in the number of *(a)* defined benefit and *(b)* defined contribution occupational pension schemes since the mid 1960s. [35584]

Mr. McCartney: The main factors contributing to the long-term decline in both the membership and number of occupational schemes are complex, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions told the House on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 665. Because of that last year the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions asked Alan Pickering to conduct a wide-ranging review of the regulatory burden that is placed on pensions schemes. The review is due to report in the summer.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what publicity he plans in order to advise the general public of the implications of the equalisation of state retirement pension ages from 2010. [35573]

Mr. McCartney: Changes to the state pension age for women affect all women born after 5 April 1950, and the Government are committed to informing women about the changes.

The changes continue to be publicised as part of the Department for Work and Pensions' marketing campaign on pensions education for people of working age. Information is also included in relevant pensions leaflets (including a specific leaflet on pensions for women) and on the Department's website. The website also features an interactive calculator where women can type in their date of birth to find out their state pension age and the date they will reach that. The Department's state pension forecast letters and the accompanying leaflet also show the recipient's state pension age and explain who is affected by the changes to the state pension age for women.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has *(a)* to introduce a one-stop shop service for access to disability benefits and services provided by his Department and *(b)* to encourage local authorities to adopt a similar approach in relation to their services. [35575]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: This Government are committed to transform public services to make them more convenient and accessible. From April this year, JobCentre Plus and the Pension Service will take over from the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency. JobCentre Plus will provide work related and benefit related services to customers of working age through a national network of integrated JobCentre Plus offices. Customers will be able to access the full range of disability benefits through JobCentre Plus offices. The Pension Service will provide a national network, working with local authorities, voluntary organisations and others to provide a service for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

An important initiative, which will help improve access to services including disability benefits for people over 60, is Care Direct, which is being piloted jointly by the Department of Health, Department for Work and Pensions and six local authorities. A key aim of Care Direct is to provide older people with a single gateway to get information about, and access to social care, health, housing and benefits, including disability benefits. The pilots are examining in a practical way, how central government, local government and the voluntary sector can work together to improve access to services.

The six local authorities piloting Care Direct are now operational and will be evaluated later this year.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many young people aged 0 to 16 are in receipt of a disability benefit; and what percentage of households in which a young person is in receipt of such a benefit have an income of less than 60 per cent. of the median household income. [33010]

Maria Eagle: Such information as is available is as follows:

At 31 August 2001, about 243,300 people aged 16 or under in Great Britain were receiving disability living allowance. The latest available estimates, which relate to 1999–00, indicate that the proportion of this group of young people who were living in households with below 60 per cent. of median income was 11 per cent. on a 'Before Housing Costs' basis, or 14 per cent. 'After Housing Costs'.

The Government have introduced several measures from April 2001 to help families with disabled children. The higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance has been extended to severely disabled children aged three or four, providing extra help to their families of £38.65 a week. In addition, the disabled child premium in the income-related benefits has been increased to £30 a week—£7.40 more than the normal uprating. Finally, the new disability income guarantee helps 33,000 families with severely disabled children, providing an extra £11.05 a week for each disabled child.

Notes:

1. The number of young people aged 0 to 16 in receipt of DLA is the latest information available, and is based on a 5 per cent. sample of disability living allowance (DLA) administrative records. The figure given is rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Estimates relating to the percentage of individuals living in households with below 60 per cent. of median income have been taken from the "Households Below Average Income" (HBAI) series which is derived from the Family Resources Survey (FRS) data set. The FRS does not include Northern Ireland, and 1999–00 is the latest year for which data is available.

3. HBAI estimates are sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors that control for region, council tax band and a number of other demographic variables. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and variability in non-response. Percentages are given to the nearest whole percent.

4. HBAI estimates have been presented on both a before and after housing costs basis to take into account variations in housing costs as is standard HBAI practice. No adjustment has been to household disposable income as used in HBAI to take into account any additional costs that may be incurred due to the illness or disability in question.

Benefit Downrating (Hospital Patients)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the annual costs to his Department were in each of the last three years of administering the downrating of benefits during hospital stays. [35580]

Mr. McCartney: The Benefit Agency's administration costs are published in the Benefits Agency annual report and accounts 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Library. The costs are not broken down to the detail required, but the current estimated staff costs for administering these rules is around £0.5 million. The information is not available for previous years.

Job Trials

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the new rules for job trials effective from 8 April. [35577]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 685–86W.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in each of the last two years who were in receipt of the *(a)* middle and *(b)* higher care component of the disability living allowance in the (i) UK and (ii) London borough of Hillingdon were also eligible for the winter fuel allowance. [34525]

Mr. McCartney: The number of disability living allowance recipients receiving the higher or middle rate care component who are aged 60 or over in Great Britain and Hillingdon are given in the tables. Such people will be eligible for a winter fuel payment unless one of the exclusions applies.

Number of DLA recipients in Great Britain aged 60 or over

Thousand

Year	*Higher rate care*	*Middle rate care*
2000	132.4	183.6
2001	147.7	199.6

Number of DLA recipients in Hillingdon aged 60 or over

Thousand

Year	*Higher rate care*	*Middle rate care*
2000	*0.3	0.6
2001	*0.4	0.6

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred
2. Figures are at 31 August each year
3. Figures under 500 marked '*' are subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used only as a guide to the current situation

Source:

ASD Information Centre: 5 per cent. data

Disability Discrimination Act

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the impact of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [34659]

Maria Eagle: The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has not yet been fully implemented but indications are that those parts of the DDA that are in force are proving to be effective and that disabled people are making use of it. Research indicates that awareness levels are increasing and changes are being made to employers' and service providers' policies and practices.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to provide an answer to the question from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight of 19 November 2001 [Ref 16113]. [35516]

Mr. McCartney: I provided an answer to hon. Member's question on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 47W.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases have been dealt with in each year by the Minimum Income Guarantee helpline; and if he will make a statement. [33924]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested can be found in the table.

Telephone calls dealt with by minimum income guarantee (MIG) claimline

	Number
2000[1]	630,083
2001[1]	190,231
2002[2]	15,453

[1] January to December

[2] January only

The MIG claim line has also processed a total of 408,508 freepost requests for a clerical MIG claim form since 29 March 2000.

Fair Trade

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33548]

Mr. McCartney: The Department obtains the majority of fair trade goods from outsourced services, for example catering. The Department does not require its suppliers to take part in specific events. However, we expect them to be ethical in their business dealings and would expect them to support fair trade events of this sort.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33231]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Department does not record information about television purchase in the form requested. The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Benefit Fraud

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what monitoring has been done to ascertain the effect of human rights legislation on the efficiency of investigating benefit fraud; and if he will make a statement. [29745]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department takes account of human rights legislation in the training, deployment and tasking of its fraud officers.

Policy and organisational changes both inside and outside the Department have improved its efficiency in investigating benefit fraud. For example, the Professional Standards Unit undertakes an independent inspection of the standard of surveillance applications across the Department and the Department is subject to independent inspection by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner.

It is not possible to identify separately the improvements in efficiency that are due specifically to human rights legislation.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the average weekly payment of housing benefit in each region and nation to tenants of *(a)* local authority tenants, *(b)* housing association tenants and *(c)* private tenants using the quarterly 100 per cent. counts taken on the last day of August (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [29710]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the tables.

Average weekly housing benefit: by region and tenure, August 1999

£ per week

	Local authority tenants	*Registered social landlord tenants*[1]	*Private tenants*
Great Britain	39.00	53.00	60.30
North East	33.00	47.30	50.20
North West	37.50	48.70	53.30
Yorkshire and Humberside	31.70	54.70	49.80
East Midlands	34.90	50.40	46.80
West Midlands	37.00	49.20	54.80
East	40.30	53.60	59.10
London	55.50	67.70	86.10
South East	43.30	56.30	66.90
South West	39.10	49.40	56.20
England	40.00	54.90	61.40
Wales	36.80	45.00	50.30
Scotland	34.40	38.80	54.10

Average Weekly Housing Benefit: by region and tenure—August 2000

£ per week

	Local authority tenants	*Registered social landlord tenants*[1]	*Private tenants*
Great Britain	41.10	54.50	62.00
North East	35.20	48.00	51.40
North West	39.70	49.10	54.90
Yorkshire and Humberside	34.00	55.80	51.10
East Midlands	37.10	50.40	48.90
West Midlands	38.80	49.40	56.40
East	42.90	54.80	60.90
London	58.00	71.50	90.40
South East	45.80	57.70	69.40
South West	41.00	50.80	58.20
England	42.30	56.20	63.20
Wales	38.80	47.30	51.40
Scotland	35.80	40.80	55.50

Average weekly housing benefit: by region and tenure—August 2001

£ per week

	Local authority tenants	*Registered social landlord tenants*[1]	*Private tenants*
Great Britain	44.00	57.20	65.30
North East	37.30	47.40	53.70
North West	42.00	51.90	57.10
Yorkshire and Humberside	37.20	57.10	53.40
East Midlands	39.80	52.70	51.90
West Midlands	41.60	50.70	59.90
East	45.40	58.30	63.90
London	62.10	76.30	98.70
South East	49.30	61.10	73.70
South West	43.00	53.90	61.50
England	45.50	58.60	66.60
Wales	41.00	50.80	53.80
Scotland	37.50	45.20	59.00

Notes:

1. Figures for housing benefit paid to registered social landlord tenants include housing association and non-housing association accommodation. Separate data on housing benefit paid to housing association tenants only are not collected.

2. The data refer to recipients of housing benefit which may be a single person, a member of a couple or a member of a family.
3. Average amounts have been rounded to the nearest ten pence.
4. Figures for authorities who have failed to respond have been estimated.
5. The figures exclude any Extended Payment cases.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System. Quarterly 100 per cent. caseload count taken in August of each year.

Public Service Agreement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if proposals for public service agreement targets for the reduction of sickness absence rates were discussed and agreed with the Cabinet Office by June 1999, as referred to on page 22 of the 2001 departmental report. [19015]

Mr. McCartney: Yes.

Child Support Agency

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact he expects the reforms of the working of the Child Support Agency will have on *(a)* the time taken to assess new claims and *(b)* the time devoted to pursuing non-compliant fathers. [25421]

Malcolm Wicks: The new child support system will be straightforward and easy to understand. The simpler method for making a maintenance calculation will take less time, allowing the Child Support Agency more time to ensure their clients are compliant.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what action he has taken as a consequence of the European Court judgment of 25 February 1999 in the case of Swaddling, with special reference to British nationals returning to Britain from South Africa; [30950]

(2) what plans he has to review the habitual residence test. [30951]

Malcolm Wicks: In its judgment in the Swaddling case, the European Court of Justice made it clear that people returning from a European member state to re-establish ties in the United Kingdom can be treated as habitually resident on their return.

Following this judgment we reviewed the habitual residence test and decided to extend this important principle to people returning from any country overseas to re-establish ties here. These measures have resulted in fairer access to income-related benefits, while ensuring security against possible abuse of the benefits system by those with no real links to the United Kingdom.

We keep all our policies under review but have no current plans to change the habitual residence test.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure that non-screened areas in Jobcentre Plus offices will be staffed by those who volunteer for the position. [30342]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus will be delivered by our staff in a predominantly unscreened environment. Detailed staffing arrangements are a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus and his managers.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are to change the Office of Water Services departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36857]

Margaret Beckett: The Ofwat DEL will be reduced by £2,000 from £35,000 to £33,000 and the administration costs limits will be decreased by £302,000 from £11,846,000 to £11,544,000. With the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

	Resources	*Capital*
Change	–302	300
New DEL	–567	600
Of which:		
Voted	–567	600
Non-voted	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Not applicable

The £302,000 reduction in the resource element of the DEL arises from the transfer of £2,000 resources to the Cabinet Office for the fast stream recruitment and a transfer to a capital of £300,000.

The increase of £300,000 in the capital element of the DEL arises from an investment in the development financial model for the periodic review. This will be used in the next review of prices and will be shared with the industry.

There has been a change in accounting policy for OFWAT treatment of VAT. The previous accounting policy meant that VAT was Cfered. The new accounting policy is that the Department now accounts, net of VAT. This has no impact on the DEL.There will be a reduction in consolidated fund extra receipts of £135,000.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are to change the departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limit for 2001–02. [36856]

Margaret Beckett: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' DEL will be increased by £368,615,000 from £2,590,774,000 to £2,959,389,000, and the administration costs limit will be increased by £149,998,000 from £503,649,000 to £653,647,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table:

	£000
Resource	
Change	+359,167
New DEL	2,443,809

	£000
of which:	
Voted	1,452,453
Non-voted	991,356
Capital	
Change	+9,448
New DEL	515,580
of which:	
Voted	435,281
Non-voted	80,299

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from: (i) a draw down of £335,900,000 from the DEL Reserve for various FMD related expenditure, (ii) a reduction of £11,300,000 in expenditure on the Factortame litigation, (iii) a take-up of £8,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund, (iv) a take-up of £271,000 from the Invest to Save Budget, (v) a transfer from DfES of £500,000 for the school milk scheme, (vi) various MOG transfers from DTLR for £6,683,000, (vii) a transfer from DTLR of £40,908,000 for the Rural Development Agency, (viii) transfers from various OGDs of £3,176,000 for the Energy Efficiency Best Practice measure, (ix) two transfers from HMC&E for £94,000, (x) a net transfer of £41,000 to the DTLR for work by the MCA, (xi) a transfer to NAWAD of £40,000 for the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme, (xii) a transfer to DTLR of £30,000 for sea bed rehabilitation, (xiii) a transfer to SEERAD of £6,300,000 for the British Waterways Board, (xiv) a transfer to DFID of £2,000,000 for the Environment Know-How Fund, (xv) a transfer of £345,000 to the Highways Agency for canal work, plus, (xvi) a reduction of £8,317,000 in the DEL resource budget stemming from an adjustment in the Winter Supplementary.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from: (i) a take-up of £65,000 from the Invest to Save budget, (ii) a transfer to SEERAD of £4,233,000 for the British Waterways Board, (iii) a transfer of £487,000 from DTLR for emissions projects, (iv) a take-up of £700,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund, plus, (v) an increase of £12,429,000 in the DEL capital budget stemming from an adjustment in the Winter Supplementary.

There will also be a net switch of £21,875,000 from non-estimate funds on to the estimate.

Increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers and charged to the DEL Reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to change the Forestry Commission's departmental expenditure limit for 2001–02. [36854]

Mr. Morley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Forestry Commission's DEL will be reduced by £4,644,000 from £69,809,000 to £65,165,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table.

	£
Resources	
Changes	–4,644
New DEL	65,165
of which:	
Voted	62,512
Non-voted	2,653
Capital	
Changes	No changes
New DEL	—
Of which:	
Voted	—
Non-voted	—

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the winding up of the Forestry Commission Pension Scheme (FCPS) after 30 November 2001 and the transfer of its future liabilities to the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS). The £4,644,000 reduction is the unused element of the net expenditure of the FCPS included in the Main Estimate.

Flood and Coastal Defence

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will report on the outcome of the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review; and if she will make a statement. [36858]

Mr. Morley: I am pleased to announce that the report "Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review—Report to Ministers by the Review Steering Group" has been published today along with a consultation document seeking views on the steering group's recommendations and conclusions and how these might be taken forward. I am placing copies in the Library of the House.

The steering group's report assessed a number of options for change including additional sources of funding and a broad-based regional model to provide a single funding stream. Suggestions for short-term changes include giving the Environment Agency responsibility for all watercourses that present a significant flood risk and on combining and consolidating capital grant and revenue support grant to the agency, possibly in the form of central grant allocations.

Elsewhere, the report recommends continued reliance on the existing flood management strategic framework to monitor achievement of the Government's policies and priorities.

The Government have agreed to consult on the recommendations in the report. This provides a unique opportunity to consider provision of the flood and coastal defence service from first principles and I look forward to receiving the views of interested parties. I will keep Parliament informed of developments.

Ofwat

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action her Department is taking to ensure that Ofwat improves its serviceability criteria. [34070]

Mr. Meacher: The Government continue to work with the Office of Water Services (Ofwat) the quality regulators and the water industry to take forward discussions on serviceability and asset maintenance.

Ofwat develops measures of companies' serviceability to customers. Ofwat is reviewing its measures of the serviceability of water and sewerage company assets. A consultation paper on improved serviceability indicators was issued in November 2001. The consultation period ended on 8 February 2002. Ofwat will also consult on its approach to capital maintenance in the spring.

In its consultation paper on the approach to the periodic review of price limits for 2005–10, to be published in October 2002, Ofwat will also set out how it proposes to take account of serviceability and capital maintenance.

Water Sports

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Environment Agency is taking to encourage more access agreements to moving water for canoeists in England and Wales. [34959]

Alun Michael: The agency has produced a guidance booklet "Agreeing Access to water for Canoeing (July 1999)", which sets out the background to property and access rights and how to move forward in the development of access agreements. The guidance is provided free of charge to interested parties. The agency will also respond to requests for assistance in arranging access agreements.

Sand Dredging (Erosion)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent guidelines she has issued to protect sand beaches from excessive erosion caused by the actions of the sand dredging industry. [35634]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

Draft policy guidance on the extraction of sand and gravel from the English sea bed was published for public consultation in February 2001. This explains the existing requirement for a coastal impact study to be undertaken as part of the application procedure to obtain a licence to dredge for minerals. These studies need to consider, among other matters, the potential for the extraction activity to cause coastal erosion. If this suggests unavoidable risk of coastal erosion, the application is refused.

The National Assembly for Wales is responsible for dredging in Welsh waters.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 14 February 2002

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Postal Service Job Losses

11. **Colin Burgon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Communication Workers Union regarding projected job losses in the postal service. [33802]

Ms Hewitt: While Ministers have had discussions with the Communication Workers Union on a range of issues, the cost-saving proposals announced by Consignia are an operational issue for the company in consultation with the unions.

Chemicals Industry

12. **Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the chemicals industry in the north-west of England. [33803]

Mr. Wilson: The chemical sector forms one of the north-west region's most important clusters. It accounts for 22 per cent. of the UK chemical industry. It contains the highest concentration in the country of the faster growing speciality and fine chemicals companies, supplying new markets such as electronics, pharmaceuticals and consumer products.

Aerospace Industry

13. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the prospects for the aerospace component manufacturing industry in 2002. [33804]

Mr. Wilson: As the hon. Member will be aware, the severe downturn in air travel following 11 September has resulted in a reduction in orders for new aircraft and a lower demand for aircraft repair and maintenance. This is inevitably having an adverse effect on the aerospace component manufacturing industry, which is likely to persist throughout 2002. However, all possible steps are being taken to restore passenger confidence and there are signs that this is starting to return. The Government believe that the long-term prospects for the industry remain good, and that market growth will return to its former level.

Gas and Electricity Suppliers

14. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to eradicate sales malpractices by gas and electricity suppliers. [33805]

Mr. Wilson: Regulation of energy suppliers is for the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem). Ofgem has already, with our strong encouragement, put in place specific marketing and sales rules for suppliers that go beyond those in general consumer law, and will shortly consult on extending these rules. Energywatch, the statutory consumer body established under the Utilities Act 2000, recently launched its "Stop Now!" campaign to combat unscrupulous sales practices. I wrote to all suppliers in November making clear that, if they do not address the problem of dishonest sales, those of us concerned with energy supply will need to look again at how best to protect consumers.

Technology (Telford)

16. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Advantage West Midlands in relation to technology investment in Telford. [33809]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met the Board of Advantage West Midlands to discuss region-wide issues such as manufacturing and the region's proposals to become a Manufacturing Beacon; clearly this will have an impact on Telford. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and other DTI Ministers, also attend regular meetings of the RDA Chairs, including Advantage West Midlands, where a wide range of issues is discussed, including its broadband and technology cluster proposals.

Higher Education

17. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place between her Department and the Department for Education and Skills on modifications to the research assessment exercise in higher education. [33810]

Ms Hewitt: As mentioned in the Science and Innovation White paper "Excellence and Opportunity", my Department will monitor the modified guidance for the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, and we shall be discussing the issues arising with the Department for Education and Skills, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Inward Investment

19. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what actions she is taking to encourage inward investment from Japan and South Korea. [33812]

Ms Hewitt: I visited South Korea and Japan from 7–12 January and met existing and prospective investors in both individual and group meetings, including a meeting with senior representatives of the Japanese automotive industry in Tokyo.

The Invest UK teams in both South Korea and Japan organise a series of initiatives, including marketing programmes, company calls, seminars, company visits to the UK, and attendance at trade fairs, all aimed at encouraging companies to invest in the United Kingdom.

The attractions of the United Kingdom mean that this country remains the number one location for South Korean and Japanese foreign direct investment in the European Union. To maintain this position, in the face of difficult global economic conditions, Invest UK has intensified its efforts at attracting knowledge-driven, high value investments in the ICT, automotive, life sciences and financial services sectors.

Manufacturing

20. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on Government assistance for exports from the UK manufacturing industry. [33814]

Nigel Griffiths: British manufacturers account for over 60 per cent. of total British exports.

This year we are spending some £69 million through British Trade International to help British exporters access the information, skills and contacts they need to trade successfully overseas.

In addition, the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) helps British exporters to compete overseas. Last year it underwrote £5.6 billion of new business.

23. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to improve productivity in manufacturing industry. [33817]

Mr. Wilson: Since 1997 we have established a stable macro-economic framework to ensure the future competitiveness and productivity of British manufacturing. We have built on this basis with policies to promote the spread of best practice, encourage innovation, raise skills levels and improve the transfer of ideas from the science base.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the state of manufacturing industry. [33811]

Mr. Wilson: Manufacturing production is weak across the industrialised countries, including in the UK. The Government's policies are designed to assist the manufacturing sector improve its competitiveness and future prospects.

Work Life Balance Challenge Fund

21. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many organisations have received funding from the work life balance challenge fund. [33815]

Ms Hewitt: 176 organisations.

Social Entrepreneurship

22. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the contribution social entrepreneurship can make to the UK economy. [33816]

Ms Hewitt: The past lack of a common definition of social enterprise means that there is currently no reliable data on the contribution it makes to the UK economy. DTI's Social Enterprise Unit, working with academics and others, is reviewing existing research and identifying how best to map and evaluate social enterprise.

Fireworks

24. **Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent consultation has taken place with trading standards officers on the subject of fireworks. [33818]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have sought feedback from trading standards departments on enforcement activities in respect of the fireworks safety regulations.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will answer the letters of 30 November 2001 and 10 January 2002 from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West regarding nuisance fireworks. [32514]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I will reply to the hon. Member shortly.

Wind Energy

25. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met National Assembly secretaries to discuss wind energy in Wales; and if she will make a statement. [33819]

Mr. Wilson: DTI Ministers and officials have regular contact with Ministers and officials of the National Assembly on a range of issues including wind energy.

The Government have set an ambitious target for renewable energy and the development of wind energy in Wales will make an important contribution.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment the Government have made of the environmental impact of wind farms. [35607]

Mr. Wilson: Each proposed wind turbine installation is subject to some environmental evaluation prior to its construction. For proposed wind farms involving more than a single turbine, whether onshore or offshore, a full environmental impact assessment by an independent consultant is generally required.

A number of studies, conducted both within the DTI's Sustainable Energy Programme and outside, have looked in detail at environmental effects of wind farms. These include studies on noise, birds, other wildlife, visual impact, electromagnetic interference, and the cumulative effects of wind turbines on a locality.

Information and Consultation Directive

26. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact of the information and consultation directive on British business. [33820]

Alan Johnson: The directive will help reinforce what the Government are already doing to promote partnership at work, and through partnership to enhance the productivity and competitiveness of British business.

Barcelona Summit

27. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her objectives will be at the forthcoming Barcelona summit with special reference to industrial competitiveness. [33821]

Ms Hewitt: At the Lisbon summit in March 2000, Heads of Government acknowledged that Europe needed major structural reform to succeed in the global economy and that companies needed flexible, strong and open markets to enable them to improve their competitive position and create new jobs. The summit set out two ambitious goals: to make the EU the most competitive economy in the world and to create full employment by 2010. The Barcelona summit marks the end of the second year of this 10-year programme.

The Government are a strong supporter of the Lisbon agenda and want the Barcelona summit to reaffirm the EU's commitment to economic reform. In doing this we need to take stock and evaluate progress against the conclusions agreed at Lisbon and set out a future programme of work to ensure that momentum is maintained.

The EU has made good progress in a number of areas—for example, updating the regulation of telecommunications—but progress has been less encouraging in others. We are still waiting for agreement on a Community Patent and updated public procurement rules. We will be looking to Barcelona to give a political push in those areas where negotiations have progressed less positively.

Postal Services

28. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she next expects to meet Consignia management to discuss their business plan for 2002–03. [33822]

Mr. Alexander: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has regular meetings with Consignia management to discuss a range of issues relating to the future of the company.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of the universal service obligation for mail delivery services. [33801]

Mr. Alexander: The Government consider the maintenance of a universal postal service in this country to be of the highest importance. That is why we enshrined the obligation in primary legislation in the Postal Services Act 2000 and gave the postal regulator (Postcomm) the primary duty to exercise its functions in a manner best calculated to ensure the provision of a universal postal service. It is therefore for Postcomm to determine how the universal service obligation is implemented in the interests of consumers. Currently Postcomm requires Consignia plc, in the licence, to provide a universal postal service.

Technology Transfer

29. **Mr. McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what she is doing to encourage technology transfer from academia to industry. [33823]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's White Paper, "Excellence and Opportunity: a science and innovation policy for the 21st century", published last July, set out a comprehensive range of measures to help promote technology transfer from academia to industry; and we have made some excellent progress here.

Last October we announced awards totalling over £100 million to help universities grow their capability to interact with business and to realise the business opportunities offered by science—including further science enterprise centres and seed-corn funding to assist the transformation of good research into good business. We have doubled the number of new starts for Faraday Partnerships to link the science base to business networks, and expect to have reached our target for a national network of 24 partnerships by the end of the year. We have increased our funding of the successful TCS scheme.

Total TCS activity grew by 25 per cent. during 2001; from 730 to 918 current TCS programmes. TCS enables universities and businesses to work together using high calibre graduates drawing on academic support and expertise while they work in companies on "business-driven" projects.

We are also continuing to provide support for collaborative research and development under the Link programme and have committed £12 million in 2000–01 to a further round of Foresight Link Awards projects complementing current Link programmes in Foresight priority areas.

Correspondence

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he intends to reply to the letter dated 24 September 2001 from the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East on fines for the non-delivery of accounts to Companies House. [28009]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* I replied on 13 February 2002.

Single Tier Exemption

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations her Department has received since the Trading Schemes Act 1996 to amend the definition of single tier established in the Fair Trading Act 1973, so that more than a single master franchise of a trading scheme may be permitted in the UK; if proposals permitting a change to exempt certain multi-level schemes were considered in her Department when drawing up S.I., 1997, No. 1887; if she will place in the Library details of her considerations in opting to maintain the single tier exemption in 1997; and if she will make a statement. [26153]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Current legislation on trading schemes does not prohibit more than one master franchise from operating in the UK. However, each master franchise would have to comply with the relevant provisions of the trading schemes legislation.

The legislation is intended to protect scheme participants or potential participants whose ability to take commercial risks is similar to that of consumers and not to restrict normal business format transactions. The 1997 regulations therefore exclude from controls single-tier schemes or schemes where participants are registered for VAT. Some exemption of certain multi-level schemes was considered but it was concluded that this carried the risk of creating loopholes in the controls.

A copy of the summary of responses to the consultation which preceded the 1997 regulations has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Enron

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will establish an inquiry into the implications for UK corporate accounting practice of the collapse of Enron. [30084]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No. There are major differences between the accounting requirements in the UK and the US, which make it unlikely that the principal accounting factors we understand to have been involved in the collapse of Enron would be replicated here. We are, however, following developments in the US. The UK Accounting Standards Board has been playing a leading role for some time in international discussions of accounting requirements in this area.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when, and by whom, the relevant ministers were informed of the problems at Enron Corporation. [31937]

Mr. Wilson: In accordance with previous Administrations it is not our practice to disclose internal advice to Ministers which is exempt under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on access to Government information.

Dual-use Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many dual-use export licences have been granted for the category code 5A001b4a since 1997; how many items were contained within each export licence application granted; and what were the countries of destination and the end-users for the equipment. [32281]

Nigel Griffiths: It would entail disproportionate cost to establish the number of licences issued by destination for the category code 5A001.b.4.a since 1997.

Details of all export licences, including those for digitally controlled radio receivers controlled under category code 5A001, are published by destination in the Government's annual reports on strategic export controls. Copies of the 1997,1998, 1999 and 2000 annual reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 annual report will be published as soon as possible.

Small Businesses (Regulatory Burden)

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to reduce the regulatory burden on small businesses resulting from the implementation of EU directives. [33016]

Nigel Griffiths: To tackle European policy initiatives that unfairly burden British small firms, the Small Business Service has set up smallbusinesseurope which lobbies for small business interest while European directives are being framed. To avoid unnecessary and over-complex implementation of European directives in the UK, this Government have produced essential guidance for policy officials—the Guide to Better European Regulations, and the Transposition Checklist. Transposition Notes help avoid 'gold-plating' by showing up any potential over-implementation, enabling it to be addressed. These notes have accompanied primary or secondary legislation that gives effect to European directives, easing scrutiny both by Parliament and business, since November 2001.

Departmental Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33201]

Ms Hewitt: Centrally held records show the numbers of secondments to and from each of the companies listed in the years specified as:

Inward secondments to the DTI

Name	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
BP Amoco	0	1	0
BP	0	0	1
Shell	1	1	2
Enron	0	0	0
Exxon Mobil	0	0	0
Conoco	0	0	0
Texaco	0	0	0
TotalFinaElf	0	0	0

Outward secondment from the DTI

Name	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
BP Amoco	0	1	0
BP Gas Marketing Ltd.	1	0	0
Shell	0	0	0
Enron	0	0	0
Exxon Mobil	0	0	0
Conoco	0	0	0
Texaco	0	0	0
TotalFinaElf	0	0	0

Independent Non-executive Directors

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage companies to appoint independent non-executive directors. [35187]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's approach to this issue was set out in the pre-Budget report, which stated:

> "The Myners review highlighted the importance of non-executive directors in UK corporate governance. The Company Law Review drew attention to a growing body of evidence from the US suggesting that companies with a strong contingent of non-executives produce superior performance. The Government recognises the importance of continued progress in this area, and of developing further the role of strong, independent non-executive directors within the present best practice framework of corporate governance for quoted companies."

We consider that effective non-executive directors have a key role to play in contributing to the success of their companies. This is an area where the Government believe that there is room for improvement. We regularly discuss this issue with institutional investors and other leading business organisations, and recognise and appreciate the work they do in raising the effectiveness of non-executive directors.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many copies of BNFL Inc.'s 1998 accounts were *(a)* printed and *(b)* distributed by BNFL Inc. [34635]

Mr. Wilson: This is a matter for BNFL. I have asked the chief executive of BNFL to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33865]

Ms Hewitt: Centrally held records show the numbers of secondments to and from each of the companies listed in the years specified as:

Secondments into DTI

Company name	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*April 2001 to date*
PricewaterhouseCoopers	1	0	0
Ernst and Young	1	0	1
Deloitte and Touche	1	1	0
KPMG	0	1	2
Andersen	0	0	0

Secondments from DTI

There were no secondments to the companies listed from the DTI in the periods covered.

Office of Fair Trading

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether a code of conduct exists for the Office of Fair Trading when investigating complaints against companies; and if she will make a statement. [33049]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The conduct of the Office of Fair Trading is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading.

Ispat International

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list meetings between *(a)* Department Ministers and *(b)* senior departmental officials and representatives of Ispat International between May 1997 and December 2001, indicating the date of each meeting. [33115]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Ministers, special advisers and officials in my Department regularly meet a wide range of representatives from business. However, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply of 19 November 2001 *Official Report,* column 102W makes clear, it is not normal practice to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings were held between her Department and representatives of LNM/Ispat International since May 1997. [36739]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release specific details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Broadband

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of companies had access to broadband technology in *(a)* St. Helens South, *(b)* the St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* the North-West RDA area, *(f)* the other RDA areas and *(g)* England in each of the last three years. [35421]

Mr. Alexander: A map showing geographical availability of broadband services can be found in the UK online annual report, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Research and Development

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of private sector investment in research and development as a share of GDP was made in *(a)* St. Helens South, *(b)* the St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* the North-West RDA area, *(f)* other RDA areas and *(g)* England in each of the last 12 months. [35412]

Mr. Wilson: Data on research and development (R&D) spending are not available on a monthly basis or for the exact geographies requested. The Office for National Statistics do, however, conduct an annual survey of R&D performed in business enterprise (BERD). Sub-regional data are available from this survey for 2000 but GDP is only available at a Government office region level (equivalent to RDA regions) for 1999 and at a sub-regional level for 1998. The table only covers own-funded BERD ie R&D performed in that region which was funded by the companies themselves (and not by Government or from abroad). Further details on the BERD survey can be found on www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme—commerce/MA14–2000.pdf.

Own-funded BERD as a proportion of GDP 1998–99

Percentage

	1998	*1999*
Region		
England	0.92	0.97
North-west	1.05	1.13
Cheshire	2.34	[1]—
Cumbria	0.79	[1]—
Greater Manchester	0.40	[1]—
Lancashire	0.97	[1]—
Merseyside	1.31	[1]—
North-east	0.18	0.52
Yorkshire and the Humber	0.31	0.30
East Midlands	0.87	0.98
West Midlands	0.90	0.89
East	2.43	2.22
London	0.32	0.42
South-east	1.03	1.11
South-west	0.89	0.85
Wales	0.29	0.48
Scotland	0.27	0.28
Northern Ireland	0.33	0.43

Own-funded BERD as a proportion of GDP 1998–99

		Percentage
	1998	*1999*
UK	0.83	0.88

[1] Not available

Source:

National Statistics

Asbestos

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent estimate her Department has made of the cost of removing white asbestos from commercial and domestic buildings in the UK. [35383]

Mr. Wilson: We do not have data on white asbestos contained in buildings and therefore do not have data on the cost of its removal.

Energy Memorandum of Understanding (US)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action has been taken as a result of her Department's Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Department of Energy in relation to new and renewable energy technologies. [35389]

Mr. Wilson: The Memorandum of Understanding between the DTI and the US Department of Energy (US DoE) came into force in November 2000. It aims to encourage collaboration in energy research and development. Some activities have already begun, eg on cleaner coal technologies. In the field of renewable energy, we await the response from the US DoE to a recent DTI proposal for a joint workshop on biomass to be held in UK later this year. This workshop would be supported by a series of site visits to show US experts what we are doing in the UK.

My officials are also in discussion with US DoE on the possibilities of a workshop on distributed generation. Such a workshop would bring together experts from both sides of the Atlantic to discuss issues critical to the market penetration of renewable energy, with a view to possibly developing collaborative research and development projects.

Local Shops

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to promote the economic viability of local shops in the vicinity of supermarkets. [35712]

Nigel Griffiths: I fully recognise the economic and social role that local retailing plays. Access to a local shop is an important service, and one which can help in the regeneration of our high streets, and in the rejuvenation of urban and rural communities.

Our goal is the sustainability of a vibrant and diverse retail sector which can serve the needs of all social groups. It is not, however, our role artificially to keep businesses afloat through subsidies or to interfere in the commercial decisions of supermarkets operating in accordance with local planning regulations, but to help local shops become more sustainable through innovation, the adoption of new technologies and best practice.

The DTI is holding a seminar on 15 February as part of its work on supporting small retailers. The seminar's objective is to encourage local organisations in England to help sustain retail businesses through promoting good practice initiatives, encouraging long term sharing of best practice among participants and promoting awareness of new projects. A signposting guide containing information and advice for small and medium sized retail enterprises in England on the schemes and support available will be launched at the event.

The Small Business Service is also working with a number of intermediaries such as the Rural Shops Alliance, Association of Convenience Stores and the British Retail Consortium on issues to help small shops' competitiveness.

Bristol, East

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of her Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35596]

Alan Johnson: The South West of England Regional Development Agency (SW RDA), is applying a considerable proportion of its resources to help improve the physical, social and environmental conditions of the Bristol, East constituency. The Agency works in partnership with Bristol city council and Barton Hill Community at Heart (New Deal for Communities) to identify, prioritise and manage its activities. The first year of operation was 1999–2000. Since then the agency, through either its own or inherited projects, has invested some £22.7 million in nine projects, which range from small community development buildings, through environmental improvement schemes, to Temple Quay—a major inner-city mixed-use development scheme. Seven additional future projects are at feasibility stage which are likely to attract agency investment of c. £10 million.

The nine projects are:

Sofa 2000: £284,000

Bristol Foyer: £505,000

110–116 Cheltenham Road: £446,000

Temple Quay Core: £21,000,000

Black Development Agency: £101,000

St. Agnes Parl Lodge: £101,000

Kuumba project: £101,500

NCN Route 3, Avon Valley: £127,000

Dings Park: £25,000.

Business Link West and the Small Business Service continue to support business start up and development of existing businesses. The national Phoenix Fund, designed to encourage entrepreneurship in disadvantaged areas and launched in 1999, has made awards to two schemes in Bristol, East: the Bristol Area Community Enterprise Network (BACEN) and Bristol East Side Traders.

Five wards in Bristol (Ashley, Easton, Lawrence Hill, Windmill Hill and Filwood) will benefit from the South West of England Objective 2 programme, launched on 13 March 2001, with total European funding of

£118 million. The approved projects to date include £1.9 million European funding for Bristol Means Business, led by Business Link West.

In November 2000 Brunel Training Group Ltd. based in St. George, participated in a Trade Partners UK sponsored Trade Mission to the Caribbean, organised by Business Link West and Bristol Chamber of Commerce. Prior to that visit the company commissioned a Tailored Market Information Report from the British High Commission in Barbados. As a direct result of that report and following their visit the company has started to train managers and customer care workers in Barbados. The company has plans to run the course on 11 West Indies islands. Barbados Government Ministers were among the first delegates at the first course.

Energy Consumption (Scotland)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much *(a)* coal, *(b)* gas and *(c)* oil she estimates was consumed in Scotland in the last year for which figures area available, broken down by local authority or by the nearest appropriate division. [35784]

Mr. Wilson: Oil consumption in Scotland in 2000 (as measured by deliveries of products for energy and non-energy uses to final consumers) was 6.8 million tonnes.

Sales of gas to customers in Scotland receiving gas via the national transmission system amounted to 45,638 GWh in 2000.

Data for oil and gas consumption are not available at a lower geographical level of disaggregation. 2000 is the latest year for which figures are available.

Coal consumption data for Scotland alone are not readily available as consumption data are based on disposals from collieries and from coal imports, neither of which are separated by country of destination.

Corus (Redundancies)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the aid package that was announced in May 2001 to provide support to communities affected by Corus redundancies has been spent. [35303]

Mr. Wilson: The majority of the £48 million package of regeneration measures for areas in England affected by the closures announced by Corus in May 2001 consisted of major infrastructure projects funded by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Projects of this kind are necessarily slow moving, and little money is spent in the early stages. Progress on the projects is as follows:

Durham University Stockton Campus (budget £19.4 million)—discussions are continuing with Environment Agency and Highways Agency on the impact of the development. Site reclamation work will commence once this is concluded. No significant expenditure to date.

Phase 2 of the Middlehaven scheme—One NorthEast is planning to spend some £16 million on Phase 2 which includes a contribution to a new junction on the A66 to access the site. Design work on the junction has been started and it should be built by March 2003. Development of the Phase 2 site, which will involve the private sector, is planned to start in the spring.

New Tees crossing feasibility study (budget £250,000)—£118,520 committed to be spent in financial year 2001–02, the remainder in early 2002–03.

Teesside Light Rapid Transit system feasibility study (budget £250,000)—£93,525 committed to be spent in financial year 2001–02, the remainder in early 2002–03.

A66 Longnewton Junction improvements (budget £4.7 million)—the project is included in the Highways Agency budget and work programme. The agency expects to have identified a detailed work programme in the next two months.

Broadband communications in Teesside and North Lincolnshire (budget £500,000 in each)—proposals from Regional Development Agencies are under consideration by DTI as part of the £30 million fund for the roll-out of broadband communications across the UK. An announcement of the work programme is expected shortly.

Enterprise Grants in Scunthorpe (budget of up to £500,000)—expenditure is dependent on applications from companies wishing to expand. No expenditure has yet been made.

The remainder of the package announced on 3 May consisted of an extension of the Job Transition Service to the areas affected by the closures, and is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Expenditure on the regeneration package for Wales also announced on that day is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Casim Project

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ensure that the procedure and process of peer review of the science case of the 4 GLS part of the Casim project are fair and transparent. [35462]

Ms Hewitt: The Engineering and Physical Science Research Council, on behalf of all the research councils, is handling the scientific peer review of the 4 GLS science case. To ensure that the process is fair the review is being undertaken by a panel of independent scientists nominated by the research councils. The proposal is being considered against a set of standard, agreed criteria. The reviewers' recommendations will be passed on to the Director General of the research councils, the meeting of the chief executives of the research councils and the scientists involved in the project.

Higher Education Services (GATS)

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what consultations her Department has had with universities and colleges of higher education on the inclusion of higher education services in the United Kingdom as part of the forthcoming World Trade Organisation negotiations on the general agreement on trade in services; and if she will make a statement; [35438]

(2) what plans her Department has to include higher education services in the United Kingdom as part of the forthcoming World Trade Organisation negotiations on the general agreement on trade in services. [35439]

Ms Hewitt: My officials and officials from the Department for Education and Skills are consulting Universities UK. In addition the DfES is seeking the views of the devolved Administrations and I understand the Scottish Executive are consulting separately with Universities Scotland.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are employed in her Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35368]

Ms Hewitt: Currently we are aware of 28 members of staff employed in a total of 14 job shares in the Department.

Apart from a very small number, where there are particular, fully justifiable business requirements, all vacant positions are advertised as being available on a part-time, job share/split as well as on a full-time basis.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on her Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps she is taking to reduce this number; and if she will make a statement. [35894]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested is held at local management level and is not readily available centrally.

A partnership project between management and unions is currently looking at improving work/life balance in the Department.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices are planned to close in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the UK. [34919]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Post office closures are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. The Government's formal requirement on the Post Office to maintain the rural network and prevent avoidable closure of rural post offices remains in place. In relation to the urban network, detailed discussion continues on the programme to restructure the urban post office network.

Sellafield

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of cracks in the B30 nuclear waste storage facility at Sellafield. [36000]

Mr. Wilson: Inspectors from HSE's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate inspected the B30 plant in 2001. As a result of this inspection, and a subsequent detailed review by BNFL's own experts, BNFL are taking action to institute a programme of remedial work and to enhanced its contingency plans for this plant.

B30 is one of the older plants at Sellafield that contain the legacy wastes referred to in the statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the House on 28 November 2001 on Government proposals to set up a Liabilities Management Agency. These proposals are intended to help to systematically address the UK's historical legacy of radioactive waste, including the decommissioning of such plant as B30. In this particular case HSE is pressing BNFL to establish an early decommissioning programme.

Clean Coal Technology

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funding her Department provides for research into clean coal technology. [33807]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is making available some £13 million over the period 2001–02 to 2003–04 for the research and development of clean coal technology. In addition to this some £11 million has been budgeted for underground coal gasification.

Parliamentary Questions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the questions tabled for answer by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr on 4 February 2002. [36063]

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy answered question No. 33111 on 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1202W, and I answered question No. 33115 today at column 523–24W.

Mineworker's Compensation

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the total of legal fees paid in respect of compensation claims for chronic obstructive and pulmonary disease for former miners who worked in the Leicestershire and south Derbyshire coalfields; what principles underpin the determination of such fees; and if he will make a statement. [35104]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* To date, £1.0 million in Leicestershire and £0.3 million in south Derbyshire has been paid in claimants' solicitors costs. Costs and disbursements are paid in line with the handling agreement agreed between the Department and the claimants' solicitors. The costs are fixed in real terms, rising with inflation, and depend on the complexity of the case.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [35876]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Information from the Department's systems indicate the following:

Contracts	£
May 2001 to December 2002	
Gateway Fuels Ltd.	28,897,176
Consignia (Customer Management) Ltd.	25,179,254
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	24,943,160
ETSU	22,211,888
Post Office Ltd.	12,013,929
Laser (Teddington II) Ltd.	8,966,759
Freehold Portfolios Victoria Management Ltd.	7,022,500
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	4,382,400
Credit Suisse First Boston (Europe) Ltd.	4,141,000
CSL Group Ltd.	3,759,398
Land Securities Properties Ltd.	3,666,852
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	3,134,273
Jones Lang Lasalle	3,054,321
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	3,001,240
Deloitte and Touche	3,000,000
AEA Technology Environment	3,000,000
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	2,760,000
International Computers Ltd. (ICL)	2,500,000
International Computers Ltd. (ICL)	2,500,000
A. Davies and Co. (Shopfitters) Ltd.	2,391,319
First Security (Guards) Ltd.	2,170,065
Credit Suisse First Boston (Europe) Ltd.	2,100,000
Inside UK Enterprise Ltd.	1,918,592
Palmlace Ltd.	1,792,858
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	1,575,936
Brightstation	1,539,600
Astrium	1,500,000
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	1,443,811
Jones Lang Lasalle	1,350,564
Deloitte and Touche	1,327,000
May 2000 to April 2001	
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	26,450,000
AEA Technology PLC	26,450,000
ETSU	26,450,000
Westport Private Equity Ltd.	20,000,000
Syntegra	17,857,426
NPL Management Ltd.	14,288,953
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	12,870,000
Laser (Teddington II) Ltd.	£11,000,000
Legal and General	7,750,000
LGC (Teddington) Ltd.	7,457,600
International Computers Ltd. (ICL)	7,282,859
Freehold Portfolios Victoria Management Ltd.	7,022,500
Legal and General	6,708,333
AEA Technology Plc	6,127,659
Laser (Teddington II) Ltd.	5,659,585
International Computers Ltd. (ICL)	5,276,595
Syntegra	5,262,244
National Federation of Enterprise Agencies	4,582,887
Laser (Teddington II) Ltd.	4,384,067
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	4,089,000
Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry	3,927,017
AEA Technology Environment	3,800,000
Land Securities Properties Ltd.	3,666,852
Westminster City Council	3,253,995
Arthur Andersen	3,078,652
AEA Technology	3,062,131
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	2,909,000
Small Business Service (Staffordshire) Ltd.	2,887,985
Hays Information Management	2,770,694
Black Country BS	2,658,893
May 1999 to April 2000	
TUV Product Service Ltd.	7,633,000
ICL Central Europe Division	6,960,000
ICL Central Europe Division	6,960,000
National Federation of Enterprise Agencies	6,162,340
ETSU	6,104,000
AEA Technology Plc	6,104,000
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	5,880,763
Westminster City Council	4,633,040
NPL Management Ltd.	4,534,472
AEA Technology Plc	4,307,152
NPL Management Ltd.	4,092,039
John Laing Construction	4,028,987
LGC (Teddington) Ltd.	4,016,000
NPL Management Ltd.	3,403,454
ETSU	3,395,154
International Computers Ltd. (ICL)	3,361,702
NPL Management Ltd.	3,227,394
Westminster City Council	3,165,682
NPL Management Ltd.	2,739,733
NPL Management Ltd.	2,643,786
First Security (Guards) Ltd.	2,397,308
NPL Management Ltd. (NPL)	1,930,642
Legal and General	1,909,375
Freehold Portfolios Victoria Management Ltd.	1,755,625
International Computers Ltd. (ICL)	1,702,127
NPL Management Ltd.	1,652,558
Legal and General	1,625,000
CSL Group Ltd.	1,557,251
Westminster City Council	1,509,580
Michael Shortland Associates	1,444,579

Information is not held centrally for earlier years and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Overseas Embassies

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in invoicing the number of scientific attachés in overseas embassies. [33431]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

The £3 million expansion of the FCO's Science and Technology (S&T) network over the three financial years from April 2001 is being implemented on schedule. New S&T staff have already taken up duties in Berne, Boston, Moscow, New Delhi, Ottawa, San Francisco, Shanghai, Taipei, Tel Aviv and The Hague. A further 22 new or upgraded slots will be filled, as planned, by April 2003. This will reinforce the network in key technology centres and more than double its geographical coverage. The expansion and management of the network are being co-ordinated by the FCO's Science and Technology Unit, established in April 2001.

E-Government

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration she has given to making e-Government accessible for disabled people; and what actions have been taken as a result. [36242]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Since December 1999 with the publication of the Guidelines for UK Government websites, Government web managers have been advised on how to make websites accessible to people with disabilities or impairments. On 1 February 2001 the then e-Government Minister the Minister for Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), announced that all central Government websites should conform to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) recommendations. The recently revised Guidelines for UK Government Websites support WAI recommendations and will give detailed guidance on how to conform to these internationally recognised recommendations.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Equal Pay

33. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Minister what steps she is taking to promote best practice in industry on equal pay. [33828]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have taken a number of steps already. As well as a questionnaire procedure for use in equal pay cases and other provisions in the Employment Bill, the Fair Pay Champions and the Castle Awards, created by my predecessor, are helping to spread good practice on equal pay. We are also taking forward recommendations from the Kingsmill report aimed at further reducing the pay gap. I have written to my Cabinet colleagues' union and will soon be writing to FTSE 100 companies, to gather examples of their good working practices, so that we can help spread these more widely.

Sex Discrimination Act

34. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Minister if she will propose legislation to make the Church of England and Church in Wales subject to the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. [33829]

Ms Hewitt: There are no plans to review the relevant section of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, relating to organised religions generally.

Unmarried Mothers

35. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Minister what assessment she has made of the impact of the enactment of the Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill on unmarried mothers in long term partnerships. [33830]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are taking forward a cross-departmental exercise to examine all the issues relevant to civil partnerships in detail. It would be premature for the Government to commit themselves to making any changes in these areas before undertaking a comprehensive analysis of all the implications.

Flexible Working Practices

36. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Minister what steps she is taking to encourage flexibility at work for women. [33831]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's Employment Bill will give mothers, and fathers, of young children a right to request to work flexibly and set out the procedure that employers will have to follow to ensure applications are considered seriously. This new right will apply from April 2003.

The Government's work-life balance campaign encourages all employers to introduce working practices, particularly flexible working arrangements, to enable mothers, and other employees, to balance better their work with other responsibilities. The fourth round of the Work-Life Challenge Fund, which provides consultancy support to employers looking to adopt such policies, is currently under way and employers are invited to submit applications by the closing date of 8 March.

Women in Public Life

37. **Richard Younger-Ross:** To ask the Minister what consultations she has had on the departmental action plans for public appointments of women. [33832]

Ms Hewitt: We are determined that women should hold half of all public appointments. The Minister for Women in the Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), has discussed with ministerial colleagues in other Departments efforts towards this, and other diversity targets. The Government's overall action plan, together with individual departmental action plans, will be published later this month.

Women Scientists

38. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Minister what steps she is taking to increase the number of women scientists working in the United Kingdom. [33833]

Ms Hewitt: I recently allocated funding to ensure that the Promoting SET for Women Unit will continue to be in existence for another five years to stimulate progress. I have asked Baroness Greenfield to lead a new high-level group to report with recommendations for a stronger strategic approach to increase the participation of women in science and engineering. I have also recently published the report "Maximising Returns to Science and Engineering Careers".

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31744]

Dr. Whitehead: The annual leave entitlement for all DTLR(C) staff outside of the senior civil service is 30 days, and has been in each of the last four years.

The annual leave entitlement for all members of the senior civil service within DTLR(C) is currently set by the Cabinet Office at 30 days, and has been for the last four years.

Public Appointments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the people he has appointed to official bodies and non-departmental public bodies coming under the aegis of his Department in the last three years; and who they were. [33350]

Ms Keeble: Information about the numbers and remuneration of ministerial appointments to public bodies, including the names of chairpersons, is included in the annual Cabinet Office publication, "Public Bodies". Copies are available in the Libraries of the House and also published on the Cabinet Office's website at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/quango. The next edition of "Public Bodies", which will include information on appointments as at 31 March 2001, will be published shortly.

A list showing people appointed by Ministers in the last three years has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Public Bodies (Chairmen)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33887]

Ms Keeble: Ministers in my Department have appointed or reappointed chairs since 1 May 1997 as follows:

	Name	*(i) Term of office*	*(ii) Salary (£)*
(a) Non-departmental public body			
Audit Commission	Dame Helena Shovelton[1]	17 December 1998 to 30 November 2001	34,880
Castle Vale Housing Action Trust	Richard Temple Cox (reappointed)	30 June 1999 to 29 June 2002	32,680
Urban Regeneration Agency	Lord Walker (reappointed)	10 December 1997 to 30 September 1998	0
Commission for the New Towns	Dr. John Bradfield (reappointed)	1 April 1998 to 30 September 1998	37,223
English Partnerships	Sir Alan Cockshaw[2]	1 October 1998 to 30 September 2001	50,000
Housing Corporation	Baroness Brenda Dean	6 November 1997 to 31 March 2001	43,131
	(reappointed)	1 April 2001 to 30 September 2003	
Health and Safety Commission	Bill Callaghan	1 October 1999 to 30 September 2004	93,021
Liverpool Housing Action Trust	Paula Ridley (reappointed)	8 February 1999 to 31 March 2004	32,680
Stonebridge Housing Action Trust	Tony Wade (reappointed)	27 July 1997 to 31 October 1997	28,765
	Ivan Weekes	1 November 1997 to 31 October 2000 (resigned 31 March 2000)	30,828
	Caroline Pickering	7 July 2000 to 16 July 2003	32,680
Tower Hamlets Housing Action Trust	Sheila Drew Smith	1 July 1999 to 30 June 2004	32,680
Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust	John Chumrow (reappointed)	10 December 1997 to 31 December 2001	32,680
Standards Board for England (body created in 2001)	Tony Holland	7 February 2001 to 6 February 2004	50,000
Strategic Rail Authority	Sir Alastair Morton[3]	15 January 2001 to 31 March 2002 (resigned 30 November 2001)	137,917
	Richard Bowker	1 December 2001 to 30 November 2006	250,000
Civil Aviation Authority	Sir Malcolm Field (reappointed)	1 June 1999 to 31 May 2002 (resigned 16 September 2001)	79,149
	Sir Roy McNulty	17 September 2001 to 31 August 2004	90,640
Advisory Panel on Standards in the Planning Inspectorate	Michael FitzGerald (reappointed)	2 August 1998 to 1 December 2000	0
	Corinne Swain	1 February 2001 to 31 January 2004	0
Building Regulations Advisory Committee	Jack Anderson (reappointed)	1 January 1998 to 31 December 1999	0
	Pat O'Sullivan	1 January 2000 to 31 December 2001	0
	Michael Finn	1 January 2002 to 31 December 2004	0
Commission for Integrated Transport (body created in 1999)	David Begg	30 March 1999 to 29 March 2002	26,497
Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee	Jane Wilmot	1 January 1999 to 31 December 2001	0
	(reappointed)	1 January 2002 to 30 June 2003	0
Local Government Commission	Malcolm Grant (reappointed)	1 July 1999 to 30 June 2002	21,400
Property Advisory Group	Robin Broadhurst	1 July 1998 to 30 June 2003	0
Rent Assessment Panel Eastern	Bruce Edgington	1 October 1998 to 30 September 2002	31,406
Rent Assessment Panel London	Susan Lloyd (reappointed)	1 April 1999 to 31 March 2002 (resigned 19 July 2000)	56,670
	Siobahn McGrath (reappointed)	1 December 2000 to 31 January 2003	57,201
Rent Assessment Panel Midland	John Bettinson (reappointed)	1 January 2000 to 14 October 2002	31,406
Rent Assessment Panel Northern	Martin Davey (reappointed)	1 April 1999 to 31 March 2004	47,110
Rent Assessment Panel Southern	Robert Long (reappointed)	1 October 1997 to 30 September 2002	47,110
Traffic Area Eastern	Geoffrey Simms	1 June 1998 to 2 August 2006[4]	68,000
Traffic Area North Eastern	Tom Macartney	28 February 2000 to 30 June 2012[4]	68,000
Traffic Area North Western	Beverley Bell	10 April 2000 to 7 December 2024[4]	68,000
Traffic Area South Eastern and Metropolitan	Chris Heaps	4 January 2000 to 15 November 2007[4]	69,100
Traffic Area West Midland and Welsh	David Dixon	1 May 1998 to 3 April 2007[4]	68,000
Traffic Area Western	Philip Brown	9 May 2000 to 16 April 2018[4]	68,000
(b) Commission			
Channel Tunnel Intergovernmental Commission	John Henes	4 January 2000 to 31 December 2002	Daily fee based on standard senior civil service rates
Commission for Local Administration	Anthony Redmond	12 November 2001 to [5]	132,603
(c) Public inquiries			
Thames Safety Inquiry	Right Hon. Lord Justice Clarke	Appointed 09/09, report published January 2000	No salary from the inquiry
Marchioness/Bowbelle Formal Investigation and Public Inquiry into the Identification of Victims following Major Transport Accidents	Right Hon. Lord Justice Clarke	Appointed February 2000, final reports published March 2001	No salary from the Formal Investigation

	Name	(i) Term of office	(ii) Salary (£)
Reopened Formal Investigation into the loss of the MV Derbyshire	Hon. Mr. Justice Colman	Appointed April 2000, report published November 2000	No salary from the Reopened Formal Investigation
Reopened Formal Investigation into the loss of the FV Gaul	Mr. Justice Steel	Appointed May 2000, currently adjourned. Likely to reopen late February/early March	No salary from the Reopened Formal Investigation

[1] A new chair is currently being appointed to the Audit Commission. The deputy chair has been acting chair since Dame Helena stood down last November.

[2] In May 1999, during Sir Alan Cockshaw's chairmanship, the Urban Regeneration Agency and Commission for the New Towns came together as a single operating entity with the name English Partnerships. A new chair is currently being appointed, the deputy chair has been acting chair since Sir Alan stood down.

[3] Sir Alastair was appointed chair of British Railways Board—one of Strategic Rail Authority's predecessor bodies on 1 April 1999.

[4] The Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 provides for appointment of Traffic Commissioners until their compulsory retirement at age 65.

[5] This post runs concurrently with the tenure of Mr. Redmond's appointment as a Commissioner for Local Administration. Commissioners may be relieved of office at their own request or may be removed from office on the grounds of incapacity or misbehaviour and shall vacate office on completing the year of service in which they attain the age of 65.

(d) This Department does not designate a chair to head its agencies.

(e) Information on the number, remit and membership of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000, and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 13 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report, "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews," issued in October 2001, covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

(iii) Information on chairs political affiliation is not collected.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years, giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34182]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is not available in the form requested.

Telecommunications

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the costs of telecommunications services within public sector agencies in the south west region were in the last five years broken down by county. [33727]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held by my Department.

Ship Safety Standards

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government plan to take to enforce and improve safety and working conditions onboard ships using British port and waters. [32127]

Mr. Jamieson: Ships using British ports and waters are subject to a rigorous regime of inspection to check that they comply with minimum international safety standards and relevant working conditions. This is an on-going process.

Ships that are found on inspection to fall short of international safety standards are detained until the defects leading to detention are put right. Ships failing to comply with the terms of release are refused access to British and European ports until the safety standards are met.

The details of ships detained by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) are published on national and European websites and the ships are targeted for further inspection. Significant breaches of regulations are investigated and followed up by prosecution where appropriate. Details of prosecutions are also published.

Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in relation to the Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh, what the profits were in the last five years for which figures are available; what the estimated profit this year is; what the current surplus or deficit was *(a)* five and *(b)* three years ago and what it is today; how much has been invested in the college in each of the last five years, including this year's estimate; what recent orders the college has won and how many residential students weeks have resulted; and how many student weeks were provided in the each of the last five years, including an estimate for this year. [34471]

Dr. Whitehead: Information on profits, surpluses, deficits and investment is set out in the annual reports and accounts of the Fire Service College which are presented to Parliament and published. The college estimates that investment in 2000–02 will total £4 million and profits will be between £2 million and £2.5 million.

The college reports that it has recently won orders in respect of National Police Training totalling 14,500 student weeks over an 18 month period in 2001–03, firefighter recruit training totalling 780 student weeks and a number of foreign contracts totalling 1,260 weeks.

Estimates of student weeks in each of the last five years are set out in the table.

	Weeks
1996–97	15,192
1997–98	15,008
1998–99	15,283
1999–2000	14,822
2000–01	14,087

The estimate of student weeks for 2001–02 is: 17,435.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in respect of the Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh, how much foreign contracts were worth in each of the last five years, including an estimate for this year; what consultations and working parties are in progress on the framework document on the future of the college and when they are due to report; what the mechanism is for revising the framework document; when last year's audited accounts are due to be presented to Parliament; and who will write the summary of the annual report. [34473]

Dr. Whitehead: Information provided by the Fire Service College for foreign contracts is set out in the table. The information is drawn from the college's course booking system. The figure for 2001–02 is an estimate.

	£000
1996–97	1,108
1997–98	927
1998–99	736
1999–2000	885
2000–01	1,149
2001–02	1,870

Work on the future training requirements of the fire service in England and Wales, and the role of the college in delivering those requirements, are being taken forward in consultation with the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council. A report will go to that council in the summer.

A revision of the Framework Document is being taken forward separately through the Fire Service College's Advisory Board. A new document will be submitted to me in due course.

The annual report and accounts for 2000–01 were presented to Parliament in July 2001. The annual report and accounts for 2001–02 are expected to be presented in July this year. The foreword to the annual report will be written by the chief executive in charge of the college at the time.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32328]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Paragraph 7.1.7 of the Civil Service Management Code prohibits departments and agencies from providing staff with private medical insurance.

NDPBs are not bound by the conditions in the Management Code—remuneration for staff in NDPBs is a matter for the sponsoring department and the individual NDPB.

Planning

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *(b)* Sport England, and *(c)* the appropriate devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the revised draft of PPG17. [34506]

Ms Keeble: I will consult other Government Departments before the final version of PPG17 is issued. I have met Sport England regarding PPG17, and my officials will be consulting further with Sport England in drafting the final version. The final guidance, like the draft that preceded it, will be for England only.

Standard Spending Assessment (Elderly Care)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the SSA for elderly clients is calculated in each area; and if he will make a statement. [34601]

Dr. Whitehead: There are two formulae for elderly social services—one for residential care and one for domiciliary care. The starting point for both formulae is the number of elderly people in each area. In the case of residential care it is the number of people in households; for domiciliary care it is the total resident population (which includes people in institutions as well as in households). In both formulae the number of people over 85 are given most weight, followed by those aged 75–84, with those aged 65–74 given least weight.

In addition to age, the formulae include deprivation and other indicators associated with the likelihood of being in need of care. These indicators are shown in the table:

Elderly residential SSA	*Elderly domiciliary SSA*
Elderly people on income support	Pensioners in rented accommodation
Elderly people on attendance allowance or disability living allowance	Pensioners living alone
Pensioners in rented accommodation	Elderly people on income support
Elderly people with a limiting long-term illness	Elderly people with a limiting long-term illness
Pensioners not in a couple and not a head of household	
Pensioners living alone	

The domiciliary formula also includes a measure of sparsity, and both formulae include [illegible] adjustment for ability to raise income from charges. Finally, an area cost adjustment is applied.Full details of the formulae are available in "The Local Government Finance Report (England) 2002/2003" which is available in the House of Commons Library. The social services formulae are currently under review together with the other grant distribution formulae. A new grant distribution system will be introduced in 2003–04.

Green Belt

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce new legislation giving local authorities powers for the immediate removal of those illegally in occupation of green belt land; and if he will make a statement. [34596]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* Local authorities already have at their disposal a range of planning enforcement powers if they consider that an unacceptable breach of planning control has occurred. These powers include the ability to seek a planning injunction in the High Court or county court, to restrain any actual or expected breach of planning control. The exercise of enforcement powers is at the local authority's discretion. The powers apply irrespective of whether the land benefits from any special designation such as green belt.

Entering on to land without the owner's consent constitutes trespass. The owner of the land may bring a civil action for trespass before the courts and seek recovery of the land. Clearly where a local authority owns the land concerned, it is open to that authority to pursue recovery through this route. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 provides a further route through which local authorities (and the police) can seek eviction.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35600]

Dr. Whitehead: The principal kinds of funding that this Department has provided to Bristol city council for the period 1994–2002 are shown in the table. These include grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure.

It is not possible to determine how much of this money has been spent on Bristol, East. It is for the local authority to decide where within its boundary these resources are applied.

£ million

Nature of funding	*5 May 94–2 May 97*	*2 May 97–7 May 98*	*7 May 98–11 Feb 02*
Revenue Support Grant[1]	166.581	121.880	506.021
Income form National Domestic Rates[2]	122.235	90.650	426.346
Housing Investment Programme	58.280	15.962	50.368
Housing Revenue Account Subsidy	n/a	n/a	16.629
Capital Receipts Initiative[3]	n/a	1.714	11.567
Cash Incentive Scheme[4]	0.200	n/a	n/a
Loan Charges Defective Housing[5]	4.493	1.498	5.990
SRB Funding[6]	2.446	3.892	24.150
Local Transport Plan Settlement[7]	3.079	4.574	21.287
New Deal for Communities[8]	n/a	n/a	3.617
Objective 2 Funding[9]	n/a	n/a	8.717
Urban 1 Funding[10]	n/a	n/a	2.101
Neighbourhood Renewal Funding[11]	n/a	n/a	0.850
Community Empowerment Fund[12]	n/a	n/a	0.062
Community Chest[13]	n/a	n/a	0.100
Workplace and Travel Plan Co-ordinators[14]	n/a	n/a	0.030
Estate Action[15]	6.990	n/a	n/a

[1] From 1996–97 Bristol became a unitary authority and took on greater responsibilities.
[2] See 1.
[3] The Capital Receipts Initiative started in 1997–98 and ran for three years to 1999–2000 before being swallowed up by the single housing pot.
[4] Supplementary Credit Approval for the Cash Incentive Scheme ceased in 1998–99. There is no information available prior to 1996–97.
[5] The figure for 2001–02 is provisional at this stage as it is claimed retrospectively.
[6] SRB figures are for a variety of projects over the six rounds of SRB funding.
[7] The figure given is for 1996–97. There is no information available prior to 1995–96 when an Avon Area Package was given £10,856 million. See additional information for East Bristol specific schemes.
[8] This figure is the total forecast spend at the end of 31 March 2002. Additional information about NDC can be found in the additional information.
[9] See additional information for projects approved so far that will have an impact on East Bristol.
[10] Examples of projects funded by Urban in the East Bristol Constituency are in the additional information.
[11] See additional information.
[12] See additional information.
[13] See additional information.
[14] See additional information.
[15] This programme continued under the Single Regeneration Budget following 1995.

Additional Information

New Deal for Communities

NDC is a 10-year programme that will bring an additional £50 million of government funding to support regeneration of the Dings, Redfield, Barton Hill and Lawrence Hill areas of Bristol. The programme supports a plan that brings together local people, community and voluntary organisations, public agencies, local authorities and business in an intensive local focus to tackle problems around, drugs, poor educational attainment, and unemployment.

Transport

Specific schemes funded in Bristol, East since May 1997 include:

Improved bus priorities on Bath road, Brislington and Wells road, Knowle and Totterdown and Clarence road, Lawrence hill.

Bristol Dial-a-Ride Service extended to cover the whole of East Bristol.

Preparatory work towards the Light Rapid Transit, which runs through Lawrence hill.

Sandy Park road (Brislington) environmental improvement scheme

Emlyn road and Robertson road (Eastville) traffic calming

The increased funding allocation for this year will see the programme include:

Brislington Home Zone, covering Broomhill road, Wick road, Allison road and First avenue.

Ridgeway road/Lodge Causeway Road Safety Scheme.

Whitehall Primary Safer Routes to Schools scheme.

Objective 2

The South West of England Objective 2 programme was launched on 13 March 2001 with total European funding of £118 million. Five wards in Bristol will benefit—Ashley, Easton, Lawrence Hill, Windmill Hill and Filwood. Projects approved so far include:

Bristol Neighbourhood Action Plan (Bristol City) Council/Bristol Regeneration Partnership)—£6.7 million European funding

Bristol Means Business (Business Link West)—£1.9 million European funding

Ashley Vale Action Group Office Block Development—£117 thousand European funding.

URBAN 1

Bristol, East wards have benefited from the E-C URBAN programme, a community initiative worth over £7.6 million in total over 1997–2001. Projects that have operated in Bristol East, include:

Bristol East Side Traders awarded £491,200 towards a £1 million project to reverse decline in the inner area of Bristol.

Easton Business Centre awarded £300,000 towards a £741,000 project to provide 19 enterprise workshops on derelict land.

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Bristol has been awarded £8 million over three years from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The fund is an additional, non-ring fenced resource to help local authorities in the most deprived areas focus their main programme spending to deliver better outcomes for their deprived communities. Knowle West, St. Pauls and Southmead have been identified in the city for targeting the fund.

Community Chest

This is a small grants scheme for small organisations in NRF authorities. Bristol has been allocated £100,000 in year one.

Community Empowerment Fund

Available to NRF authorities as way of capacity building in communities to enable them to play a full and meaningful role in Local Strategic Partnerships.

Workplace and School Travel Plan Co-ordinators

Bristol was successful in bidding for additional funding for Workplace and School Travel Plan Co-ordinators. The £30,000 was awarded to the Council, however the amount claimed will be slightly less due to recruitment taking place in June and August respectively.

Ports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what position he has taken on the proposed directive on the market access to port services; and if he will make a statement. [35872]

Mr. Jamieson: The proposed directive on market access to port services would introduce a framework for competition in provision of services within ports, covering cargo handling, passenger services and technical-nautical services, including pilotage. The UK fully supports the broad principles of liberalisation and competition in the provision of port services, subject to safety and standards being safeguarded. However, we have a number of concerns about the proposals, and we consider that amendments will be required in order to take account of the diversity and complexity of the ports industry.

The proposed directive is now under discussion in the Transport Council Working Group. We understand that the commission is planning to issue modified proposals. We shall consult fully with the ports industry, users, trades unions and other interests on them.

Social Housing (London)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many units of social housing were built in London in each year between 1979 and 2001; and how many bedrooms there were in these units. [36033]

Ms Keeble: The data we currently have available for housing completions by registered social landlords and Local authorities are as follows:

	Number
1988–89	2,876
1989–90	3,638
1990–91	4,024
1991–92	3,720
1992–93	4,606
1993–94	5,743
1994–95	5,660
1995–96	5,052
1996–97	4,881
1997–98	4,381
1998–99	3,233
1999–2000	2,856

The completions for registered social landlords of particular bedroom numbers are as follows:

	1 bedroom	*2 bedrooms*	*3 bedrooms*	*4 or more bedrooms*
1988–89	870	474	139	5
1989–90	821	743	295	103
1990–91	977	829	350	123
1991–92	1,156	1,378	490	116
1992–93	1,887	1,619	732	199
1993–94	1,581	2,495	1,253	268
1994–95	1,523	2,432	1,195	287
1995–96	1,300	2,324	1,103	280
1996–97	1,156	1,859	1,442	401
1997–98	1,068	1,636	1,202	422
1998–99[1]	14.3	46.1	31.2	8.3
1999–2000[1]	21	44	29.3	5.7
2000–01[1]	19.8	50.3	24.2	5.8

[1] Percentage

Note:

For more recent years we only have the proportions of number of rooms.

Information for the period 1979–88 is not readily available and there is no information currently available on the number of rooms per local authority completion.

Motorcycle VED

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many submissions he has received during the consultation over changes to motorcycle VED; and if he will make a statement. [35970]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The consultation on reforming vehicle excise duty for motorcycles launched by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the pre-Budget report closed on Friday 8 February 2002. More than 10,000 responses have been received.

New Rolling Stock

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the rate of delivery of the fleet of new trains to replace those in service, indicating the first date of delivery and the number in service at the end of *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004. [35827]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* London Transport's plans for modernisation of the tube are designed to deliver a comprehensive upgrade of the whole network as quickly and efficiently as possible. London Transport is currently consulting the Mayor and Transport for London on the plans following its announcement on 7 February that it is minded to proceed. I expect London Transport to publish detailed information on the train replacement and refurbishment programme following that consultation.

Electoral Modernisation

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the names of companies contracted to assist the local authorities in conducting the electoral modernisation pilot schemes for the May 2002 local elections. [35401]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* As a result of a procurement tendering exercise we have chosen the following 11 companies to support local authorities in conducting the electoral modernisation pilot schemes for the May 2002 local elections:

Accenture
BT
DRS
Electoral Reform Services
ES&S
KPMG Consulting
OPT Balloting Technologies
Oracle Corporation UK
Powervote Ltd
PWC Consulting
Strand Business Systems

Arriva Trains Northern

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he has taken to facilitate an agreement between Arriva Trains Northern and the Rail, Maritime and Transport union. [35986]

Mr. Spellar: Ministers are in regular contact with the Rail, Maritime and Transport union on a number of transport-related issues.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36181]

Dr. Whitehead: No days have been lost through industrial action during 1998–2001.

Norwich Airport

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the management of Norwich International airport in each of the last five years; and what the nature of the discussions was. [36322]

Mr. Jamieson: Over the last five years, neither my Ministers nor I have had discussions with the management of Norwich International airport.

Since the start of the South-East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) in March 1999 officials from my Department have met Norwich airport management on a number of occasions. Discussions focused on the SERAS study process, possible technical assistance by the airport in the study and the future role of the airport as perceived by the management team.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* Norfolk county council and *(b)* Norwich city council about the future of Norwich international airport; and what assessment he has made of the future of the airport within the Government's airport strategy. [36321]

Mr. Jamieson: Neither my Ministers nor I have had recent discussions about the future of Norwich international airport with either of the organisations.

As part of the South-East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) there have been discussions at official level with both Norfolk county council and Norwich city council about the future role of the airport.

An assessment of that role will be presented in the forthcoming public consultation on the study outcomes. This is currently scheduled for spring 2002. Decisions made following the consultation will feed into the Air Transport White Paper which we aim to publish in the second half of the year.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of his relaxation of financial borrowing for the development of certain regional airports. [36323]

Mr. Jamieson: The relaxation of borrowing controls has allowed soundly-financed local authority airport companies to make investment plans with much greater confidence and to respond to commercial opportunities as they arise. It has also encouraged them to bring a more commercial approach to their investment decisions. Manchester and Norwich airports have made use of their freedom to borrow money from the banks, while the Newcastle shareholders have been able to restructure the airport company as a public private partnership.

Broadspring Wood, Denham

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if the Highways Agency will revoke the licence of the Uxbridge Gun Club to occupy Broadspring Wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire; [36095]

(2) if the Highways Agency will bring proceedings against the Uxbridge Gun Club in respect of damage to Broadspring Wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire; [36098]

(3) if Broadspring Wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire, is ancient woodland; and what environmental assessments have been carried out [illegible] respect of the wood; [36096]

(4) what the terms are of the licence from the Highways Agency under which the Uxbridge Gun Club occupies Broadspring Wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire. [36094]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency agreed to the licence of Broadspring Wood to the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club under the following terms:

> "The exclusive right of sporting by shooting and of killing and carrying away for his own use all game deer wild fowl and such other wild birds listed in Part 1 of the Second Schedule to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as it shall for the time being be lawful to shoot kill or take and to shoot clay pigeon. Together with power to enter upon the lands for the purposes aforesaid and for rearing and preserving game and wildfowl".
>
> "To exercise the rights and privileges hereby granted and demised in a sportsmanlike and proper manner and at proper seasons of the year and in such a way not to endanger tenants occupiers or users of the lands or any adjoining neighbouring premises or to cause any nuisance or annoyance to the same".
>
> "Not in the exercise of the said rights and privileges to do or permit to be done any spoil or damage whatsoever to the lands or to the woods banks fences hedges crops or plantation thereon or any property of the Owners".
>
> "To indemnify the Owners against all agricultural and other claims and demands made against them for costs incurred by them in relation to any spoil or damage to property stock crops or any person against claims of any other nature arising out of game damage or the exercise of the rights and privileges herby granted and demised".
>
> "To kill destroy and strictly keep down the ground game pigeons moles and other pests in and upon the lands so as to prevent the number of them increasing or impeding the good management of the lands or injuring the crops trees underwood plantation pasturage hedges and fences thereon".
>
> "To satisfy the Owners that the Licensee during the period of this Agreement is adequately covered by insurance in respect of third party liability for a sum of not less than £5,000,000 and on request to produce for inspection by the Owners the policy and premium receipt".
>
> "To obtain any planning or other permission which may be required".
>
> "Not to shoot towards the M25".
>
> "To remove empty cartridge cases from the land after each shooting day".
>
> "To adhere to the British Sporting Code".

The Highways Agency have requested their managing agents Smiths Gore urgently to visit the site to investigate any further disturbance to the land since their visit on 13 December 2001. They are requested to report immediately and on receipt a decision will be made on whether the licence held by the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club is to be revoked.

Throughout the process of negotiating the licence and the sale of Broadspring Wood to the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club the Highways Agency had no indication that the site was designated as ancient woodland. Professional advice was sought in respect of the sale of the land and it was reported the woodland was in poor condition and contaminated. The contamination was alleged to be from the adjacent land that was a former refuse site.

Together with the recent concerns about the activities of the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club and the suggestion that the site is designated as ancient woodland the Highways Agency will undertake a full review of the case and take any action deemed necessary against the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club.

EU Funding

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those regions in which areas entitled to bid only for Objective 3 structural fund programmes are represented on programme monitoring and regional committees. [36257]

Ms Keeble: Programme monitoring committees only operate in Objective 2 areas, so do not include representatives from areas only entitled to bid for Objective 3 funds. Objective 3 is a national programme and operates across England (excluding Objective 1 areas). It is managed by a national committee. Nine regional committees oversee the delivery of the regional Objective 3 programmes. They are: north west, north east, Yorkshire and the Humber, west midlands, east midlands, south west, east of England, south east and London.

In three regions, north west, west midlands and east of England, the partners have agreed that in the interests of coherence and integration both Objective 2 and 3 programmes should be managed by a single monitoring committee.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that areas entitled to bid only for Objective 3 structural fund programmes are represented on programme monitoring and regional committees. [36258]

Ms Keeble: Most Objective 3 funding is allocated to Government offices who work with partners to deliver the programme in line with regional priorities. Regional committees for Objective 3 oversee the delivery of the programmes.

The Government have provided guidance to regions on the composition of each regional committee to ensure that they reflect regional interests in terms of sectoral and geographic coverage.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list, for each region for the years 1993 to 1999 the percentage split of *(a)* Objective 2 structural fund programmes between

European regional development fund and European social fund projects and *(b)* Objective 3 structural fund programmes between ERDF and ESF projects. [36259]

Ms Keeble: The table gives the information requested for the Objective 2 structural funds programmes by region for the 1994–99 programme round. There are currently no separate figures available for 1993, which formed part of the 1989–93 programme round; the data for Thanet (SE Region) are not broken down by year because funds were allocated in a single tranche for each of the two programme rounds—1994–96 and 1997–99.

Objective 3 structural fund programmes are 100 per cent. ESF since ERDF formed no part of these programmes.

Structural funds allocations for England 1994–99

£000 (current exchange rate)

Regional programme	*ERDF structural funds*	*ESF structural funds*	*Total structural funds ERDF and ESF*	*Structural funds ERDF (%)*	*Structural funds ESF (%)*
East Midlands					
1994	686	4,309	4,995	13.74	86.26
1995	1,023	3,146	4,169	24.55	75.45
1996	29,366	3,288	32,654	89.93	10.07
1997	16,931	2,075	19,006	89.08	10.92
1998	17,733	7,620	25,354	69.94	30.06
1999	18,033	8,101	26,134	69.00	31.00
Total	83,773	28,539	112,312	74.59	25.41
Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire					
1994	1,585	18,740	20,325	7.80	92.20
1995	7,407	13,410	20,817	35.58	64.42
1996	136,062	33,000	169,062	80.48	19.52
1997	8	12,880	12,888	0.06	99.94
1998	592	25,025	25,617	2.31	97.69
1999	194,444	35,697	230,141	84.49	15.51
Total	340,098	138,753	478,850	71.02	28.98
West Cumbria					
1994	0	310	310	0.00	100.00
1995	673	740	1,413	47.62	52.38
1996	10,772	1,780	12,552	85.82	14.18
1997	1,481	792	2,273	65.17	34.83
1998	10,367	792	11,158	92.91	7.09
1999	4,364	945	5,308	82.20	17.80
Total	27,656	5,358	33,014	83.77	16.23
London					
1994	127	2,120	2,247	5.66	94.34
1995	1,385	3,140	4,525	30.60	69.40
1996	32,254	4,770	37,024	87.12	12.88
1997	44	2,984	3,028	1.45	98.55
1998	28,270	7,005	35,275	80.14	19.86
1999	18,876	5,578	24,454	77.19	22.81
Total	80,955	25,597	106,552	75.98	24.02
North East					
1994	4,801	9,660	14,461	33.20	66.80
1995	17,555	11,650	29,205	60.11	39.89
1996	114,130	26,740	140,870	81.02	18.98
1997	1,601	7,096	8,698	18.41	81.59
1998	6,270	24,633	30,903	20.29	79.71
1999	172,536	29,855	202,391	85.25	14.75
Total	316,893	109,634	426,527	74.30	25.70
Plymouth					
1994	889	780	1,669	53.26	46.74
1995	1,759	1,220	2,979	59.05	40.95
1996	10,593	1,410	12,003	88.25	11.75
1997	5,804	1,391	7,196	80.66	19.34
1998	7,739	1,855	9,594	80.66	19.34
1999	11,606	1,393	12,999	89.29	10.71
Total	38,390	8,049	46,439	82.67	17.33

Structural funds allocations for England 1994–99

£000 (current exchange rate)

Regional programme	*ERDF structural funds*	*ESF structural funds*	*Total structural funds ERDF and ESF*	*Structural funds ERDF (%)*	*Structural funds ESF (%)*
Thanet (SE)					
1994	4,795	1,130	5,925	80.93	19.07
1995	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
1996	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
1997	11,436	2,528	13,964	81.90	18.10
1998	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
1999	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
Total	16,231	3,658	19,889	81.61	18.39
Yorkshire and the Humber					
1994	2,233	10,410	12,643	17.66	82.34
1995	13,810	7,430	21,240	65.02	34.98
1996	124,311	16,270	140,581	88.43	11.57
1997	758	4,029	4,787	15.84	84.16
1998	9,735	20,511	30,246	32.19	67.81
1999	180,781	44,081	224,862	80.40	19.60
Total	331,628	102,730	434,358	76.35	23.65
West Midlands					
1994	3,507	15,490	18,997	18.46	81.54
1995	12,624	17,440	30,064	41.99	58.01
1996	157,918	27,450	185,368	85.19	14.81
1997	3,596	11,263	14,860	24.20	75.80
1998	89,041	31,670	120,711	73.76	26.24
1999	113,222	30,468	143,689	78.80	21.20
Total	379,908	133,781	513,689	73.96	26.04

Concessionary Travel Schemes

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 838W, how many local authorities have exercised their discretionary powers to provide concessionary travel to children *(a)* under 16 and *(b)* 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education. [34976]

Ms Keeble: My Department has recently carried out a survey about concessionary travel in England that covers these matters. The returns are being analysed at present and the results will be published in due course.

Air Passenger Rights

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which UK airlines and airports have signed up to the European Airline and Airports Commitments on Air Passenger Rights. [37365]

Mr. Jamieson: 10 UK airlines have signed up to the Airline Passenger Service Commitment. They are Air 2000; Airtours International; bmi British Midland; Britannia Airways; British Airways; British European Airways; JMC Airlines; KLM(UK); Monarch Airlines; Virgin Atlantic Airways.

20 UK airports have signed up to the Airport Passenger Service Commitment. They are Aberdeen; Belfast international; Birmingham international; Bournemouth; Bristol international; Cardiff international; East Midlands; Edinburgh; Exeter International; Glasgow; Humberside; Leeds Bradford; Liverpool; London Gatwick; London Heathrow; London Luton; London Stansted; Manchester; Norwich international; Southampton.

The launch of the Voluntary Commitments on Passenger Rights is good news for European air travellers. Air passengers have a right to expect the highest standards of customer care from the time at which they arrive at the airport to the point at which they reach their destinations. Responding to these expectations is a key component of a commercially successful aviation industry and the UK signatories have signalled that this is a matter that they treat very seriously.

Railtrack

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what organisation will represent passengers on the board of the not-for-profit company to run the functions of Railtrack; and if he has offered anyone for that position. [35328]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 195–97W, made it clear that passenger groups could be members of a company limited by guarantee (CLG). It is for the team developing a bid based on the concept of a CLG to make a proposal to the administrator, including proposals for the membership of the proposed company.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people he has approached to serve on the board of the not-for-profit company to run the functions of Railtrack. [35329]

Mr. Spellar: None. It is for the team developing a bid based on the concept of a company limited by guarantee to make a proposal to the administrator, including a proposal for the management of the proposed company.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy that the not-for-profit limited company proposed for Railtrack will be 100 per cent. privately owned; and what option the Government will retain to buy back the company. [34039]

Mr. Spellar: A company limited by guarantee (CLG) is a private company without shareholders. A CLG would be accountable to its members. We do not expect that there would be an option to buy back the company.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the budgeted running costs are of the Strategic Rail Authority in 2001–02. [33991]

Mr. Spellar: Within its total budget for 2001–02 of £1.9 billion, the Strategic Rail Authority was set a running cost limit of £44.332 million.

London Underground

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the targets for each of the London underground lines for *(a)* points failure, *(b)* signal failure and *(c)* power train failure by (i) 2007 and (ii) 2012 under the proposed PPP; [35330]

(2) what new rolling stock will be available on each of the London underground lines by *(a)* 2007 and *(b)* 2012 under the proposed PPP. [35331]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 397W, by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), to the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) [35828].

Repossessions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many court repossessions of property there were, broken down by region, in each of the last 15 years; and if he will make a statement. [34605]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

Statistical information for each region cannot be provided prior to 1990, as the manual figures collated are no longer available. However, national figures for this period are available from 1986 until 1989. Data collated by region from 1990 onwards are set out in the table. This shows possession warrants executed on mortgaged and rented properties in England and Wales from 1990 until 2001.

Possession warrants executed (mortgaged and rented properties), England and Wales, 1990 to 2001

Region	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
East Anglia[1]	1,590	2,144	1,873	1,515	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
East Midlands	2,441	4,487	3,245	2,842	3,148	3,663	3,668	3,924	5,099	5,363	4,511	3,878
Eastern[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4,546	4,375	4,541	3,911	4,393	4,461	4,129	3,986
London	12,659	17,320	21,662	16,052	13,992	14,417	11,851	13,067	18,596	21,071	19,800	21,834
Merseyside[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	842	816	825	1,087	1,269	1,793	1,719	3,789
North East	1,363	1,913	1,989	1,722	1,654	1,788	1,707	1,970	2,285	3,003	2,353	2,353
North West	3,297	4,642	5,175	5,132	3,933	5,019	5,389	5,883	5,506	6,804	6,318	5,456
South East	9,401	14,606	13,304	10,909	7,636	8,002	6,943	6,076	6,635	6,996	5,519	6,085
South West	3,149	4,478	4,016	3,899	3,335	3,545	3,103	2,939	3,245	3,655	2,549	2,041
Wales	2,207	2,726	2,698	2,302	2,907	2,094	2,036	2,593	3,075	3,090	3,079	3,079
West Midlands	3,170	5,205	4,808	3,907	4,161	4,138	4,293	4,639	5,255	6,755	6,145	7,535
Yorkshire and Humber	2,522	3,618	3,669	3,053	3,068	3,239	3,665	4,333	4,825	5,747	5,448	5,563

[1] East Anglia region was absorbed into the eastern region in 1994

[2] Pre-1994 the eastern region was a combination of the east Anglia and part-south eastern regions

[3] Pre-1994 the Merseyside region formed part of the north west region

Fire Services Act

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government plans to review section 32 of the Fire Services Act 1947. [33782]

Dr. Whitehead: Section 32 provides that no member of a police force should be employed as a member of a local authority fire brigade. The Government are working with the fire service to consider the requirements for modernising the service, including the legislative arrangements. The application of section 32 will be included in that work.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35939]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not available as certification does not distinguish between work related and non-work related stress. No compensatory payments have been made for any stress-related absence.

The Cabinet Office is aware of its legal responsibilities to reduce stress at work and provides in-house guidance and training to its managers. It also encourages, where possible, flexible working arrangements that allow for both work and home commitments to be accommodated.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what information the Government publish on the relative performance of Government Departments with respect to regulatory impact assessment; [36973]

(2) if the regulatory impact assessment guidelines issued by the Cabinet Office will be made mandatory. [36974]

Mr. Leslie: The Government do not publish information on the relative performance of Government Departments with respect to regulatory impact assessments.

All Government Departments and agencies are required to produce regulatory impact assessments for proposed regulations that could impact on business, charities or the voluntary sector.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many employees in his office who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36690]

Mr. Leslie: The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, effective January 1993, require employers to provide and pay for, upon request from an employee, an eye and eyesight test. There is a requirement for further tests at regular intervals; the optometrist doing the first test can recommend when the next one should be. In addition, employers must pay the cost of special spectacles required where normal ones cannot be used.

I can confirm that 127 staff who regularly use computers within the Cabinet Office have taken up the offer of a free eye test between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2001.

The service is advertised to current staff on the Personnel website. This information is brought to the attention of new staff through the e-induction package which links in to the relevant Personnel website.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36183]

Mr. Leslie: None.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36207]

Mr. Leslie: The information is as follows:

1. Total expenditure on design, hosting and security for the Cabinet Office website (http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk) over the past four years was:

	£
1998–99	17,000
1999–2000	10,500
2000–01	100,170
2001–02	12,337

These figures exclude VAT and staff costs. The significant increase in 2000–01 was due to security recovery following a successful hacking incident in July 2000.

2. In accordance with the Office of the E-envoy's Guidelines for UK Government websites, greater importance is given to the statistical features of page impressions and unique visitors rather than hits (which is recorded in both homepage and entire site amounts), therefore these criteria have also been supplied for the years in question (January to December unless where indicated):

1998

No recorded statistics/data

1999

(Recorded from April to December)

Page impressions—185,073

Unique visitors—1,276

Hits for homepage—170,358

Successful hits for entire site—187,303

2000

(Months of July to September not recorded due to hacking)

Page impressions—1,237,709

Unique visitors—67,745

Hits for homepage—233,037

Successful hits for entire site—1,933,738

2001

Page impressions—7,172,623

Unique visitors—424,596

Hits for homepage—459,506

Successful hits for entire site—12,588,868.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the statutory instruments issued by his Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36231]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office has issued one statutory instrument during the last 12 months:

SI 2001 No. 1587 The Superannuation (Admission to Schedule 1 to the Superannuation Act 1972) Order 2001

the purpose of which was to add to and remove from the list of Other Bodies and Offices covered by the Superannuation Act 1972.

The cost of implementation to (i) public funds was nil, (ii) businesses nil and (iii) individuals nil.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately-provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if he will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if he will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34390]

Mr. Leslie: Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 April 1999. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The additional detailed information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by his Department and how much reclaimed. [34452]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27958]

Mr. Leslie: Information requested covering 1997–98 to 2000–01 (inclusive) is as follows:

	£
1997–98	935,000
1998–99	4,139,000
1999–2000	16,694,000
2000–01	15,763,000

Note:

Figures include fees, furniture/office equipment and VAT

The increase between 1998–99 and 1999–2000 is mainly attributable to the commencement of the project to refurbish Admiralty Arch (completed in 2000–01) and the Ripley and Kirkland buildings (due for completion in 2002–03). The Ripley and Kirkland project is a major change project involving a complete refurbishment (including the installation of new mechanical, electrical and plumbing services and lifts). This will create modern office space. When the project is completed this will form 22 Whitehall; one of the Department's major buildings.

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how much has been spent on timber for the refurbishment of the Ripley and Kirkland building; [35686]

(2) how much certified timber has been used in the refurbishment of the Ripley and Kirkland building; and what proportion of the total timber purchased for this refurbishment this represents; [35685]

(3) what action was taken by his Department to ensure that timber procured for the refurbishment of the Ripley and Kirkland building was sourced *(a)* sustainably and *(b)* legally. [35684]

Mr. Leslie: Approximately £460,000 of timber is being used in the refurbishment of 22 Whitehall (the Ripley and Kirkland buildings). With the exception of around £50,000 of timber which has been reclaimed (ie it is recycled) the remainder is all certified.

The contract used with the main contractor for the refurbishment of 22 Whitehall places a requirement on the contractor to provide timber from certifiable sustainably managed sources upon which certificates are to be made available. Evidence provided by the main contractor indicates that all the timber supplied so far has been derived from sustainable and legal sources, ie the timber has been purchased under certified logging schemes.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and civil service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35842]

Mr. Leslie: Secondments are part of the interchange programme, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the civil service and other organisations. Before an interchange can occur all parties must be satisfied that no conflict of interest arises.

The secondees to the Cabinet Office, in the table, between May 1997 and 1 February 2002, worked in a variety of jobs from Cabinet Office B2 (equivalent to Higher Executive officer) to the senior civil service. They worked in a wide range of areas where we could benefit from their knowledge and expertise from the private sector.

I am not prepared to identify individual secondees by name or responsibilities for reasons of employee confidentiality. Secondees are employed on the basis that they can contribute valuable expertise and good practice to the civil service, and on the basis that no conflict of interest arises. Where appropriate, their names are published in directories such as the Civil Service Year Book, as are those of permanent staff. But they are not separately identified as being on secondment.

In all cases agreements are reached with the parent organisation on the salary reimbursed by the Cabinet Office to ensure it fall in the civil service pay range appropriate to the post.

Completed secondments into the Cabinet Office from the private sector from May 1997

Personal grade	*Start date*	*Loaned organisation*	*Termination date*
SCS	1997	Alexander Blackford Communications	1999
A	9 November 1998	National Westminster Bank	9 November 1999
SCS-4	1 January 1999	Andersen Consulting	31 December 2000
A	4 January 1999	PricewaterhouseCooper	31 August 2000
SCS-1	4 May 1999	Oracle	30 April 2001
A	10 May 1999	BT	5 May 2000
A	17 May 1999	KPMG	30 June 2001
A	June 1999	PricewaterhouseCoopers	2000
A	23 August 1999	Frontier Economics Ltd.	31 December 1999
A	9 September 1999	BT	28 July 2000
A	27 September 1999	Carillion	19 October 2001
A	27 September 1999	KPMG	12 May 2000
A	4 October 1999	Wragg and Co.	24 February 2000
SCS-1	25 October 1999	Unilever	19 October 2001
A	6 December 1999	Andersen Consulting	21 July 2000
A	6 December 1999	Hay Management Consultants	17 May 2000
A	13 December 1999	Microsoft Ltd.	21 July 2000
A	10 January 2000	PricewaterhouseCoopers	10 January 2002
A	7 February 2000	Zurich Financial Services	7 April 200
A	17 April 2000	Hay Management Consultants	28 July 2000
B2	27 March 2000	British Airways	23 March 2001
A	3 July 2000	Energis	31 October 2000
SCS-3	18 September 2000	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	16 March 2001
A	21 November 2000	GlaxoSmithKline	30 June 2001

Source:

Central Cabinet Office records

Secondees currently in the Cabinet Office from the private sector

Personal grade	*Start date*	*Loaned organisation*
A	9 November 1999	Marks and Spencer plc
SCS-1	13 March 2000	Sun Microsystems
B2	16 October 2000	BUPA
B2	29 January 2001	Environmental Resources Management Ltd.
A	2 April 2001	Ford Motor Company
A	23 April 2001	KPMG
A	23 April 2001	Worksystems Inc.
SCS-1	4 June 2001	Oxera Consulting Ltd.
A	18 June 2001	Oracle
A	16 July 2001	Attfield James Ltd.
A	25 June 2001	Financial Times
A	1 October 2001	Arthur Andersen
A	1 August 2001	Bates, Wells and Braithwaite
A	3 October 2001	PriceWaterhouseCoopers
A	22 October 2001	Unilever
SCS-1	1 November 2001	ICI
A	19 November 2001	Accenture
A	3 January 2002	KPMG
B2	3 January 2002	KPMG

Source:

Central Cabinet Office records

Tom Brake: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33214]

Mr. Leslie: During the period 1 April 1999 to 1 February 2002 there were no secondees into or out of the Cabinet Office from: BP, Shell, Enron, Exxon-Mobil, Conoco, Texaco or TotalFinaElf.

Consultancy Services

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of work commissioned by Government Departments has been undertaken by *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Ernst and Young and *(c)* PricewaterhouseCoopers in each year since 1978. [32808]

Mr. Leslie: Information for all Government Departments is not held centrally. This answer covers the Cabinet Office, including its agency, and the Central Office of Information.

The table gives the proportions by value of consultancy work commissioned by the Cabinet Office and COI that was undertaken by *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Ernst and Young and *(c)* PricewaterhouseCoopers in each financial year from 1997–98 to date. Figures for earlier financial years are available only at disproportionate cost.

Per cent.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	0.56	2.15
Ernst and Young	1.57	11.53	2.18	0.04	2.17
PricewaterhouseCoopers	0.35	2.42	2.30	5.67	4.52

[1] 2001–02 figures for year to end January and subject to audit

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33843]

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34996]

Mr. Leslie: The remuneration made by Cabinet Office and the Central Office of Information to PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst and Young, Deloitte Touche, KPMG and Arthur Andersen for consultancy services in each of the financial years 1997–98 to 2001–02 is set out in the table. Information on the number of individual contracts is available only at disproportionate cost.

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
PWC Consulting PricewaterhouseCoopers	19,228	117,653	233,021	562,250	463,533
Ernst and Young	85,553	846,231	221,480	4,406	0
Deloitte Touche	42,593	45,839	0	32,648	0
KPMG	66,997	45,310	33,768	36,368	42,259
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	55,812	220,313

[1] 2001–02 figures to the end of January 2002 and subject to audit.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what contracts his Department has had since 1997 with *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture for (i) accountancy, (ii) audit and (iii) consultancy work; and what staff have been seconded (A) to his Department from and (B) from his Department to these firms. [32424]

Mr. Leslie: Individual Government Departments are responsible for taking decisions on the goods and services they acquire taking into account the Government's policy of seeking value for money for the taxpayer.

Since 1997 the Cabinet Office, its Agencies and COI have let the following contracts with Arthur Andersen and Accenture.

	Accountancy	*Audit*	*Consultancy*
Arthur Andersen			
1997–98	0	0	0
1998–99	0	0	0
1999–2000	0	0	0
2000–01	0	0	1
2001–02	0	0	1

	Accountancy	*Audit*	*Consultancy*
Accenture			
1997–98	0	0	0
1998–99	0	0	0
1999–2000	0	0	0
2000–01	0	0	0
2001–02	0	0	0

The number of secondments is as follows:

	Secondment to CO	*Secondment from CO*
Arthur Andersen		
1997–98	0	0
1998–99	1	0
1999–2000	1	0
2000–01	0	0
2001–02	1	0
Accenture		
1997–98	0	0
1998–99	0	0
1999–2000	0	0
2000–01	0	1
2001–02	1	0

Public Appointments

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) when his Department expects to publish departmental targets for the appointment of women to public bodies for *(a)* 2001–04 and *(b)* 2002–05; [35989]

(2) what percentage of those appointed to public bodies are women; and when the next set of figures will be released; [35990]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of progress by Departments towards their 1998 to 2001 targets for the appointment of women to public bodies. [35991]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given below to my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate).

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Government will publish the next edition of "Public Bodies" and the annual publication setting out the targets for increasing diversity in public appointments; and if he will make a statement. [36683]

Mr. Leslie: I am pleased to report that the latest edition of "Public Bodies", "Public Bodies 2001", is published today. This publication provides detailed information on all public corporations, nationalised industries, health bodies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), including tribunals and boards of visitors to penal establishments, in existence at 31 March 2001. Specifically, the report sets out for each body:

Its location and terms of reference;

The name, gender and remuneration of the chair and deputy chair and the number of members of the board and their gender (where these positions exist);

The number of staff employed;

The audit arrangements and the financial year in which the body was last reviewed by Government; and

The body's total expenditure and the amounts funded by Government or by other means.

Public bodies play an important role in the processes of national government and the women and men who serve on them, and the staff of these bodies, make a very valuable and positive contribution to the continuous improvement of public services and also to better policy making.

The Government remain committed to minimising the number of NDPBs. As "Public Bodies 2001" shows that, at 31 March 2001, there were 1,025 public bodies, fewer than at any time since "Public Bodies" was first published in 1979.

In parallel with the continuing commitment to reduce the number of NDPBs, the Government also remain committed to ensuring that new NDPBs and other bodies are set up only where it can be demonstrated that this is the most cost-effective and appropriate means of carrying out the function concerned.

Finally, this Government also remain firmly committed to making appointments on merit to the boards of public bodies and to equality of opportunity with the aim of ensuring that the people who serve on public bodies are broadly representative of the diversity of the United Kingdom. To achieve this, the opportunity to play a part in public life by serving on a public body must be open to all, whether or not they are disabled and irrespective of their age, ethnicity or gender as well as their geographical or social background. Women and men should hold an equal share of public appointments and a greater proportion of appointments should be held by people from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people.

We have made some progress towards these goals. At 31 March 2001 women held 34 per cent. of appointments to the bodies detailed in "Public Bodies 2001" and 4.8 per cent. were held by people from ethnic minority backgrounds; in both cases this is a small increase on the position at 31 March 2000. Similar information on the proportion of appointments held by disabled people is not yet available but it will be given in the next edition of "Public Bodies". There has been some continuing progress but there is more to do. I am therefore also pleased to announce that we have today published "Public Bodies: Opening Up Public Appointments 2002–2005", which sets out for each Department its plans for increasing the diversity of the boards of the public bodies for which it is responsible. These targets, and the activities aimed at ensuring that they are met and that our overall goals are achieved.

Copies of "Public Bodies 2001" and "Public Bodies: Opening up Appointments: 2002–2005" have been placed in the Libraries of the House. Both publications will be accessible via the Cabinet Office's internet website.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Detainees

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he consented to British nationals detained in Afghanistan being transferred to Guantanamo Bay prior to the determination of their status. [32294]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have had many discussions with the US authorities about the detention of British nationals. The US authorities informed us in advance that three British detainees would be transferred from Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay on 11 January. They also informed us in advance of the transfer of a further two British detainees on 11 February. As the detaining power, it is for the US authorities to decide on the handling and status of the detainees.

Plain English Campaign

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact his Department has had in the last year with the Plain English Campaign, and if he will make a statement. [35849]

Peter Hain: The Plain English Campaign have written to me in connection with my efforts to explain the Government's policy on Europe to the British public. I am aware of their excellent work.

Ispat International

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from employees or directors of Ispat International between May 1997 and December 2001; and if he will list them by date and subject. [33113]

Mr. MacShane: *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I receive representations from many groups eager to press their case.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list meetings between *(a)* departmental Ministers and *(b)* senior departmental officials and representatives of Ispat International between May 1997 and December 2001, indicating the date of each meeting. [33114]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

DEFENCE

Overseas Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30184]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 707W.

Bloody Sunday Inquiry

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost to his Department is of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry. [35339]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 2–3W, to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt).

Former Service Personnel

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what systems are in place to monitor the number of former members of the armed services who become homeless within 18 months of leaving the armed forces. [35271]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence does not itself monitor homelessness among those who have left the services but we are able to keep track of the number of rough sleepers with an ex-service background through work with the Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU). The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report published in 1998 identified that between one quarter and one fifth of rough sleepers had been in the armed forces at some stage, predominantly some years before as national service men. The MOD has since been working in partnership with the RSU and the charitable sector to reduce some of the most acute cases of homelessness, those sleeping rough on the streets.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have confirmed that interim analysis of rough sleeping data collected in November 2001 shows that the percentage of rough sleepers with an armed forces background has decreased markedly since the 1998 SEU report. This is clearly good news and provides strong evidence of the success that can be achieved by Government working in partnership with the voluntary sector.

Improvements that have been delivered by this partnership include the establishment of the Single Person Accommodation Service for Ex Service (SPACES) project at Catterick Garrison in 1999 which has already provided a range of housing and other support services to over 550 vulnerable people leaving the services. This exceeds the first target of 400.

We recognise there is further work to be done in this area and, as part of the Veterans' Initiative we are looking at improvements to resettlement arrangements for the most vulnerable service leavers. This will include addressing the risk of homelessness.

HMS Vengeance

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many missiles were collected by HMS Vengeance in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [32709]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to defence, security and international relations.

Golden Jubilee Medal

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will arrange for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal to be awarded to those members of the Retired Officers' Corps who are serving with HM forces. [33492]

Dr. Moonie: The Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal will be awarded to those serving members of the armed forces, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the emergency services who meet the stipulated eligibility criteria. Members of the armed forces who are recruited to the retired officer grades in the Ministry of Defence at the conclusion of their service become civil servants. They are no longer serving in the armed forces and nor are they members of the emergency services. As is the case for civil servants generally, they are not eligible to receive the medal.

Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34998]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has awarded the following numbers of contracts to the above-named companies since 1997.

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2002
Arthur Anderson	1	0	0	1	2
Deloitte Touche	2	0	1	1	1
Ernst and Young	3	2	2	1	0
KPMG	6	6	1	13	11
PricewaterhouseCoopers	3	7	6	5	5

The values of individual contracts are withheld under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information but the total values of contracts awarded to each company is approximately as follows:

	£million
Arthur Andersen	2.5
Deloitte Touche	1.3
Ernst and Young	1.7
KPMG	54.8
PricewaterhouseCoopers	13.9

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35924]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35886]

Dr. Moonie: It is the Ministry of Defence's policy to encourage civilian staff, at all levels, to move away from the long hours culture. Ten members of the senior civil service have signed opt outs. Officials are trying to establish the number of civil servants, other than senior civil servants, who have signed the voluntary opt out.

I will write to the hon. Member when this work is complete and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

RAF Eurofighters

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which squadron will be the Operational Evaluation Unit for Eurofighter; and if he will make a statement. [35648]

Mr. Ingram: The operational evaluation unit for the Eurofighter will be 17 Squadron.

Naval Contracts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much compensation has been awarded for insufficient work load in each of the last three years to *(a)* DML in Devonport, *(b)* SLM in Portsmouth and *(c)* BRCD; and if he will make a statement. [36300]

Mr. Ingram: In the last three years a total of £2.1 million has been paid to the dockyard companies in compensation where they have been unable to otherwise recover overheads due to changes in the naval maintenance programme. Such payments are made only where it has not been possible to reflect the changing work load in the annually agreed charging rates or to mitigate its impact by allocating other work. I am withholding details of individual payments to the companies in accordance with Exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to commercial activities.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guarantees his Department has given to *(a)* DML in Devonport, *(b)* SLM in Portsmouth and *(c)* BRCD as to their future work load in the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [36301]

Mr. Ingram: As part of the 1997 dockyard sale agreements undertakings were given to the two dockyard companies, DML at Devonport and BRDL at Rosyth, as to their share of the future naval ship maintenance work load for an agreed period. Similar arrangements apply to FSL, who operate within Portsmouth Naval Base, under the GOCO (Government Owned Contractor Operated) contract awarded to them in 1998.

The Warship Support Modernisation Initiative, which is looking at ways to modernise support arrangements across all naval bases and dockyards, involves negotiations with the companies with a view to increasing the proportion of the surface ship refit and repair programme opened up to competition. Any undertakings on future work load will be dependent on the outcome of this initiative.

Tipnor Shooting Ranges

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Tipnor shooting ranges in Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement. [36302]

Mr. Ingram: In November 1998, against a background of the Strategic Defence Review, the Navy Board directed the chief executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) to study the size and shape of the future training estate and to make recommendations for improvement given the lower trainee throughput that is expected in 2010–15. The consequent review was in advance of, and is informing, the current tri-Service Defence Training Review (DTR).

In July 2001 I announced proposed changes in the naval training estate. All naval training estate is now being considered in detail and this includes the Tipner firing range at Portsmouth. While alternative options are being studied, no decision has yet been made on the future of these ranges. Due account will be taken of proposed local transport improvement schemes and other local environmental issues before any decision is reached.

Naval Air Services

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest projection is of the in-service dates for the naval version of the Joint Strike Fighter and the new aircraft carrier; and if he will make a statement. [36306]

Dr. Moonie: On current plans the in service date for the first of the two new aircraft carriers and the Joint Strike Fighters which will operate from it is 2012.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the decision on which version of the air strike fighter for the new aircraft carrier to be commissioned by the Royal Navy will be used; and if he will make a statement. [36308]

Dr. Moonie: We expect a decision on which variant of the Joint Strike Fighter best meets our future Joint Combat Aircraft requirement to be taken by autumn this year.

Surge Production Capacity

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what categories of military equipment there are contractual arrangements with the manufacturer to provide surge production capacity for times of conflict. [35038]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence aims to ensure that sufficient production capacity is available to meet current defence planning assumptions. I am withholding the information with regard to specific arrangements for surge production under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Public Appointments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have been appointed by him to official bodies and NDPBs coming under the aegis of his Department in the last three years; and who they were. [33349]

Dr. Moonie: Information about the numbers and remuneration of ministerial appointments to public bodies, including the names of chairpersons, is included in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies". Copies are available in the Libraries of the House and it is also published on the Cabinet Office's website, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/quango. The next edition of "Public Bodies", which will include information on appointments as at 31 March 2001, will be published shortly.

There have been 190 appointments to Ministry of Defence non-departmental public bodies over the period January 1999 to December 2001, including those sponsored by the War Pension Agency, which was part of the then Department of Social Security until July 2001.

I will write to my hon. Friend with details of the individuals appointed and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34159]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, information on expenditure on external assistance, categorised by type of work and top level budget holder, is contained in the Ministry of Defence's annual return of expenditure on external assistance. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House, covering the period 1996–97 to 1999–2000, and the return for financial year 2000–01 is currently being staffed.

MOD Housing

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many MOD houses are empty; and if he will make a statement; [34032]

(2) how many MOD houses have been empty for more than six months; and if he will make a statement. [34606]

Dr. Moonie: At the end of January 2002 there were some 10,500 empty married quarters in mainland UK. Of these, over 3,800 are in the course of disposal; some 2,000 are currently awaiting incoming families; a further 2,200 are being held for future unit deployments and some 1,100 are empty awaiting modernisation.

Some 4,500 married quarters in mainland UK have been empty for six months or more at the end of January 2002. Currently, 2,350 of this total are in the course of disposal. A further 1,600 are either awaiting future deployments or are empty pending refurbishment. The remaining 550 are subject to a rolling review of their long term retention.

Over many years, there has been a continuing decline in demand for service family housing. Currently, however, the Defence Housing Executive is making good progress with a substantial disposal programme. The number of disposals achieved since 1 January 2000 will shortly reach 10,000, with some thousands more to be disposed of during 2002–03.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many MOD houses have been sold to the private sector, by year, since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [34608]

Dr. Moonie: In 1996, the great majority of the defence housing stock was sold to Annington Homes Ltd. (AHL) and leased back for service use. In response to the subsequent fall in demand from service families, many properties which are surplus to longer term service requirements have been, or will be, disposed of, but most such disposals result in release of the property back to AHL and thus do not constitute sales by the Ministry of Defence to the private sector. Disposals of non-AHL residential properties by MOD over the period are as follows.

Year	*Properties*
1997–98	537
1998–99	500
1999–2000	208
2000–01	646
2001–02[1]	175

[1] So far

Service Pensions

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what underlay the decision for service pensions to be inherited by the person who was the spouse at the time of service; [35309]

(2) what plans he has to review rules for the inheritance of service pensions by surviving spouses. [35310]

Mr. Ingram: It was a normal and well-established principle of occupational schemes, including those in public sector, that to qualify for a widow's or widower's pension, the widow or widower of the pension had to be married to him or her at the time he or she was engaged in the occupation covered by the scheme. The Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) was similar to other public service schemes in this aspect. At the time, it was seen as reasonable to limit pensions to those widows or widowers who had shared at least some of their husband's or wife's service life.

Post-retirement widow and widower pensions (PRWP) were introduced as a requirement of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975. Provision was made in the AFPS for the payment of pensions to widows or widowers of service pensioners who married (or remarried) after retirement, but this change benefited only the widows of those giving service on or after 6 April 1978, and the widowers of those giving service on or after 6 April 1989. Only service on or after those dates was taken into account when calculating the level of pension and there is no distinction between servicemen and other public sector employees in this respect.

The armed forces pension review has looked at PRWP but has no plans to extend the provision to those who left before the qualifying dates. The review, however, has recommended, under the new scheme, paying a pension to a child born after the pensioner's retirement. Under the current scheme only children born, or conceived, while the member was serving are covered.

In divorce settlements, pension sharing has been available in respect of divorce and nullity proceedings that begin on or after 1 December 2000. Under pension sharing, a percentage of the capitalised value of the pension rights which an AFPS member has accrued to date may be allocated to his or her former spouse to provide that former spouse with pension rights of her or his own. Pension sharing is not available to unmarried partners.

MOD Shooting Ranges

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what MOD shooting ranges there are in Hampshire; who uses them; and if he will make a statement. [36303]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence's outdoor live firing ranges in Hampshire are:

Tipner Range

Browndown Training Camp

Barton Stacey

Chilcomb

Longmoor Training Area—(4 ranges)

Moody's Down

Solent Training Area.

The users are:

1. Regular and Reserve, University Officer Training and Cadet Units (including visiting foreign forces)
2. Police
3. National Rifle Association and civilian rifle clubs
4. Bodies conducting trials, for example QinetiQ.

RAF Chilmark

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on *(a)* decontamination and *(b)* disposal of the site of former RAF Chilmark. [[illegible]135]

Dr. Moonie: The explosive ordnance disposal exercise at RAF Chilmark is continuing. Approximately half of this 52 hectare (317.5 acre) site should be certified clear by autumn 2002.

A considerable section of the site has already been sold on the open market. Defence Estates is currently in discussion with the representatives of a trust, which has been constituted with a view to buying an area of the site which is of high conservation and wildlife value. It is hoped that this sale will be concluded during 2002.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to change the *(a)* resource departmental expenditure limit and *(b)* administration costs limit for her Department in 2001. [37065]

Hilary Benn: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the Department for International Development Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2001–02 will be increased from £3,127,152,749 to £3,140,099,492. The administration cost limit will increase from £67,561,000 to £76,661,000. Within this DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	90,446
New DEL	2,811,939
of which:	
Voted	2,139,919
Non-voted	672,020
Capital	
Change	–71,500
New DEL	328,160
of which:	
Voted	20,447
Non-voted	307,713

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

a transfer of £2,000,000 resource from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to the Bilateral Development Assistance;

a transfer of £3,500,000 resource from the Central Reserve as a part contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East;

a transfer of £12,532,492 resource from the Central Reserve for HIPC 100 per cent.;

to take up DEL end year flexibility of £8,000,000 resource on administration costs;

an increase in the Bilateral Administration-in-Aid of £867,000 resource, and a corresponding increase in the gross provision;

a transfer of £4,005,000 resource from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Global Conflict Prevention;

a transfer of £500,000 from the sub-Saharan Africa—Programme voted expenditure to the Ministry of Defence;

a transfer of £12,129,000 of UNPROFOR receipts from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to DFID's non-voted Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP);

a transfer of £3,000,000 from DFID's non-voted DUP to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for Conflict Prevention in Sierra Leone;

a transfer of £20,587,000 from DFID's non-voted DUP to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for Nigeria and Burundi and to cover increased commitments in peacekeeping;

a transfer of £42,500,000 from Multilateral Capital to Bilateral Development Assistance resource;

a transfer of £35,000,000 from non-voted Capital to Bilateral Development Assistance resource.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

a transfer of £42,500,000 from Multilateral Capital to Bilateral Development Assistance resource;

a reduction of £2,000,000 in the amount of Bilateral non-operating Administration-in-Aid;

a reduction of £4,000,000 in the amount of Multilateral non-operating Administration-in-Aid;

a transfer of £35,000,000 from non-voted Capital to Bilateral Development Assistance resource.

CDC

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the performance of the CDC Capital Partners. [34654]

Hilary Benn: CDC met all the Investment Policy targets in 2001. When it is available, I will place a copy of the audited annual report and accounts for 2001 in the Library of the House.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 5W, how many of the investments made in poorer countries by the CDC were investments made in countries in sub-Sahara Africa in the years from 1998 to 2000; and if she will break these investments down by country. [34328]

Hilary Benn: The information is as follows:

1998—41 out of 72 investments;

1999—34 out of 60 investments;

2000—26 out of 60 investments.

This breaks down, by country, as follows.

	1998	*1999*	*2000*
Malawi	4	4	1
Mozambique	3	2	1
Zambia	3	3	2
Zimbabwe	4	3	1
Kenya	5	4	4
Tanzania	11	6	9
Uganda	5	2	1
Swaziland	2	3	2
Cote d'Ivoire	1	2	2
Ghana	2	5	2
Nigeria	0	0	1
Sierra Leone	1	0	0

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 5W, how many private equity funds were jointly managed by the CDC in the years from 1996 to 2000, broken down by country. [34315]

Hilary Benn: Between 1996 and 2000 CDC did not jointly manage any private equity funds. In 2001 CDC formed a joint venture fund management company with Norfund, creating Aureos Capital. A series of country funds which hitherto had been solely managed by CDC were rolled up as part of Aureos Capital and are now jointly managed. These funds and their country of origin are shown as follows.

1996—10 funds (Papua New Guinea, Ghana, Tanzania, Mauritius, Zambia, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Central America, South Africa)

1997—11 funds (as in 1996, plus Pacific islands)

1998—13 funds (as in 1997, plus Mozambique and a second fund in Tanzania)

1999—15 funds (as in 1998, plus Indian ocean and Caribbean)

2000—15 funds (as in 1999, plus China, minus South Africa).

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 5W, how much was invested in the private equity funds which are jointly managed by the CDC in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000 broken down by country. [34327]

Hilary Benn: No private equity funds were jointly managed by CDC in the years concerned. A series of country funds which CDC had managed on its own became jointly managed with Aureos Capital in 2001. Information giving an exact breakdown of the amount invested in each of these funds in 1998, 1999 and 2000 is not centrally available.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 5W, on the Commonwealth Development Corporation, whether the jointly managed series of private equity funds are subject to the same targets of 70 per cent. of new investments being made in poorer countries and 50 per cent. being made in sub-Sahara Africa. [34329]

Hilary Benn: Yes. The targets do not apply to each fund separately, but to the total of CDC's activities.

Fair Trade Products

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will take steps to encourage UK supermarkets to stock a greater range of fair trade products. [36082]

Hilary Benn: Fair Trade (FT) is a small but significant part of the international trading system that aims to build more equitable trading partnerships between north and south, by offering better prices and better trading terms to small and medium-sized producer groups in developing countries.

The growth in sales of FT labelled products in the UK over the past five years has been dramatic—albeit from a low base. Moreover, whereas in the past, FT products were sold only through dedicated FT outlets, nowadays FT foods and beverages are to be found in an increasing number of UK supermarkets. Some retailers have even launched own label FT products and there is every indication of this trend continuing as more FT standards are agreed and consumer demand for FT increases.

DFID has provided financial support to the media campaigns of the Fair Trade Foundation designed specifically to raise both supermarket and consumer awareness of FT. In particular DFID funds the Fair Trade Foundation's annual Fair Trade Fortnight (4–17 March 2002) which will draw shoppers' attention to the increasing range of FT products available in UK supermarkets.

Ghana

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on Ghana's long-term debt. [34758]

Hilary Benn: DFID has provided occasional technical assistance through "Debt Relief International" (DRI) to the Government of Ghana since 1998 to help them undertake debt sustainability analysis, develop a debt reduction strategy, and build capacity in the Aid and Debt Management Unit of the Ministry of Finance. DFID has not commissioned any separate research, nor commissioned any independent evaluation of the DRI's work in Ghana, although DRI's analysis has been largely verified by the World Bank and IMF during their HIPC related assessments of Ghana's debt sustainability.

TREASURY

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33245]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 58W.

Vocational Training

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the estimated charge in tax revenue following the removal of IR 119 tax relief for students on self-funded vocational training for the financial year after the decision was implemented; [36024]

(2) how many students were affected by the removal of IR 119 tax relief on self-funded vocational training; and if he will make a statement. [36022]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* Vocational Training Relief (VTR) was abolished with effect from 31 August 2000. The estimated cost of tax relief was around £60 million in the last full year it was available (1999–2000), and about £30 million in 2000–01. It was estimated that there were probably about 200,000 people claiming VTR in 1998–99. These figures are based on the number of claims received and the amount reclaimed by training providers from the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated benefit was of allowing tax relief on employers' contributions to fund vocational training for their employees in the last financial year. [36023]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* The information is not available.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the aggregates tax on existing PFI/PPP contracts. [35045]

Mr. Boateng: An increase in the price of aggregates will provide an incentive to use aggregates efficiently and encourage wider use of recycled aggregates, regardless of whether they are being used in public or private sector projects.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the changes to Scottish local authority spending as a result of the introduction of the aggregates tax. [35046]

Mr. Boateng: As confirmed in the pre-Budget report (Cm 5318) published in November 2001, the Government are introducing the aggregates levy in April 2002. Scottish local authority spending is a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to reduce the administrative and technical difficulties in allowing quarries to act as aggregates tax collectors. [35043]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise has consulted extensively with the quarrying industry to ensure that accounting for aggregates levy will be as straightforward as possible.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on the Scottish economy of the introduction of the aggregates tax; [35048]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on quarries of the implementation of the aggregates tax. [35047]

Mr. Boateng: A regulatory impact assessment for the aggregates levy was published at the time of Budget 2000. It is available from the Customs and Excise website.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage increase the proposed aggregates tax will add to the average price of a tonne of aggregate in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England. [35042]

Mr. Boateng: The levy's impact on the cost of aggregate will be dependent upon the commercial decisions of those in the supply chain.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to extend the aggregates tax to include imported aggregate and concrete-based products. [35044]

Mr. Boateng: Imported aggregate will be subject to levy.

The Government have no proposals to extend the levy to include imports of concrete-based products.

Small Enterprises (Allowances)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of 100 per cent. first year allowances for small enterprises spending on information and communication technology. [36102]

Dawn Primarolo: It is too early to assess the impact of the scheme, which was introduced less than two years ago as part of a package of measures to help businesses get on-line. The Inland Revenue are monitoring the use of the allowances.

VAT

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether public authorities are able to reclaim VAT on leased vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [35847]

Mr. Boateng: In general, public authorities which draw their funding directly from local taxation are able to recover the VAT incurred on all purchases relating to their statutory non-business activities under the section 33 VAT refund scheme. Except where specifically covered by the section 41 (3) refund scheme for certain contracted-out services, the VAT incurred by bodies which draw their funding directly from central Government may not generally be recovered, and is instead taken into account when that funding is allocated.

Revenue (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of *(a)* revenue raised and *(b)* revenue spent by the Exchequer in the Greater Manchester area in the last 12 months. [34883]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Estimates of total revenue raised and spent by the Exchequer in Greater Manchester are not available.

Inland Revenue Staff

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 695W, if he will make a statement on the changes in staff employed by the Inland Revenue. [36103]

Dawn Primarolo: The reasons for the staffing changes in the Inland Revenue shown in the answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 695W, for the period 1 January 1999 to 1 January 2000 were:

1. On 1 April 1999, 8,400 staff joined the department from the Contributions Agency.
2. On 1 October 1999, 3,700 staff joined the department from the Benefits Agency.
3. The further increase of around 245 was due to increases in work loads.

Capital Gains Taper

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the behavioural impact of the introduction of the taper on capital gains in April 1998. [36101]

Dawn Primarolo: We intend to evaluate taper relief once the system has had time for its effects to become measurable.

Reputational Externalities

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 705W, on reputational externalities, if he will state whether the assumptions used for analysing the London Underground public-private partnerships are identical to those recommended in "Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government"; and if he will make a statement. [34888]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The appraisal of the London Underground PPPs conforms with the guidance contained in the said document.

Northern Ireland Financial Statement

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what publication is produced by the Treasury to replace the Northern Ireland Financial Statement. [34862]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Northern Ireland Financial Statement was published each year by the Department of Finance and Personnel until 1999–2000. Following devolution, details of the Northern Ireland Executive's annual budget are presented to the Northern Ireland Assembly by the Minister of Finance and Personnel and published each December.

I have asked the Department of Finance and Personnel to provide the hon. Gentleman with a copy of the 2002–03 budget published on 3 December 2001 and approved by the Assembly on 11 December 2001. A copy of the budget may also be found on the Department's website at http://www.nics.gov.uk/dfp.htm.

City of London (Ward Elections) Bill

John McDonnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what communications have taken place between Ministers, officials and advisers and the City of London Corporation in relation to the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill since 1997. [35658]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The City of London (Ward Elections) Bill is a private Bill and, in so far as the Government have an interest, responsibility rests with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

National Insurance

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 742W, on national insurance, which assumptions concerning SERPS were used to come to his answer; and if he will make a statement. [35825]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimate of £750 million is the increase in national insurance employee contributions accruing in 2002–03. Assumptions for SERPS would not materially affect this estimate.

Industrial and Provident Societies

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* co-operation and *(b)* community benefit societies registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 with a registered address in (i) London, (ii) Norfolk, (iii) Hampshire and (iv) Lancashire. [35973]

Ruth Kelly: The information is not readily available. I can, however, give an estimate of the number of Industrial and Provident Societies as a whole of each of these regions:

1,088 have a registered office address in London;

93 in Norfolk;

203 in Hampshire;

184 in Lancashire.

Internet Access

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of adults had internet access in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* the St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* the north-west RDA region, *(f)* the other RDA regions, *(g)* England and *(h)* the UK in each of the last five years. [35420]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward, dated 14 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question regarding data about the percentage of adults who had internet access in (a) St. Helen's South, (b) the St. Helen's MBC area, (c) Merseyside, (d) Manchester, (e) the North West RDA region, (f) the other RDA regions, (g) England and (h) the UK in each of the last five years. (35420)

Currently the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has available regional information for households but not adults. Presented below are the percentages of households with home access to the Internet in each of the government office regions (this is the lowest geographical breakdown available). This information is provided for the 1998–1999, 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 financial years. These data were not collected prior to 1998–1999, the data for the 2001–2002 financial year will be available in June 2002.

Percentage of households with access to the Internet by Government Office Regions 1998–2001

Percentage

	April to March		
Government Office Region	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
North East	7	14	25
North West	9	18	32
Yorkshire and the Humber	8	15	29
East Midlands	9	19	32
West Midlands	8	20	33
East	11	22	35
London	16	25	40
South East	13	24	39
South West	9	19	37
England	11	20	34
Wales	7	15	22
Scotland	8	14	24
Northern Ireland	5	11	20
UK	10	19	32

Note:

Like all estimates from sample surveys these figures are subject to sampling variability. This is greater for regional than for UK estimates.

Source:

Family Expenditure Survey (April 1998 to March 2001); Expenditure and Food Survey (April 2001 onwards).

Secondments

Tom Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33204]

Ruth Kelly: According to central Treasury records there have been no people seconded between BP, Shell, Enron, Exxon-Mobil, Conoco, Texaco and TotalFinaElf and the Treasury in the years 1999–2000, 2000–01, and from April 2001 to date.

White Collar Workers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of the work force in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* the St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* the north-west RDA area, *(f)* the other RDA regions and *(g)* England, are civilian scientists and engineers; [35413]

(2) what percentage of the work force were office workers in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* the St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* the north-west RDA region, *(f)* the other RDA regions and *(g)* England, in each of the last five years; [35414]

(3) what percentage of the work force were employed in *(a)* managerial, *(b)* professional and *(c)* technical positions in (i) St. Helens, South, (ii) the St. Helens MBC area, (iii) Merseyside, (iv) Manchester, (v) the north-west RDA region, (vi) the other RDA regions and (vii) England, in each of the last five years. [35415]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward, dated 14 February 2002

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions about (i) civilian engineers, (ii) office workers and (iii) employment in managerial, professional and technical occupations.

The table overleaf provides the available information from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for autumn (September to November) 2001. Information for earlier years is not available on a consistent basis. "Office workers" are not specifically identified in the LFS, but many of the people included in the occupation categories shown in the table will have jobs which are office-based.

Percentages of total employment by occupation group in main job[1,2], autumn (September to November) 2001, not seasonally adjusted

Government office regions and St. Helens metropolitan borough council	*All in employment[3] (thousand) (=100%)*	*Managers and senior officials*	*Professional occupations:*	*of which 211 and 212 science and engineering professionals*	*Associate, professional and technical*	*Administrative and secretarial*
United Kingdom	28,288	14.1	11.5	1.9	13.7	13.2
England	23,923	14.4	11.5	1.9	14.0	13.3
North West:	3.103	12.5	10.8	1.8	13.1	13.7
Greater Manchester	1,198	11.6	10.0	1.2	13.1	14.4
Merseyside	563	12.2	12.0	1.8	14.5	14.6
St. Helens MBC	84	[4]—	14.4	[4]—	[4]—	12.4
Rest of North West	1,342	13.5	11.1	2.4	12.5	12.7
North East	1,101	9.8	10.4	2.1	12.6	13.9
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,338	12.5	9.8	1.8	11.8	11.7
East Midlands	2,058	12.4	9.6	1.8	11.8	12.4
West Midlands	2,511	13.9	10.4	1.8	11.4	12.9
Eastern	2,748	15.0	11.2	2.4	14.2	13.8
London	3,471	17.5	14.9	1.2	19.2	15.2
South East	4,147	16.6	12.6	2.2	14.5	13.3
South West	2,446	14.1	11.0	2.0	14.2	12.2
Wales	1,263	11.9	11.2	2.0	11.4	11.7
Scotland	2,391	12.5	12.2	2.5	12.7	12.5
Northern Ireland	711	12.3	10.4	[4]—	9.8	13.7

[1] The number of people employed in each Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) 2000 occupation group as a percentage of all in employment.

[2] Base for percentage excludes people who did not state their occupation.

[3] Includes people who did not state their occupation.

[4] Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Refurbishment

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much certified timber has been used in the refurbishment of the Treasury building; and what proportion of the total timber purchased for this refurbishment this represents. [35687]

Ruth Kelly: A significant majority of all timber used in the refurbishment already existed in the building. Exchequer Partnership plc, the consortium undertaking the refurbishment, has satisfied itself as far as is reasonably practical that all new timber used is certified or obtained from sustainable sources. Preference is always given to timber and timber products carrying the FSC trademark or other label from an equivalent internationally recognised independent certification system for good forest management.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action was taken by his Department to ensure that timber procured for the refurbishment of the Treasury building was sourced *(a)* sustainably and *(b)* legally. [35688]

Ruth Kelly: Under the terms of the contract, Exchequer Partnership plc warrants that neither it nor its sub-contractors have committed any illegal act, and the Treasury has the power to terminate the contract if they are found to be in breach. All new timber used in the project has, wherever possible, come from sustainable sources as required by the contract.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent on timber for the refurbishment of the Treasury building. [35689]

Ruth Kelly: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Academic Qualifications

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the work force had *(a)* an advanced degree, *(b)* a BA, *(c)* an associated degree and *(d)* undertaken higher or further education course work in (i) St. Helens, South, (ii) the St. Helens MBC area, (iii) Merseyside, (iv) Manchester, (v) the North West RDA region, (vi) the other RDA regions and (vii) England, in each of the last five years. [35416]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward, dated 14 February 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about qualifications in the workforce. (35416)

The table below gives the available information from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the autumn (September to November) quarters of each year from 1997 to 2001.

Percentages of working age[1] people in employment by highest qualification[2], autumn (September to November), quarters 1997 to 2001, not seasonally adjusted

Government office regions and St. Helens metropolitan borough council	*All of working age[1] in employment[3,4] (thousand)*	*Higher degree*	*First degree*	*Other degree*	*Other higher education below degree level*
Autumn (September to November) 1997					
UK	26,380	3.9	9.8	1.4	9.5
England	22,269	3.9	9.9	1.5	9.1
North West:	2,936	3.1	8.9	1.3	10.2
Greater Manchester	1,120	3.9	8.4	1.1	9.9
Merseyside	535	3.3	8.1	[5]—	10.1
St. Helens	85	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	13.6
Rest of North West	1,281	2.3	9.6	1.3	10.5
North East	1,067	2.7	6.3	1.7	8.7
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,204	3.8	8.3	1.4	8.6
East Midlands	1,927	3.1	8.3	1.3	8.5
West Midlands	2,391	3.0	8.3	0.9	8.8
Eastern	2,529	3.2	8.8	1.3	8.0
London	3,168	7.4	15.9	1.9	8.2
South East	3,818	4.0	10.6	2.1	9.3
South West	2,228	3.3	9.1	1.3	11.1
Wales	1.179	3.5	7.8	1.2	10.6
Scotland	2,253	3.9	9.5	0.9	12.8
Northern Ireland	680	3.9	9.4	[5]—	8.9
Autumn (September to November) 1998					
UK	26,735	4.4	10.3	1.6	9.9
England	22,593	4.3	10.5	1.7	9.4
North West:	2,969	3.4	9.3	1.2	10.2
Greater Manchester	1.137	3.6	9.5	1.0	9.6
Merseyside	514	3.4	8.4	2.2	10.1
St. Helens	77	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	15.7
Rest of North West	1,318	3.3	9.5	1.0	10.9
North East	1,052	3.2	7.5	1.1	9.5
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,241	3.7	8.4	1.5	9.1
East Midlands	1,943	3.1	9.1	1.9	8.3
West Midlands	2,413	3.6	7.6	1.2	9.2
Eastern	2,544	3.9	9.7	2.0	8.4
London	3,274	7.5	17.1	2.0	8.6
South East	3,892	5.0	11.7	2.2	10.1
South West	2,256	3.5	9.3	1.7	11.1
Wales	1,187	4.7	7.9	1.0	11.2
Scotland	2,279	4.5	10.3	1.0	13.6
Northern Ireland	676	4.7	9.0	[5]—	9.3

Percentages of working age[1] people in employment by highest qualification[2], autumn (September to November), quarters 1997 to 2001, not seasonally adjusted

Government office regions and St. Helens metropolitan borough council	*All of working age[1] in employment[3,4] (thousand)*	*Higher degree*	*First degree*	*Other degree*	*Other higher education below degree level*
Autumn (September to November) 1999					
UK	26,997	4.6	10.7	1.7	9.7
England	22,830	4.7	10.8	1.8	9.2
North West:	3,042	3.9	9.4	1.3	10.0
Greater Manchester	1,167	4.0	9.3	1.3	9.1
Merseyside	546	4.4	9.3	[5]—	9.6
St. Helens	77	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Rest of North West	1,329	3.6	9.5	1.1	11.1
North East	1,064	2.9	7.3	1.0	10.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,265	3.9	8.2	1.8	9.5
East Midlands	1,960	4.2	9.3	1.4	8.4
West Midlands	2,408	3.7	8.7	1.2	9.3
Eastern	2,581	4.2	10.1	1.7	8.2
London	3,296	8.0	17.7	2.1	7.4
South East	3,922	5.2	11.7	2.6	9.8
South West	2,293	4.1	10.0	2.0	10.4
Wales	1,215	4.0	8.8	[5]—	11.6
Scotland	2,270	4.4	10.7	0.9	14.2
Northern Ireland	681	4.3	11.1	[5]—	8.6
Autumn (September to November) 2000					
UK	27,215	4.8	11.5	1.7	9.7
England	22,971	4.8	11.7	1.8	9.2
North West:	3,020	4.0	10.9	1.1	10.2
Greater Manchester	1,162	4.3	10.9	1.2	10.0
Merseyside	542	4.7	10.9	[5]—	10.9
St. Helens	69	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Rest of North West	1,316	3.4	10.9	1.1	10.2
North East	1,083	3.6	7.8	1.5	8.8
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,291	3.9	9.0	1.4	9.9
East Midlands	1,963	3.7	10.5	1.1	9.3
West Midlands	2,382	3.8	9.6	1.7	10.0
Eastern	2,640	4.2	9.9	2.0	8.0
London	3,302	8.1	19.1	2.4	7.3
South East	3,958	5.5	12.1	2.2	9.1
South West	2,332	4.0	11.0	1.8	10.5
Wales	1,212	4.9	9.7	1.2	11.4
Scotland	2,344	4.7	10.4	1.4	14.3
Northern Ireland	689	4.6	11.1	[5]—	7.9
Autumn (September to November) 2001					
UK	27,425	5.2	11.9	1.5	9.3
England	23,176	5.2	12.0	1.6	8.8
North West:	3,020	4.4	10.3	1.1	9.6
Greater Manchester	1,169	3.4	10.4	1.0	9.2
Merseyside	549	5.4	10.3	[5]—	9.9
St. Helens	83	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Rest of North West	1,302	4.9	10.2	1.2	9.7
North East	1,080	4.3	8.3	1.0	9.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,280	4.3	9.6	1.0	8.8
East Midlands	2,003	3.8	9.5	1.3	8.1
West Midlands	2,434	4.2	9.8	1.2	8.7

Percentages of working age[1] people in employment by highest qualification[2], autumn (September to November), quarters 1997 to 2001, not seasonally adjusted

Government office regions and St. Helens metropolitan borough council	*All of working age[1] in employment[3,4] (thousand)*	*Higher degree*	*First degree*	*Other degree*	*Other higher education below degree level*
Eastern	2,656	4.1	10.5	1.9	9.0
London	3,366	9.3	20.2	2.5	7.4
South East	3,988	5.6	13.1	1.9	8.7
South West	2,350	4.3	10.6	1.8	10.1
Wales	1,223	4.8	8.7	1.1	11.5
Scotland	2,334	5.3	12.2	1.4	13.7
Northern Ireland	692	5.0	11.6	[5]—	8.6

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59.

[2] Base for percentages excludes people who did not state their qualifications.

[3] Includes people who did not state their qualifications.

[4] = 100 per cent.

[5] Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

NIRS2

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much compensation has been paid in total to people who have been adversely affected by the problems with the NIRS2 computer system, broken down by year. [35287]

Dawn Primarolo: The delay in the implementation of NIRS2 caused arrears of work in both the Inland Revenue and the then DSS. These arrears have been managed through an integrated recovery plan. The compensation costs paid to customers as a result of the delays are:

Million

Year paid	*IR*	*DSS*	*Total*
1998–99	21.5	—	21.5
1999–2000	19.5	2.5	22.0
2000–01	14.0	1.3	15.3
2001–02	2.8	0.7	3.5
Total	57.8	4.5	62.3

The compensation costs paid in 2000–01 have previously been overstated. The actual amounts paid from the National Insurance Fund are set out.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer since the NIRS2 computer system first became operational, how many people have received national insurance contribution rebates after the date they were due; how much money has been paid to these people in compensation; and what his best estimate is of the total value of late rebates that are outstanding. [35285]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have paid over £57.8 million in compensation for late rebate payments since 1998. This is for compensation paid, on behalf of individuals, to pension providers for the late payment of NI age-related rebates for 1997–98.

Rebate payments, together with any compensation due, are paid directly as an aggregate amount to the pension provider, not to the individual scheme member. The information in relation to these payments is not held in a way that makes it possible to quantify the number of people whose rebates for 1997–98 were paid late. It is not possible to estimate the total value of late rebates still outstanding, as this is partly dependent on the extent to which all relevant information for 1997–98 has been received from employers.

Advisory Groups

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 960W, if he will place in the Library a list of the membership of the *(a)* Business Advisory Group on Economic and Monetary Union, *(b)* Royal Mint Shareholder Panel, and *(c)* Standing Committee on Euro Preparations; and if he will make a statement. [36008]

Ruth Kelly: The members of the Royal Mint Stakeholder Panel are John Dean, Hugh Beevor and Stephen Dawson. It also includes Treasury officials with responsibility for oversight of public enterprises and the coinage. The organisations represented on both the Chancellor's Standing Committee on Euro Preparations and the Business Advisory Group on Euro Preparations were listed in the Fifth Report on Euro Preparations, published in November 2001. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Princess of Wales Memorial Committee

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money from the proceeds of the £5 coin has been paid to projects recommended by the Princess of Wales Memorial Committee; how many organisations have received allocations; and how many will do so in 2002. [36113]

Ruth Kelly: The sale of commemorative and collector coins in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales raised

£7,404,000 by 12 February 2002. This will be used to offset voted expenditure on projects put forward by the Diana Memorial Committee.

I gave details of these projects in my answer of 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 260W. As I said then, the total cost of the park projects to date is £6,000,000. Half of this has been spent, the balance associated with the building of the fountain in Hyde Park, will be used by summer 2003. The Diana Nursing Teams cost £2,000,000 in each of the last two financial years. They are forecast to cost the same this year and again in 2002–03.

EDS Contract

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell of 29 January, what the value is of the full 10 year contract with EDS in 2002 prices *(a)* excluding and *(b)* including IT assets; and if he will make a statement. [35460]

Dawn Primarolo: The value of the contract in 2002 prices is £2.4 billion excluding capital and £2.8 million including capital. In the past, we have reported the value of the contract in 1994 prices so for completeness this compares with £2.0 billion excluding capital and £2.3 billion including capital. The difference is actual and forecast inflation.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36210]

Ruth Kelly: The arrangements for granting paid leave for union duties are the subject of formal agreements between Departments and the recognised trade unions within each Department. The agreements vary to reflect the needs of each Department. As the day-to-day management of each agreement is in the hands of managers throughout the UK detailed figures of the type sought are not readily available in every Department and the cost of collecting them would be disproportionate.

Managers are aware of the need to guard against excessive or unnecessary absences and paid union activity is restricted to the minimum necessary to ensure effective industrial relations and minimise strife.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36142]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 321W.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is his policy to rule out removing the ceiling on employees' national insurance contributions. [36406]

Dawn Primarolo: As with all elements of taxation, the Chancellor reviews the levels and threshold for national insurance contributions annually and will continue to keep the upper earnings level and other earnings limits and thresholds under review.

Tax (Students)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Inland Revenue last updated their advice and information to full-time students who have earnings or other income; and in what form this advice is available. [37036]

Dawn Primarolo: The current Inland Revenue leaflet "IR60—Income Tax and Students" was published in June 1997. The contents of this leaflet are currently being reviewed and a revised version is expected to be issued in April.

1911 Census

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis the 1911 Census returns remain confidential; and if he will make a statement. [36599]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Chris Mullin dated 14 February 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking on what basis the 1911 Census returns remain confidential. (36599).

The 1911 Census records are subject to the Public Records Act 1958 (Instrument No 12 dated 1966), and are closed to the public for a period of 100 years. The Lord Chancellor in conjunction with the Minister of Health, who at that time was responsible for the Census, prescribed the closure period. At the time of the 1911 Census, assurance was given that the contents of the Schedule would be treated as strictly confidential.

Under the Public Records Act, there is provision for a record held by the Public Record Office to be inspected if special authority is given by the department responsible for the record. In 1993 it was announced in Parliament that the Registrar General would be willing to consider particular applications for information to be extracted from the 1911 returns if it would enable the applicant to establish a legal entitlement such as an inheritance. A concession announced in 1993 which does allow the release of information from the 1911 Census, is conditional upon the applicant requiring the information solely in order to establish a legal entitlement and would only be considered where the information could not be obtained from any other source.

Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many appeals were brought under the provisions referred to in *(a)* subsection (2)(e) (Chapter 2 of Part 1 of the Social Security Act 1998 (c. 14) (social security decisions and appeals: Great Britain)) and *(b)* (2)(f) (Chapter 2 of Part 2 of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (social security decisions and appeals: Northern Ireland)) of Clause 46 of the Tax Credits Bill in each year since 1997; and how many of these appeals were successful. [35183]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of first tier appeals made against child benefit and guardian's allowance decisions and the number of those appeals that were found in favour of the appellant since 1997 are:

	Number of appeals	*Successful appeals*
Great Britain		
1997	4,315	155
1998	4,730	215
1999	1,960	185
2000	1,255	75
2001	1,120	70
Northern Ireland		
1997	117	13
1998	93	11
1999	141	2
2000	75	1
2001	78	1

Notes:

All figures are subject to change as more up to date data becomes available.

Figures after June 2001 are provisional.

Figures are rounded to the nearest five.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committee Witnesses (Gender)

Margaret Moran: To ask the President of the Council if he will collate statistics on the gender breakdown of witnesses to each select committee since 1997. [36367]

Mr. Robin Cook: The choice of witnesses is a matter for individual Select Committees. The Minutes of Proceedings issued each Session for each Committee give details of witnesses, although the sex of a particular individual may not always be clear from their name and title. On these grounds, the cost of collating such figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Working Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the President of the Council when he expects the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to report on the reform of the daily working practices of the House. [36713]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons has just published its report on the Select Committee System.

The Committee now plans to address some of the other issues contained in the Memorandum I presented to the Committee before Christmas. I hope the Committee will be able to report on these issues as soon as is practical.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Advocate-General what steps she is taking to encourage participation by her Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33555]

The Advocate-General: The Office of the Advocate-General for Scotland provides legal advice and services to the Government and has very limited requirements for goods which are subject to fair trade schemes. However, the Department for International Development is providing £120,000 to the Fair Trade Foundation over three years from 2001 in support of the foundation's efforts to target new groups through its annual Fair Trade Fortnight. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development will be attending the launch of this year's campaign on 4 March.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was to the New Millennium Experience Company of commissioning Anthony Gormley's Quantum Cloud; and who currently owns the sculpture. [27895]

Tessa Jowell: The cost to NMEC of commissioning and installation was £1.2 million. The sculpture is owned by Anthony Gormley.

Libraries

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on how the quality of libraries is determined, and on the results of evaluations undertaken in each local authority in the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [35246]

Dr. Howells: The Government have encouraged better planning and accountability in public library services through the introduction of annual library plans in 1998. This process was strengthened still further in April 2001 with the introduction of public library standards. From 2001, ALPs have been used as the main vehicle for assessing the quality of library services, as library authorities are required to use them to report on their current position against the standards and their plans for meeting them in the future. In addition, all local authority services, including libraries, are subject to best value, and best value reviews provide a further valuable insight into the provision and plans made by authorities for continuous improvement in their library provision. Before the introduction of the annual library plans, public library standards and best value, there was no on-going check of library authority plans and performance.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the Government have spent on library book funds per annum per local authority in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [35195]

Dr. Howells: Funding for public libraries generally is provided through the Environmental Protection and Cultural Services (EPCS) block and through council tax. In the latest Local Government Financial Settlement (for 2002–03) the funds for the EPCS block were increased by 4.2 per cent., a real terms increase of 1.7 per cent.

It is for library authorities to decide how much of their funding to allocate to their libraries, and then to the purchase of books and other materials, in line with their statutory duty to provide library services that are comprehensive and efficient.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many libraries have closed in each of the past three years in England and Wales; [35802]

(2) how many libraries there are in England and Wales. [35803]

Dr. Howells: A register of all library openings and closures in England is not held centrally. However, DCMS was glad to note the opening of the new Epsom Library at the Ebbishall Centre in May 2001 with more floor space and longer opening hours.

The total number of libraries in England for the last three years has been:

	Number
1997–98	3,053
1998–99	3,037
1999–2000	3,031

The figures reflect branch and central libraries only. They do not include mobile libraries or special services provided by English library authorities to senior citizens' homes and others in sheltered housing schemes. In 1999–2000 the figures for these two types of provision were, respectively, 440 mobiles and 14,617 outlets in institutions.

Library provision in Wales is properly a matter for the Minister for Culture, Sport and Welsh Language and the National Assembly for Wales.

Sports Funding

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the sources of the £2 billion investment in sport that she announced on 3 February, broken down by *(a)* the financial year in which it is to be paid, *(b)* the financial year in which it is to be accounted for, *(c)* the method of distribution of the funds and *(d)* whether it had been announced before. [34767]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The current sources of funding for sport are as follows:

New Opportunities Fund PE and Sport Programme

£581 million in England. All funding will be committed by 2005. Announced by Prime Minister in September 2000. Local education authorities will act as lead organisations in submitting applications to the New Opportunities Fund.

New Opportunities Fund—Playing Fields and Community Green Spaces Scheme

£30 million for England to be administered by Sport England. Planned that all funding will be committed by 2005. Scheme commenced in April 2001.

New Opportunities Fund—Better Play Grant Programme

£9 million delivered by Barnardo's and children's Play Council. Planned that all funding will be committed by 2003.

New Opportunities Fund—Activities for young people programme

£38.75 million to be committed by 2003. Distributed by NOF to lead organisations in 47 Connexions areas. Launched in August 2001.

New Opportunities Fund—Out of School Hours Sport Activities

£25.5 million to be committed by 2004. Distributed through partnership between NOF and Sports Councils.

Space for Sport and Arts

£130 million to be distributed by 2003–04. Grants paid to local education authorities by Sport England which is administering the scheme. Scheme announced in March 2001.

Sport England—grant in aid

£43.2 million in 2001–02, £53.3 million in 2002–03 and £78.3 million in 2003–04. Announced July 2000.

Sport England—Lottery sports Fund

£224,000 million in 2001–02, £202,000 million in 2002–03 and £188,000 million in 2003–04.

UK Sport—grant in aid

£17.6 million in 2001–02, £19.6 million in 2002–03 and £19.6 million in 2003–04. Announced in July 2000.

UK Sport Lottery Sports Fund

£22.1 million in 2001–02, £22.7 million in 2002–03 and £23.7 million in 2003–04.

Commonwealth games

£10.5 million for the opening ceremony to be paid to Manchester 2002 Ltd. in 2001–02 and 2002–03. Announced in July 2000.

£30 million towards the games budget to be paid to Manchester city council through Sport England. Announced in July 2001.

Football Licensing Authority

£925,000 a year for 2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04. Announced July 2000.

Specialist Sports Colleges

£14.2 million in 2001–02, £24.3 million in 2002–03 and £34.7 million in 2003–04. Funds distributed by DFES to individual sports colleges. Announced July 2000.

Volunteering in Sport Project

£3 million in 2002–03 and £4 million in 2003–04. To be distributed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to Youth Sport Trust, British Sports Trust and Sport England, who will be implementing the project. Announced March 2001.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people are employed in her Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35356]

Dr. Howells: There are currently no staff employed on a job share contract in the Department.

All vacancies advertised state that

> "applications are welcome from staff wishing to job-share or work part-time, and managers will seek to accommodate flexible working patterns".

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35940]

Dr. Howells: My Department's independent staff counselling service report that over the past year they have dealt in confidence with three work-related stress cases. Details for the previous two years are not available. No compensation has been paid out over the past three years. While levels of sick absence are closely monitored, we do not have records to identify which absences through stress are work-related; therefore the cost similarly cannot be identified. However, my Department is committed to meeting the targets for reducing the number of working days lost generally due to work related injuries and illness in line with the Government's Revitalising Health and Safety initiative. To this end my Department introduced a new stress management policy last year providing staff and managers with guidance on identifying and managing stress more effectively, and this month we are launching a dedicated Health and Well-Being intranet site for all staff. A full review of work-life balance polices has also been conducted recently. The costs involved in these initiatives are not available.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment has been made of the effect of the working time directive on her Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps she is taking to reduce this number; and if she will make a statement. [35899]

Dr. Howells: The results of working hours surveys conducted in my Department, including the Royal Parks Agency, indicate that there are occasions where a small number of senior staff are working voluntarily in excess of 48 hours per week. However, no staff are doing so on a regular basis save for a group of horticultural staff in the royal parks who are on all hours worked contracts and have signed an "opt out" agreement. The actual hours worked by staff in different parts of the Department are monitored regularly against conditioned working hours to identify any developing trends and/or potential problem areas. Where these arise, divisional business plans and work demands may be adjusted, and individual staff offered time management training. My Department has also conducted a review of personnel policies with the aim of achieving a better work-life balance for all staff. This review took account of the results of the working hours surveys and of responses to work-life balance questions posed in last year's annual staff attitude survey.

Sport England

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many applications for funding via Sport England in *(a)* rural areas and *(b)* urban areas have been (i) received and (ii) approved in each year since Sport England was set up. [35822]

Mr. Caborn: The information requested is as follows.

	Rural[1]		*Urban*	
Year	*Applications received*	*Applications approved*	*Applications received*	*Applications approved*
1994–95	33	17	51	17
1995–96	410	289	883	528
1996–97	408	254	852	480
1997–98	504	181	1043	367
1998–99	418	141	828	293
1999–2000	253	114	564	244
2000–01	135	82	467	181
2001–02	156	60	581	160
Total	2,317	1,138	5,269	2,270

[1] Applications in respect of rural local authorities as defined by the Countryside Agency for the purposes of its State of the Countryside Report.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the minimum usage levels are for sports schemes that will qualify for lottery funding via Sport England; [35824]

(2) what steps she is taking to ensure that rural areas are not deprived of lottery funding from Sport England because of lower usage levels than in urban areas. [35821]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England does not apply any minimum usage levels in considering whether to award lottery funding to sports projects. Each application is judged on the merits of the particular case, taking into account, among other things, value for money and the need for the facility in question whether it is in a rural or urban area.

National Youth Music Theatre

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has made to the Department of Education and Skills over funding for the National Youth Music Theatre. [35823]

Dr. Howells: This Department has been in close contact with the Department for Education and Skills over the issue of funding for all youth music organisations, including the National Youth Music Theatre. National Youth Music Theatre has already received £35,000 from an initial central fund for the national youth music organisations. Together with the Department for Education and Skills, the Arts Council of England and the National Foundation for Youth Music we are looking at how best to secure the future of these organisations.

Lottery Awards

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the average lottery award has been in the *(a)* Cleethorpes and *(b)* Grimsby constituencies; and what the UK average is. [35316]

Mr. Caborn: According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the National Lottery awards database, the average lottery award made to date in the Cleethorpes and Grimsby constituencies are £28,092 and £44,163 respectively. The median average lottery award for UK constituencies is £54,861, and the average award to UK lottery projects, found by dividing the total amount awarded by the total number of projects, is £98,509.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 952W, on fair trade goods, if she will review and increase the amount of fairly traded goods purchased by her Department during Fair Trade Fortnight. [35918]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is a small policy Department with a purchasing profile that would make little impact on suppliers from any source over a very limited period. There is a commitment to fairly traded goods which will be pursued throughout the year and, where considerations of propriety and value for money allow, those goods will be given preference.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in her Department to *(a)* herself and *(b)* her fellow Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36270]

Mr. Caborn: Wherever possible, ministerial boxes are conveyed between Ministers' homes and their private offices by means of the secure services provided by the Government Car and Despatch Agency. Where this would be uneconomic, ministerial boxes are sent using the secure service provided by Consignia.

Sport Funding

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on the Government's statement on spending £2 billion on sport. [36086]

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 7 February for a list of the sources of this funding. There have been no other representations.

Ministerial Visit (Belfast)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to visit Belfast; and if her Department will support the celebrations of British maritime history on the anniversary of the Titanic. [36956]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Belfast in October 2001 but she currently has no plans for a future visit. While we recognise the illustrious contribution that our maritime history has made to the United Kingdom, the holding of such celebrations in Northern Ireland is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

National Stadium

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the FA and Wembley National Stadium about the financing of the National Stadium project; and if she will make a statement. [37487]

Tessa Jowell: I set out the Government's position on the Football Association's National Stadium project to the House on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 291. My officials are working closely with the Football Association, Wembley National Stadium Ltd., Sport England and other interested parties to monitor progress in addressing the issues I set out to the House. Sir Rodney Walker, Chairman of WNSL has already written to me setting out how WNSL are addressing these issues. In that letter Sir Rodney requested a letter for his bankers setting out the Government's commitment to the project and the conditions which attach to that commitment. This I was happy to provide. I am arranging for copies of this exchange of correspondence to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Stonehenge

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on proposals to create a tunnel at Stonehenge. [35560]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 February 2002]*: I have been asked to reply.

The proposals to build a 2 km cut and cover tunnel to take the A303 past Stonehenge were announced in July 1998 in "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England" as an "exceptional environmental scheme". They are the central component of a wider set of proposals, set out in the Stonehenge master plan to restore the world heritage site and the scheduled ancient monument to its pre-historic setting.

The Highways Agency is currently seeking feasibility proposals and costs from the construction industry which include two options for the tunnel: a 2 km cut and cover tunnel and a 2 km shallow bored tunnel. The proposals will be scrutinised carefully to ensure that they meet the agreed requirements for this archaeologically important site, offer value for money and deliver the best balance of benefits.

The aim is to begin the necessary statutory procedures later this year. Subject to the outcome, construction could start in 2005.

Cemeteries

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assistance she is planning to give to local authorities to make memorials in cemeteries safe. [31270]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 29 January 2002]*: I have been asked to reply.

The Local Government Finance Settlement 2002–03 provides funds for local authorities' responsibilities in this area. Provision for funding on environmental, protective and cultural services has increased, on a like for like basis, by £360 million or 4.2 per cent. Local authorities are, of course, responsible for decisions on their own spending priorities, bearing in mind their statutory responsibilities and the wishes of their electorate.

We are looking, with local government, at pressures on local authorities in the context of Spending Review 2002, and are aware that the Local Government Association (LGA) have highlighted the additional cost of making memorials in cemeteries safe. We will be looking closely at the case made by the LGA, having regard to the Government's position on funding the renovation of unsafe memorials, as set out in our response to the Environment Select Committee report on cemeteries (Reference CM Paper 5281).

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Golden Jubilee Celebrations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what events *(a)* she is and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events her Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33259]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 11 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 58–59W.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the average cost of processing each information request under the Data Protection Act 1998. [33443]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the period of time elapsed is for the oldest outstanding request for information under the Data Protection Act 1998, since receipt of the *(a)* original request and *(b)* administration fee. [33444]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills has five outstanding requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998.

For the oldest request, 36 days have elapsed since the original request for information was received.

The Department does not charge a fee for requests for information under the Act.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the longest period of time elapsed is between receiving *(a)* the administration fee and providing the information requested and *(b)* a request for information and providing the information requested, under the Data Protection Act 1998. [33453]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The longest period of time that has elapsed between a request for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the provision of that information is 60 days.

The Department for Education and Skills does not charge a fee for requests for information under the Act.

The data controller is also not obliged to comply with the request until he has been supplied with such information as he may reasonably require to confirm the requester's identity and to locate the information that the requester requires. The 40-day period begins when this information is received.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what administration fees are charged by the Department for information requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33460]

(2) what percentage of responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of the £10 fee, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the administration fee; [33467]

(3) how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of receiving and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the £10 administration fee. [33562]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills does not charge a fee for requests for information under the Act.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the policy of the Department is for ensuring responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 are completed within 40 days; and what their procedure is to achieve this. [33472]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 are logged by the departmental Data Protection Officer (DPO).

When the DPO has either to trawl the Department or approach individual divisions for information, he ensures that a deadline is set for response that gives him sufficient time to co-ordinate the response within the requirements of the Act, and ensures that any non-response is followed up promptly.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the Department's procedure is for responding to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998; if she will place a copy in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [33481]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 are logged by the departmental Data Protection Officer (DPO) who also co-ordinates the completion of the response within the requirements of the Act.

The DPO may write to the requester seeking such evidence as he may reasonably require to confirm the requester's identity and to locate the information that the requester requires. Depending on the response, he will initiate a search either with the relevant division(s) or Department-wide. The DPO is responsible for sifting the information provided and co-ordinating the final reply within the required 40-day deadline.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 have been completed *(a)* within 40 days, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the original letter; and how many are still outstanding. [33569]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The data controller is not obliged to comply with the request until he has been supplied with such information as he may reasonably require to confirm the requester's identity and to locate the information that the requester requires. The 40-day period begins when this information is received.

With reference to that date, the numbers completed are as follows: *(a)* 20 *(b)* 6 *(c)* 0.

There are five requests outstanding.

Individual Learning Accounts

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her latest estimate is of the losses sustained by learning providers following the closure of the ILA scheme in November 2001; whether she intends to accept claims for compensation for such losses; and if she will make a statement. [35208]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The Department is in no position to estimate the losses sustained by learning providers following the closure of the individual learning account programme on 23 November 2001. The Department has no plans to compensate learning providers in relation to the closure.

Our intention is that all bookings of validated eligible learning made with the ILA centre by 23 November will be honoured. The extent to which organisations made business decisions around their participation in ILAs is something each organisation determined for itself.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her latest estimate is of the amount of fraudulent claims made under the individual learning accounts scheme; and if she will make a statement. [35209]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The Department's Special Investigations Unit is investigating 96 registered learning providers. Of these, police are investigating 13 and the Department's Special Investigation Unit is discussing a further 53 with the police. 44 arrests have been made in relation to allegations of fraud with the operation of the individual learning account programme, 13 have been charged one of whom has been convicted.

As at 31 December, the Department had received some 5,800 complaints from individuals claiming that money had been drawn from their individual learning account without their knowledge or consent. Complaints received will be followed up with providers, and where we have evidence of fraud we will make referrals to the police. It is not possible at this stage to determine costs in relation to the abuse of the individual learning account programme. Costs will become clearer as learning provider and police investigations progress.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the reason was for the closure of the individual learning account scheme; and if she will make a statement. [33986]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 591W.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1, ref 31413, on ILAs, if she will place in the Library the terms of the consultation being conducted, the means by which providers, learners and other stakeholders have been informed and the closing date for receipt of responses. [35826]

John Healey *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The consultation exercise is aimed at seeking views on the strengths and weaknesses of the ILA scheme and ideas on what a replacement scheme should include. We have written to all registered ILA providers and to 32 national stakeholders to inform them of the exercise. There will be a telephone survey of a sample of 1,000 ILA holders. There is also a consultation website (http://www.dfes.gov.uk/ilaviews), through which learners, providers and others can give their views and enter into debate. The website also provides information about the various strands of the consultation exercise. It is planned that surveys and interviews will be completed by the end of February. There will then be a series of workshops, which will be held in March.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the total *(a)* number and *(b)* cost of individual learning accounts issued to persons with special educational needs. [35578]

John Healey *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* Data collected from individual learning account holders during the application process did not require them to supply information about special educational needs.

Pay Scales

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to address the difference in pay between teachers in secondary schools and lecturers in further education colleges. [36011]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* We are aware of the differences between salaries in general further education colleges, sixth form colleges and schools and this issue is being considered as part of the current spending review.

As independent organisations, it is for each college to agree annual pay rises and conditions of employment with its staff in the context of the overall resources available to them. This year alone, an additional £527 million is available for FE, a 12 per cent. real terms increase on last year. Funding will increase again next year by a further three per cent. This compares with the period between 1993–94 and 1996–97 when FE funding per FTE student fell by 12 per cent. in real terms. As part of the planned increases, we are investing more than £300 million in the Teaching Pay Initiative between 2001 and 2004 to allow colleges, including sixth form colleges, to reward high quality teaching. This is separate to any general pay rise a teacher may receive.

16+ Learning

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what requirement there is for Learning and Skills Councils to draw up a marketing plan to promote 16+ learning. [36013]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* The Learning and Skills Council has a statutory duty to encourage individuals to take part in post-16 education and training, and to encourage employers to participate in and contribute to its provision. Local Learning and Skills Councils must prepare a plan for each financial year, but there is no specific requirement for a marketing plan.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish *(a)* local and *(b)* national marketing plans for Learning and Skills Councils to promote 16+ learning. [36025]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Lady and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Higher Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 718W, on higher education, which of the courses listed are carried out at universities and funded by HEFCE. [36014]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* The Higher Education Funding Council for England funds all the courses cited in my reply of 4 February carried out at universities and colleges of higher education, provided they meet the HEFCE criteria for funding. The funding criteria can be found in HEFCE publication 01/52—Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey, and include, for example, that the course is open to any suitably qualified candidate and there is no duplication of HEFCE funding from any other public source.

Postgraduate Certificate of Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students entered PGCE courses in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; and how many of them dropped out before completion of the course. [36007]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the form requested; there is no single central data collection for both the numbers entering PGCE courses and numbers completing them.

The numbers of new entrants to courses of initial teacher training at institutions in England are collected through the Teacher Training Agency's Annual Survey of Training Providers. The table shows the number of new entrants to PGCE courses in the years in question:

Table 1: Number of new entrants to PGCE courses, 1997–98 to 2000–01

	Number
2000–01	19,616
1999–2000	17,461
1998–99	17,415
1997–98	18,100

Note:

The figures cover providers in England only

Sources:

Teacher Training Agency (TTA)

Annual Survey of ITT Providers 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000

Most PGCE trainees enter one-year courses.

The Initial Teacher Training Performance Profiles, published annually by the Teacher Training Agency, show the numbers of final-year trainees at institutions in England at 1 December who fail to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) by the end of their final year. The table shows this information for the three latest years for which data are available:

Table 2: Number of final year PGCE trainees who failed to gain QTS, 1997–98 to 1999–2000

	Number of final year trainees	*Number failed to gain QTS at end of final year*
1999–2000	17,167	2,320
1998–99	17,431	2,267
1997–98	17,998	2,634

Notes:

1. The figures cover providers in England only.
2. Number of trainees who failed to gain QTS includes those who failed the course, those who left before the end, and those yet to complete. Some of the latter group may have been awarded QTS at a later date.

Sources:

Teacher Training Agency (TTA)

ITT Performance Profiles 1999, 2000, 2001

Line Management

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the average number of staff for which *(a)* secondary school teachers and *(b)* further education lecturers have line management responsibility. [36027]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* This information is not collected centrally.

Violence in Schools

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she is taking to address violence against teachers and other school staff members during school hours. [35623]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 716W, which explained the initiatives the Department for Education and Skills has undertaken, and is undertaking, to reduce the incidence of abuse by parents and others against school staff. This is in addition to the legal remedies that exist for dealing with harassment and violence. The Department has provided £178 million in 2001–02 to schools and local education authorities to help support measures to tackle poor pupil behaviour. This funding backs up the guidance in Circular 10/99 "Social Inclusion: Pupil Support".

The Department has also recently announced £10 million for 2002–03 from the capital modernisation fund for local education authorities to spend on local school security improvements to help make premises more secure from intruders.

National Youth Music Theatre

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what recent representations she has received on the funding of the National Youth Music Theatre; [35729]

(2) when she will make a decision on the funding for the National Youth Music Theatre; [35730]

(3) what commitment she has made to match the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's offer of £500,000 to the National Youth Music Theatre. [35731]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: A number of representations have been made about funding for national youth music organisations, including the National Youth Music Theatre, and meetings have been held with the National Foundation for Youth Music, which represents their interests.

This Department has already made available grants totalling £12 million over the last three years (1999–2000 to 2001–2002) for National Voluntary Youth Organisations; of which the National Youth Music Theatre received £112,000. We have also provided £50,000 towards the start-up costs of a central fund for national youth music organisations.

I am considering what role these organisations might play in supporting young musicians and a decision on funding is expected to be made shortly. The Department is working closely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Arts Council for England and other external partners in this area.

Primary Education Standards

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the relationship between the number of pupils attending a primary school and educational standards; and if she will make a statement. [36100]

Mr. Timms: The following tables set out the distribution of achievement at Key Stages 1 and 2 by the size of a school's pupil cohort. For schools with a cohort of 10 or more pupils, school size appears to have little significant effect on the proportion of children achieving the expected standard for their age.

Key Stage 1: Percentage of pupils at Level 2 or above (test)

	Size of cohort						
	0–10	*10–20*	*20–40*	*40–80*	*80–100*	*100 and over*	*All schools*
Reading task/test[1]	65	84	84	83	84	85	83
Writing task	65	84	85	85	86	86	84
Mathematics	69	89	90	90	91	91	90

[1] These percentages are based on achievements at Level 2C/B/A in the reading task and Level 3 and 4 in the reading test.

Key Stage 2: Percentage of pupils at Level 4 or above (test)

	Size of cohort						
	0–10	*10–20*	*20–40*	*40–80*	*80–100*	*100 and over*	*All schools*
English	59	73	77	74	75	76	75
Mathematics	56	71	74	71	71	71	72
Science	66	81	86	85	85	86	85

HE2 Forms

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many HE2 forms were submitted in 2001; and how many applicants completed details of financial obligations as described in question 39. [36262]

Margaret Hodge: To date in the 2001–02 academic year 718,000 students in England and Wales have submitted HE2 forms to their local education authorities. All applicants are required to complete details of financial obligations as described in question 39.

Fast-track Teachers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools employ fast-track teachers. [36608]

Mr. Timms: The first teachers on the Fast-Track Programme will take up posts in September 2002. 110 successful candidates took up places in Fast-Track Initial Teacher Training in September 2001; teachers on the Fast-Track Programme are required to gain Qualified Teacher Status before taking up approved Fast-Track posts in schools.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to change the departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limits for 2001–02. [37369]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Education and Skills' DEL (including the Office for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (Ofsted) which has a separate Estimate) will be increased by £83,651,000 from £20,220,827,000 to £20,304,478,000 and the administration costs limits will be changed as follows.

£000

	Original	*Change*	*Revised*
DfES (RfR1)	219,045	685	219,730
Sure Start (RfR3)	3,449	441	3,890
Children and Young People's Unit (RfR4)	2,666	–175	2,491
Ofsted	27,095	0	27,095

Within the DEL change, the impact on the resources element and the capital element are as set out in the following table:

£000

			Of which:	
	Change	*New DEL*	*Voted*	*Non-voted*
Resources				
RfR 1	59,953	17,015,128	6,675,262	10,339,866
RfR 3	441	125,833	125,833	0
RfR 4	–1,543	98,073	98,073	0
Total change	58,851	—	—	—
Ofsted	694	152,019	152,019	0

£000

			Of which:	
	Change	*New DEL*	*Voted*	*Non-voted*
Capital				
RfR 1	1,938	2,820,374	1,851,123	969,251
RfR 3	21,462	80,470	80,470	0
RfR 4	0	0	0	0
Total change	23,400	—	—	—
Ofsted	706	12,581	12,581	0

The increase in the voted resource element of the DEL for RfR1, (£129,703,000) arises from the take up of £108,000,000 of End-Year Flexibility provision; the increase in receipts of £20,000,000 resulting from the winding up of the Training and Enterprise Councils; the increase of £30,000,000 in receipts surrendered to the Consolidated Fund, the transfer of £8,511,000 to the Department for Work and Pensions for Basic Skills, disability issues undertaken by the Disability Rights Commission and hardship payments to young people in lieu of bridging allowances; the transfer of £2,175,000 from the Department for Trade and Industry; the transfer from Student Tuition Fees of £1,450,000 to the Teacher Training Agency Grant in Aid; the transfer of £1,400,000 to the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England to fund increased contract prices and the monitoring of schools facing challenge; the transfer of £1,105,000 from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for a project to address the training and skills in the Road Haulage Industry, Neighbourhood Surveys and a pilot project on Resident's Consultancy; the transfer to the Home Office of £920,000 for the prison education service and a contribution to the Black Training and Enterprise Group; the transfer of £500,000 to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs towards the Milk and Milk Products (Pupils in Educational Establishments) (Scotland) Regulations 2001; the net transfer of £137,000 to the Department of Health for the Care Standards Tribunal, Personal Social and Health Education and the Protection of Children Act Tribunal; the net transfer of £84,000 to the Scottish Executive for the Scottish Council of National Training Organisations and European education programmes; the transfer of £45,000 from the Office for National Statistics for Neighbourhood Statistics; the transfer of £8,037,000 to the Department for Work and Pensions, £568,000 to the Department of Trade and Industry and £15,000 to the Cabinet Office as part of the machinery of government changes announced by the Prime Minister on 8 June 2001; and the virement of £90,000,000 from non-voted DEL to reflect the changes in funding certain departmental programmes.

The increase of £441,000 in the voted resource element of the DEL for RfR3 arises from the take up of End-Year Flexibility.

The reduction in the voted resource element of DEL for RfR4 arises from the transfer of £1,543,000 to the Home Office for the evaluation of programmes.

The increase of £694,000 in the voted resource element of DEL for Ofsted arises from the transfer from DfES (RfR1) for increased contract prices and the monitoring of schools facing challenge.

The decrease in the voted capital element of the DEL for RfR1, (£4,875,000) arises from receipts of £6,063,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry, the virement of £1,200,000 from non-voted capital to fund the loss on the sale of Letchworth Skill Centre, the transfer of £45,000 from the Office for National Statistics for Neighbourhood Statistics and the transfer of £57,000 to the Department of Trade and Industry as part of the machinery of government changes announced by the Prime Minister on 8 June 2001.

The increase of £21,462,000 in the voted capital element of the DEL for RfR3 arises from the take up of End-Year Flexibility.

The increase of £706,000 in the voted capital element of the DEL for Ofsted arises from the transfer from DfES (RfR1) for increased contract prices and the monitoring of schools facing challenge.

The decrease in the non-voted resource element of the DEL for RfR1, (£69,750,000) arises from an increase of £20,000,000 to the grant in aid to the Learning and Skills Council, a transfer of £1,450,000 from Student Tuition fees to the Teacher Training Agency to fund flexible Initial Teacher Training Fees and a virement of £91,200,000 to voted DEL to reflect the changes in funding certain departmental programmes and the loss on the sale of Letchworth Skill Centre.

The increase in the non-voted capital element of the DEL for RfR1, (£6,813,000) arises from the transfer from the Department of Health for the National Institute of Psychiatry (£750,000) and the increase of £6,063,000 in the provision for the Higher Education Funding Council for England funded by the receipts from the Department of Trade and Industry.

PRIME MINISTER

Political Donations

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister when *(a)* he and *(b)* officials in his office were first informed of the donation registered by the Electoral Commission under the name of Mr. Lakshmi N. Mittal on 20 June 2001. [36066]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 198–99.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the most recent delayed discharge figures referred to in his answer given to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 283; and if he will make a statement. [34016]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health to the hon. Member on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 688W.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34290]

The Prime Minister: Legal costs incurred by my office in each of the last four years are as follows:

	£
2 May 1997 to 31 March 1998	0.00
1998–99	0.00
1999–2000	0.00
2000–01	40.00

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what the total cost to his Office was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34165]

The Prime Minister: No expenditure has been made by my office.

Performance and Innovation Unit

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Prime Minister what the role of the performance and innovation unit is; and if he will make a statement on its organisation. [36934]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 87W.

Security and Intelligence Agencies

John Mann: To ask the Prime Minister if he plans to change the departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limits for 2001–02 for the security and intelligence agencies. [37367]

The Prime Minister: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the departmental expenditure limit (DEL) for the Security and Intelligence Agencies will be increased by £7,521,000 from £891,833,000 to £899,354,000 and the administration cost limit will be increased by £5,505,000 from £441,954,000 t £447,459,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table:

	£
Resources	
Change	3,945,000
New DEL	783,229,000
Of which:	
Voted	783,229,000
Non-voted	—
Capital	
Change	3,576,000
New DEL	116,903,000
Of which:	
Voted	116,903,000
Non-voted	—

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

1. £49,449,000 for further counter-terrorism work drawn from the Reserve;
2. a PES transfer of £106,000 from the Treasury Solicitor's Department;
3. a transfer of £700,000 from Capital;
4. the take up of End of Year Flexibility (EYF) carried forward from 2001–02 of £1,800,000;
5. a reduction of £48,000,000 due to a revised forecast;
6. a decrease of £105,000 to reflect the latest property/land values
7. a decrease of £5,000 to cover Loss on Sale.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from £4,276,000 for further counter-terrorism work drawn from the Reserve and £700,000 transferred to Resource DEL.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers, the take up of DEL EYF and extra funding from the Reserve.

British Companies

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what the Government's definition of a British company is; [36069]

(2) on what basis he decided that LNM Holdings was a British company; [36064]

(3) on what criteria he judged the LNM group to be British; [36737]

(4) what his policy is on congratulating foreign Governments on granting contracts to companies with British connections; [36071]

(5) on how many occasions in the past year he has written to his European counterparts regarding the awarding of contracts to companies with British interests; [36070]

(6) what criteria he uses to decide whether an attempted overseas acquisition by an individual or company seeking assistance from him would be in the national interest; and what process of assessment takes place against these criteria; [36736]

(7) if he will list the *(a)* individuals and *(b)* companies since 1997 which have received assistance from himself and his Office in attempts to acquire assets overseas. [36738]

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will publish the text of his letter to the Prime Minister of Romania about the sale of that country's steel company, Sidex; and when the text was made available to LNM Holdings; [37011]

(2) if he will list the letters he has written in the last 12 months to foreign Governments following British companies winning business abroad, stating in each case *(a)* the Government concerned, *(b)* the name of the British company, *(c)* the place of registration of the company, *(d)* the nature of the contract, *(e)* the date the contract in question was signed and *(f)* the date the letter was sent; [37014]

(3) *(a)* by whom and *(b)* when he was informed that a contract had been awarded by the Government of Romania to privatise Sidex. [37012]

The Prime Minister: There is no formal legal definition of a British company.

Each case is considered on its merits in terms of the overall potential benefit to UK business and to the UK economy. A number of factors will be relevant in considering this including whether the company is incorporated or registered in Britain, whether the company has a UK address, whether a company is UK controlled or owned, whether it employs people in the UK, whether it has a UK manufactured product or service, and whether there are wider benefits for the UK, in terms of increased access to overseas markets, increased employment or increased competitiveness.

The LNM Group is a global organisation with a headquarters in London, which includes UK registered companies and which employs people in the UK. London and the UK benefit from the location of groups such as LNM here which reflect its position as a global centre for business.

As I have made clear I signed the letter on the advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the ambassador in Bucharest. The decision to award the contract had already been made when I signed the letter, as the text of the letter made clear. This letter is already in the public domain. With the agreement of the Romanian Government, this letter was read out at the signing ceremony in Bucharest on 25 July 2001.

There was nothing extraordinary about my letter to the Romanian Government. I have written regularly to other leaders concerning contracts in which there is a British commercial interest. I have also lobbied fellow leaders in person and over the telephone on behalf of British business. Ministers in successive Governments have fought for British interests abroad and I regard this as an important part of my job.

It is not normal practice to release letters from the Prime Minister to another Head of Government under exemption 1(b) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Exemption 13 of the Code also applies with regard to commercial confidentiality.

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what recent representations the Government have made to the European Union regarding the impact of enlargement of the European Union on the British steel industry; [36065]

(2) what representations the Government have made to the Romanian Government regarding the steel industry since January 2001; [36072]

(3) what recent representations the Government have made to the European Union regarding acceptability of Romania for accession to the European Union; [36068]

(4) on what criteria he suggested to the Romanian Prime Minister on 23 July 2001 that the acquisition of the sidex steel plant by the LNM group would assist Romania's membership to the European Union; [36735]

(5) what communication the Government have had with Governments of other EU member states regarding the privatisation of the Romanian state-owned steel industry. [36740]

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister (1) when *(a)* he and *(b)* his staff have met representatives of the Government of Romania to discuss that country's accession to the European Union; [37016]

(2) what effect he estimates there will be on the UK from the sale of Sidex to LNM Holdings; [37015]

(3) what assessment he has made of how the sale of Sidex to a British company will assist Romania's admission to the European Union. [37013]

The Prime Minister: UK support for Romanian EU accession, once Romania fulfils the conditions for membership, has long been on the record. It is our firm view that enlargement of the EU will be of economic and political benefit to existing members and candidate countries.

Together with our European partners, we have encouraged the Romanian Government to complete the privatisation of the Romanian steel industry as part of the process of creating a fully-functioning market economy, one of the fundamental criteria for Romania's EU accession.

We have consistently supported the interests of British business in the EU enlargement process, including those of the British steel industry, through the relevant EU fora.

The sale of Sidex strengthens UK/Romania relations. It sends a strong positive signal to investors and businessman in Britain about market liberalisation and investment opportunities in Romania. The UK has strong interest in steps that help towards the reconstruction of the Romanian economy and towards its membership of the European Union. Privatisation of its steel industry through the sale of Sidex is an important element in its economic reform which will help to establish a level playing field between EU and Romanian steel producers and should lead to a reduction in levels of state subsidies which disadvantage UK steel producers. the privatisation did not threaten British jobs.

I met the previous Romanian President, Emil Constantinescu, in Strasbourg in October 1997, during my visit to Bucharest in May 1999 and in London in February 2000. During my visit to Bucharest in May 1999 I also met the then Prime Minister Radu Vasile, and I met the current Prime Minister Adrian Nastase during his official visit in November 2001. On each occasion I emphasised my support for Romanian EU accession.

Visits

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost was to Her Majesty's Treasury of the Romanian Prime Minister's visit to the UK in November 2001. [36073]

The Prime Minister: The Romanian Prime Minister visited London under our Guest of Government visit scheme. As is normal on such occasions, the Government met the costs of accommodation, some official entertainment and some travel within the UK for the official party.

The cost to the Government of the visit was £26,813.37.

PIU Energy Review

John Mann: To ask the Prime Minister when the performance and innovation unit's energy review will be published; and if he will make a statement. [37366]

The Prime Minister: The performance and innovation unit's energy review is published today. Copies of the report will be available in the Libraries of the House.

The energy review considers the long-term issues in energy policy—ensuring that GB will have secure, competitive and affordable energy, while at the same time addressing the likely requirements of a low carbon economy.

The report examines the main trends in energy markets and reviews the key choices facing policy makers including when decisions need to be taken and how to keep options open, so policy remains relevant to changing circumstances.

While this report is not a statement of Government policy, it raises a broad range of issues that are important to the future evolution of energy policy. The Government intend to set in process a period of public consultation, leading to an energy White Paper in the autumn.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Decisions by Statute

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many decisions by statute she has made since taking office. [32593]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In common with all Government Ministers, the Lord Chancellor and his ministerial colleagues in the Lord Chancellor's Department make a large number of decisions under statutory authority in the normal course of their duties. To identify every such decision would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the instances in which his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32029]

Mr. Wills: All Government Departments and their agencies are required to pay all undisputed bills within 30 days of receipt of the goods or services or receipt of a valid invoice, whichever is the later (or other agreed payment period). Since 1993 all Government Departments and agencies have been required to monitor their payment performance and the figures are published annually in the form of a written PQ. Figures for 2000–01 were published on 19 July 2001.

During the financial year 2000–01 the Lord Chancellor's Department (LCD) incorporating the Court Service (CS), Northern Ireland Court Service (NICS), Land Registry (LR), Public Guardianship Office (PGO) and Public Record Office (PRO) paid a total of 256,668 invoices. Of this total 15,717 (6.12 per cent.) were paid beyond agreed credit terms. These figures are broken down as follows.

	Number	*Percentage*
LCD		
Invoices paid	43,194	—
Paid late	1,043	2.4
CS		
Invoices paid	144,034	
Paid late	8,904	6.2
NICS		
Invoices paid	16,844	—
Paid late	838	4.97
LR		
Invoices paid	31,240	—
Paid late	156	0.5
PGO		
Invoices paid	12,358	—
Paid late	4,704	38.06
PRO		
Invoices paid	8,998	—
Paid late	72	0.8

No central records are kept detailing the reason for late payment of each individual invoice. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

This was the first year that LCD and CS have been in a position to report against all invoices paid rather than the practice in previous years of reporting against a sample of 1,200. A number of steps have been taken subsequently to improve payment performance. Following a successful pilot of the Government Procurement Card plans are in place to extend its use throughout the CS during 2002 and thereafter to other areas of LCD and its agencies. This will reduce the volume of individual payments and streamline the authorisation and payment process. The purchase order system is being used far more extensively and in new areas of the Department and this should also help to improve performance. There are signs that these changes have already had some impact as monitoring of this year's payments show that performance for LCD and CS has increased to over 96 per cent.

During 2000–01 the PGO experienced major changes which increased greatly their invoice activity. They also introduced steps to ensure payment performance improved. Changes to the finance management team, the purchase ordering process and increased monitoring of payments have reduced the risk of payment delay. Monitoring of the earlier part of 2001–02 showed that performance had increased to 71 per cent. The second half to date shows that 98 per cent. of invoices are paid within agreed credit terms.

The NICS has introduced a number of steps to improve performance. These include establishing a user group to encourage best practice in local offices and increase awareness for staff involved in processing payments. They have also redefined their end of year procedures. Although figures for this financial year (2001–02) show that their performance has decreased slightly to 93.5 per cent. the measures introduced should start making an impact in the financial year 2002–03.

Possession Orders

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if county courts will sit on bank holidays and other holiday periods in response to an application by a local authority for a possession order; and if he will make a statement. [34900]

Mr. Wills: In order to cater for incidents that may require the attention of a judge, including applications for urgent possession orders, out of normal office hours, on bank holidays and other holiday periods, the Court Service provides a system known as the Urgent Court Business Scheme. This scheme allows for an experienced member of court staff to be contacted during the night, weekends or public holidays. Every circuit has arrangements in place for handling urgent court business outside normal office hours. Urgent business consists of Injunctions, Children Act applications, and other urgent applications such as Possession order applications. Cover is provided between 4.00 pm and 8.30 pm each weekday, between 4.00 pm on Friday until 8.30 am on Monday for each weekend and from 4.00 pm on the last day preceding a public or privilege holiday that the court is open until 8.30 am on the day the court is next open. There will always be a judge available in each UCBO area to deal with urgent court business. In the vast majority of cases the judge will deal with matters over the telephone. Only in the most extreme case should the judge have to meet with the applicant's solicitor. Where this is unavoidable the venue will be arranged by the UCBO in consultation with the judge and the solicitor involved.

Records (Ireland)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the outcome was of the reassessment in 2000 of the three records dating from 1876 to 1914 concerning activities of the Secret Service in Ireland and Irish terrorist organisations which were being withheld from public disclosure; and if she will make a statement. [35240]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The files were reviewed by the Home Office in conjunction with the Security Service. One file has been released in full, one has been released except for some extracts and one is still withheld. The information that has not been released could be used to identify individuals working for or giving information to the intelligence services.

Records

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which Departments and agencies have *(a)* applied for extended closure of records and *(b)* applied to the Lord Chancellor for permission to retain records over 30 years; how many applications were made in each category and how many were granted; if she will list by title each record retained in this way; and what arrangements there are for their review for public disclosure. [35242]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The tables show for 2001, the most recent complete year, by Department, the number of applications for extended closure (Table A) or retention (Table B) and the number approved. An application can cover anything from a small extract from a page in a file to a large collection of records. Three formal applications were rejected.

The full lists of all public records subject to extended closure and retention are kept at the Public Record Office at Kew and are freely available for public inspection there.

More precise details can be found for most of the records that are subject to extended closure or retention by consulting the PRO online catalogue (http://catalogue.pro.gov.uk/). For records not yet transferred to the PRO, the Department holding the records has these details rather than the PRO.

Permission for retention or extended closure is given for a precise finite period. It is the responsibility of Departmental Record Officers to ensure that the records are re-reviewed, and of the Records Management Department of the PRO to supervise this process.

Researchers who require access to records held by the PRO and catalogued as closed, or to historical records still held by Departments, should first ask the PRO to check their status. If the records are closed or retained, researchers can apply for a review of access restrictions. They should write to the Departmental Record Officer of the Department that created the records (or its successor) quoting the PRO reference where this is known. Such requests are handled in the order in which they are received except where the information is urgently required for legal purposes.

Table A: Applications for extended closure of public records in 2001

Department	*Number of applications*	*Number of applications granted*
Cabinet Office	13	13
The Court Service	313	313
Crown Prosecution Service	3	3
Ministry of Defence	13	13
Department for Education and Skills	1	1
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	104	101
Department of Health	16	16
Home Office	11	11
Department for International Development	5	5
Legal Services Commission (England and Wales)	30	30
Lord Chancellor's Department	1	1
Metropolitan Police Office	17	17
Prime Minister's Office	10	10
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions[1]	1	1
HM Treasury	1	1
Department for Work and Pensions	8	8
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority	1	1

[1] Formerly Department of Social Security

Table B: Applications for retention of public records in 2001

Department	*Number of applications*	*Number of applications granted*
Cabinet Office	15	15
HM Customs and Excise	1	1
Ministry of Defence	19	19
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs[1]	4	4
English Partnerships	1	1
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	38	38
Forestry Commission	1	1
Home Office	4	4
Department for International Development	2	2
Legal Services Commission (England and Wales)	1	1

Table B: Applications for retention of public records in 2001

Department	*Number of applications*	*Number of applications granted*
Metropolitan Police Office	2	2
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	1	1
Northern Ireland Office	1	1
Office for National Statistics	2	2
Prime Minister's Office	4	4
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions[2]	3	3
HM Treasury	21	21
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority	7	7

[1] Formerly Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

[2] Formerly Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Judicial Appointments Commission

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations she has received advocating a judicial appointments commission; and if she will place copies in the Library. [33749]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Following a recommendation made by Sir Leonard Peach, the Lord Chancellor has already established a commission for judicial appointments to oversee the appointments process.

During his period of office the Lord Chancellor has received representations proposing the establishment of a judicial appointments commission with more than supervisory functions over the existing appointments system, from the following organisations:

the Law Society of England and Wales;

Doncaster and District Law Society:

the Association of Women Barristers;

the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers; and

a number of private individuals.

Copies of the relevant material from the organisations will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Criminal Justice System Reports

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the reports produced by the Lord Chancellor's Department which relate to the criminal justice system since 1978. [35966]

Mr. Wills: The information requested is not held centrally within the Lord Chancellor's Department and can be supplied only at disproportionate cost. However, research reports relating to the criminal justice system that have been commissioned and published by LCD Research Secretariat since it was established in 1996 are listed:

February 2000—"Factors affecting the decision to apply for silk and judicial office", K. Malleson and F. Banda.

March 2000—"The effects on magistrates of learning that the defendant has a previous conviction", S. Lloyd-Bostock.

April 1999—"Reducing delay in the criminal justice system: the views of defence lawyers", L. Bridges and M. Jacobs.

May 1999—"An empirical analysis of standard fees in magistrates' court criminal cases", A. Gray, P. Fenn and N. Rickman.

February 1997—"Delay in the criminal justice system", S. Choongh.

June 1997—"Judicial appointments commissions: the European and North American experience and the possible implications for the United Kingdom", C. Thomas and K. Malleson.

September 1997—"Expenditure on legal services", M. Hope, LCD economist (review paper).

November 1997—"Ethnic monitoring of defendants appearing at Leicester magistrates' court in 1995", Home Office and Professor Philip Bean.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sex Offenders

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will require sex offenders convicted overseas to sign the sex offenders register when they live in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [33020]

Beverley Hughes: We are keen to do all we can to protect the public, especially children, from sex offenders. Sex offenders whose offences were committed overseas and who act in a way that gives the police reason to believe they pose a risk to the public can be made subject to a sex offender order, which will require them to comply with the requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 (the register) and can impose restrictions on their behaviour. They can also be the subject of a Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel which will form a plan to manage the risks they pose.

We were aware of this issue when we announced the review of Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 and it was discussed with relevant agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) during the review.

That discussion is reflected in the consultation paper, which was published in July 2001. The review concluded there is no mechanism by which offenders convicted overseas could reliably be made aware of a duty to register with the police when coming to the United Kingdom. the review therefore proposes that where the police become aware of the arrival or presence in the United Kingdom of a sex offender convicted overseas of offences equivalent to those in the United Kingdom that trigger registration, they should be able to apply to the courts for an Order to Register as a Sex Offender. We are currently analysing responses to the review.

We know of only four countries which have a register of sex offenders and only one which currently requires sex offenders from abroad to register with the police.

Smallpox

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with the Department for Health about contingency measures to be introduced in the event of a smallpox outbreak. [33335]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Home Office and Department of Health officials have regular meetings to ensure cross-Government preparedness for responding to a deliberate chemical/biological release. This work includes arrangements for responding to a smallpox outbreak.

Bilateral arrangements with the United States assist us in ensuring preparation for and stocks of vaccine to contain any such eventuality.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in the Greater London area in the last 12 months. [34037]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 576W.

Football-related Offences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been convicted of football-related offences in England and Wales in each of the last three years. [34036]

Mr. Denham: The data requested are not available.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to reduce incidents of crowd-related violence at football matches. [34100]

Mr. Denham: An extensive array of legislation is in place for tackling football-related disorder. The Government expect the police and courts to make full use of the powers that have been placed at their disposal. The Government work with the police and football authorities in order to ensure that offenders are identified and prosecuted.

Tobacco Sales (Children)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many shopkeepers have been prosecuted for selling tobacco to under-aged children in each of the last three years. [34035]

Mr. Denham: 166 defendants were proceeded against in England and Wales in 1998 for selling tobacco, etc. to persons under 16. Figures for 1999 and 2000[1] were 127 and 161 respectively. Figures for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

[1] The 2000 figure excludes cases in Staffordshire as Staffordshire police force were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and so are excluded from the total.

Criminal Statistics (Terminology)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what definition is used for a female defective in the Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1999. [33980]

Mr. Denham: The term 'female defective' is mentioned three times in the 'Criminal statistics, England and Wales' as follows:

(i) Man having unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman who is a defective. (Sexual Offences Act 1956, Sec 7 (as amended by the Mental Health Act 1959)).

(ii) Procuring, permitting or causing the prostitution etc. of a female defective. (Sexual Offence Act 1956, Secs 9, 27 and 29).

(iii) Abduction of female defective. (Sexual Offences Act 1956, Sec 32).

and is part of the definition of the offences referred to.

It is defined by the Sexual Offences Act 1956, Sec 45, as substituted by Mental Health Act 1959, Sec 127(1) and amended by the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 1982, Sch 3, as follows:

> In this Act 'defective' means a person suffering from a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind which includes severe impairment of intelligence and social functioning'.

The report of the Sex Offences review (set in the boundaries: reforming the law on sex offences) argued that it was 'a demeaning derogatory term' suggested changing the word to

> 'a person with severe mental incapacity'.

in future legislation.

The Government are considering their response to the review.

Correspondence

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the security services concerning a case, details of which have been supplied to him in a letter dated 1 February; and if he will make a statement. [34092]

Mr. Blunkett: I have received a letter from my hon. Friend to which I have responded today.

It is not Government policy to discuss individual cases. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 350W.

Police Numbers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police there *(a)* were on 1 January and *(b)* will be on 1 January 2003 in (i) England and Wales and (ii) North Yorkshire. [34010]

Mr. Denham: Police numbers are collected twice a year in March and September. There were 127,231 officers in England and Wales on 30 September 2001. The Home Secretary has set a target for overall police strength in England and Wales to reach 130,000 by the spring of 2003.

North Yorkshire police had 1,390 officers on 30 September 2001. I understand from the chief constable that on 1 January the force had 1,391 officers and that the projected strength for North Yorkshire police for March 2003 is 1,425 officers.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in post in Leicestershire Police Authority in *(a)* each year between 1996–97 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [34762]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table.

Year[1]	*Police officers*	*Civilian support staff*
1996	1,908	667
1997	1,949	755
1998	1,983	774
1999	1,993	802
2000	1,993	805
2001	2,033	806

[1] As at 31 March

Leicestershire Constabulary had a record number of officers at the end of September 2001, at 2,062.

Metropolitan Police Accommodation

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many units of police accommodation were *(a)* sold, *(b)* put up for sale and *(c)* withdrawn from sale in each of the last 10 years by the Metropolitan police. [34443]

Mr. Denham: I understand from the Metropolitan Police Commissioner that the information requested is readily available for the last five years only. This is shown in the table.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Residential Quarters					
Sold	77	138	265	151	110
For Sale	387	535	583	360	149
Withdrawn	56	219	141	139	3
Section Houses					
Sold	0	2	3	2	0
For Sale	3	7	6	4	1
Withdrawn	0	0	0	1	0
Operational Estate					
Sold	7	8	11	8	2
For Sale	39	47	36	38	29
Withdrawn	6	6	3	1	5

Notes:

The figures record each occasion a property has been offered for sale or withdrawn from the market. Properties that remained on the market for a year or more will appear in more than one annual total of properties for sale. The operational estate refers to buildings not tracts of land.

Police Salaries

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 686W, in what format the information was available. [34646]

Mr. Denham: There are separate national salary scales for each rank in the police service. How much police officers earn depends on their rank, their length of service in the rank and whether they are entitled to premium rates of pay and to allowances in addition to basic salary.

The Home Office does not hold data on housing costs either by force area or by region.

Golden Jubilee

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government will meet additional policing costs arising from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's Golden Jubilee. [34660]

Mr. Denham: Where it can be demonstrated there are exceptional additional costs which could not be met from within existing budgets, it is open to forces to apply for a special grant.

Criminal Records Bureau

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if a volunteer who receives expenses will be eligible for exemption from charging for disclosure certificates from the Criminal Records Bureau; [34517]

(2) what the definition is of a volunteer in the exemptions from charging for disclosure certificates from the Criminal Records Bureau. [34516]

Mr. Denham: Under the Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) Regulations 2002, which were laid before Parliament on 7 February 2002, higher-level disclosures will be issued free of charge to a volunteer, which is defined in the regulations as

> "a person engaged in an activity which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit some third party other than or in addition to a close relative".

Youth Inclusion

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the areas in London where youth inclusion projects will be operational by March; and what resources will be allocated to each. [35244]

Mr. Denham: The Youth Justice Board managed Youth Inclusion Programme has a total of 70 projects in operation across the country. The programme has been at full operational capacity since March 2001. Of these, 13 are operating in London.

Each project receives annually £75,000 from local partnerships and £75,000 from the Youth Justice Board.

The areas in London where Youth Inclusion projects are operational are listed in the table:

Areas in London with Youth Inclusion projects

Neighbourhood	*Area*
Gascoigne and Barking Roding Valley	Barking and Dagenham
Church End estate	Brent
Castlehaven	Camden
Page estate	Greenwich
Woodbury Down	Hackney
North Fulham neighbourhood	Hammersmith and Fulham
Tottenham and Wood Green	Haringey
Holloway and Tollington	Islington
Dalgarno	Kensington and Chelsea
Clapham Park estate	Lambeth
Forest Gate	Newham
Lawson, Rockingham, Heygate and Draper estates	Southwark
Alton estate	Wandsworth

Arrests and Detentions

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were arrested and detained in police custody in England and Wales in 1999. [R] [34853]

Beverley Hughes: In the financial year 1999–2000 an estimated 1,277,900 persons were arrested for notifiable offences within England and Wales.

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the prison budget for England and Wales has been in each of the last 10 years. [35326]

Beverley Hughes: The table sets out the total net cash expenditure (current and capital) for the Prison Service for the 10 financial years 1991–92 to 2000–01.

The budget for 2001–02 is in resource accounting and budgeting terms. The present voted provision, as set out in the Home Office's Winter Supplementary Estimate, includes net Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) funding of £1,739.6 million (including £114.9 million funding from the Youth Justice Board for juvenile places and £46 million from the Department for Education and Skills for prisoners' education costs other than for juveniles); net Capital DEL funding of £218.8 million (including £61.8 million non-cash funding for the capitalisation of Dovegate prison under the Private Finance Initiative; £73.9 million funding for other spending outside of DEL; and £426.6 million net Annually Managed Expenditure (including £15.7 million funding from the Youth Justice Board).

Prison service net expenditure 1990–91 to 2000–01

£ million

Financial year	*Current*	*Capital*	*Total*
1990–91	887.7	453.8	1,341.5
1991–92	1,049.5	412.6	1,462.1
1992–93	1,138.4	331.9	1,470.3
1993–94	1,223.7	285.1	1,508.8
1994–95	1,279.6	318.3	1,597.9
1995–96	1,336.7	330.2	1,666.9
1996–97	1,388.5	220.1	1,608.6
1997–98	1,462.9	277.9	1,740.8
1998–99	1,611.7	200.4	1,812.1
1999–2000	1,696.8	149.6	1,846.4
2000–01	1,659.5	135.2	1,794.7

Notes:

The decrease in capital expenditure from 1996–97 follows the completion of a programme for major capital works. In recent years new prisons have been provided through Private Finance Initiative funding.

In 200–01 payments of £123.8 million for juvenile places were made by the Youth Justice Board with a resultant decrease in the net operating costs of the Prison Service.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with officials of the Prison Officers Association; and what issues were discussed. [35325]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I met most recently with representatives of the Prison Officers Association (POA) on Thursday 7 February 2002 to discuss the recommendations of the Prison Service Pay Review Body and the Government's response to it.

The Home Secretary explained that, while the 6 per cent. recommended was not affordable in full from 1 January 2002 without severe implications for Prison Service regimes, he had none the less wanted to respond to the recommendations positively in a way that recognised the value of the staff in the remit group.

To this end, he had implemented the awards in full within the period covered by the recommendations. In staging the 6 per cent, he had front-loaded the first stage from 1 January 2002 to ensure an immediate pay rise commensurate with that awarded to other public sector groups for the year. In addition, prison officers would receive the further 2.5 per cent. in January 2003. Finally the locality payments for officers in London and south-east, the areas most hard pressed by recruitment and retention problems, would increase by the full 6 per cent. from 1 January 2002.

C-Far, Okehampton

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken by his Department to provide funding for C-Far in Okehampton, Devon; and if he will make a statement. [35531]

Beverley Hughes: A payment of £150,000 from the Criminal Justice System Reserve for 2001–02 has been approved as a contribution to the continuing costs of the C-Far "Life Change" programme and will be paid before the end of March. C-Far have also made an application for a further £1.9 million from the Criminal Justice System Reserve in 2002–03. A decision on this application has been deferred pending receipt of an interim evaluation report from C-Far and resolution of outstanding concerns regarding a full, independent assessment of the programme's effectiveness in reducing re-offending. The national probation service and the Prison Service jointly have set aside £20,000 to assist with the cost of such an independent evaluation.

Prisoners (Mental Health)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many and what proportion of prisoners are suffering from a psychotic illness; [35405]

(2) what proportion of prisoners developed *(a)* a mental health problem and *(b)* a psychotic illness while in custody in the last 12 months; [35406]

(3) how many and what proportion of prisoners are known to have a mental health problem. [35407]

Beverley Hughes: A survey of mental ill health in the prison population of England and Wales, undertaken in 1997 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), showed that some 10 per cent. of remanded men, 7 per cent. of sentenced men and 14 per cent. of all women prisoners had suffered from a functional psychosis in the past year. Applying these rates to the current population would indicate that, on any one day, there would be around 5,300 prisoners in custody who would have suffered from symptoms of a functional psychosis in the previous year.

The ONS survey also reported that only one in 10 prisoners or fewer showed no evidence of any of the five disorders considered in the survey (personality disorder, psychosis, neurosis, alcohol misuse, and drug dependence). That would indicate that, at any one time, upwards of 60,000 prisoners would have a mental health problem of some kind.

The information currently available from research studies does not allow us to form an assessment of the proportion of prisoners who may have developed a mental health problem or psychotic illness while in custody.

Videos (Legislation)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the Government will bring forward legislation to establish the Video Appeals Committee as a statutory body; [35728]

(2) if the Government will bring forward legislation to make it an offence *(a)* to show a Restricted 18 video to a child and *(b)* to allow a child to view such a video. [35726]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for taking forward these and other issues raised in the Government's consultation paper on R18 videos passed from the Home Office to this Department last year. We are assessing the responses to the consultation and will produce our response as soon as possible.

BBFC Guidelines

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government will require the British Board of Film Classification to submit its classification guidelines for parliamentary approval. [35654]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

The BBFC is an independent body, and it would not be appropriate to submit its guidelines—which were subject to public consultation—for parliamentary approval.

Prison Escorts (Tachographs)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what safeguards are in place to ensure that prison custody officers employed to drive prison cellular escort vehicles do not drive for longer than would be the case if they were driving other similar size vehicles covered by the tachograph regulations; [35011]

(2) what vehicles used by companies involved in the Home Office Prison Court and Escort contracts to escort prisoners to and from courts and between prisons are exempt from tachograph regulations; [35010]

(3) if he will introduce tachograph regulations to cover cellular vehicles used to carry prisoners on escort. [35009]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The fitting and use of tachographs is governed by European Union (EU) Regulations. Passenger carrying vehicles with fewer than 17 seats are exempt. Prison escort vehicles with between 10 and 17 seats are subject to the separate UK domestic drivers' hours legislation which sets maximum driving and duty limits.

The European Commission has put forward a proposal to change the existing EU Regulation, including the possible removal of the exemption for passenger vehicles with between 10 and 17 seats. The UK Government are currently consulting on this proposal. Any change to the existing EU law will require the agreement of the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

Escort contractors are expected to comply with all relevant provisions of Road Traffic Legislation in respect of drivers' hours and to maintain, and produce, for inspection by the appropriate authorities, such records as are required.

Criminal Justice System Business Plan

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the criminal justice system business plan for 2002–03. [37485]

Mr. Blunkett: My noble and learned Friends the Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor and I will today be publishing a Business Plan for the criminal justice system for England and Wales.

The plan describes the priorities for the coming year which the Government expect the criminal justice system as a whole to work to deliver.

Copies of the plan will be placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in her Department. [26965]

Mrs. Liddell: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21264]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999 and staff numbers have increased since that date.

Details of the number of days lost to sickness absence are shown in the table:

	Number of days
1 July 1999–31 December 1999[1]	299
2000	442.5
2001 to 1 November 2001[1]	727.5

[1] Part year

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she expects to reply to the Question of 5 December, ref. 21264, from the hon. Member for Buckingham on sickness absence. [24752]

Mrs. Liddell: I replied to the hon. Member today.

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will estimate the number of individuals in her *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26321]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. My Department has one member of staff whose total remuneration exceeded £100,000 in 2000–01. No individuals have had annual remuneration in excess of £200,000.

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27392]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The Department has had no expenditure on external public relations consultants.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27982]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

In 1999–2000 the cost of theft to the Department was estimated at £2,200. In 2000–01, the Department had no cases of theft or fraud reported.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional security measures are planned by her Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31793]

Mrs. Liddell: A wide range of security measures are in place to deter and detect theft and fraud. These are kept under review and additional measures are put in place as appropriate.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate her Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if she will make a statement. [27292]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. No cases of fraud have been reported since that date.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what expenditure has been incurred by her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if she will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27944]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

My Department has not incurred any expenditure on opinion polling, focus groups or other forms of market research.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [28007]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since that date one laptop computer has been stolen. No items have been reported as lost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [34225]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

No items valued at less than £50 have been reported lost or stolen in my Department.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by her Department in each of the last four years. [27965]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

The Department spent £150,354 on building refurbishment work in 1999–2000. No refurbishment work was carried out in 2000–01.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) her Department, (ii) her agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which she has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30074]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

The Department has had no empty properties.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total external spend by her Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [31039]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

My Department has had no expenditure on Private Finance Initiative consultants.

Contracts (KPMG)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contracts her Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31322]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has no contacts with KPMG.

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in her Department in each of the last four years. [31741]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

The average annual leave entitlement of staff in my Department outside the senior civil service was 27.5 days for 1999–2000, 26.7 days for 2000–01 and 26.5 days for 2001–02 to date.

The annual leave entitlement for members of the senior civil service is currently set by the Cabinet Office at 30 days and has been so for the last four years.

Secondments

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33207]

Mrs. Liddell: No staff have been seconded to my Department by any of the companies listed.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33861]

Mrs. Liddell: No staff have been seconded to my Department by any of the companies listed.

Consultancy Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many contracts were let by her Department and agencies for which she is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33855]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. No contracts have been let by my Department to any of the companies mentioned.

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by her Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte & Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34992]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. No contracts have been awarded by my Department to any of the companies listed.

Scottish Parliament

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions she has recently had on the Scottish Parliament's powers to confer devolved functions on UK bodies; who was present; and if she will make a statement on the conclusions of such meetings; [34801]

(2) if she will publish the agenda for and list the location of recent meetings she has been involved in to discuss the Scottish Parliament's powers to confer devolved functions on UK bodies; and from which Department supporting officials were provided. [34980]

Mrs. Liddell: Information relating to internal discussion and advice is not disclosed under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Unclaimed Benefits

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the Government's policy is on unclaimed benefits among the elderly in Scotland. [35529]

Mr. Foulkes: The Government are committed to ensuring that elderly people eligible for benefits achieve their legal entitlement and that the poorest among our pensioners have a guaranteed minimum income. The minimum income guarantee (MIG) is paid to around 181,000 claimants aged 60 or over in Scotland.

In May 2000 we launched a national take-up campaign writing to 2 million pensioners across the UK, informing them about MIG. Since October last year, callers to the Retirement Pension Telecentre, who are not in receipt of MIG but identified as possible claimants, have been encouraged to claim. Pensioners claiming retirement pension by post are sent a MIG leaflet.

We are looking at options to prompt automatically the issue of a claim for MIG following certain key life events, for example when a pensioner reaches age 75 or 80 or when another benefit is awarded. We are also working in partnership with organisations for older people to improve access to benefits and take-up of the MIG. This includes projects on a national good practice guide and a survey of local take-up initiatives.

Friends of Scotland

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Friends of Scotland have been recruited to date; what has been the cost of that project to date; and what its budget is for 2002. [35734]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 12 February 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 169W.

The costs of this programme are being met from within the existing resources of the Scotland Office, together with private sponsorship for the Scottish banquet on 28 November 2001. It is not possible to quantify the cost of staff time spent on this programme this year.

My officials and I are in discussion with interested parties, including the Scottish Executive, about the further development of the initiative. These discussions will inform decisions about the allocation of resources.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34218]

Mr. Robin Cook: No items have been stolen or lost from my Department during the period mentioned. More detailed information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the publications issued by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34192]

Mr. Robin Cook: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the President of the Council how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35932]

Mr. Robin Cook: No such cases have been reported in my Department. My Department recognises that it is obliged by law to provide a safe working environment for employees. It is committed to meeting targets for reducing the number of working days lost generally owing to work related injuries and illnesses arising from the Government's "Revitalising Health and Safety" initiative.

Dr. Cable: To ask the President of the Council how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35366]

Mr. Robin Cook: No-one is currently employed in my Department on a job-share basis. No vacant positions have been advertised on this basis in the last 12 months, although an application on a job-share basis would always be considered.

Dr. Cable: To ask the President of the Council what assessment has been made of the effect of the working time directive on his office's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35884]

Mr. Robin Cook: In my Department, the working time directive has implications chiefly for employees working directly in support of Ministers. Six private office staff have signed agreements enabling them to work in excess or 48 hours per week; this compares with 14 such staff a year ago. I have recently restructured my office so as to increase the level of clerical support, and this has reduced somewhat the average number of hours worked by private secretaries. Much long hours' working arises from the need to provide support for me in my responsibilities as Leader of the House. Any decision by the House to reform its own working arrangements would be likely to have a positive impact on the working hours of the staff concerned. The working arrangements in my office and in my Department generally are constantly under review. My Department is committed to keeping long hours working to an absolute minimum commensurate with operational needs, and to promoting a proper work/life balance for its employees.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [36182]

Mr. Robin Cook: None.

WORK AND PENSIONS

IT Investment

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much of the budget for modernising the delivery of the social security system will be spent on *(a)* the Payment Modernisation Programme, *(b)* the New IT for the Child Support Agency, *(c)* new front end systems, *(d)* replacement of legacy systems, (d) improvements to management information, *(e)* PCs for all staff, *(f)* modernising services to pensioners, including preparation for the pension credit and *(g)* his Department's work on (i) the working tax credit and (ii) the child tax credit. [22059]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 899W, on the 2001 Departmental report, how much and what proportion of the Welfare Modernisation Fund money has been allocated to specific projects. [30136]

Mr. McCartney: Available information can be found in the document 'Department for work and pensions: approach to IT investment', a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the safety of staff in jobcentres. [33047]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Regular health and safety risk assessments and safety inspections are conducted to ensure the safety of staff in Jobcentres. These assessments are reviewed whenever new services are introduced.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will introduce screened reception areas in benefit offices after the removal of security screens for individual desks. [32967]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* In every Jobcentre Plus area there will continue to be screened provision for dealing with those customers and transactions known to give rise to particular risk. The precise type and location of this provision will depend on the recommendations of the risk assessments carried out in each individual Jobcentre Plus office.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the level of physical assaults that have taken place in Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder clusters compared with the level of assaults that have taken place in other centres administered by him. [32966]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* During 2000, (the latest year for which full records are held) there were 164 cases of physical contact between Benefits Agency staff and clients. In the Employment Service, which has twice as many offices as the Benefits Agency, there were 233 cases of physical contact in that year. Cases of physical contact cover any physical contact, including spitting, the throwing of small items such as paper clips or rolled up forms, or touching of any kind. Approximately 190,000 people per day visit Benefits Agency and Employment Service offices, and 100,000 people work in the two agencies.

In the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices, since they opened for business on 22 October, there has been one reported case of physical contact between a member of public and a member of staff where a client trod on the foot of a member of staff, possibly by accident. In that period, well over half a million people have passed through Jobcentre Plus offices.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the results were of discussions held with the Health and Safety Executive prior to the removal of glass security screens from the new Jobcentre Plus offices; and what recommendations were made by the Health and Safety Executive. [32638]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Officials have discussed the changes to delivery associated with Jobcentre Plus and the risk assessment measures we have put in place with the Health and Safety Executive. Overall the HSE were satisfied with the general level of management of safety issues and the areas for improvement they will cover in their report are all within the scope of our current procedures.

Full risk assessments have been carried out in every Jobcentre Plus office and all of their individual recommendations implemented in full. Safety measures implemented as a result of risk assessments include security guards, installation of closed circuit TV cameras, provision of safety alarm systems, controlled segregation of staff areas using coded door locks and changes to the office layout to maximise safety.

Officials continue to remain in touch with the Health and Safety Executive as we review the effectiveness of the new service arrangements.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what additional protection he will provide for Benefits Agency staff following the removal of security screens; [32969]

(2) if he will amend his security plans for benefits offices. [32968]

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the removal of screens in Benefits Agency offices. [33048]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to carry out a review of staff safety before removing screening from Benefits Agency offices; and if he will make a statement. [32759]

Mr. Nicholas Brown [holding answers 4 and 6 February, 2002]: There are no plans to remove protective screens from Benefits Agency offices until they are converted into fully integrated offices of the new Jobcentre Plus service.

56 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices are already open and operating effectively—with positive feedback from staff and customers. For each of these offices a full health and safety risk assessment has been conducted and its recommendations implemented in full. These risk assessments are now in the process of being reviewed in the light of experience of live operations. The measures implemented to support the safety of staff and improved customer service as a result of the risk assessments include: closed circuit television; better management in each office to avoid difficult situations building up, for example floor managers to greet customers and guide them through their visit; where recommended by risk assessments, security guards with clear instructions as to when to intervene; in each pathfinder area screened facilities to deal with situations likely to give rise to particular risk; a clear zero tolerance policy under which determined action will be taken against anyone threatening or abusing Jobcentre Plus staff.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training was given to his Department's staff with regard to the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001 before they came into effect on 23 October. [24218]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Some 50,000 days of training were provided for the approximately 4,000 staff in Jobcentre Plus pathfinder office before they opened in October 2001. The amount of training delivered to individual members of staff was largely dependent on their background and experience. For example, staff new to the personal adviser role received an average of 73 days training, whereas existing personal advisers received an average of eight days training. The requirements of the specific regulations referred to was fully covered in the training provided wherever appropriate.

Women Workers (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to increase the proportion of women from ethnic minorities in the labour force. [33826]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: As I explained in my reply to my hon. Member of 11 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1045W, women from ethnic minorities can benefit from the range of new deals and other welfare to work initiatives that we have introduced. These initiatives, such as working families tax credit, the national minimum wage and the national child care strategy, help people overcome the barriers to employment and to make work pay. In April this year, we are also introducing a new service in five areas of the country to reach out to people from ethnic minorities who are at a disadvantage in the labour market. The outreach service will explore different ways jobless people from ethnic minority communities can be helped—from attracting people in to mainstream services like new deal to improving links to employers or providing specialist training where appropriate. We are investing £15 million in this new service.

Measures are also being introduced in the current Employment Bill that will help working mothers to remain within the work force through better balancing of their work and home commitments. This is good for parents, children and business.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to include people under the age of 60, but registered disabled, in the cold weather payment scheme. [34924]

Malcolm Wicks: Cold weather payments provide extra help towards heating costs for the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society in periods of exceptionally cold weather.

People under 60 years of age who receive income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance which includes a premium for disability or long term sickness can already receive cold weather payments. We have no plans to change the eligibility conditions.

Industrial Injuries (Chemical Agents)

Mr. Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking on the report of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on Chemical Agents at Work. [37370]

Malcolm Wicks: The report of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on chemical agents has been laid before Parliament today (Cm 5395). Copies of the report will be placed in the Library and are available to hon. Members from the Vote Office. We are grateful to the council for their work on this subject. After careful consideration we have decided to accept all the recommendations made in the report for changes to the list of prescribed diseases under the industrial injuries scheme caused by exposure to chemical agents at work. The necessary regulations will be brought before Parliament in due course to implement the changes.

Pensions Statistics

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to ensure that work and pensions statistics are placed on the Office for National Statistics website on the day of release; and if he will make a commitment to release statistics in non-electronic formats when this is not possible. [28971]

Mr McCartney: National Statistics outputs published by the Department for Work and Pensions are normally made available on the departmental website on the day of release (at www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/online.html). Paper based versions of publications are also available and almost all can be found in the library. The title and date of each output is provided in the monthly ONS National Statistics Updates release. This can be found at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/updates.pdf.

Unemployment (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the employment prospects for the Greater London area. [32124]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department does not make forecasts of the future level of employment. However, despite uncertainty about the prospects for the world economy, the UK labour market is still performing well. The number of people in work in London remains at a high level and has increased by 240,000 since 1997, and is up by 75,000 over the last year.

Though unemployment in the capital has increased over the year, this is because the number of people in London's labour force has increased by more than the rise of employment. New vacancies are displayed in London Jobcentres all the time—over a thousand every working day, with many more available through other recruitment channels.

Like other regions, some areas within London have employment rates well below the national average. Initiatives such as Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones are supporting areas like these through new and innovative ways of helping jobless people move into work.

Pensions Downrating

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners a year over the last four years had their pensions reduced after a six week stay in hospital; what estimate he has made of how much money was raised in that way; what estimate he has made of the costs in administration of *(a)* reducing and *(b)* reinstating those pension payments; what proportion of people whose pensions were reduced subsequently experienced delays in their benefits being reinstated when they left hospital; and what plans he has to review these rules. [31237]

Mr. McCartney: The available information is in the tables.

Number of people as of 31 March in each individual year with their pension down-rated

Year	*Number down-rated six to 52 weeks*
March 1998	19,000
March 1999	20,000
March 2000	22,000
March 2001	23,000

Notes:

1. Figures rounded to nearest 1,000.
2. Information is not available prior to 1997–98.
3. Administrative data only records information at an individual point in time. It is therefore not possible to give the total number of people who have their pension down-rated during the course of a year, only the total number at a particular point in time.

Reduction in state pension expenditure due to six weeks hospital downrating

£ million

Year	*Over six weeks*
1996–97	22
1997–98	22
1998–99	24
1999–2000	26
2000–01	28

Notes:

1. Cash terms
2. Rounded to the nearest £ million

The Benefit Agency's administration costs are published in the Benefits Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Library. The costs are not classified by individual tasks but an estimate of the staff costs for administration of hospital downrating is around £0.5 million.

The information about the proportion of people whose pensions were reduced and who subsequently experienced delays in their benefits being reinstated when they left hospital is not collected.

The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, has looked at issues affecting hospital in-patients including rules governing the downrating of benefits.

This rule prevents double provision from public funds as the publicly funded NHS maintains people while they stay in hospital as well as providing free treatment. Social security maintenance benefits are also paid from state funds. They are therefore not paid in full indefinitely where a person is in a NHS hospital and having their day to day living expenses met through the NHS.

The double provision principle, is a key cornerstone of the system of national insurance introduced over 50 years ago.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 710W, on hospital downrating, what the saving to public funds was from the downrating of pensions for people staying *(a)* more than six weeks and *(b)* more than 52 weeks in hospital. [30130]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

£ million

	Downrating type		
	6–52 weeks	*Over 52 weeks*	*Total*
1997–98	22	33	55
1998–99	24	32	56
1999–2000	26	30	56
2000–01	28	29	57

Notes:

1. Figures are in cash terms
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27399]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department (including the former DSS and the part of the former DfEE which are now the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions) incurred the following expenditure on public relations consultancies since 1998–99:

	£
1998–99	342,440
1999–2000	317,267
2000–01	[1]201,811
2001–02	[2]234,000

[1] Includes £45,607 (rounded up to £46,000 for the new deal also included in the written answer to the hon. Member by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Young People and Learning (Mr. Lewis) on 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1130W.

[2] To end November.

Note:

Agencies of the Department registered no expenditure on public relations consultancies over the last four years.

New Deal

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the New Deal supports unemployed people who wish to start their own businesses, with special reference to Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East. [21812]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We recognise the importance of the role of self-employment in the economy and helping unemployed people set up their own businesses is a key feature of our welfare to work initiatives. Eligible unemployed jobseekers can receive help entering self-employment through the new deals or through the Work-Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) programme. This help is available in all parts of the country, including Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East.

The self-employment model for people entering from new deals for young people, 25 plus, lone parents and partners or WBLA has three stages:

Stage 1: a one day basic awareness and information session;

Stage 2: four one day courses/counselling leading to the production of a business plan;

Stage 3: up to 26 weeks of test trading (up to 13 weeks in WBLA), in which the participant receives: experience of the responsibilities and realities of self employment;

an allowance equivalent to their previous level of benefit (plus a small weekly top up allowance) to avoid going into debt;

on-going advice and counselling from a business mentor;

supported training and;

continued aftercare once test trading has finished.

A range of help and financial support is also available to people moving into self-employment through new deal 50 plus. This includes help and advice from a new deal personal adviser, a tax free Employment Credit paid in addition to someone's income for up to 52 weeks, and an in-work training grant.

The new deal for disabled people is piloting a range of approaches to find out how best to help people on incapacity benefits move into and remain in work. People in receipt of qualifying benefits have access to a network of innovative job brokers across Great Britain who will help and support them in finding and keeping work. As part of the service they offer, job brokers work with people who wish to start their own businesses and offer them support once they have moved into work.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35365]

Dr. John Reid: 33 staff are currently employed by the Northern Ireland office on a jobshare contract.

71 per cent. of vacant positions advertised in the last 12 months were open to job-sharing arrangements.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35931]

Dr. John Reid: There have been a total of five confirmed work-related stress cases over the last three years; two cases in 1999, one case in 2000 and two cases in 2001. No compensation has been paid to employees in each of the last three years. On the five confirmed cases, the working days lost were 352 days in 1999, one year and 86 days in 2000, and one year and 126 days in 2001. Of the five confirmed cases, the costs were £35,212.84 in 1999, £48,611.32 in 2000, and £63,366.58 in 2001.

The procedures in place include the provision of the departmental welfare service; facilities such as phased return to work, the introduction of work-life balance policies; and early referral by personnel to the occupational health service. Costs are not recorded specifically against work-related stress.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made of the effect of the working time directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35891]

Dr. John Reid: The regulations are operated within the Department and it is only exceptional where business needs require staff to be invited to work in excess of the 48 hour limit.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-Departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34276]

Dr. John Reid: As no records of this information are kept centrally, this question could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the publications issued by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34195]

Dr. John Reid: As no records of this information are kept centrally, this question could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Farming Subsidies

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* payments made and *(b)* running costs have been of the (i) arable area payment scheme, (ii) suckler cow premium scheme, (iii) hill livestock compensatory allowance, (iv) hill farming allowance, (v) countryside stewardship scheme and (vi) environmentally sensitive areas schemes since 1996. [29995]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The amounts paid for (i) arable area payments scheme were:

£

Scheme year	*Amount paid*	*Administration costs*
1996	1,054,740,241	6,824,000
1997	1,055,721,796	6,388,000
1998	985,942,025	6,730,000
1999	1,130,409,358	6,347,000
2000	882,979,696	[1]7,222,000

[1] Estimated outturn

The amounts paid for (ii) suckler cow premium scheme were:

£

Scheme year	*Amount paid*	*Administration costs*
1996	81,524,702	2,685,900
1997	78,762,180	2,373,600
1998	77,854,276	2,493,300
1999	70,567,139	3,752,071
2000	67,923,516	3,742,781

The amounts paid for (iii) hill livestock compensatory allowance were:

£

Scheme year	Amount paid	Administration costs
1996	27,128,357	1,127,000
1997	41,398,518	996,000
1998	28,086,148	1,046,000
1999	44,288,837	1,755,281
2000	43,666,451	927,037

There were no amounts paid for (iv) hill farm allowance for these periods.

The amounts paid for (v) countryside stewardship scheme were:

£

Scheme year	Amount paid	Administration costs
1996	12,468,000	2,031,000
1997	17,126,000	1,793,000
1998	22,030,000	1,884,000
1999	26,038,000	1,773,000
2000	31,915,000	2,918,000

The amounts paid for (vi) environmentally sensitive areas scheme were:

£

Scheme year	Amount paid	Administration costs
1996	27,591,000	1,461,000
1997	32,984,000	1,290,000
1998	36,376,000	1,355,000
1999	41,144,000	1,743,000
2000	43,807,000	2,005,000

Agriculture, Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from *(a)* the National Assembly for Wales and *(b)* the Secretary of State for Wales regarding the devolution of full powers on agricultural affairs to the National Assembly for Wales; and if she will make a statement. [32223]

Mr. Morley: On 1 February we received a letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, following a discussion he had had with the Minister for Rural Affairs of the Welsh Assembly on the question of the devolution of further functions in respect of animal health. This is an aspect of devolution that is likely to be looked at by the independent foot and mouth disease inquiries. This is an important matter which will need to be carefully looked at in the light of any recommendations from these inquiries.

Seals and Dolphins

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what scientific evidence she has evaluated that the feeding habits of *(a)* grey seals, *(b)* common seals and *(c)* dolphins are likely to have a significant detrimental effect on the fish stocks in the waters around England and Wales; [32598]

(2) what studies she has evaluated on the average amount of fish consumed each year by an individual adult *(a)* grey seal, *(b)* common seal and *(c)* dolphin; [32595]

(3) what scientific evidence she has evaluated on whether culling seals would be an effective strategy for fisheries management in England and Wales; and what studies she has evaluated on the success of seal culling initiatives in other countries in increasing commercial fish catches. [32599]

Mr. Morley: 1985 diet data indicate that grey seals require about 5,500Kcals of energy per day, equivalent to about 7kg of cod or 4kg of sandeels (the difference being due to the oil content of the fish). Diet composition varies seasonally and by area, but is mostly sandeels, gadoids (predominantly cod) and flatfish. The same is true for common seals whose daily dietary requirement is less, at around 3,000 Kcals. However, most of the fish consumed are likely to have been juveniles and, given the high rates of natural mortality for these species, there is no guarantee that had they not been caught they would have survived to reach a size at which they would have been available to commercial fishermen.

Equivalent information is not available for dolphins.

The Natural Environment Research Council's Special Committee on Seals has advised that populations in England and Wales are still below the levels which preceded the outbreak of the phocine distemper virus in 1988 and that on that basis and the lack of clear scientific evidence seals are having a major impact on commercial fish stocks, there is no justification for a cull.

Livestock Movements

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to amend the 20-day standstill order scheme to apply to individual animals instead of holdings; and what assessment she has made of the efficacy of such a change on the practical management of livestock farms. [33374]

Mr. Morley: Veterinary advice is that for biosecurity reasons, the 20-day standstill rule should continue to apply to holdings rather that individual animals although a number of exceptions to this rule are being permitted under the livestock movement regime which was introduced on 11 February.

Any future changes will need to ensure the continued segregation of incoming animals from the rest of the livestock in order to maintain biosecurity. This situation will be kept under review.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what events *(a)* she is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the golden jubilee celebrations; and what events her Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the golden jubilee. [33253]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W.

Epidemics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what definition of epidemic *(a)* is used by her Department and *(b)* was used by its predecessor. [33714]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The Chief Veterinary Officer would usually consider that a pattern whereby over a period of time, the number of new cases confirmed each day substantially exceeded the previous day's total, would provide reasonable grounds to consider an outbreak to be an epidemic.

Brown Rats

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment has been made of the contribution of wild brown rats to the spread of foot and mouth disease; and what the result of such assessment was. [34067]

Mr. Morley: There has been no recent assessment of the contribution of wild brown rats to the spread of foot and mouth disease.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what proportion of farms affected by foot and mouth disease steps were taken to eradicate the brown rat population; and how many rat bodies were recovered as the result of treatments. [34068]

Mr. Morley: Steps were taken to eradicate brown rats on all infected premises, on dangerous contact premises and on slaughter on suspicion premises. Rat bodies were destroyed immediately and there are no records of the numbers involved.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [34208]

Mr. Morley: In the last four years there have been several reports of lost or stolen items ranging from personal groceries to small pieces of office equipment such as a dictaphone or calculator. The estimated value of these small items by year is as follows:

Year	*£*
1998	148.30
1999	107.25
2000	46.70
2001	[1]—

[1] None reported

Data from 8 June 2001 relate to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs while previous information covers Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Animal Health Strategy

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's animal health strategy is. [34108]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The recent Policy Commission report on the future of farming and food recommended that a comprehensive animal health strategy be devised and implemented. In addition, the on-going inquiries into the foot and mouth epidemic may affect our approach to animal health. The Government will consider the recommendations of these inquiries to determine whether the existing strategy, as described in the CVO's annual reports, should be amended.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the most recent results of the monitoring of the environmental implications of the foot and mouth burial site at Throckmorton airfield. [34484]

Mr. Morley: Monitoring of the site since May 2001 has demonstrated that degradation of carcases is under way. The great majority of the fluids from the degradation (the leachate) is abstracted and taken to a treatment facility for processing (Minworth water reclamation works). To reduce the risk of unacceptable migration of the small remaining amounts of leachate, a low permeability barrier has been constructed within the ground.

Intense monitoring of surface water, ground water, and ground gas is being carried out under the supervision of the Environment Agency. Migration through the ground of the remnant degradation by-products is proceeding at an environmentally acceptable rate. All results are currently within environmentally acceptable limits. The Department will continue to manage, monitor and carry out remedial measures on the site for as long as is necessary, all under the oversight of the Environment Agency.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department expects to contribute to farmers in North Yorkshire in foot and mouth compensation and clean up payments; and how many farms will receive payments. [34683]

Mr. Morley: The Department expects to pay farmers in North Yorkshire as a result of foot and mouth disease as follows:

Compensation for animals slaughtered—£124,460,216

Compensation for items seized and destroyed—£2,989,645

Cleansing and disinfecting costs paid to farmers—£16,101,929.

Payments are being made in relation to 765 premises in North Yorkshire.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the Government expect to contribute in grants to businesses in North Yorkshire other than farms to help them to deal with the consequences of foot and mouth. [34684]

Mr. Morley: The total foot and mouth business recovery fund allocation to North Yorkshire, both from Yorkshire Forward's existing resources and from those made specifically available by the Department, is some £5.5 million. This is all available to small non-agriculture businesses.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the value is of losses notified to her Department caused by the foot and mouth epidemic suffered by non-profit making organisations; [35671]

(2) if she will list all the non-profit making organisations who have contacted her to report financial losses caused by the foot and mouth epidemic. [35672]

Alun Michael: Various not-for-profit organisations have contacted the Department about the impact that foot and mouth disease and the measures taken to control it have had on their operations. These include the Youth Hostels Association (who estimate the impact on their income in 2001 to be £5 million), National Trust (£4.5 million), National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs (£0.5 million), the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (£0.25 million), the Holiday Fellowship, Farm Stay UK, the Wetlands and Wildfowl Trust (£0.6 million), the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (£0.25 million) and the Field Studies Council. Purely local organisations are not included; and, given the practical difficulty of checking all the correspondence received by the Department and its predecessors, the list may not be comprehensive.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many public footpaths and public open spaces are closed due to the foot and mouth epidemic; and if she will make a statement. [35668]

Alun Michael: Well over 99 per cent. of rights of way in England are open again. Remaining closures are where rights of way pass through the farmyards of premises still under veterinary restrictions, until re-stocking procedures are completed. Most of these restrictions will be lifted in the coming few weeks.

A small number of farms are not re-stocking, and will remain under veterinary restrictions into the summer. Any rights of way through those farmyards will remain closed, unless temporary diversions can be put in place. I am urging local authorities to publish clear information on their websites and through helplines and tourist information centres about where these few remaining closures are located.

I am not aware of any public open spaces still closed because of foot and mouth disease.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if the Countryside Agency will be permitted to claim costs of administration from the Countryside Access Recovery Fund; and if she will make a statement; [35673]

(2) what the criteria is for the selection and allocation of money to organisations making claims to the Countryside Access Recovery Fund; and if she will make a statement; [35669]

(3) if non-profit making organisations making claims to the Countryside Access Recovery Fund will have their administration costs paid by her Department; [35674]

(4) if the Countryside Agency has been allocated special funding for the administration of the Countryside Access Recovery Fund; and if she will make a statement. [35670]

Alun Michael: Grants from the Countryside Access Recovery Fund will be disbursed in accordance with the guidelines I published when I announced the fund on 5 February. These are set out as follows:

Guidelines for the Countryside Access Recovery Fund

(1) Grants from the fund will be available to support approved projects developed by not-for-profit organisations concerned with promoting countryside access and/or understanding of the English countryside and will be subject to the criteria set out as follows:

(2) The package of support for an individual organisation or project will vary from case to case. The fund will be used for direct support to expenditure by not-for-profit organisations on: (i) improvements and renovations or provision of new buildings or other infrastructure to help secure, expand or enhance the activity of the organisation related to the promotion of access to or understanding of the countryside; (ii) advice and consultancy to help them adjust and plan their recovery; and (iii) activities to promote access to, and understanding of the countryside.

(3) Before direct support is provided to an individual not-for-profit organisation they must satisfy the Countryside Agency that: (i) the financial position of the organisation has been substantially adversely affected by the incidence of FMD and/or the measures taken to control it; (ii) the organisation has taken all reasonable action to mitigate the impact (including claiming rate relief and tax, VAT and NIC deferral where eligible), and where appropriate has drawn on other sources of support (including contributions from the private sector, appeals to members etc.); (iii) the organisation would be financially viable apart from the effect of FMD, and expects to return to its normal level of income by 31 December 2002.

(4) Grants will normally cover a maximum of 60 per cent. of the project cost. Applications for grants must be received by 30 April 2002 and the grant will be payable on proof of expenditure.

(5) The scheme will be administered by the Countryside Agency. Potential applicants should contact the Countryside Agency (01242 533237) for a preliminary discussion.

Fuller guidance for prospective applicants will be available from the Countryside Agency. If eligible applications exceed available resources, regard will be had to how far applications meet the criteria and how effectively they would promote the objectives of the fund.

Organisations will not have their costs of applying to the fund paid for by the Department, but the overhead costs of projects may be included. My officials are in discussion with the Countryside Agency about the costs they may incur in administering the scheme on DEFRA's behalf.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Government are investigating the use of vaccination in response to a future foot and mouth outbreak. [35630]

Mr. Morley: Yes. Vaccination is a disease control option, whose use was investigated and kept under review during the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak. Like all other disease control options, we are currently considering its future use as part of the review of our contingency planning.

Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Secretary for Agriculture in the National Assembly for Wales on assistance for the English and Welsh shellfish industries in recovering from the impact of recent diarrhetic shellfish poisoning outbreaks. [34533]

Mr. Morley: None.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the economic, employment and environmental impact of recent outbreaks of diarrhetic shellfish poisoning in the UK. [34535]

Mr. Morley: None. The devolved Administrations have responsibility for making such assessments in their own areas. In England, we have, at the request of the Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee, made provision under the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 1994 for greater flexibility in the management of the fishery to help minimise the impact of any closures on local cockle fishermen.

Legislative Reform (Cruelty to Animals)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to propose reform and legislation relating to cruelty to animals, with particular reference to the tethering of horses. [34756]

Mr. Morley: Under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, it is an offence to cause a horse, ass or mule unnecessary suffering including as a result of the manner or conditions in which it was tethered.

The Department is currently reviewing the legislation relating to the welfare of captive and domestic animals, including that which affects the tethering of horses. More information about the review can be found at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/animalwelfare/letter.htm.

CAP Spending (Euros)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much per year has been spent in euros at current exchange rates in the EU as a whole on the common agricultural policy in each of the last five years. [34679]

Mr. Morley: The following table give the cost of the common agricultural policy throughout the EU at current exchange rates.

FEOGA years	*Cost of the CAP in euros (millions)*	*Cost of the CAP converted into pounds (millions) at £/euro = 0.6163*
1996	39,108	24,102
1997	40,675	25,068
1998	38,748	23,881
1999	39,541	24,369
2000	40,435	24,920

Water Sports

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when DEFRA-funded research into water-based sport and recreation was discussed by *(a)* the Environment Agency Board and *(b)* each regional fisheries, ecology and recreation advisory committee. [34963]

Alun Michael: An information paper was presented to regional fisheries, ecology and recreation advisory committees at the time the DETR research was commissioned (2001). The final report to DEFRA has only just been published and the summary report will be provided to Committees for the April 2002 round of meetings. The report may subsequently be referred to the agency board.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will request the Environment Agency to make a comparative study of arrangements for access to water for non-powered craft in other European countries; and if she will make a statement; [34957]

(2) what assessment she has made of the compatibility of angling and canoeing activities on waters where there is a statutory right of navigation; and if she will make a statement. [34956]

Alun Michael: In December 2001 we published the findings of research into the facts about water-based sport and recreation. The report, "Water-Based Sport and Recreation: the facts", considered the relations between users including anglers and canoeists. The research did not extend to examining the provision of access to water in other European countries.

DEFRA officials will shortly be meeting the other sponsors of the research (British Waterways, the Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency and Sport England) and other interested Government Departments. In the light of those decisions I shall consider what further work or action we may need to undertake in the light of the report's findings.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list new access agreements to moving water for canoeists in England and Wales reached in each of the last 10 years. [34958]

Alun Michael: Such information is not held by this Department or its agencies. However, the report, "Water-Based Sport and Recreation: the facts", found that there were formal access agreements on 812 km of major inland rivers that are not public navigations. Over two thirds of agreements are either for the angling closed season or periods of less than one month.

Organic Farming

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what progress she has made in increasing organic food production as a proportion of total UK food production; [34665]

(2) what plans she has to set a target for the proportion of farmland to be farmed organically. [34666]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* We have made a significant amount of money available to assist farmers to convert to organic production and will continue to do so. In April 1999 we introduced the Organic Farming Scheme offering greatly increased rates of aid compared to the previous scheme. Since then the area of land under organic management in England has risen from 0.6 per cent. to 1.7 per cent. of agricultural land. And we have budgeted expenditure of £140 million over the lifetime of the England Rural Development Programme, which should triple the area under organic management by 2006; however, the Government do not have any plans to set a specific target for proportion of land to be farmed organically. The development of the UK organic sector will be carried forward in the context of an organic food and farming action plan once the recommendations of the Policy Commission on the future of Farming and Food have been taken into account.

Genotype Errors

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 241W, on genotype errors, if she will list the different types of errors that were discovered upon the retesting of the samples. [34863]

Mr. Morley: The errors which occurred at LGC were as follows:

Problems with the bar code reader on the robot handling the samples resulted in manual interventions which in turn caused errors in the identification of samples;

A second robot was misaligned and this resulted in the incorrect transfer of samples, causing errors in the identification of samples;

There were two sets of problems with the main testing methodology used by LGC. The first caused delays but not errors. The second was a technical problem with the assay. The latter resulted in the false reading of three samples.

Fisheries

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 409, on fisheries, if she will make a statement on whether the effort distribution set out in the proposal for the cod and hake recovery programme will be directly linked to the quota distribution scheme as under the present Relative Stability keys. [35881]

Mr. Morley: In their proposals for measures for the recovery of cod and hake stocks, the Commission envisage that the allocation of permitted effort between member states should be based on relative fishing effort by each member state's fleet over the reference period 1998–2000. The Commission proposals effectively leave the distribution of the national effort allocation within each member state to national discretion.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress her Department has made in securing the effective UK management control over fishing effort within the *(a)* six and *(b)* 12-mile limit from the UK's coastline. [35264]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* A decision on the six and 12-mile limits will be taken as part of the CFP review in 2002. Previous discussions in the Council of Ministers have revealed a very strong consensus among member states in favour of renewing the present provisions; the commission is also known to support them. For my part, I shall be making every effort to get the limits made permanent.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many fishermen there were and what the value of fish caught by the fishing industry was in each relevant constituency in each year since 1990. [34869]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Data are not available by constituency. However estimates of the number of fishermen from 1994 by district and the value of fish landed by UK vessels over 10m in length for the major UK ports are published in UK Sea Fisheries Statistics available in the Library of the House.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 242W, if *(a)* the whole £6 million decommissioning scheme funds will be paid through her Department's account and *(b)* the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Objective 1 budget will be fully restored. [35293]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* It is in the public interest for grant payments under the fishing vessel decommissioning scheme to be co-financed by EU funds, and we will therefore draw on the available EU finance. Under the Community requirements the EU contribution for vessels which under the scheme are Cornish must be set against the total allocation of EU funds for the Cornish Objective 1 fisheries programme for the 2000–06 period. this arrangement was agreed by the Objective 1 programme monitoring committee for the decommissioning scheme.

This process does not reduce the availability of the £5 million funds which we have made available for fisheries for the period 2001–02 to 2003–04 under the Cornish programme. Only £1 million of this provision has so far been committed through projects approved by the Objective 1 Working Group. I welcome the work being undertaken by the fisheries task force to develop a strategy for future expenditure in Cornwall.

Bovine TB

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many herds are under movement restrictions imposed by her Department owing to overdue bovine tuberculosis tests; and if she will make a statement. [35533]

Mr. Morley: Around 1,000 herds are expected to be affected by the measures introduced on 31 January 2002 to re-impose movement restrictions on certain herds in annual testing parishes. These herds had an overdue six or 12 month test after the lifting of movement restrictions following a previous TB incident.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effects of the suspension of the bovine tuberculosis testing programme during the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease on the incubation and spread of TB; and if she will make a statement. [35534]

Mr. Morley: We will not be able to assess accurately the impact of the diversion of resources to deal with the foot and mouth disease emergency on the spread of TB until the backlog of tests has been cleared. As clearance of the backlog and routine testing is being prioritised according to veterinary risk assessment, the early results are from those premises considered most likely to be affected.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many press releases were issued about bovine TB by her Department and MAFF in each of the past 36 months. [35536]

Mr. Morley: The number of press releases issued about bovine TB per month in the past 36 months is as follows:

Year/month	*Number*
1999	
February	0
March	4
April	0
May	0
June	0
July	0
August	0
September	2
October	1
November	1
December	4
2000	
January	3
February	2
March	3
April	0
May	1
June	0
July	0
August	3
September	1
October	3
November	1
December	1
2001	
January	1
February	1
March	0
April	0
May	0
June	0
July	0
August	1
September	1
October	1
November	1
December	0
2002	
January	1

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to speed up the bovine tuberculosis testing programme since the lifting of foot and mouth disease control restrictions; and if she will calculate the number of personnel employed by her Department in executing the bovine TB testing programme. [35535]

Mr. Morley: Following the foot and mouth emergency we are re-directing resources to the research and control strategy to tackle TB in cattle including the testing programme. To date over 5,800 working hours have been recorded on the testing programme in December 2001. Some 90 per cent. of this comprised work by administrative staff and the remainder by veterinary professionals.

As at 1 January 2002 the complement of permanent veterinary staff of the State Veterinary Service tasked with undertaking, among other matters, the bovine TB testing programme was 218 veterinary officers and 24 divisional veterinary managers. In addition to permanent veterinary staff we are also employing temporary veterinary inspectors. Currently there are 340 in post carrying out similar functions to veterinary officers including work on testing as part of the TB control strategy. Primarily local veterinary inspectors from private practice undertake the actual testing on farms. There are nearly 4,000 approved who will spend a varying proportion of their time carrying out testing on our behalf.

Rural Affairs

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost was of the NURAD programme. [35277]

Mr. Morley: The NURAD budget presented in the Business Case approved by Treasury showed total costs of £41.9 million over the full seven years, with IT development costs of £29.3 million over the CSR period 1999–2000.

Total expenditure from April 1999 until programme suspension was £13.2 million of which £6.8 million is reusable assets and £6.4 million nugatory construction in progress expenditure that has been formally written off.

Parishes

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1018W, what use her Department will make of the list of parishes and sleeping parishes deposited in the Library; and what her estimate is of the cost to the Countryside Agency of preparing this list. [35274]

Alun Michael: The data in the list were collected as part of the Countryside Agency's regular Rural Services Survey and used to prepare the Rural White Paper headline indicator of community vibrancy. The list arose from the need to answer a parliamentary question from the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) on 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 320W on rural parishes. No other use of the list is intended. Preparation of the list in the format requested is estimated to have cost two days of staff time.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the parish councils of *(a)* Broad Town, *(b)* Chippenham Without, *(c)* Great Somerford, *(d)* Grittleton, *(e)* Kington St. Michael, *(f)* Lea and Cleverton, *(g)* Luckington, *(h)* Lydiard Millicent, *(i)* Minety, *(j)* Nettleton, *(k)* North Wraxall, *(l)* Norton and Foxley, *(m)* Oaksey, *(n)* Seagry, *(o)* Stanton St. Quintin, *(p)* Tockenham, and *(q)* Yatton Keynell in North Wiltshire were omitted from the list of parishes deposited in the Library. [35815]

Alun Michael: I understand that all of the above mentioned parish councils were sent questionnaires by the Countryside Agency as part of the Rural Services Survey. However, the completed questionnaire was not returned to the agency so it was not possible to complete an indicator score for them.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if, pursuant to her answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 320W, on rural parishes, she will define what parameters were used in defining parishes according to the four categories; and what factors led to the choice of these categories for parish activity; [35814]

(2) which criteria were used by her Department and the Countryside Agency to determine that *(a)* Braydon, *(b)* Hankerton and *(c)* Easton Grey parish councils are sleeping; [35867]

(3) which criteria were used by her Department and the Countryside Agency to determine that *(a)* St. Paul Malmesbury Without, *(b)* Kington Langley, *(c)* Brokenborough, *(d)* Bremhill and *(e)* Lydiard Tregoze parish councils are barely active. [35866]

Alun Michael: The former DETR asked the Countryside Agency to develop an indicator of community vibrancy for inclusion in the Rural White Paper with a view to measuring agreed change over time. It was decided to use measurable factors that could be collected as part of the Countryside Agency's Rural Services Survey but with the expectation that the indicator would develop over time. The information collected and used comprised of contested parish council elections, the presence of a village hall or similar local meeting place, the presence of a public house, and incidence of local traditions and events. Full details are set out in the Countryside Agency's State of the Countryside report 2001 where it was noted that there is a marked relationship between the indicator score and population size. The indicator was reported at the national level.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in her Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [35927]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA has received a total of three centrally reported cases of work-related stress among staff over the past three years. No compensation has been paid in any of these cases. Time of work totalled 245 days at a cost of £6,225.

It is not possible to quantify the cost of this strategy without detailed analysis of all work groups which is not practicable.

The Department has set a target to reduce the number of working days lost from work-related injury and ill-health by 30 per cent. by 2010. This mirrors the Revitalising Health and Safety Strategy target.

DEFRA was established in June 2001. Since then, the Management Board has established a sub-committee on stress which recommended a number of actions currently under way. A stress policy statement for the new Department will be issued this year.

Organophosphate Pesticides

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the international studies of the effect of exposure to organophosphate pesticides, with particular reference to their use in agriculture, which are under review in her Department; and if she will make a statement. [35403]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* It would not be possible to list all of the studies, both national and international, which have been submitted by companies to support applications for approvals or for reviews of organophosphate pesticides. The information is not collected in this format and it would be too resource intensive and disproportionate in cost to collate one. For example, 171 published and unpublished studies were evaluated for the review of the organophosphate, chlorpyrifos and a list of over 2,000 other studies which were available was also submitted.

At the conclusion of these reviews, as is normal practice, the Advisory Committee on Pesticides' evaluation documents will be made available and will include a list of the studies which have been evaluated. No evaluation documents have yet been published.

Cetacean Deaths

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* France, *(c)* Denmark and *(d)* other nations regarding the incidence of cetacean deaths in the English Channel and western approaches. [35477]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* In order to have an impact on the problem identified by the monitoring work, action will need to be taken—either by introducing mitigation measures or by other means—at EU level, as vessels from a number of member states are involved. Following consultation with the Scottish Executive, I have therefore written on 4 February to Commissioner Fischler to alert him to the need for action. I will be maintaining contact with the Commission and other member states to follow this up.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the extent of cetacean bycatch in the *(a)* fair-trawl, *(b)* industrial trawl and *(c)* other pelagic fishery sectors in each of the last three years. [35478]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Information on the full extent of cetacean casualties caused by fishing is not available.

The Department has commissioned sample monitoring of the incidental capture of cetaceans through a number of research contracts with the Sea Mammal Research Unit. This research has demonstrated that there is a cetacean bycatch problem in pelagic trawl fisheries. We are therefore pressing forward with trials of mitigation measures to reduce bycatch.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* recent work has been and *(b)* present work is being undertaken to discover the (i) extent and (ii) cause of cetacean deaths in recent (A) years and (B) months in the English Channel and western approaches. [35476]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The Department funds a co-ordinated investigation carried out by The Natural History Museum in co-operation with the Institute of Zoology and the Scottish Agricultural College which aims to find out and record the cause of death of stranded cetaceans, what species, sex and length they are, and when and where they strand.

In January 2002, 75 cetacean strandings were reported along the coast of Cornwall, Devon and Dorset, with another eight animals reported along the coast of Hampshire and West Sussex. Post-mortem examinations were conducted on 34 of these cetaceans, 27 of which were found to have been bycaught, four were live strandings, and one died of pneumonia. In the rest of England and Wales, a further 19 cetacean strandings were reported. The number of strandings is not unusual for this time of year, taking account of the recent adverse weather conditions. Figures are not currently available for the latter months of 2001.

During the period from 1 January to 31 March in Great Britain, 155 cetaceans were reported as stranding in 2001 (of which 82 were in Devon and Cornwall), 125 in 2000 (of which 53 animals were found in Devon and Cornwall), 114 in 1999 and 113 animals were reported in 1998.

For Devon and Cornwall, from January 1991 to December 2001 post-mortem examinations were carried out on 186 dolphins, 75 per cent. of these were diagnosed as having died of bycatch, and 79 harbour porpoises, 48 per cent. of which were bycaught.

Mackerel Box Regulations

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with fishing nations which have industrial trawler companies with regard to the *(a)* appropriate enforcement of mackerel box regulations and *(b)* level of cetacean by-catch. [35479]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* There have been no recent discussions with other fishing nations about the enforcement of mackerel box regulations. As in previous years the Royal Navy's Fishery Protection Squadron has been tasked by the Department to enforce the EC rules applicable to the mackerel box whether or not vessels are engaged in human consumption or other fisheries. There are no EC rules specifying levels of cetacean bycatch.

Farm Co-operatives

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farm co-operatives there were in each constituency in each year since 1990. [34871]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Information on the number of farm co-operatives in each constituency is not available.

Woodland

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much woodland there was in *(a)* absolute and *(b)* percentage terms in each constituency in each year since 1990. [34870]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* This information is not currently available in the format requested. However, the Forestry Commission carries out woodland surveys by county every 10–15 years. The most recent surveys were conducted between 1979–1982 and 1995–99, and the table shows the findings from each survey.

	Inventory of Woodland and Trees 1995–99			*Woodland Census 1979–1982*		
Region/county	*Land area*	*Woodland area (ha)*	*Woodland cover (%)*	*Land area*	*Woodland area (ha)*	*Woodland cover (%)*
Greater London	157.916	6,204	3.9	157,946	6,032	3.8
South-east						
Berkshire	125,879	18,308	14.5	125,891	17,018	13.5
Buckinghamshire	187,673	17,573	9.4	188,285	15,618	8.3
East Sussex	179,541	29,924	16.7	179,519	28,044	15.6
Hampshire	377,872	66,939	17.7	377,685	62,049	16.4
Isle of Wight	38,014	4,549	12.0	38,097	3,695	9.7
Kent	373,499	39,487	10.6	373,063	42,664	11.4
Oxfordshire	260,595	18,235	7.0	260,793	15,369	5.9
Surrey	167,713	37,564	22.4	167,924	31,531	18.8
West Sussex	198,808	37,507	18.9	198,939	34,524	17.4
Region	1,909,594	279,084	14.1	1,910,196	250,512	13.1

	Inventory of Woodland and Trees 1995–99			Woodland Census 1979–1982		
Region/county	*Land area*	*Woodland area (ha)*	*Woodland cover (%)*	*Land area*	*Woodland area (ha)*	*Woodland cover (%)*
South-west						
Avon	133,244	8,364	6.3	134,605	6,862	5.1
Cornwall	356,466	26,869	7.5	356,422	18,301	5.1
Devon	670,961	66,660	9.9	671,087	53,813	8.0
Dorset	265,274	28,759	10.8	265,380	25,062	9.4
Gloucestershire	265,327	29,752	11.2	264,263	26,372	10.0
Somerset	345,207	24,291	7.0	345,043	19,300	5.6
Wiltshire	347,605	27,325	7.9	348,070	24,839	7.1
Region	2,384,084	212,021	8.9	2,384,870	174,549	7.3
West midlands						
Hereford and Worcester	392,346	35,668	9.1	392,648	28,757	7.3
Shropshire	348,767	29,482	8.5	349,014	25,275	7.2
Staffordshire	271,545	21,175	7.8	271,616	16,936	6.2
Warwickshire	197,854	9,390	4.7	198,053	6,883	3.5
West midlands	89,874	2,759	3.1	89,942	1,827	2.0
Region	1,300,386	98,474	7.6	1,301,273	79,678	6.1
East						
Bedfordshire	123,557	7,655	6.2	123,467	6,184	5.0
Cambridgeshire	339,963	12,325	3.6	340,901	6,612	1.9
Essex	367,344	19,456	5.3	367,188	14,996	4.1
Hertfordshire	163,928	15,503	9.5	163,418	12,370	7.6
Norfolk	537,234	52,739	9.8	536,823	42,697	8.0
Suffolk	379,839	31,435	8.3	379,667	28,211	7.4
Region	1,911,865	139,112	7.3	1,911,464	111,070	5.8
East midlands						
Derbyshire	262,858	19,512	7.4	263,096	13,299	5.1
Leicestershire	255,087	9,660	3.8	255,293	7,741	3.0
Lincolnshire	592,091	18,903	3.2	591,484	18,774	3.2
Northamptonshire	236,697	14,498	6.1	236,734	11,909	5.0
Nottinghamshire	215,980	17,298	8.0	216,365	15,058	7.0
Region	1,562,713	79,871	5.1	1,562,972	66,781	4.3
Yorkshire and the Humber						
Humberside	350,806	9,080	2.6	351,226	9,617	2.7
North Yorkshire	839,949	60,843	7.3	830,869	55,852	6.7
South Yorkshire	155,941	11,551	7.4	156,049	10,398	6.7
West Yorkshire	203,417	10,607	5.2	203,912	9,350	4.6
Region	1,541,113	92,081	6.0	1,542,056	85,217	5.5
North-east						
Cleveland	59,652	3,790	6.4	58,307	3,361	5.8
Durham	242,907	15,540	6.4	243,591	13,934	5.7
Northumberland	502,594	80,645	16.0	503,166	75,770	15.1
Tune and Wear	54,033	2,892	5.4	54,005	1,690	3.1
Region	859,186	102,867	12.0	859,069	94,755	11.0
North-west						
Cheshire	233,107	10,337	4.4	232,846	8,842	3.8
Cumbria	682,333	64,582	9.5	681,015	54,450	8.0
Greater Manchester	128,584	4,696	3.7	128,674	2,649	2.1
Lancashire	306,978	14,078	4.6	306,347	11,477	3.7
Merseyside	65,516	2,478	3.8	65,202	1,677	2.6
Region	1,416,518	96,171	6.8	1,414,084	79,095	5.6
England	13,043,370	1,096,885	8.4	13,043,927	947,688	7.3

Note:

NIWT land area, including inland water, based on digital boundaries used in the 1991 Census of Population

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the names of staff who have been seconded to her Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and civil service grades within her Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35838]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Due to confidentiality I am not able to release the names of the individuals that have been seconded to the Department. Two members of staff have been seconded from the private sector, one from July to December 1999, the other from September 2001 to May 2002. Both were seconded from the BBC at approximately grade seven level and paid by the BBC.

Energy Efficiency

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to encourage energy efficiency in commercial buildings. [33813]

Mr. Meacher: We have set up the Carbon Trust to promote business and public sector energy efficiency and the take-up of low carbon technology. We will be consulting on a CHP strategy shortly to promote this highly energy efficient technology. The climate change levy, and its associated climate change agreements, are also an important spur to business energy efficiency. But there remains a great unrealised potential for energy efficiency and the Department will be considering strategies to further enhance its role in the future.

BSE

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 905W, whether she can update the House on the measures her Department has taken to trace the offspring of BSE cases. [37486]

Mr. Morley: As a result of further checks, it has now become clear that two more offspring of BSE cases have been sold for human consumption, one in December and one in January. Some meat from the latter has been prevented from going into the food chain. These cases are being investigated. Measures are being taken to tighten up procedure and we are considering taking legal action.

Passports thought to have been held by officials outside animal health divisional offices were in fact returned to owners, enabling the animals to be sold despite the fact restriction notices were properly served on the owners, informing them the animals were not to be sold for human consumption. Consumer protection is provided by the over-30-month rule, the removal of specified risk material and the ban on the feeding of mammalian meat and bone meal to all farm livestock. These measures were applied in these cases.

Animal Welfare

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for the future of the live animal export trade; and what plans she has for the banning of this trade. [32602]

Mr. Morley: The Government have been consistent in their view that a trade in meat is preferable to the long distance transport of animals for slaughter. It is a matter that will be considered when the European Commission produces its proposals to update and improve the current EU rules on animal welfare during transport. The Government have no powers to introduce a ban on this trade. Judgments by the European Court of Justice have made it quite clear that such a ban would be illegal.

Pornography

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with newspaper and journal wholesalers who insist on individual newsagents taking pornography with their newspaper orders. [32844]

Mr. Morley: None. This is not a matter for this Department.

Horse Passports

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how she intends to implement Commission Decision 2000/68 on horse passports and to ensure that the new system meets the needs of the horse industry. [37280]

Alun Michael: We have carefully considered the responses to the consultation exercise carried out on the implementation of Commission Decision 2000/68. Taking account of these views and the need to comply with the terms of the Decision the Government have decided that by 31 December 2003 all horses and ponies must have passports. The Government also intend to introduce a unique identification number for all horses and ponies.

Owners and keepers of horses and ponies which are not currently registered will be required to register these animals with one of the appropriate approved equine organisations. The owners of these animals and the owners of registered horses and ponies which currently do not have passports, will be required to obtain passports from the approved organisations. We will require that owners of horses and ponies which currently have passports be issued with the new extended passport containing details of veterinary medicines administered.

Discussions are now taking place with industry organisations about detailed implementation arrangements.

The Government also consider that it is vital to establish a central database of basic information on horses which could be used for disease control and other purposes and will establish the necessary arrangements following discussion with the horse industry in order to achieve this end with a minimum of bureaucracy and at minimum costs.

CAP

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how CAP funding is spent in the United Kingdom broken down by *(a)* types of schemes and *(b)* nations. [31254]

Mr. Morley *[pursuant to his reply, 5 February 2002, c. 896W]:* My answer referred to a table entitled

"Subsidies Paid Directly to Farmers in 2001". The last two rows of the table showed values for total other subsidies and total subsidies. Unfortunately, these totals included some double counting. A new table providing the correct information is annexed. The rest of the answer remains unchanged.

Subsidies paid directly to farmers in 2001

£ million

	England	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*UK*
Subsidies on product					
Crop subsidies					
Arable area payments on:					
Wheat	330	2	16	1	349
Barley	180	5	68	7	259
Other cereal crops	22	1	5	[1]—	27
Oilseed rape	94	[1]—	9	[1]—	103
Linseed	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10
Peas and beans-stockfeed and human consumption	67	[1]—	1	[2]—	68
Other crops	7	1	[1]—	[1]—	8
Other crop subsidies	3	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	3
Livestock subsidies:					
Beef special premium	126	24	46	46	242
Suckler cow premium	80	25	61	45	211
Slaughter premium	49	7	13	15	84
Extensification payment scheme	50	15	34	27	126
Over-30-months scheme	91	17	23	26	157
Beef national envelope	11	3	8	5	26
Sheep annual premium	74	53	42	13	182
FMD light lambs	1	2	2	[2]—	5
Other subsidies					
Dairy agrimonetary compensation	56	8	6	9	79
Total subsidies on products	1,249	162	334	194	1,940
Other subsidies					
Set-aside	162	1	20	1	184
Other animal disease compensation	11	1	[1]—	16	29
Less favoured areas support schemes	42	42	61	18	164
Agri-environment schemes:	145	34	34	7	220
Countryside Stewardship	49	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	49
Countryside Premium (Scotland)	[2]—	[2]—	9	[2]—	9
Tir Cymen and Tir Gofal	[2]—	13	[2]—	[2]—	13
Organic Farming	27	3	5	[1]—	35
Environmentally Sensitive Areas	48	7	10	5	71
Nitrate Sensitive Areas	3	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	3
Woodland Schemes	8	[1]—	5	2	14
SSSI[3]	9	2	5	[2]—	16
Other	2	8	[1]—	[1]—	10
Total other subsidies	360	79	115	43	596
Total subsidies	1,609	242	449	237	2,536

[1] Negligible, less than 0.5

[2] Not applicable

[3] Payments for sites of special scientific interest are not part of CAP

WALES

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34396]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This information is not readily available.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34168]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The notional cost of the accountancy services provided to the Wales Office by the National Assembly for Wales was £25,000 in 2000–01 and £19,000 in 1999–2000 (for the period July to March). The figure for 2001–02 is not yet available and figures are not available for the former Welsh Office.

National Assembly

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the Welsh Assembly Government regarding the further devolution of powers to the National Assembly for Wales; and if he will make a statement. [32220]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Minister and other Assembly Ministers regularly to discuss matters of common interest, including the suggestion that animal health powers should be transferred to the Assembly.

Devolved Functions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues concerning devolving more functions to the National Assembly for Wales. [35711]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with my colleagues about a variety of issues, including representations made to me by the National Assembly for Wales.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his fellow Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36286]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

Enron

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings Wales Office Ministers have had since 1997 with Enron representatives; and on what dates. [34611]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None since the establishment of the Wales Office in July 1999.

HEALTH

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to amend the Department of Health departmental expenditure limit and administration costs limit for 2001–02. [37368]

Mr. Milburn: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department of Health, Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £231,363,000 from £50,573,402,000 to £50,804,765,000. This includes a change in the Administration Cost Limit which will decrease by £3,584,000 from £321,935,000 to £318,351,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table.

£000

	Resources	*Capital*
Change	538,562	–307,199
New DEL	48,872,673	1,932,092
Of which voted	49,364,233	483,499
Non-voted	–491,560	1,448,593

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the take up of end-year flexibility £120,000,000 for health authority allocations as set out in Table 6 of the Public Expenditure 2000–01 Provisional Outturn White Paper Cm 5243 published in July 2001. A claim of £30,000,000 on the Reserve for variant CJD compensation. An additional £6,267.000 from HM Treasury as a result of technical adjustments following changes in accounting arrangements for some PFI schemes. A net transfer to the National Assembly of Wales of £2,493,000, £3,683,000 for out-of-area treatment costs, dental service increment for teaching, cross border flows and high security psychiatric services, partially offset by a transfer of £1,190,000 for regional re-costing and post graduate education. Transfers from Northern Ireland totalling £2,030,000, £68,000 for post graduate training, £1,941,000 for out of area treatment costs and £21,000 (of which £7,000 administration costs) for contributions to committees and non-departmental public bodies. Transfer to the Home Office of £1,569,000, £2,767,000 for drug action teams and match funded social care projects, offset by £1,098,000 for costs arising from the Victoria Climbie Inquiry and £100,000 for medium secure units. A net transfer to the Department for Education and Skills of £613,000, comprising of £750,000 for the National Institute of Psychiatry and £100,000 for a learning and development website package, offset by a transfer of £237,000 for the costs of Protection of Children Act tribunal and Care Standards tribunal. Transfer to the Lord Chancellors Department of £164,000, (of which £123,000 administration costs) for Care Standards tribunals and family health services appeals authority recruitment. A transfer to the Department for Work and Pensions of £1,095,000 for the road traffic accidents work of the compensation recovery unit. A transfer from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions of £80,000,000, for building care capacity offset by £1,000,000, for the Rough Sleepers Unit.

The administration cost limit has decreased by £3,584,000 from £321,935,000 to £318,351,000. In addition to the changes detailed above there is an increase of £2,290,000, mainly for education and training and the modernisation agency, offset by £5,758,000, for capitalised in house software developments and other IT software and hardware.The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers and the planned total of public claim on the reserve, and will not therefore add to expenditure.

Consultants

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column 111W, what restrictions on doctors within the non-consultant grades with potential to become consultants he regards as unnecessary; when he plans to remove these restrictions; and if he will make a statement. [16219]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* In order to be appointed to a consultant post in the national health service, a doctor has to have his or her name included on the specialist register. This register lists the names of those doctors who hold the United Kingdom Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST) or, for doctors trained overseas, enter the UK already possessing qualifications considered by the specialist training authority of the medical royal colleges (STA) to be equivalent to a CCST. There is no provision, in law, for doctors with specialist medical training, but no formal qualification, to enter the register. Similarly, there is no provision for doctors wishing to 'top-up' their specialist training to the required standard by undertaking further training in the UK then to enter the specialist register.

We wish to amend these provisions to provide a route to the specialist register through an 'equivalence of training' provision. A doctor would be assessed by the STA to evaluate whether the sum of his or her training and qualifications, wherever obtained, is equivalent to a CCST in his or her specialty in the UK. This will provide a direct, assessed route to the specialist register while ensuring that standards do not slip and that patient safety is not compromised.

Our aim, subject to consultation and parliamentary approval, is to have the amended legislation in place by summer 2002.

Approved Hospital Providers (EU)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision he has made in relation to liability of approved hospital providers in the EU. [16853]

Mr. Hutton: An overseas provider treating a national health service patient pursuant to a contract with an NHS commissioning body will clearly be potentially liable to the patient for any medical negligence. However, although the law is not fully developed in this area, English courts may decide that the NHS body commissioning that treatment was also potentially liable. Commissioners therefore need to seek appropriate indemnities against any claims from foreign providers.

Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses have been *(a)* disciplined and *(b)* sacked for (i) drug-taking offences and (ii) stealing NHS medical drugs in each year since 1997. [24300]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Data for the discipline or sacking of nurses involved with drug-taking offences or stealing of national health service medical NHS drugs are not collected centrally but may be held at a local level by employers.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times agency staff were used to fulfil shifts in acute hospitals by *(a)* authority area and *(b)* trust presented (i) numerically and (ii) as a proportion of all nurse shifts for each of the last three years for which figures are available. [16396]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, information from the Audit Commissioning report 2001 states that on a typical day about 20,000 bank and agency staff work in national health service trusts, covering 10 per cent. of shifts.

Solvent Abuse

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths attributed to solvent abuse there have been in each year since 1995. [25448]

Ms Blears: Statistics collected by St. George's Medical School show that there were 65 deaths in 1995; 79 in deaths in 1997; 70 deaths in 1998; and 73 deaths in 1999 in the United Kingdom associated with volatile substance abuse (VSA). Deaths in 1999 were less than half the number recorded at their peak in 1990. We take any deaths associated with VSA very seriously and are committed to continuing action to address this problem.

It is particularly important that young people should know about the dangers of abusing volatile substances. We are supporting a programme that will enable general practitioners and other health care professionals to assist teachers in communicating health messages about the dangers of drugs and other solvents. Other measures to address this issue include a campaign to inform retailers about the risks of volatile substance abuse, and their responsibilities under the law. The Department is also working with voluntary organisations to develop training packages for professionals working with young people at risk of abusing volatile substances.

Waiting Lists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts have been subject to waiting list spot checks since the publication of the National Audit Office report into irregularities in waiting lists. [27254]

Mr. Hutton: We are in active discussion with the Audit Commission on the detailed implementation of spot checks on national health service trusts to ensure that waiting list data are independently verified.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the advertising campaigns which he and his predecessors have commissioned since May 1997, showing for each *(a)* its objectives, *(b)* its beginning and end dates, *(c)* the media used, *(d)* the criteria adopted to judge its effectiveness, *(e)* the extent to which the effectiveness criteria were met, *(f)* agency involvement and *(g)* its cost; [29665]

(2) if he will list the advertising campaigns commissioned by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the national health service since May 1997, showing for each (i) its objectives, (ii) its beginning and end dates, (iii) the media used, (iv) the criteria adopted to judge its effectiveness, (v) the extent to which effectiveness criteria were met, (vi) any agency involvement and (vii) its cost. [28235]

Ms Blears: Major advertising campaigns commissioned by the Department's communications directorate since May 1997 are shown in the table.

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Antibiotics	—	—	0.17	—	0.44
Blood donation	0.60	1.70	[2]0.22	—	—
CALM	—	—	—	—	0.05
Children's services	—	—	—	0.60	0.17
Drugs	—	—	0.34	—	—
Flu	—	—	—	2.00	1.45
Mind out	—	—	—	—	0.13
National health service including nurse recruitment	1.30	4.90	4.21	4.90	4.41
NHS Direct	0.12	0.78	1.20	1.15	1.38
Organ donation	—	0.77	0.47	0.38	0.20
Prescription fraud	—	0.38	—	0.18	—
Sexual health	—	—	—	—	0.2
Sexwise/teenage pregnancy	—	—	0.39	1.5	2.0
Social worker recruitment	—	—	—	—	1.0
Smoking	—	—	[3]6.18	8.97	7.24
Walk-in centres	—	—	—	0.02	—
Winter	—	—	1.07	2.35	0.2
Working family tax credit	—	—	—	—	0.05

[1] Planned (to be updated)

[2] The Department's spend on blood donation advertising reduced in 1999–2000 because most of this activity was funded directly by the National Blood Authority, who took over full responsibility for this expenditure on 1 April 2000.

[3] Prior to 1999–2000 advertising on smoking was undertaken by the Health Education Authority (HEA).

Information about NHS expenditure is collected centrally and published annually in the Health and Personal Social Statistics for England.

Lymington Hospital

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients are waiting for *(a)* hearing tests and *(b)* other audiology treatment at the Lymington hospital; [27746]

(2) how many patients have been waiting for *(a)* less than one year, *(b)* more than one year and *(c)* more than two years for a hearing test at the Lymington hospital at the latest available date; [27747]

(3) what the waiting time is for a hearing test at the Lymington hospital. [27748]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The data requested are not collected centrally.

Departmental Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33211]

Ms Blears: Interchange is a key component of the reform agenda. The Modernising Government White Paper committed us to increasing interchange, in particular by bringing in more people on secondment and sending more of our people out. Secondments and attachments are part of the interchange initiative, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the civil service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: voluntary, education, health, public and private.

Centrally held records in the Department show that there have been no secondments between the Department and the companies asked about.

NHS Dentistry (Birkenhead)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in the Birkenhead constituency are taking national health service patients; and how many were taking patients five years ago. [32851]

Ms Blears: At present in Birkenhead (excluding Woodchurch and Upton wards), there are 15 practices taking national health service patients (13 general dental surgeons (GDS) and two orthodontic specialists) with a total of 30 dentists working from these practices. Five years ago, for the same area, there were 15 practices (14 GDS and one orthodontic specialist).

Hospital Television Viewing

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the provision of pay-to-view television for patients in *(a)* the James Paget hospital in Gorlston, Norfolk and *(b)* other NHS hospitals; and whether NHS hospitals are permitted to cease provision of free-to-air television. [33595]

Ms Blears: National Health Service Estates has worked with staff in trusts, and potential suppliers to set up a national licensing system that allows suppliers, who have demonstrated that they have the capacity to install and effectively manage a bedside communication and entertainment system, to provide the service in NHS hospitals.

The suppliers are responsible for all aspects of installation, managing and running the service and for any associated costs. They make a charge to the patient for use of the services provided. The trust does not bear any of the cost of either the installation or running of the service.

Patients at the James Paget hospital will have the choice of pay-to-view television at their bedside or free television viewing in the hospital day rooms. NHS Estates specified to trusts and suppliers, at the outset, that access to the free televisions in communal rooms and payphone telephones would not cease to exist as a result of the introduction of the bedside services. These will remain an alternative for patients who do not wish to use bedside services.

Professor James Malone-Lee

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what contact there has been between his Department and Professor James Malone-Lee since 1 January; [33496]

(2) pursuant to the oral statement of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 880W, what involvement Professor Malone-Lee had in the drafting of the letter from the Whittington hospital read out by the Prime Minister. [33630]

Mr. Hutton: Department of Health officials routinely discuss management issues with staff at national health service trusts. However, there was no contact with Professor James Malone-Lee, the medical director of the Whittington hospital, in order to discuss the *Evening Standard* letter. The letter that appeared in the *Evening Standard*, read out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 880, is the property of the Whittington hospital NHS trust.

Whittington Hospital

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions there were between Government press officers and trust managers and medical directors of the Whittington hospital between 16 and 23 January; and whether the Medical Director's statement was *(a)* shown to, *(b)* amended by and *(c)* discussed with Government press officers. [31140]

Mr. Hutton: Departmental officials routinely discuss management issues with staff at national health service trusts. These discussions can from time to time include issues that have been reported in the news media. Between 16 and 23 January, department of health press officers, as well as other officials, discussed with the trust's chief executive, but not its medical director, several stories that had appeared about the Whittington hospital in the *Evening Standard*. When it became clear that the staff at the Whittington had responded to these stories by writing to that newspaper, the Department's press office asked for a copy of their letter. At no time was the Department's press office's approval of, or assistance with, that letter either sought or offered; and nor was there any discussion between Departmental officials and the medical director of the Whittington Hospital NHS Trust about any of his public statements about media reporting of the trust.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will respond to the question from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) of 24 January Ref 31140 regarding the Whittington hospital. [35543]

Mr. Hutton: I refer to the hon. Member to my previous answer.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in fair trade fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33541]

Ms Blears: The Department have yet to receive an invitation to this event, whether as a group of delegates or as exhibitors.

Generally, national health service trusts are approached directly by the organisations that run these ventures and it is for them to decide whether to attend.

The Department for International Development is providing £120,000 to the Fair Trade Foundation over three years (2001–03) in support of its efforts to target new groups through the annual Fairtrade Fortnight campaigns. My hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State for International Development will be attending the launch of this year's campaign on 4 March 2002.

It Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33677]

Ms Blears: The Department's total information technology spend for financial years 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1998–1999	23.5
1999–2000	23.0
2000–01	22.9

There is no readily accessible information for financial year 1997–98 and material for 2001–02 is not yet available.

Information on the other aspects of the question is not available in an easily accessible form and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Consultancy Services

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33850]

Ms Blears: The Department does not centrally hold a record of individual contracts. However our financial records show the following total payments made by the Department and its agencies to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services by fiscal year since April 1997:

£

	Fiscal year				
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
(a) PWC Consulting	143,711	196,890	244,670	1,052,892	308,364
(b) Ernst and Young	26,230	18,234	58,603	71,200	66,677
(c) Deloitte and Touche	72,350	45,445	11,084	60,614	342,730
(d) KPMG	331,712	166,943	546,453	267,981	1,202,720
(e) Andersen	51,547	77,226	70,000	71,774	70,000

Epsom Riding for the Disabled Association

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects NHS Estates to put forward proposed terms to the Epsom Riding for the Disabled Association for the acquisition of the site adjoining St. Ebba's Hospital. [32652]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The district valuer has been instructed to act on behalf of National Health Service Estates/the Secretary of State for Health in this matter. Negotiations with the Epsom Riding for the Disabled Association are on-going and it is understood that the Epsom Riding for the Disabled Association are currently considering an offer which has been made to them.

Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the information about the number of people living within 20 minutes drive prepared by the DTLR and presented to the management team of the Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust as part of its strategic review in 2000–01. [33707]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The management team of Epsom and St. Helier national health service trust are unaware of any submissions by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in response to the strategy document "Investing in Excellence".

The management consultancy SECTA, however, was commissioned by Epsom and St. Helier NHS trust to conduct some further work on site option development. Although a report was never produced a presentation was made on the work in progress to the trust at an executive team awayday in February 2001. Details of the presentation have been placed in the Library.

Probiotics

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of prescription of probiotics by the NHS was in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [33967]

Ms Blears: Information is not collected centrally on which, if any, of the products, which have been prescribed, contain or are composed of probiotics.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department plans to encourage the prescribing of probiotics; and if he will make as statement. [33966]

Ms Blears: We have no plans to do so.

Health Authority Expenditure (Dorset and Somerset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the expenditure by weighted head by health authorities and primary care trusts is different in Dorset health authority from that in Somerset health authority; and if he will make a statement. [32560]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Expenditure per weighted head cannot be reliably compared between different health authorities and primary care trusts. Somerset health authority had no primary care trusts in 2000–01 and Dorset health authority had four primary care trusts.

In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure per head. These include: the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission health care or fund training on behalf of other health bodies; asset revaluations in national health service trusts being funded through health authorities; and some double counting of expenditure between health authorities and primary care trusts within the health authority area.

In the case of Dorset and Somerset health authorities, all the above factors occur which distort the expenditure per weighted head of population.

Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in a considerable element of double counting in Dorset where the health authority acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by the primary care trusts. The effect of this double counting cannot be identified exactly from the accounts.

"The Bulletin"

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the leaflet "The Bulletin" issued to general practitioners has cost since its inception. [34140]

Mr. Hutton: Currently the GP Bulletin is circulated to all general practitioners in England. Around 50 per cent. of GPs receive "The Bulletin" electronically, the remainder receive it by hard copy distribution.

Since its inception the Department has issued seven editions of "The Bulletin", each edition costing around £43,768 (value added tax inclusive). The cost will vary slightly with size.

The Department is conscious of the cost of hard copy distribution. Future editions will be circulated electronically, reducing the cost of distribution approximately to £21,000 (VAT inclusive).

Complaints Procedure

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a right of appeal for a patient against a decision made by an internal NHS inquiry following a complaint against a medical practitioner; and if he will make a statement. [34142]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service complaints procedure already contains an independent review element if a complainant is not happy with the initial response to their complaint at local resolution. A complainant also has the option of complaining to the health service ombudsman if they are not happy with the response of the NHS to their complaint.

District Nurses

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district nurses there are per head of population in each health authority in the north-west. [34075]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): District nurses employed within health authority areas within the north-west regional office area and per 100,000 population as at 30 September 2001

	Whole-time equivalents	*Per 100,000 population*	*Headcount*	*Per 100,000 population*
North-west total	1,610	20	1,960	30
QC1 South Lancashire HA	80	20	90	30
QC2 Liverpool HA	120	30	150	30
QC3 Manchester HA	120	30	140	30
QC4 Morecambe Bay HA	70	20	80	30
QC5 St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	50	10	50	10
QC6 Salford and Trafford HA	100	20	120	30
QC7 Sefton HA	50	20	70	20
QC8 Stockport HA	110	40	150	50
QC9 West Pennine HA	110	20	130	30
QCT Bury and Rochdale HA	110	30	140	30
QCV North Cheshire HA	130	40	150	50
QCW South Cheshire HA	130	20	180	30
QCX East Lancashire HA	150	30	190	40
QCY North West Lancashire HA	90	20	100	20
QDA Wigan and Bolton HA	140	20	160	30
QDC Wirral HA	50	20	60	20

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
3. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.

Sources:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census
Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on trends in waiting times in accident and emergency units since 1997. [34861]

Ms Blears: We are committed to reducing waiting times in accident and emergency departments. The NHS Plan set the target to reduce the maximum wait in accident and emergency from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours by 2004.

Over 12-hour trolley waits have been reduced by over 50 per cent. since 1999 and over 24-hour waits have been virtually eliminated. The NHS is on track to meet the four-hour target, currently 77 per cent. of all accident and emergency attenders spend four hours or less in accident and emergency.

Negligence Claims

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been allocated to meet medical negligence claims in 2002–03. [35239]

Ms Blears: The budget allocated for clinical negligence for 2002–03 is £403.276 million.

This can be found in the Health Authorities Revenue Resource Limits Exposition book, which was published in December 2001, copies of which are available in the Library.

Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for a first appointment with a consultant at Broomfield hospital, Chelmsford, Essex in June *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [34851]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested for numbers of patients waiting 13 weeks or more for a first appointment for Mid Essex Hospital Services national health service trust is shown in the table.

Separate figures for Broomfield hospital are unavailable.

Total number of patients waiting more than 13 weeks for an out-patients appointment

Month	*Number*
June 1999	3,284
June 2000	3,212
June 2001	2,146

Source: QM08 quarterly return waiting times collection.

Patient Deaths (Hospital Transfers)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients died *(a)* in transfer between hospitals and *(b)* in NHS transport to hospital in the last year for which information is available, broken down by (i) the health authority responsible for the transport involved, (ii) the length of journey by distance, (iii) the condition for which treatment was to be provided and (iv) the type of transport involved. [34764]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

NHS Direct Nurse Advisers

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* nature and *(b)* length is of the specialist training for NHS Direct nurse advisers on (i) self-harm and (ii) suicide. [35497]

Ms Blears: *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* All NHS direct nurse advisers are qualified nurses with several years of front-line experience. They receive a supplementary three-day intensive programme of training to develop their competence in the identification of mental health problems over the telephone which includes assessment of risk of self-harm or suicide. In addition, they are given on-site supervision by a senior mental health nurse; they utilise an interactive CD Rom based training package designed to enhance their general knowledge and understanding of mental health issues, and they attend regular refresher courses.

Community Hospitals (Kent)

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of outpatients from the Kent and Canterbury hospital are being treated in community hospitals; [35400]

(2) what proportion of outpatients from the East Kent health authority area are being treated at the Faversham Cottage hospital; [35398]

(3)what proportion of outpatients in the East Kent health authority area are being treated in community hospitals. [35399]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Eastbourne District General Hospital

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled at the Eastbourne District General Hospital in each of the last 60 months for which figures are available. [36243]

Ms Blears: Data on cancelled operations were not collected by National Health Service Trust prior to this year (2001–02). The information is available only for quarters and the figures for Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust are shown in the table.

Last minute cancelled operations for non clinical reasons at Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trusts—2001–02 Quarter 1 and 2

Quarter	*Last minute cancellations for non clinical reasons*
1	63
2	85

Source:
D of H forms—QMNG

Data on cancelled operations were previously provided at health authority level. That information is available in the Library.

Commission for Health Improvement

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the 2000–01 annual report of the Commission for Health Improvement will be published. [37197]

Ms Hutton: The combined annual report and accounts "Holding a mirror up to ourselves" is being published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire which was acknowledged on 7 December, reference P0000821. [36040]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 13 February.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 3 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. J Titterington; [14369]

(2) further to his holding reply, if he will explain the reason for his delay in replying to the letter to him dated 3 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. J. Titterington. [16245]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent to my right hon. Friend's letter of 3 October regarding his constituent Mr. Titterington on 19 November. I apologise for the delay in replying to my right hon. Friend's letter. The initial draft reply did require amendments and there was also a need to liaise with the Home Office due to the subject area.

Nurse Accommodation

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the extra units of nurse accommodation for London nurses set out in the NHS plan are *(a)* single bedroom units, *(b)* two bedroom units and *(c)* houseshare units; and how many (i) are new units and (ii) have been completed. [34882]

Mr. Hutton: Since publication of the NHS Plan in July 2000, 803 extra units of new and refurbished rental accommodation have been made available in London. The new accommodation comprises of 687 single rooms, 42 double rooms and 10 studios in clusters of up to six rooms. There are also 64 units in one, two and three bedroom refurbished flats.

We are aware of a demand for, and look to provide, flexible accommodation which can enable both single and family type of accommodation to be provided. The target of providing 2,000 extra units in London within three years of the NHS Plan is expected to be achieved.

Ambulances

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulances in England were leased in 2000–01; what estimates he made of the number of ambulances in England that will have been leased during 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [35848]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Government Legal Advisers

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Solicitor-General what proportion of directly employed Government legal advisers have had previous specialist experience of contract law in private practice. [32905]

The Solicitor-General: Government lawyers are recruited from all fields. They include those who have experience of contract law in private practice. However, such information is not collated and the proportions required could be found only involving a disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 25 February 2002

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Church Maintenance

39. **John Cryer:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent representations he has received regarding the cost of church repairs. [34269]

Mr. Bell: I have not received any particular representations on church repair costs following the launch of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme in December 2001.

Church Lands (Deconsecration)

41. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, how many *(a)* graveyards and *(b)* other church lands have been deconsecrated since 1972 and sold for development. [34271]

Mr. Bell: Since 1972 the Commissioners have completed 634 pastoral schemes to enable surplus churchyard or burial ground to be used for some other purpose, in most cases removing the legal effects of consecration. Very few of these cases have involved sale for development.

Clergy

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on clergy conditions of service. [34262]

Mr. Bell: Conditions vary slightly from dioceses to diocese. But, in addition to their stipend, based on a National Stipend Benchmark of £17,420 from April 2002, clergy receive free accommodation or a housing allowance, and membership of a non-contributory pension scheme. Their working expenses should be fully reimbursed.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Referendum (Euro)

38. **Norman Baker:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission if he will set out the Commission's responsibilities in respect of a referendum relating to membership of the euro. [34268]

Mr. Beith: The role of the Commission in the conduct of any national or regional referendum are set out in the Political Parties, Referendums and Elections Act 2000. In summary, the Act provides that broadcasters must have regard to views of the Commission before making any rules with respect to referendum campaign broadcasts; the Commission shall consider the wording of the referendum question; the Commission shall receive declarations from and maintain a register of permitted participants; the Commission may designate one representative campaign organisation for each outcome of a referendum, and provide assistance in the form of grants and the provision of free facilities; the Commission shall ensure compliance with financial controls governing referendum expenditure and donations; the Chairman of the Commission (or his delegate) shall be the Chief Counting Officer for the referendum (except for a referendum held only in Northern Ireland, in which case the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland is the Chief Counting Officer) and shall appoint counting officers in each relevant local government area who will be responsible for certifying the result in that area; and the Commission shall be consulted by the Secretary of State before the making of Orders regulating the conduct of referendums, the Commission shall prepare and publish a report on the administration of referendums.

Referendums (Questions)

40. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what reviews they intend to carry out relating to the wording of referendum questions. [34270]

Mr. Beith: The wording of a national or regional referendum question will normally be specified in the Bill providing for the holding of the referendum. As soon as reasonably practicable after the Bill is introduced, the Commission, as required by the Political Parties, Referendums and Elections Act 2000, will consider the wording of the question and publish a statement of its views, if any, as to the intelligibility of the question. A recent Electoral Commission paper on the conduct of mayoral referendums reported some concerns about the wording of the question, and I understand that the Commission is in discussion with the Government as to whether it might be improved.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Communications

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee (1) what plans she has for the provision of *(a)* Braille translation facilities, *(b)* Braille typing facilities, *(c)* lip reading training and *(d)* lip speaking training for hon. Members and their staff; [37458]

(2) what steps she is taking to promote awareness of the services available to the blind and visually impaired for contacting hon. Members; [37088]

(3) if there is provision for a constituent writing to an hon. Member in Braille to have their letter translated into print and the subsequent reply translated from print into Braille; [37089]

(4) what steps she is taking to promote awareness of the services available to the deaf and hard of hearing for contacting hon. Members; [37087]

(5) pursuant to the answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 507–08W, and following the resolutions of the House of 5 July 2001, what proportion of the new general services budget is earmarked for *(a)* the provision of special telephone equipment and Braille equipment and *(b)* training in their use, for the purpose of constituents contacting their Member of Parliament and vice versa. [37454]

Mrs. Roe: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 507–08W. These areas are not strictly the responsibility of the Administration Committee; however, I understand that the Director of Finance and Administration will be happy to assist the hon. Member with any queries or concerns.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Council by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his fellow Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36280]

Mr. Robin Cook: Ministerial boxes originating from my Department are transported to the House or to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary's home by Government car. My staff and I sometimes take papers to my home on foot. No private courier firms are used.

Legislation

Pete Wishart: To ask the President of the Council how much Government legislation in this Parliamentary session concerns *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Great Britain only, *(c)* England and Wales only, *(d)* England only, *(e)* Northern Ireland only and *(f)* Scotland only. [37047]

Mr. Robin Cook: The following table sets out the number of Bills introduced so far this session, as they apply to the United Kingdom and its constituent parts. The totals given include those Bills that contain provisions relating to all the relevant constituent parts, whether or not all the provisions within such Bills have the same territorial extent.

Extent	*Number of bills*
United Kingdom	18
Great Britain	2
England and Wales only	7
England only	0
Northern Ireland only	3
Scotland only	0

DEFENCE

British Army (Germany)

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the establishment against actual strength of British army units in Germany; and how many requests for transfer there are for each of these units. [29650]

Mr. Ingram *[pursuant to his reply, 28 January 2002, c. 24–26W]:* I regret the information provided was incomplete. The table omitted figures relating to 102 Logistics Brigade which is provided. All other figures remain correct.

102 Logistics Brigade and 1 Regiment Army Air Corps

Unit	*Establishment*	*Actual strength*
HQ 102 Log Bde	43	43
6 Sup Regt RLC	773	343
7 Tpt Regt RLC	577	352
1 Regt AAC	299	[1]366

[1] Drawdown to new establishment to be completed by October 2002

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31798]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has in place a range of measures to deter and detect fraud and theft. Through our internal fraud policy, and response plan, it is made clear to line managers, at all levels, that dishonest behaviour will not be tolerated and that all suspicions will be investigated, many of them by the MOD Police or Service Police Authorities. Where suspected perpetrators can be identified, appropriate criminal or internal disciplinary action will be taken. Staff are encouraged to report suspicions and are also aware that the MOD has in place long established controls such as separation of duties, spot checks and physical security.

Additional measures introduced over recent years include the creation of the Defence Fraud Analysis Unit, which is responsible for overseeing fraud policy, maintaining data, promoting fraud awareness and encouraging a proactive response to fraud, including the use of private sector consultants and specialists in the fields of quantity surveying and data mining.

Invoice Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the instances in which his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32030]

Dr. Moonie: The majority of the Ministry of Defence bills (some 95 per cent.) are paid by the Defence Bills Agency (DBA) which paid 100 per cent. of correctly presented bills within 30 days in the financial year 2000–01. The balance of the MOD's payments was made by the MOD's Trading Fund Agencies. Their performance against the 30 day target was as follows: Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 94.4 per cent.; Meteorological Office 99.9 per cent.; and the Hydrographic Office 98.5 per cent.

Royal Ordnance

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for Royal Ordnance to source ammunition from overseas for MOD needs. [33028]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence places contracts with RO Defence as the prime contractor for ammunition. The sourcing of ammunition and its component parts is a commercial decision that rests with the prime contractor. RO Defence is contracted to supply ammunition which is safe and suitable for use, provides both value for money and security of supply, and meets all the stringent requirements for UK service.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Department's procedure is for responding to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998; if he will place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [33482]

Dr. Moonie: Subject Access Requests (SARs) can be received at any level within the Ministry of Defence. Guidance on answering SARs has been cascaded throughout the MOD and its Agencies to a comprehensive network of data protection focal points for data protection issues. Different areas will have their own procedures to ensure compliance with MOD Guidance and the Data Protection Act. Departmental Guidance is regularly reviewed and updated as we continue to evaluate and develop our procedures. A copy of the current Guidance Notes will be placed in the Library of the House.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what administration fees are charged by the Department for information requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33461]

(2) how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of receiving and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the £10 administration fee; [33563]

(3) how many responses the Department has completed to requests for information made under the Data Protection Act 1998 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation; [33575]

(4) what percentage of responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of the £10 fee, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the administration fee; [33468]

(5) what the policy of the Department is for ensuring responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 are completed within 40 days; and what their procedure is to achieve this; [33475]

(6) what the period of time elapsed is for the oldest outstanding request for information under the Data Protection Act 1998, since receipt of the *(a)* original request and *(b)* administration fee; [33450]

(7) what his estimate is of the average cost of processing each information request under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33440]

(8) how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 have been completed *(a)* within 40 days, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the original letter; and how many are still outstanding; [33570]

(9) what the longest period of time elapsed is between receiving *(a)* the administration fee and providing the information requested and *(b)* a request for information and providing the information requested, under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33454]

(10) how many requests the Department has received under the Data Protection Act 1988 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation. [33582]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not hold information centrally relating to the number or format of Subject Access Requests (SAR) received. Nor do we hold information centrally about the type of documentation requested. There is no requirement in the Act, or by the Information Commissioner to collate such information centrally therefore we have not set up such an arrangement.

However, Guidance on answering Subject Access Requests in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 has been cascaded throughout the MOD and its Agencies to a comprehensive network of nominated data protection focal points for data protection issues who monitor performance in their own area. As SARs can be received anywhere within the MOD, to collate this information would require us to contact all the different areas and assemble the information in a compatible format. Such an exercise would involve disproportionate effort. The Act provides that a data controller is not obliged to answer a SAR unless he has received a request in writing, the fee payable and sufficient information to confirm the identity of the applicant and to locate the information sought. The MOD currently does not make a charge for SAR.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33256]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 11 February, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W.

Golden Jubilee Medal

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason members of the RAF Reserve are not eligible to receive the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal. [36499]

Dr. Moonie: The RAF Reserve is divided into two broad categories, volunteer member and those former members of the Regular RAF who have a liability for a period of reserve service. Those volunteer members who were in effective military service on 6 February 2002 and had completed five annual bounty earning training years prior to that date are eligible to receive the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal (QGJM).

Ex-Regular members of the RAF Reserve will not have qualified for the QGJM unless on 6 February 2002 they had been called out for permanent service and their aggregated Regular service and/or Volunteer Reserve service totalled five years. Some Ministry of Defence civil servants who are required to wear service uniform as part of their terms of employment, are commissioned into the RAF Reserve (Civil Component). They are employed on civil service terms and conditions and so will not qualify for the medal, as is the case for civil servants generally.

Public Bodies (Chairmen)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33891]

Dr. Moonie: Details of the appointments of Chairmen of Ministry of Defence-sponsored non-departmental public bodies are set out in the table. Information is not collected on the political affiliation of appointees.

The MOD has not appointed a Chairman to any commissions, public inquiries or agencies since 1 May 1997.

Information on the number, remit and membership of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews is published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period from 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000 and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 13 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report, "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews", was issued in October 2001 and covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Library of the House.

NDPB chairman appointments in MOD since 1 May 1997

Name of body	*Chairman*	*Date of appointment*	*Appointment ends*	*Salary*
Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors	His Honour Judge Rogers[1]	27 October 1997	23 October 1999	£178 per day
Advisory Group on Medical Countermeasures	Name withheld[2]	1 February 1998	No date[3]	£265 per day
Animal Welfare Advisory Committee	Dr. Robert Hubrecht	13 July 2000	April 2002	£250 per day
Armed Forces Pay Review Body	Right hon. Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde	1 April 1999	31 March 2002	Nil
Dartmoor Steering Group	Mr. James Woollcombe	18 December 2000	17 December 2003	Nil
Defence Nuclear Safety Committee	Dr. Sam Harbison CB	1 January 2000	1 January 2005	£315 per day
Defence Scientific Advisory Council	Professor Anthony Ledwith	11 August 2000	31 March 2003	£315 per day
Independent Board of Visitors to the Military Corrective Training Centre	Mr. R Jacklin	1 January 1998 and 4 April 2001	1 June 2006	Nil
National Army Museum	General Sir John Waters GCB CBE JP	1 July 1997 and 30 March 2001	30 March 2002	Nil
National Employers Liaison Committee	Mr. John Bridgeman CBE TD DL	1 December 1997	1 December 2002	Nil
Nuclear Research Advisory Council	Dr. Derek Robinson	1 October 2001	1 October 2006	£315 per day
Oil and Pipelines Agency	Dr. John Hastie	8 July 1999	7 July 2002	£9,800 per year
Review Board for Government Contracts	Sir Peter Webster	17 March 1999	30 September 2001	£10,990 per year
RAF Museum[4]	AM Ian McFayden	4 May 1999 (elected Chair September 1999)	February 2001	Nil
	ACM Sir Richard Johns	7 December 2000 (elected Chair February 2001)	6 December 2003	Nil
Royal Marines Museum	Lieutenant General Sir Henry Beverley	1 May 1997	1 May 2003	Nil
Royal Military College of Science Advisory Council	Mr. Peter Gershon	9 October 2000	8 October 2005	£110 per day
Royal Naval Museum	Vice Admiral Sir Barry Wilson KCB	15 March 1999 and 9 January 2002	15 March 2003	Nil
Royal Navy Submarine Museum	Vice Admiral Sir Roy Newman	1 August 1999	1 August 2004	Nil
War Pensions Committees—Northern Ireland	Major Gordon Dodds MBE	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—West of Scotland	Mr. Derek Evans	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—East of Scotland	Mr. Arthur Oliver	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—Yorkshire and Humberside	Mrs. Jane Gummer MBE JP DL LLB	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—North West England	Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Overton	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—East Midlands	Mrs. Irene Shiels	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—West Midlands	Mr. Anthony Hartley-Woolley	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—Eastern England	Lieutenant Colonel Ray Holland OBE	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—South East England	Ms Penny Melville-Brown	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—London	Air Commodore Jack Hargreaves	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil
War Pensions Committees—South West England	Major Tim Tyler	1 January 2001	31 December 2003	Nil

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[1] Appointed by the Lord Chancellor

[2] Name withheld under Exemption 12 (privacy of an individual) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

[3] The AGMC was not an NDPB at the date of this appointment, and there was no specific term of office stated. Now that AGMC was classified as an NDPB, all members' terms of office will be reviewed formally to specify appropriate length of service.

[4] Ministers appoint Trustees to the Board of the RAF Museum, which then elects a Chair from among its members.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years, giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34180]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I regret I am therefore unable to provide a substantive answer under the terms of Exemption 9 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Civilian Locums

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of civilian locums in each of the last five years. [34643]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of civilian locums incurred by British Forces Germany and the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA) in respect of its directly managed units in the last five financial years is shown in the table. The cost of providing civilian locums in place of military personnel at the Ministry of Defence Hospital Units is met by the host trusts. It is not possible to provide information for the cost of civilian locums employed in primary care as the information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Financial year	*£ million*
1997–98	2.34
1998–99	2.72
1999–2000	4.03
2000–01	5.85
2001–02	3.67

Note:
The figure for 2001–02 is to end of December 2001.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many conversions from short to *(a)* intermediate and *(b)* full career commissions there were within the Defence Medical Services in each of the last five years. [34642]

Dr. Moonie: The number of conversions from short to intermediate commissions and from short to full career commissions within the Defence Medical Services in each of the last five years are shown in the table.

	Short to intermediate commission	*Short to full career commission*
1996–97	17	45
1997–98	16	37
1998–99	82	36
1999–2000	55	25
2000–01	48	33

Hawk Aircraft (India)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision has been made for British aircrew to train Indian pilots in the use of Hawk aircraft if British Hawk aircraft are sold to India. [34077]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Details of BAE Systems bid to sell Hawk advanced jet trainer aircraft to India, including any provisions for training support, are a matter for the company and the Government of India. In line with its role of supporting legitimate defence exports, and a policy of offering spare training capacity to overseas customers, the Ministry of Defence may make UK aircrew and facilities available if requested.

Exports (Subcontinent)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts for UK defence exports are expected to be signed with *(a)* Pakistan and *(b)* India in 2002. [34079]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The signing of contracts for UK defence exports is a matter for the commercial companies involved and their proposed customers.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what defence exports the Government are engaged in promoting to Pakistan. [34078]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Details of commercial companies' marketing strategies and promotions are a matter for the companies involved. It does, however, remain Government policy to support the promotion of legitimate defence exports to Pakistan that are compatible with our export control criteria.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35357]

Dr. Moonie: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence. the MOD is committed to the work/life balance of its civilian staff. A range of flexible working patterns including part time working, flexible working hours, home working and job sharing is available to staff by agreement with their management. United Kingdom Defence Statistics 2001, Chapter 2, Section 2.20 shows 4,533 staff (excluding those in Trading Funds) employed on a part time basis at 1 April 2001. Of these, 596 are recorded centrally as being employed formally under job share arrangements. Figures are not available on the number of vacant positions advertised on this basis although our general policy is that, unless specific job requirements prevent it, positions should be open to flexible working arrangements including job sharing.

RAF Eurofighters

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Eurofighters are planned to be delivered to the RAF in each of the next five years. [35649]

Dr. Moonie: The Tranche 1 Eurofighter production contract with industry calls for six aircraft to be delivered to the RAF in financial year 2002–03, 14 in 2003–04, 19 in 2004–05 and 13 in 2005–06. Three additional aircraft will be procured for development purposes but will not enter service with the RAF. The Tranche 2 production contract is expected to be placed next year with deliveries commencing in 2006.

QinetiQ

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if development on QinetiQ land is covered by Crown immunity; and if he will make a statement. [35643]

Dr. Moonie: Property transferred to QinetiQ, and developed by them, is not subject to Crown immunity.

I assume that this question arises from the recent announcement by the Home Office that land owned by QinetiQ near Pershore is being considered as a potential site for an asylum-seeker accommodation centre. Assuming Pershore is one of the sites chosen, as soon as the Home Office purchase the land it becomes Crown land, and therefore any subsequent development would be covered by Crown immunity.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is the owner of QinetiQ; what powers he has to influence the disposal of property owned by QinetiQ; if these powers extend to the power to instruct disposal; and if he will make a statement. [35642]

Dr. Moonie: At present the Ministry of Defence wholly owns QinetiQ plc and its subsidiaries. Under the terms of the Business Transfer Agreement (BTA), signed on 1 July 2001, MOD, as a special shareholder, enjoys a number of rights that could be used to prevent the company from disposing of strategic assets and facilities. However, these assets, deemed important to the national defence interest, are small in number. No special shareholder rights exist which could be used to instruct disposal of property owned by QinetiQ.

In the short-term, MOD, as the majority shareholder, does have additional rights which could be used to instruct the company to undertake a certain course of action. However, it has always been our intention that the company should fully develop commercial opportunities and income, and maximise the use of its assets. Commercial development of the company's real estate is in keeping with this, is good for the company and its shareholders, and will be welcomed by future potential investors. Therefore, unless an over-riding defence interest arose, MOD would not contemplate using its majority shareholder rights to influence the company's normal day-to-day operation.

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on the details of the privatisation of QinetiQ. [36847]

Mr. Hoon: The decision on the precise timing and nature of a sale transaction for QinetiQ will be based on achieving best value for money for the taxpayer. In conjunction with specialist advisers and QinetiQ's management we are reviewing the way forward and I expect to make an announcement shortly.

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35708]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Underwater Capability

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the maritime underwater capability; what this will involve; and when the project will begin. [35718]

Dr. Moonie: The Maritime Underwater Future Capability, previously known as the Future Attack Submarine, is the project looking into the range of future capabilities required by the United Kingdom for the control and denial of the underwater battlespace into the third and fourth decades of the century. We will be considering a range of concepts, including innovation solutions combining unmanned underwater vehicles, ships, airborne and land assets, as well as submarines. The project has already begun.

Future Surface Combatant

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration is being given to the replacement of the Type 23 frigate with the Future Surface Combatant; and if he will make a statement. [35717]

Dr. Moonie: We currently plan for the Future Surface Combatant (FSC) to succeed the current Type 22 and Type 23 classes of frigate. The assumption is that FSC will be an operationally versatile, affordable warship that can be deployed through life across the full spectrum of defence missions. The project has already begun.

Offshore Protection Vessels

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the three offshore protection vessels that are to be procured and their *(a)* capabilities and *(b)* cost. [35716]

Dr. Moonie: The first vessel is due to enter service with the Royal Navy around the end of this year, with the others following at roughly six-monthly intervals. They will replace the five vessels of the Island class, the capability and availability of which they will match. The new vessels are being built, following competition, by Vosper Thorneycroft at Southampton. They will be leased to the RN and will be maintained by the shipbuilder for five years, subject to extension. The vessels will be based at Portsmouth as part of the Fishery Protection Squadron. The total cost of this innovative lease package is approximately £60 million.

Equipment Sales

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the benefit to the UK was from the sale of naval equipment and platforms in each year since 1997. [35722]

Dr. Moonie: Information in the Ministry of Defence publication UK Defence Statistics 2001 at Table 1.13 shows that for each of the years since 1997, the value of export orders in the sea sector was as follows:

Year	*Total (£ million)*
1997	368
1998	738
1999	148
2000	475

In addition to the economic benefits from the sale of naval equipment and platforms, the Government's policy of supporting legitimate defence exports contributes to our wider defence and international security interests, including by reducing the costs of Royal Navy procurement. Defence exports help support a strong defence industry and contribute to the security of our friends and allies overseas.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many warships and submarines have been sold to foreign states since 1997; what type they were; and which states bought them. [35720]

Dr. Moonie: Information relating to defence exports in categories published in the UN Nations Conventional Arms Register (UNCAR) and exports of surplus Government defence equipment is set out in Part III of the Government's annual report on Strategic Export Controls. Details of individual exports of new equipment, other than those in UNCAR categories and small arms, are not published for reasons of commercial and customer confidentiality. A summary of information taken from the annual reports on Strategic Export Controls published since 1997 is set out in the table.

Exports of naval vessels and submarines 1997–2000

	Country
1997	
One type 22 frigate	Brazil
Four (56 m) Barzan fast strike craft	Qatar
1998	
Four River Class minesweepers	Brazil
1999	
Two LEKIU frigates	Malaysia
2000	
One Upholder submarine	Canada

In addition to those transfers recorded in the Government's annual reports, three Royal Navy Peacock class patrol craft previously based in Hong Kong were transferred direct to the Philippines in 1997, and a refurbished ex Royal Navy Hunt class mine counter measure vessel was transferred to Greece in 2000 under a commercial arrangement with Vosper Thorneycroft UK Ltd.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and civil service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35840]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Secondments and attachments form a valuable part of interchange, through which the civil service and other organisations exchange people and good practice to mutual benefit.

The Ministry of Defence has a significant programme of interchange, involving all parts of the economy. Since May 1997, 57 staff have been seconded to the MOD from private sector companies; of these 15 were in place prior to May 1997 and continued beyond that date. Three of the secondees were at Senior Civil Service level, though the majority were brought in at middle management level (civil service grades HEO to Grade 6). The MOD reimbursed the parent company for 46 of the 57 secondments.

It is our practice to respect the privacy of our personnel, including those on secondment, and to withhold the names of individuals except where the seniority of the individual or the nature of the post warrants a formal announcement. I am therefore withholding that information under Exemption 12 (Privacy of an Individual) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

I will however write to the hon. Member with the other details of these secondments as requested, and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his fellow Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36279]

Dr. Moonie: Ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to the Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the statutory instruments issued by his Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36236]

Dr. Moonie: The HMSO Statutory Instrument Registrar can provide a list of statutory instruments issued by individual Departments. Statutory instruments which have been originated by Departments but eventually made by the Privy Council are listed only under the Privy

Council Office. However, between 1 January 2001 and 7 February 2002, the Ministry of Defence issued the following 11 statutory instruments:

SI 2001/1165

The Defence Aviation and Repair Agency Trading Fund Order and

SI 2001/1246

The Defence Scientific and Technological Laboratory Trading Fund Order. These orders gave both organisations trading fund status.

SI 2001/3234

The Armed Forces Act 2001 (Commencement No.1) Order 2001 that commenced sections of the Armed Forces Act 2001.

SIs 2001/542; 1520; 1521 and SI 2002/201

Four statutory instruments entitled Terms of Service (Amendment) Regulations. These instruments amended service regulations in consequence of the previously mentioned commencement order.

SI 2001/1015

The Injuries in War (Shore Employments) (Compensation) Scheme 2001 updated the rate of pension payable to recipients.

SIs 2002/229; 230 and 231

The Courts-Martial (Amendment) Rules. These instruments made amendments to court-martial rules in consequence of the Armed Forces Act 2001.

Any costs to public funds arising from the above instruments are minimal. As the Ministry of Defence is not a regulatory body there are few, if any, costs to businesses and individuals. Any costs relating to instruments made by MOD are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Claymore Mines

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if records are kept of locations in which Her Majesty's armed forces deploy Claymore mines; and if such records include details of in which mode of operation the Claymore is deployed. [36937]

Mr. Ingram: The locations in which Claymore mines are deployed are recorded. Claymore mines are used only in the command detonated mode of operation, which requires a soldier to initiate the munition.

45 Commando Royal Marines

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mission has been given to *(a)* HMS Ocean and *(b)* W and Z companies of 45 Commando Royal Marines. [36587]

Mr. Hoon: HMS Ocean, with W and Z companies of 45 Commando Royal Marines embarked, has been deployed in support of the continuing campaign against international terrorism. HMS Ocean will relieve HMS Illustrious and HMS Fearless and elements of 45 Commando will relieve elements of 40 Commando. The deployment of HMS Ocean ensures that the UK capability in the region is maintained.

Armed Forces Pension Group

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations he has received from the *(a)* Armed Forces Pension Group, *(b)* individuals and *(c)* others in support of the Group; and if he will make a statement. [36381]

Mr. Ingram: No representations have been received directly from the Armed Forces Pension Group. However, since the start of 2001, around 230 individual representations have been received on the subject of pension rights for service prior to 1975. It is thought that the vast majority were from members of the Group or supporters of its objectives. We have also received a representation from a pensioners' federation.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken in response to representations by the Armed Forces Pension Group that service in the armed forces should count towards their civil service pensions; and if he will make a statement. [36380]

Mr. Ingram: Service in the armed forces and service with the civil service are different employments with different terms, conditions and career patterns. It is reasonable that each should be covered by a separate occupational pension scheme.

Whether service with the armed forces may count towards the civil service pension scheme is a matter for the Cabinet Office, who are the managers of the scheme. It should be noted that service covered by one occupational pension scheme cannot count directly towards the occupational pension scheme of another employer. However, a facility is available to enable the pension rights earned under one employer's occupational pension scheme to be transferred to the occupational pension scheme of another employer, but this is only possible where a transfer of the preserved pension benefits is made. Prior to 1 April 1975 there was no legal requirement for any pension scheme to preserve pension rights for those who left service before reaching the normal retirement age, therefore transfers did not take place before this date.

ABRO

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of *(a)* setting up and *(b)* maintaining the ABRO Challenger 2 overhaul line at Bovington in each of the last five years. [35036]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The costs of setting up a Challenger 2 Base Inspection Repair line at the Army Base Repair Organisation Bovington are as follows:

Financial year 2000–01—a sum of £14,329 was spent on set-up tooling for pilot activity.

Financial year 2001–02—ABRO working towards a contract with VDS have committed £251,276 to Base Inspection Repair of Challenger 2.

There were no costs prior to these years.

A Base Inspection Repair contract let by the Tank Support Systems Integrated Project Team is still under negotiation. With full production yet to commence, and pilot activity only undertaken to date, the maintenance costs have been negligible.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist for ABRO to act as a strategic partner with manufacturers for the repair of military vehicles. [35037]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* There are no formal arrangements in place for the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO) to act as a strategic partner with manufacturers for the repair of military vehicles. ABRO is having discussions with industry to develop future opportunities and currently has signed agreements to this effect with ALVIS and VDS which encourage the parties to discuss potential future projects.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what military equipment ABRO maintains surge production capacity for times of conflict. [35039]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO) does not maintain dedicated surge capacity for any specific equipments. The requirement for military surge capability is protected by both the diversity of the Ministry of Defence work placed with ABRO and the working regime that ABRO has in place to meet this.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the work allocated to ABRO in each of the last four years was put out to tender for competitive bids; and if he will make a statement. [35040]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The following work was won by the Army Base Repair Organisation as a result of competitive bids:

Financial Year	*£ million*
1998–99	11.987
1999–2000	0.216
2000–01	4.749
2001–02	NIL

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement setting out the strategic purpose of ABRO. [35041]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence after careful review has decided that the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO) should vest as a trading fund with effect from 1 April 2002. This will be the subject of debate in Standing Committee on 26 February 2002. ABRO provides a comprehensive engineering and logistics support service, principally repair and maintenance, for land-based equipment of Her Majesty's armed forces. The work ranges from the complete overhaul and modification of major military vehicles to upgrades to radios and weapons. ABRO provides independent equipment advice, support to obsolete equipment no longer provided by industry and a unique surge capacity. The need to meet military surge capacity is safeguarded by both the diversity of the Ministry of Defence work place with ABRO and the working regime that the agency employs. Trading fund status will enable the MOD to realise a broad range of benefits, including a clearer customer/supplier relationship through hard charging, while retaining the flexibility to support operations, which MOD ownership provides. Trading fund will also enable ABRO to sustain its operations in support of MOD by providing similar engineering services to industry under commercial arrangements.

Officer Job Evaluations

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officer job evaluations were carried out in 2001; and if he will make a statement. [36825]

Mr. Ingram: 80 officer jobs were evaluated in 2001. A significantly larger programme is planned for 2002 and additional resources have been allocated to achieve this.

Service Entitlements

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department's studies examining disparities between entitlements of married personnel and those living in partnerships will be completed. [36827]

Mr. Ingram: Disparities in the entitlements of married and unmarried personnel have reduced over the years. In its 2002 report the Armed Forces Pay Review Body commented that this was not a clear-cut issue for the services and that there was concern among married personnel that offering parity of treatment to partnerships will result in scarce resources being spread more thinly. Work on a number of related aspects of conditions of service, including pensions and allowances, is likely to continue for at least some months.

Single Living Accommodation

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the removals package for single living accommodation to take account of trends in respect of personal possessions. [36833]

Mr. Ingram: With effect from 1 April 2002 the current rank-based unaccompanied baggage entitlements for single and married unaccompanied personnel posted within the UK or to and from north-west Europe (defined for these purposes as Belgium, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands) will be superseded by an improved standard entitlement of 6 cu m for all ranks. This will more than double the entitlement for junior personnel (Privates and Lance Corporals and their equivalents). There are no current plans for a further review.

Strong Resolve 2002

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about British military involvement in NATO's forthcoming exercise Strong Resolve 2002. [36550]

Mr. Hoon: Exercise Strong Resolve is NATO's largest exercise and is carried out every four years. This year, it is taking place between 1 and 15 March and involves some 26,000 troops from 26 nations. The United Kingdom is making a significant and balanced contribution to Strong Resolve 2002, including maritime, land, air and many specialist assets, such as signals units and other combat service support elements. Around 2,500 UK military personnel are taking part.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees in his Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36689]

Dr. Moonie: The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, effective January 1993, require employers to provide and pay for, upon request from an employee, an eye and eyesight test. There is a requirement for further tests at regular intervals; the optometrist doing the first test can recommend when the next one should be. In addition, employers must pay the cost of special spectacles required where normal ones cannot be used. The Ministry of Defence meets all these obligations.

We do not record centrally how many employees who regularly use computers have been provided with a free eye test and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. As with all aspects of health and safety legislation MOD has auditable procedures in place to ensure that the system is properly managed. The requirement is defined in the MOD's health and safety handbook, and is publicised extensively in local and MOD wide newsletters and publications. It is also included in induction training courses for all new staff.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK personnel are deployed in Sierra Leone; what has been the cost of deployments; and if he will make a statement. [36954]

Mr. Ingram: We currently have some 360 shore-based personnel deployed in Sierra Leone, and we will maintain our presence at that level over the period of presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2002. We are also contributing 15 military observers and seven headquarters staff to UNAMSIL, the UN operation in Sierra Leone. The cost of the deployments, excluding the provision of equipment to the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), was £16.9 million in the last financial year, and is estimated to be around £30 million in the current financial year.

On the current situation in Sierra Leone, I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave in the House on 11 February, *Official Report*, columns 15–16 to the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) and the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot).

Battle of Trafalgar

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar; and if he will make a statement. [36554]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 125–26W to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington).

Service Applications

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the increase in other ranks applications to the three services in 2000–01 which has not led to entries; and if he will make a statement. [36826]

Mr. Ingram: Records of the numbers of Other Ranks applications and intakes for the years 1999–2000, 2000–01 and part of 2001–02 show the following:

Services	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Naval			
Applicants	13,251	13,034	8,579
Intake	4,545	4,175	3,227
Conversation Rate (per cent.)	34.3	32.0	37.6
Army			
Applicants	37,992	33,812	25,590
Intake	15,436	13,843	9,384
Conversion Rate (per cent.)	40.6	40.9	36.7
RAF			
Applicants	16,218	15,997	10,984
Intake	3,613	3,193	2,506
Conversion Rate (per cent.)	22.3	20.0	22.8

[1] Figures for 2000–02 only cover the period up to 31 December 2001

It should be remembered that not all successful applicants may necessarily join the armed forces in the same year that they applied, due to the time needed to process the applications fully.

The figures demonstrate the conversion rates of applicants to intake has remained reasonably constant for the Naval Service and for the RAF. The change in conversion rate for the Army is associated with the introduction of an enhanced selection scheme aimed at reducing wastage during initial training. Only those assessed at Recruit Selection Centres as having more than a 90 per cent. chance of passing Phase 1 training are now selected. The higher quality of recruits ensures that final output to the field army (ie. the gains to the trained strength) remains largely the same despite the smaller intake.

House Purchase Assistance

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review his policy with respect to making long-service advance of pay for house purchase available to the Royal Navy at the age of 23 and to the Army and RAF at the age of 35. [36829]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1086W, to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson).

Unaccompanied Tours (Military Units)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the interval between six-month unaccompanied tours is for units; and if he will make a statement. [36828]

Mr. Ingram: The table shows the average interval between six-month unaccompanied tours broken down by individual corps over a 12-month period, as at 31 December 2001, the most recently available information.

Average tour intervals (as at 31 December 2001)

Arm	*Months*
Royal Armoured Corps	15
Royal Artillery	49
Royal Engineers	24
Royal Signals	23
Infantry	18
Royal Logistic Corps	24
Average	24

Tour intervals are calculated on the basis of deployments of six months. The latest average unit tour interval in the Army is consistent with the Strategic Defence Review target of 24 months. However, there are variations between units within the Arms, with some units not achieving the SDR target.

Afghanistan

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his latest estimates are of civilian casualties as a result of US and UK military action in Afghanistan. [37300]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 860W, to my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) and for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham).

Pay 2000

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many budget holders have not received budgets for the 2002–03 financial year which take full account of the costs of Pay 2000; and if overspend on this item will be an allowable expense. [36844]

Mr. Ingram: Budgets for the 2002–03 financial year have not yet been finalised. When they are, they will take full account of all aspects of pay costs.

Recruitment

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which regiments have had their recruiting capped in the last six months; and if he will make a statement. [36846]

Mr. Ingram: Individual regiments are not capped with regard to recruiting, but their priority for recruiting effort will vary dependent on their manning position at any particular time. The Army is currently recruiting to all employment areas.

Operation Amber Fox

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had regarding the possibility of the EU taking over Amber Fox in Macedonia; and if he will make a statement on his assessment of this development. [36845]

Mr. Hoon: I have had a number of discussions about the future of Operation Amber Fox. The Macedonian Government have invited NATO to extend the mandate of Task Force Fox for a further three months from 25 March 2002, with an option to extend for a further three months beyond that. NATO has accepted the invitation and Germany will continue to lead the operation. Therefore Task Force Fox remains a NATO mission.

Attributable Invalidity Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel in receipt of service attributable invalidity pensions incorrectly paid tax but had the mistake rectified by the Army Pay Office in Stanmore before the case of Major Perry was identified. [34475]

Dr. Moonie: The Army Pensions Office at Stanmore was closed in 1983 and the pension work transferred to the Army Pensions Office in Glasgow. To establish the number of service personnel in receipt of service attributable invaliding pensions who incorrectly paid tax, but had the mistake rectified by the Army Pay Office at Stanmore, would require a manual search of all pension files where awards were made before 1983. This could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Kirkcudbright

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the development of new accommodation facilities at Kirkcudbright range will be completed. [37386]

Mr. Ingram: The development of new accommodation facilities at Kirkcudbright Training Camp will take place in three phases. We had hoped that Phase 1 of the new accommodation would be completed by the end of March 2003, but the restrictions on access to the site caused by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease prevented the survey and other preparatory work being carried out, and it is unlikely that this work will be completed until the end of October 2003. We estimate that Phase 2 will be completed by the end of 2007, and the final phase by the end of 2009.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years, giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34185]

Mr. Robin Cook: There were none.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by his Department and how much reclaimed. [34451]

Mr. Robin Cook: The available information is for the Privy Council Office, which has no agencies or non-departmental public bodies:

cost in £

Financial year	*Food provided*	*Alcohol provided*
1997–98[1]	1,172	2,356
1998–99[1]	2,096	7,666
1999–2000	2,089	2,257
2000–01	1986	6,259
2001–02[2]	1,700	950

[1] The figures for these financial years include refreshment costs incurred by the Lord Privy Seal's office which was then part of the Privy Council Office.

[2] To date

The additional, disaggregated information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Prime Minister by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from his private office; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36281]

The Prime Minister: The majority of my ministerial boxes remain within No. 10. However, when they are transported it is either by a No. 10 driver or the Government car service.

My office does not use a private courier service for such duties.

Business Contracts

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions in the past two years he has written to the *(a)* Head of State and *(b)* Prime Minister of a foreign Government about the award of contracts to companies with British interests. [36802]

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will set out the criteria that he applies in determining in which cases he writes to foreign Heads of State in support of particular businesses; [36513]

(2) if he will list the occasions in the last 12 months in which he has personally written to foreign Heads of State in support of particular businesses; and if he will set out in each case *(a)* the recipient of the letter and *(b)* the businesses referred to. [36514]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Single European Currency

Tony Wright: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 25W, on single European currency, if he will explain the connection between the question to him of 25 January and his answer of 28 January. [36528]

The Prime Minister: I referred my hon. Friend to an answer which sets out the Government policy on the euro.

Voluntary Work

Bob Russell: To ask the Prime Minister how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [36383]

The Prime Minister: The Government aim to have 1 million people more involved in their communities under the "Prime Minister's Challenge on Volunteering", March 2000, which also urged employers to allow staff to take one day's paid leave to undertake some form of voluntary activity.

In my office the project began in the summer of 2000 with approximately 24 staff arranging on their own initiative to link up with a school, where they helped out for a day and followed up with mentoring and training initiatives.

PIU Energy Review

Tom Brake: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 689W, on the performance and innovation unit energy review, if he will list those companies whose responses are not available on the PIU website; and for what reason these have not been placed on the PIU website. [36957]

The Prime Minister: All companies which responded to the PIU energy review within the deadline set had their submissions placed on the website. In some cases, parts of the submissions were held back, at the request of the companies, owing to the commercially confidential nature of the material.

Departmental Energy Policy

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what measures have been taken to deploy renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency measures at *(a)* 10 Downing street and *(b)* Chequers. [36477]

The Prime Minister: Since 1 October 2001 100 per cent. of the electricity supplies to 10 Downing street have been generated from renewable energy sources.

Where appropriate, 10 Downing street purchases only equipment that conforms to the latest environmental standards for low emissions.

The management of Chequers is the responsibility of the Chequers Trust, not the Government.

WALES

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27977]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None to my department since its creation in July 1999. The Wales Office has no agencies or non-departmental public bodies.

Prior to that date:

in 1997–98: £307 to the Welsh Office; £9,405 to its NDPBs; £14,000 to its agencies

in 1998–99: £9,936 to its agencies.

Statistics

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make representations to the Office for National Statistics to increase the frequency of preparing figures on productivity and economic indicators for Wales. [32228]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No. The Office for National Statistics is actively working to improve the quality and timeliness of economic estimates for Wales. They are liaising closely with the National Assembly to take account of the particular needs of Wales and to help inform the National Assembly's economic development strategy.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33547]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has no plans to participate in Fair Trade Fortnight. The Department for International Development is providing £120,000 to the Fair Trade Foundation over 2001–03 in support of its efforts to target new groups through its annual Fair Trade Fortnight campaigns.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 939W, on fair trade goods, if, during Fair Trade Fortnight, he will review the amount of fairly traded goods used in his Department. [35449]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has very limited requirements for the type of goods which are subject to fair trade schemes and therefore has no current plans for a specific review during Fair Trade Fortnight on the use of fairly traded goods.

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35696]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information is not held centrally and collating it would involve disproportionate costs.

Attendance at events, engagements and functions by Ministers and civil servants is undertaken in line with the guidance and principles set out in the Ministerial Code and departmental staff handbooks.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27297]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There were reported thefts against the former Welsh Office in 1997–98 of £307. There was no known theft or fraud against the Welsh Office in the remainder of its life; nor has there been against the Wales Office since its creation.

Euro

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Treasury and the Minister for Europe with regard to the impact of the euro on Wales. [35624]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister for Europe when we discuss a range of issues including the impact of the euro on Wales.

The Government are committed to undertaking an economic assessment of the likely impact of joining the euro, within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Meanwhile, the Euro Taskforce has been established to help businesses take forward preparations and to raise awareness of the opportunities already presented by the introduction of euro notes and coins by a number of our European partners.

Sand Dredging

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with secretaries in the National Assembly for Wales with regards to the practice of sand dredging off the Welsh coast. [35633]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I regularly meet Assembly Secretaries; we discuss a range of issues.

The Assembly issued a draft marine aggregate dredging policy for consultation last year. The 1,200 responses received are being considered and a final version of the document will be published in due course, setting out a framework within which the Assembly will determine applications to dredge for sand.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public Libraries

13. **Mr. Miliband:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many public libraries are not on-line. [34241]

Dr. Howells: 67 per cent. of all UK public libraries now offer public internet access. All will do so by the end of the year. £120 million of lottery money is being made available to equip libraries with ICT to support learning and to train library staff.

15. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to improve public libraries; and if she will make a statement. [34243]

Dr. Howells: The Government have encouraged better planning and accountability in public library services through the introduction of Annual Library Plans and a more rigorous enforcement of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Standards of service for library authorities were introduced from 1 April 2001.

Through the New Opportunities Fund Community Access to Lifelong Learning Programme, £120 million of lottery funding is being made available to enable all public libraries to offer public internet access and ICT learning facilities by December 2002. The DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund made available over £2.3 million in 2000–01 for British history and reader development projects.

25. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent assessment she has made of library provision within East Sussex. [34254]

Dr. Howells: East Sussex along with all other English library authorities submitted their Annual Library Plan at the end of September 2001. Individual and confidential feedback was given to each of the 149 library authorities in December, and a general appraisal of all the plans will be published in the near future. A copy of this appraisal will be placed in the House Library.

Museums (English Regions)

14. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will include millennium landmark projects in discussions on supporting museums in the English regions. [34242]

Tessa Jowell: Recommendations for a new framework for museums and galleries in England's regions were set out in Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries' report "Renaissance in the regions: a new vision for England's museums", published last October. Although that report was concerned only with museums which have been recognised through Resource's Museum Registration Scheme, we anticipate that the new framework should allow museums to form partnerships with other relevant organisations. Such partnerships might include millennium landmark projects.

BBC (Finances)

16. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have to change the financing arrangements for the BBC. [34244]

Tessa Jowell: I have no plans to change the financing arrangements for the BBC.

Diving

17. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the safety of sports diving, with specific reference to the recent deaths of divers at the Dorothea quarry. [34246]

Mr. Caborn: The Government recognise that all sport contains an element of risk, and it would be neither possible nor, in many cases, desirable to remove that challenge. The sport of sub-aqua diving is an adventure sport and therefore subject to such risks.

However, it is essential to look at how sport can reduce and manage unnecessary risks and, in particular, reduce the incidence of serious illness, injury, permanent disablement or death. The recognised governing body of the sport of sub-aqua diving in the UK, the British Sub-Aqua Club (BSAC) has compiled recommendations for safe diving practices. The Government would expect those taking part in diving activities to heed the guidance produced by the sport's governing body to ensure their safe participation.

I understand that the police, in liaison with other agencies are making inquiries into the incidents at the Doreathea quarry. I would not want to say anything further that might prejudice those inquiries.

Sport is a devolved matter and as I understand it the Minister for Sport in the National Assembly for Wales would welcome the opportunity to discuss the hon. Gentlemen's concerns with him.

Olympic Games 2012

18. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support the Government will give to an English bid to host the 2012 Olympic games. [34247]

Mr. Caborn: The decision on whether or not to launch a bid for the Olympic Games is a matter principally for the British Olympic Association which has yet to decide whether to make a bid for the 2012 Games. The issue of whether there should be any Government support for such a bid will only be taken once the decision to bid has been made.

My Department in conjunction with the BOA, UK Sport, London Development Agency and Sport England has commissioned Arups to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of a possible London bid for 2012. That consultancy will include an assessment of the level of public and private funding that would be required to mount a successful bid and, if successful, to stage the Games.

English Heritage

19. **Jim Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the review of English Heritage. [34248]

Tessa Jowell: The review of English Heritage was announced on 16 October 2001 and is being undertaken as part of the Department's programme of quinquennial reviews of its public bodies. A public consultation exercise has been carried out and we are evaluating the many helpful responses that were received. The review will be completed and published later this year.

Tourism

20. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans her Department has to encourage and extend best practice in the UK tourism and hospitality industries. [34249]

Dr. Howells: My Department is working closely with the Best Practice Forum, which was launched on 25 September 2001 to identify, encourage and spread best practice throughout tourism, hospitality and leisure businesses in England. The programme includes a £500,000 research study of best practice in the UK and abroad as well as access to best practice clubs and master class seminars.

In addition, seaside resorts continue to represent a very important sector of our domestic holiday market and sharing good practice between resort destinations is essential to their future success. The English Tourism Council's Sea Changes report, published in response to the Government's tourism strategy, highlighted a variety of areas of good practice within resorts, including examples from Blackpool.

Philosophy

21. **Mr. McWalter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what activities and funding decisions by her Department provide support for philosophy as a cultural activity. [34250]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport funds both directly and indirectly many organisations that engage in philosophical activity through their programming, performance or exhibitions. The exploration of philosophical themes is an important part of many cultural bodies' work and it is a matter for them as to how best to approach the subject. Support for philosophy as an academic discipline is a matter for the Department for Education and Skills.

Athletics

22. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to establish a centre of excellence for British athletics. [34251]

Tessa Jowell: In line with the requests of UK Athletics, a network of 11 regional indoor athletic tracks is being developed as part of the United Kingdom Sports Institute. These facilities will also include state of the art sports medicine and sports science support. With the exception of the facilities in Northern Ireland the sites are all due for completion by the summer of 2003 at a cost of over £50 million and will help our top athletes and their coaches compete and win at the highest level.

Local Sports Clubs

23. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for local sports clubs. [34252]

Mr. Caborn: Local clubs remain at the heart of the Government's sports strategy. As I outlined in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), *Official Report*, 25 February 2002, column 433, DCMS is taking forward work to advance the interests of local clubs as the Government consider the responses to the Treasury consultation document, "Promoting Sport in the Community".

Amateur Football Clubs

24. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Football Association on promoting the establishment of new amateur football clubs in England. [34253]

Mr. Caborn: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have discussed the promotion of new amateur clubs with the Football Association, though I have discussed the issue of funding support for existing amateur clubs with the Association. Both new and established clubs may apply for funding to the Football Foundation's Grass Roots Advisory Panel or, where appropriate, to the Community and Education Fund.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to encourage amateur football clubs. [34240]

Mr. Caborn: The importance of amateur clubs to the health of football at all levels is recognised by the Government and the Football Foundation. With the Football Association and the FA Premier League, the Government continue to fully support the Foundation's work in funding the development of the sport at the grass roots.

Sport Development

26. **Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to improve the development of sport at grassroots level in areas of deprivation. [34255]

Mr. Caborn: "A Sporting Future for All" (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, April 2000) set out the Government's strategy for sport, and formed the basis for the subsequent "Government's Plan for Sport". The strategy addresses all levels of sport, including the grassroots level, and both documents explore how sport can promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of communities. More specifically, Sport England have launched a number of Sport Action Zones (SAZs) which, with assistance from lottery funding, are aiming to improve sports provision in deprived areas. To date £1.6 million has been invested in sport from partner funding as a result of SAZ initiatives. In addition, Sport England's Space for Sport and Arts programme is providing £130 million for new of modernised sport and arts facilities in 300 primary schools across the most deprived areas of 65 LEAs, and the level of multiple deprivation index accounted for 50 per cent. of the weighting when the New Opportunities Fund allocated its £581 million for new opportunities for PE and school sport to LEAs across England.

National Lottery

27. **Dr. Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many lottery applications have been made in Wales by parliamentary constituency *(a)* since its inception and *(b)* since January 2001. [34256]

Tessa Jowell: Comprehensive information on applications for lottery grants is not centrally held at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

30. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress being made to improve distribution of lottery funds. [34259]

Mr. Caborn: Reforms introduced under the 1998 National Lottery Act, revised policy directions issued to lottery distributors in the same year, and targeted programmes introduced by distributors are designed to improve the distribution of funds and our data show that there has been some improvement. We recognise, however, that there is still more to be done and that is why I have announced a new £150 million initiative to target funds at some 50 areas which are both deprived and have received less lottery funding than other parts of the country. The scheme, which is UK wide, will begin later this year.

31. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many lottery tickets have been purchased; and what the value is of grant made in Wythenshawe and Sale, East since November 1994. [34260]

Tessa Jowell: National Lottery tickets sales total just over £35 billion. Since the start of the lottery, 75 awards have been made to Wythenshawe and Sale, East worth just over £5.4 million.

Court Cases (Children)

28. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the media on their treatment of children in court cases. [34257]

Tessa Jowell: None.

Orchestras

29. **Mr. Bacon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her Department's financial support for orchestras. [34258]

Tessa Jowell: This is a matter for the Arts Council of England and the regional arts boards. As well as increasing the core grant-in-aid to each of the regional orchestras, awards of nearly £27 million have been made from the Arts Council's Stabilisation programme to help secure orchestral provision across the country.

National Football Stadium

32. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent meetings she has had with Mr. Patrick Carter, the Football Association and other interested parties regarding the new national football stadium. [34261]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met Patrick Carter on 13 February 2002 and the Football Association's Communication Director on 4 February 2002, where discussion included the National Football Stadium.

In addition we are receiving regular updates and briefings from our officials who are working closely with the FA, Sport England and others to help them resolve the issues we have asked to be addressed before we can give our final commitment to the FA's plans.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much financial and administrative support her Department has allocated to the Golden Jubilee events. [34237]

Mr. Caborn: £10.5 million over three years was transferred to my Department by the Home Office from their existing vote. There was therefore no additional call on the exchequer. The sum includes the cost of the 21 staff of the Golden Jubilee office.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received on the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and if she will make a statement. [34238]

Tessa Jowell: During the last month I have received letters and questions from hon. Members and the public about the regulations governing street parties and the exclusion of various groups from the criteria for the award of the Golden Jubilee medal.

Wembley Stadium

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her statement of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–93, if she will require Wembley National Stadium Ltd. to publish the findings of the report into its relationship with Multiplex as a condition of the Government's continuing support for the development of the national football stadium at Wembley. [35571]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 13 February 2002]*: As I explained in my statement, the disclosure of the report produced for the Wembley National Stadium Ltd. Board into the procurement processes relating to the National Stadium project is affected by issues of legal professional privilege and confidentiality. I have asked the Football Association and WNSL to publish it, but because of these issues they are unwilling to do so. The Government do not intend to make its publication a requirement of the Government's support for the project but I will not grant ultimate support unless I am fully assured that the concerns highlighted by the David James/Berwin Leighton Paisner report have been satisfactorily addressed.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the projected increased costs are for a proposed new Wembley Stadium; and how much extra funding the Government will be required to contribute. [37561]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the Government's position on the Football Association's national stadium project to the House on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–303. My right hon. Friend also laid before the House on that day the interim report of the English National Stadium Review Team which set out the costs of the revised World Stadium Team design at £715 million including sunk costs. The interim report also set out how these costs would be funded including a Government contribution of up to £20 million for non-stadium infrastructure costs.

Museums and Galleries (North-west)

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to support the creation of a regional hub for museums and galleries in the north-west. [34245]

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts announced on 22 January the timetable for the selection of regional hubs in accordance with the recommendations of the Regional Museums Task Force as set out in the report "Renaissance in the Regions: a new vision for England's museums" which was published last October. Resource: the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives have subsequently published draft criteria for the selection of regional hubs. It is for the museums in each region, including the north-west, to determine the nature of the application to resource to form a hub.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what steps she has taken to press for the establishment of a differentiated rate of VAT for repairs and renovations to listed buildings in the European Commission review of reduced rates of VAT; [30781]

(2) what steps she has taken to establish an action plan and timetable to consider the establishment of a differentiated rate of VAT for repairs to listed buildings, in line with paragraph 4.20 of Force for Our Future. [30784]

Dr. Howells: EC law already allows a reduced rate of VAT for works to housing but does not permit a reduced rate to other types of building, whether listed or not. However, in response to representations made by the Government, the European Commission has indicated that it will consider a reduced rate of VAT for listed places of worship in their general review of the reduced rates, which is due to take place in 2003. In the meantime the Government have introduced a grant scheme which will return in grant aid the difference between 5 per cent. and the actual amount spent on eligible repairs and maintenance to listed places of worship. We intend to publish an implementation plan for A Force for Our Future shortly.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current Session, for her Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland; [37404]

(2) what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns her Department undertook in the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current parliamentary Session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current Session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and (D) Northern Ireland. [37393]

Dr. Howells: No media advertising campaigns were run by the Department during this period.

Minority Sports Teams

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what sources of funding are available from the public sector to cover the cost of overseas international matches for teams representing Great Britain in minority sports. [36266]

Mr. Caborn: My Department provides Lottery and Exchequer funds to UK Sports who in turn make these funds available to governing bodies of sport in recognised activities for the support of teams representing Great Britain.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what rules for the allocation of funding to international minority sports teams representing Great Britain relate to the *(a)* age and *(b)* sex of the participants. [36239]

Mr. Caborn: The Sports Councils do not have rules for the allocation of funding to sports teams representing Great Britain relating to either age or sex of the participants.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in her Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36809]

Mr. Caborn: The only overseas visit by a parliamentary private secretary at this Department's expense occurred on 20–21 January 2002 when my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) attended the MIDEM conference in France on my behalf as I was unable to attend at short notice. We have yet to be invoiced for these costs.

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37501]

Dr. Howells: In DCMS travel and subsistence administration is contracted out and there is no electronic record maintained regarding mode of travel. To provide this information would involve a manual check of each travel and subsistence claim which could be undertaken only at disproportionate costs.

Arts and Community-based Programmes

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what role arts and community-based programmes are playing in helping sectarian and racial problems in divided cities in Northern Ireland. [36984]

Dr. Howells: This question relates to a matter which is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.

Regeneration (Northern Ireland)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on how lottery money is used to promote regeneration in Northern Ireland; and how much has been given to North Belfast. [36955]

Mr. Caborn: The Government have asked lottery distributors to use lottery funding to encourage regeneration where possible. Revised policy directions issued to lottery distributors in 1998 require them to take into account the scope for reducing economic and social deprivation. As of 15 February 2002, 276 awards have been made to Belfast North worth over £67 million.

Playing Fields

Joan Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the number of playing fields lost to development in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many were *(a)* school playing fields, *(b)* owned by other public bodies and *(c)* owned privately. [36378]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Education and Skills does not collect information on the number of school playing fields lost to development. Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act in October 1998, was brought in to halt the policy of forcing state schools to sell off playing fields. Local authorities and governing bodies of all maintained schools now need to ask consent for the sale of school playing fields from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. In making her decision my right hon. Friend will take into account a number of criteria including consultation with the community and user groups, whether the proceeds will be used for education or used to enhance sports provision, and whether the remaining playing fields fully meet the needs of local schools and the communities. Since October 1998, My right hon. Friend has approved the following applications to dispose or change the use of school playing fields:

	Number approved	
Year	*Sports pitch applications*	*Areas less than a sports pitch*
1998	6	3
1999	37	40
2000	28	29
2001	27	5
2002	5	—

No such estimates have been made on the number of playing fields sold to development which are either privately owned or owned by public bodies as this information is not collected. Sport England do however, monitor the number of planning applications concerning playing fields in their role as statutory consultee. The Government intend to publish, with Sport England, detailed national statistics on planning applications concerning playing fields when the data are finalised in the spring.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36187]

Dr. Howells: The information in respect of DCMS and its agencies is contained in the table.

	Number of staff[1]	*How many days allocated*	*Cost to public funds (£)*
1997–98	21	316	72,100
1998–99	21	316	74,695
1999–2000	15	256	62,570
2000–01	15	256	75,475

[1] In DCMS and agencies receiving paid leave to undertake union duties

The time scale for response to this question does not allow for this information to be obtained for non-departmental public bodies.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36211]

Dr. Howells: During this period there was no industrial action in the Department or its agencies. The time scale for response to this question does not allow for this information to be obtained for non-departmental public bodies.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the total real terms expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36164]

Dr. Howells: Using the GDP deflators notified by HM Treasury, the Department's real term expenditure on press and public relations since 1997–98 based on 2001–02 prices was:

	£
1997–98	541,483
1998–99	503,476
1999–2000	795,289
2000–01	795,302
2001–02	[1]602,700

[1] Estimated outturn

No advertising expenditure was incurred by the Department during this period.

The information requested for the Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and the costs of collating it would be disproportionate.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many employees in her Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36697]

Dr. Howells: Computer use is almost 100 per cent. across the Department. Of a staff of 450 some 67 (14.8 per cent.) have availed themselves of the free eye test provision during the 10 months of this financial year. The availability of, and entitlement to, eye test vouchers is set out in an induction pack and on the induction session given to all new staff. Office notices are used to draw attention to all staff matters including eye care vouchers and the subject is a permanent item on the departmental intranet accessible by all staff.

Throckmorton Airfield

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what consideration is being given to designating land on and around the Throckmorton airfield as an ancient monument; and if she will make a statement. [34655]

Dr. Howells: Under the Monuments Protection Programme, this Department and English Heritage are undertaking a systematic review of England's archaeological resource, with a view to providing statutory protection, through scheduling, to those sites identified as being of national importance. Once a site has been scheduled, specific consent has to be obtained from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State before any works can be carried out that could damage the monument.

We are, of course, prepared to look at sites which are under threat, or of particular significance, out of sequence. I understand that English Heritage is currently considering whether land on and around Throckmorton airfield merits scheduling, following archaeological investigation work undertaken there last year in response to the excavation of foot and mouth mass burial pits. English Heritage will be making recommendations to my Department shortly.

Camelot

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action the Government propose to take if Camelot fail to achieve its target of £15 billion for good causes over the seven year length of the contract. [36730]

Mr. Caborn: Camelot's bid for the second National Lottery licence forecasts sales at a level which would yield £15 billion for good causes over the licence period; but this was not a contractual commitment. It is for the National Lottery Commission, exercising its independent responsibilities under the National Lottery Acts 1993 and 1998, to supervise Camelot's operation of the licence and enforce its conditions.

Government Expenditure (Sports Associations)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the total Government expenditure, excluding National Lottery grants, to sports associations within Great Britain in each financial year since 1994–95. [36722]

Mr. Caborn: Government funding for national governing bodies of sport and other sports organisations is channelled through the Sports Councils. The exchequer funding provided for such bodies in England and for UK wide bodies is as follows. Funding for sport in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a devolved matter and an issue for those Administrations.

	£ million
1994–95	11.34
1995–96	[illegible]
1996–97	[illegible]
1997–98	14.75
1998–99	13.69
1999–2000	13.81
2000–01	14.37

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total cost of her Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36143]

Dr. Howells: The website was redeveloped two years ago at a cost of £81,134. Prior to that, the site was developed in-house at zero cost. The website is maintained in-house at zero cost. The hosting cost is £5,000 per year.

We do not retain website statistics beyond the current year. The number of hits over the year is of the order of 4,160,000.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that British citizens detained *(a)* by United States, *(b)* United Front and *(c)* other local forces in Afghanistan (i) have their rights respected, (ii) are not subjected to cruel or unusual conditions or punishments and (iii) are not placed in other jurisdictions against their will. [27226]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are in regular contact with the US authorities about British nationals detained by them. They have said that the detainees are being treated humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva Conventions. The question of jurisdiction is a matter for the US as the Detaining Power. We have asked the interim Afghan authorities to notify us of any British nationals detained by them and have said that all prisoners must be treated in accordance with international practice.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether British officials will have access to UK nationals held in Guantanamo Bay and Afghanistan without the presence of representatives of the US. [36512]

Mr. Bradshaw: Access to the detainees is a matter for the US as the Detaining Power.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to ensure that UK citizens held prisoner in Guantanamo Bay are sent before a competent tribunal to determine whether they are entitled to prisoner of war status. [36509]

Mr. Bradshaw: This is a matter for the US as the Detaining Power. The US authorities said in their statement of 7 February that they have no doubt that the Taliban and al-Qaeda detainees are not prisoners of war, and that the Geneva Convention requires a tribunal only where there is any doubt.

They also confirmed that, notwithstanding the question of status, all detainees would continue to be treated humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva Conventions.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the two British nationals who are detained in Kandahar by the US authorities are being held under the conditions of the Geneva Convention. [36511]

Mr. Bradshaw: The two British nationals who were being detained in Kandahar were transferred to Guantanamo Bay on 11 February. The US authorities have said that all detainees are being treated humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva Conventions.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will urge the US authorities to charge the UK citizens who are detained in Guantanamo Bay with violations of criminal law. [36522]

Mr. Bradshaw: That is a matter for the US authorities once evidence has been gathered and analysed. The US is aware of our desire that this should proceed as quickly as is practicable.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is making to the US Administration regarding the application of Article 5 of the Geneva Convention to prisoners held in US custody in Cuba and Afghanistan. [37062]

Mr. MacShane: We remain in regular contact with the Americans on many aspects of this matter.

The US authorities said in their statement of 7 February that they have no doubt that the Taliban and al-Qaedi detainees are not prisoners of war and that the Geneva Convention requires a tribunal only if there is any doubt.

They again confirmed that, notwithstanding the question of status, all detainees would continue to be treated humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva Convention.

Gibraltar

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the annual cost of the United Kingdom's role and responsibilities in Gibraltar. [31873]

Peter Hain: The main costs arising from the UK's role and responsibilities in Gibraltar fall to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. The approximate cost to the two Departments in the financial year 2000–01 was £63.5 million. £3.5 million of this total was the cost of maintaining the Governor's office, the cost of the staff in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office dealing directly with Gibraltar, and also funding for projects and secondments under the Gibraltar Project Fund. The remainder of the cost was attributable to Commander British Forces Gibraltar.

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33849]

Mr. MacShane: The number of contracts let by FCO and its agency to these companies and the payments to each of them over the period concerned is as follows:

(i) Ernst and Young: 4 contracts:

Year	£
1997–98	nil
1998–99	58,441
1999–2000	55,107
2000–01	nil
2001–02	4,700

(ii) KPMG: 5 contracts:

Year	£
1997–98	nil
1998–99	nil
1999–2000	308,874
2000–01	4,093,390
2001–02	2,013,554

(iii) PWC Consulting/PricewaterhouseCoopers: 1 contract:

Year	£
1997–98	nil
1998–99	759,520
1999–2000	54,337
2000–01	nil
2001–02	nil

No contracts were awarded to Deloitte & Touche or Andersen during this period.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years, giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34183]

Mr. MacShane: The information requested is not held centrally by any one department in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff; [34391]

(2) if he will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and

(c) its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by his Department and how much reclaimed. [34449]

Mr. MacShane: Information is not held in the form required and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the publications issued by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34190]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 825W and to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 627W.

Details of current FCO publications are available on a dedicated website at www.informationfrombritain.com.

It would incur disproportionate cost to list the circulation and unit costs of all individual publications for the four years.

Trade Deals (India)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what trade deals were *(a)* discussed and *(b)* finalised during the Prime Minister's recent visit to India. [35860]

Mr. Bradshaw: During the recent visit to India by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister a number of trade issues were discussed. He gave the keynote speech at the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) conference in Bangalore and signed the New Delhi Declaration with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee which highlighted the success of the growth, to £5 billion a year, of bilateral trade since the Indo-British Partnership was introduced in 1993. The declaration stated that we will focus together on key sectors where we share world class expertise, such as IT and healthcare, and announced the plan by the CII and CBI to hold a major economic seminar in London in July 2002 involving senior CEOs from both countries, to look at the global challenges we face together and to explore future opportunities for enhancing the trade and investment relationship.

The Prime Minister discussed a number of defence and security matters while in India, including defence export opportunities. The Government continue to support the proposals that BAE Systems has made for the supply of Hawk jets to India.

Western Sahara

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of France concerning oil exploration licences in the western Sahara by French companies; and if he will make a statement. [36615]

Mr. Bradshaw: The issue of contracts for oil exploration in western Sahara signed by Morocco with US and French companies was referred by the President of the United Nations Security Council to the United Nations legal adviser, who concluded that the specific contracts at issue were "not in themselves illegal".

This matter has not been raised with the French Government.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he and his officials have had with representatives of the Government of Morocco to discuss the occupation of the western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [36625]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met His Excellency Mohammed Benaissa, the Foreign Minister of Morocco, during his visit to the UK on 21 February 2002.

They discussed the situation in western Sahara. My right hon. Friend stated our position: that we continue to support the efforts of James Baker, the Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General, in trying to find a just and durable resolution to the dispute.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the expenditure in each of the past five years by the UK Government have been on the western Sahara people by *(a)* bilateral projects, *(b)* UN arrangements and *(c)* direct funding; and what is expected for the next financial year. [36627]

Mr. Bradshaw: UK Government expenditure on the western Sahara people under UN arrangements for the past five years is as follows:

	£
1996–97	641,173
1997–98	934,360
1998–99	2,369,371
1999–2000	1,014,550
2000–01	1,984,177

In the next financial year, the expenditure is expected to be £2,018,815.

I refer my hon. Friend to the Secretary of State for International Development for information on expenditure on the other categories.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he and his officials have had with the UN Secretary-General and his special representative concerning the future of the western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [36626]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Secretary-General recently reported to the UN Security Council on his continuing discussions with the parties in the dispute concerning western Sahara. In these discussions he has been supported by James Baker his Personal Envoy.

He observed that the parties, despite assertions to the contrary, had not been willing to co-operate with the UN either to implement the Settlement Plan or to try a 'political solution' to their dispute. He set out four options and recommended that the council extend MINURSO's mandate for two months while these were considered. The options were:

Option 1

The UN could try and resume implementation of the Settlement Plan, but without requiring the concurrence of the parties before action could be taken. The UN could still face the same problems it had already encountered and might not be able to hold a free and fair referendum whose results would be accepted by both sides. There remained the issue that there was no enforcement mechanism set out in the plan.

Option 2

Mr. James Baker, the Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General, could revise the draft Framework Agreement, taking into account the concerns expressed by the parties. But Mr. Baker would not seek their concurrence. The revised draft would be submitted to the council, and would then be presented to the parties on a non-negotiable basis.

Option 3

The council could ask Mr. Baker to explore with the parties one final time whether they would be willing to discuss a possible division of the territory, under his usual negotiating rule of nothing agreed until everything was agreed. If this option were chosen and the parties were unwilling to agree to a division by 1 November 2002, Mr. Baker should be asked to show the parties a proposal for division of the territory that would also be presented to the council. The council would then present this to the parties on a non-negotiable basis. This approach would give each side some, but not all, of what it wanted and would follow the precedent, but not necessarily the territorial arrangements, of the division agreed to in 1976 between Morocco and Mauritania.

Option 4

The council could decide to terminate MINURSO, thereby recognising and acknowledging that after more than 11 years and half a billion dollars expenditure that the UN was not going to solve the dispute without requiring that one or the other of the parties do something voluntarily that they did not wish to do.

In responding to the Secretary-General's report the UK will agree to the two month roll-over of the MINURSO mandate to allow consideration of the options. The UK position remains as previously stated, that we continue to support the efforts of Mr. Baker in trying to find a just and durable resolution to the dispute.

European Council (Barcelona)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the Government will be making to the European Council at Barcelona on the furthering of the e-Europe initiative; and if he will make a statement. [35851]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

There has been encouraging progress since the Lisbon summit of March 2000 towards its goal of making Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. As the Commission has stated in its report to Heads of State and Government for the Barcelona Spring European Council on Economic Reform, telephone calls are cheaper and there is a greater choice of operators everywhere. The number of homes connected to the internet has doubled. In all but one member state, over 90 per cent. of schools have access to the internet. These results show that the eEurope Action Plan 2002 is well on track towards its objective of bringing the internet within reach of all European consumers, businesses, schools, and Governments by the end of this year. The next stage must be to maintain this momentum by encouraging the conditions for it to be used as fully as possible. A key step will be encouraging widespread broadband technology. Higher-speed, "always on" connections will make using the internet more attractive and will stimulate the development of new interactive services.

I attended an Informal Council of Information Society Ministers on 22 February. We discussed the progress of eEurope and how it should be followed up. I expect that the results of these discussions will be forwarded to the forthcoming Barcelona summit.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the Government will be making to the European Council at Barcelona on the liberalisation of the European energy market; and if he will make a statement. [35854]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

We will continue to press for early adoption of the Commission's proposals, which require full liberalisation of EU electricity and gas markets by 2005.

EU Accession Criteria

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of *(a)* the ratio of borrowing to GDP and *(b)* the proportion of public debt to GDP as laid down by the treaty of Maastricht and the growth and stability pact in 2004 of each of the countries applying for EU membership. [36433]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The multilateral surveillance procedure set out in Article 99 of the EC treaty and in the stability and growth pact applies only on accession to the EU.

Assessment of applicant countries' readiness for EU membership will be based on the criteria agreed at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993.

Missile Threat

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the states which he estimates have the capacity to launch missiles that could reach the territory of the United Kingdom. [36476]

Mr. Hoon: I have been asked to reply.

We assess that there is currently no significant ballistic or other missile threat to the United Kingdom and that only the four other nuclear weapon states (the United States, Russia, China and France) have ballistic missile systems with the range to reach the United Kingdom mainland. We continue to monitor developments closely.

[illegible]UCATION AND SKILLS

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the statutory instruments issued by her Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36222]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* A list of the statutory instruments issued by the Department in the last 12 months and the purpose of each has been placed in the Library.

Information about the cost of statutory instruments made to public funds is not held centrally and would cost a disproportionate amount to establish. Similarly, the cost to businesses and individuals is not held centrally and is not available.

As from 1 March 2002, Explanatory Memoranda will be provided for all affirmative statutory instruments as announced by the Leader of the House on Friday 1 February 2002.

Public Appointments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people have been appointed by her to official bodies and NDPBs coming under the aegis of her Department in the last three years; and who they were. [33347]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The total number of public appointments made to non-departmental public bodies since 1 January 1999 is 312. The details of each appointment are contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Post-16 Education (Funding)

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the gross funding of the *(a)* Further Education Funding Council and training and enterprise councils in the last full financial year and *(b)* Learning and Skills Council in its first financial year. [36028]

John Healey *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) accounts for 2000–01 are not yet available, but planned total funding for the FEFC for all purposes in 2000–01 was £3,530 million, excluding student support funds and employer contributions. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) paid a total of £1,270 million to Training and Enterprise Councils in 2000–01.

The Learning and Skills Councils budget for 2001–02 is £5,493 million, excluding assumed employer contributions. This represents a 9 per cent. real terms increase compared to plans for 2000–01 in the same area.

Housing (Teachers)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for each local education authority, how many specialist housing units for teachers have been created in the past year. [36623]

Mr. Timms: The Department for Education and Skills has not created any specialist housing units for teachers in the past year. However, as part of the £250 million Starter Homes Initiative, more than 3,500 teachers will receive assistance in purchasing homes in areas of high demand or high price. In September 2001 we announced the first round of the Initiative, which aimed to help more than 2,800 teachers. In January of this year we announced that a further 700 teachers would receive help in the second round of the Initiative. Assistance will be in the form of equity loans, interest free loans and shared ownership. The tables set out the numbers of teachers who will receive assistance, by LEA, for each of the two rounds of the Initiative.

Round one—Starter Homes Initiative

Area/LEA	*Teachers*
London (covering all London boroughs	1,588
Berkshire	132
Buckinghamshire	85
Oxfordshire	87
Hampshire	200
Kent	142
East Sussex	129
Surrey	157
Cambridgeshire	50
Hertfordshire	68
Bedford	19
Essex	98
Covers Bournemouth, Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, Christchurch, Swindon	60
Total	2,815

Round two—Starter Homes Initiative

Area/LEA	*Teachers*
Dorset	18
Milton Keynes	10
Southampton	10
Warwickshire	25
Wiltshire	21
Bedfordshire	21
Buckinghamshire	25
Cambridgshire	26
East Sussex	22
Essex	66
Hertfordshire	57
Kent	70
Oxfordshire	28
South Gloucestershire/City of Bristol	13
Surrey	46
Swindon	10
Hampshire	59
Medway	30
Portsmouth	17
Thurrock	15
Luton	10
Bath and North East Somerset	10
North Somerset	10
Bracknell Forest	10
Brighton and Hove	10
Isles of Scilly	1
Poole	10
Reading	10
Slough	10
West Berkshire	10
Windsor and Maidenhead	10
Wokingham	10
Total	700

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in her Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36811]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Parliamentary Private Secretaries supporting Ministers in this Department have travelled overseas on Government business on two occasions; both visits took place in 1998, at a total cost of £940. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Code.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new entrants to the Civil Service were employed in her Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 and over. [36492]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, *Official Report*, 25 February 2002, column 879W.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which establishments qualify for the Teachers' Pay Initiative in *(a)* South Tyneside and *(b)* Tyne and Wear [36133]

Margaret Hodge: All further education sector colleges in South Tyneside and Tyne and Wear are eligible for support under the Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI). The following six colleges have submitted "declarations of intent" for TPI and are being paid by the Learning and Skills Council: City of Sunderland College; Gateshead College; Newcastle College; North Tyneside College; South Tyneside College; and Tynemouth College.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what funding is available for the higher pay spine; [36604]

(2) if she will make a statement on the future funding of the Leadership Group. [36605]

Mr. Timms: Schools fund the bulk of teachers' pay from their delegated budget provided by their local education authority using resources distributed through Education Standard Spending Assessments. The total of Education SSAs will rise to £23.8 billion in 2002–03—an increase of 5.7 per cent. in cash terms. On top of this, schools will continue to receive special grant to meet the extra cost of teachers who have moved to the first point of the upper pay scale by crossing the threshold. They will also receive a new special grant worth £250 million over the next two years to help meet the cost of performance points they award to classroom teachers—including those on the upper pay scale—and to members of the leadership group.

Excluded Pupils

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ensure that all excluded pupils enter full-time education from September. [36020]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* In 1999 the Government made a commitment that all LEAs would offer full-time education to pupils excluded for 15 days or more by September 2002. All LEAs have reported making progress against meeting this commitment. This year LEAs received more than £36 million for the Social Inclusion: Pupil Support grant to help with the provision of full-time education for excluded children compared to some £26 million last year. In addition, LEAs can transfer funding from schools when a permanent exclusion occurs in order to support the reintegration of the excluded child into a new school or to pay for education outside of school. We are supporting LEAs in meeting the commitment, visiting some LEAs to identify whether there are any barriers to achieving the commitment and what further support we might offer them; and involving education advisers and HMIs in this programme of support. We shall publish a good practice guide for all LEAs by the end of February.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36193]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: No days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), or its predecessor the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), or its non-departmental public bodies over the last four years.

Pay Scales

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the differential between pay scales in further and secondary education in the last three years for which records are available. [36289]

Margaret Hodge: The main scale pay ranges for teachers in secondary education over the last three years are as follows: 1999 (£14,658 to £23,193); 2000 (£15,141 to £23,843); 2001 (£16,038 to £24,843). The recommended salaries for main scale lecturers in general further education colleges over the two years for which we hold figures are: 2000 (£13,745 to £24,907); 2001 (£14,254 to £25,289). Although the scales are broadly comparable, as independent corporations colleges have their own pay policies and the way in which the recommended pay scales are used will vary from college to college.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in her Department to *(a)* herself and *(b)* her Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36272]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

Sixth Form Funding

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what formula is used by the Learning and Skills Council to fund *(a)* school sixth forms and *(b)* sixth form colleges. [35981]

Margaret Hodge: The formula for funding school sixth forms and further education sixth form colleges is the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the council's chief executive, to write to the right hon. Gentleman providing the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the functions, engagements and events which Ministers, her officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted by her Department and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35707]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. All attendance by Ministers and civil servants at events, engagements and functions is undertaken in line with the guidance and principles set out in the Ministerial Code and departmental staff handbooks.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what percentage of tuition fees collected since 1997 has been paid directly to universities; [35434]

(2) what the total amount is of tuition fees collected since they were introduced; [35435]

(3) what the total amount is of tuition fees that have been used to fund higher education since the introduction of tuition fees; and by what percentage funding for higher education would be received if the total amount of tuition fees collected had been used to fund extra higher education; [35967]

(4) what the increase in university funding has been since tuition fees were introduced. [35968]

Margaret Hodge: All tuition fees, whether paid by students or the taxpayer, are paid directly to higher education institutions. Introducing contributions to tuition fees in 1998 has helped the Government to fund the further expansion of the sector while maintaining and increasing the unit of funding per full-time equivalent student from 2001–02. The estimated total amount of private contributions to tuition fees collected by English institutions from 1998–99 to 2001–02 is £963 million. Over the same period, the total of publicly planned expenditure for higher education institutions was over £21 billion. The increase in publicly planned funding from this Department between 1998–99 and 2001–02 was £1,124 million, an increase of 12 per cent. in real terms. Planned public expenditure for the higher education sector in England in the six years to 2003–04 is set to grow by £1.7 billion. This represents a cash increase of 37 per cent. and a real terms increase of 18 per cent.

Part-time Employment (Universities)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many part-time employees were recruited in UK universities in each year from 1999 to 2001; and how many non-EU students were recruited *(a)* as part-time employees and *(b)* for more than 100 hours of employment in a year in UK universities in each year from 1999 to 2001. [35371]

Margaret Hodge: The available information for the three most recent years, covering part-time academic staff, is shown in the table. Details of the actual number of hours worked is not held centrally.

Part-time academic staff[1] recruited by HE institutions in the UK

	Academic year		
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Number of part-time staff recruited[2]	2,940	3,260	3,420
of which:			
Those from outside the EU	100	140	160

[1] Covers staff who are wholly financed by the institution, and include those who whose primary employment function, according to their contract, is teaching, research, or teaching/research. Only covers part-time staff whose total work commitment exceeds 25 per cent. of a full-time equivalent.

[2] Including staff recruited from other HE institutions.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency's Staff Record. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Individual Learning Accounts

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received from the Association of Colleges concerning losses sustained in the further education sector following closure of the ILA scheme; and what response her Department has made. [35206]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I received correspondence dated 25 January 2002 from David Gibson, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, about the closure of Individual Learning Accounts. I was able to send a full reply on 8 February 2002.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what advice she received from the Further Education Funding Council in May 2000 concerning the setting up of the individual learning accounts scheme; and if she will make a statement. [35207]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Further Education Funding Council staff discussed a number of aspects of the design of the ILA programme at liaison meetings with the Department. These included issues about the quality assurance and audit arrangements for providers. In the final design of the ILA programme, there were light touch quality assurance arrangements so that the scheme could be as simple and non-bureaucratic as possible. Successor arrangements for ILAs will be based on stronger quality assurance arrangements for providers.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many learning providers in the individual learning account scheme fall into each decile measured by the amount owed to them by her Department on 31 January; what was the range of each decile; and what was the total owed. [36484]

John Healey: The figures for amounts owed on 31 January 2002 include amounts withheld from providers already suspended prior to the closure of the programme on 23 November and amounts withheld pending validation checks on claims. The total amount withheld is £14,723,997.

Amounts owed to providers on 31 January 2002

Decile	*Range start (£)*	*Range end (£)*	*Number of registered providers*
1	1	100,826	113
2	100,826	201,651	22
3	201,651	302,477	9
4	302,477	403,303	6
5	403,303	504,128	0
6	504,128	604,954	2
7	604,954	705,780	0
8	705,780	806,606	1
9	806,606	907,431	0
10	907,431	1,008,257	1
Total			154

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people are employed in her Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35358]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not specifically employ staff on job share contracts; however, 12 per cent. of staff are employed under a range of part-time working patterns.

Job sharing is only one of a number of alternative working patterns that staff can take up. The Department promotes and supports the use of a range of flexible working patterns to enable staff to balance home and work responsibilities; other examples, besides part-time working, include condensed hours and home working.

Advertised vacancies in the Department are open to all staff, irrespective of their working arrangements or pattern of work.

School Review (Harrow)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the system of school review used by Harrow local education authority; and if she will make a statement. [35066]

Mr. Timms: Assessments of the way in which local education authorities perform their functions are made by Ofsted and the Audit Commission during inspections of those authorities. Harrow local education authority was inspected in September 2001 and the inspection report is available from Ofted's website at: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by her Department and how much reclaimed. [34462]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by her Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34298]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We organise a large number of events for different target audiences and purposes each year, ranging from small-scale workshops to introduce practitioners to new procedures or initiatives, to larger-scale events to promote policy initiatives or present the bigger picture of the Department's activities to external partners.

Examples of these range from the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership roadshows—a series of local seminars organised annually in the autumn for LEAs and child care providers to share best practice—to the conferences held with LEAs and teachers in autumn 2001 on the proposals set out in the White Paper "Schools: achieving success".

To give details of every event held over the last four years would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many requests the Department has received under the Data Protection Act 1988 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation. [33581]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department has received 31 requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Requests for information to the Department for Education and Skills have usually asked for all information held on the individual, irrespective of medium.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many responses the Department has completed to requests for information made under the Data Protection Act 1998 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation. [33574]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department has completed 26 responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Requests for information usually ask for all information held on the individual, irrespective of medium.

Playing Fields

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list applications made to her Department in the last three years for consent to allow development on school playing fields giving in each case *(a)* the outcome of the application, *(b)* what steps were taken to ascertain whether adequate sports facilities would remain if permission were granted and *(c)* where consent was given, what assurances were secured as to how proceeds of sale would be used. [33633]

Mr. Timms: Although the Department does not collect information in the form requested, the following table lists applications to dispose of areas equal to, or larger than, a sports pitch, together with their outcome.

Before October 1998, there was nothing to prevent a local authority selling a school playing field if it wanted to. Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 was introduced in October 1998 to stop the indiscriminate sale of school playing fields. Local authorities and governing bodies of all maintained schools are now required to obtain the Secretary of State's consent before disposing of playing fields or any part of a playing field. Applications to dispose, or change the use, of school playing fields are assessed against the following criteria:

(a) schools' needs: that playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school making the disposal, and at other schools in the local area, will be met;

(b) community needs: that community use of a school's playing fields is taken into account, with alternative facilities made available if necessary;

(c) finance: that any sale proceeds are re-invested to provide new or improved sports facilities at schools, or are used to help to raise standards by providing better educational facilities.

Only those applications that meet the criteria are approved. Since July 2001, all applications have been scrutinised by the independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel to make sure that they conform to the published criteria. The Panel comprises representatives from the National Playing Fields Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the education organisation Learning through Landscapes, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Local Government Association.

Applications to dispose of school sports pitches which have been approved by the Secretary of State

Local education authority	*School*	*Date applied*
Barnet	Ashmole School	15 December 1998
Bedfordshire	Silver Jubilee Middle School	30 April 1999
Bedfordshire	Ashton St. Peter VA School	29 September 2000
Birmingham	Broadway School	11 June 2001
Blackpool	Collegiate High School	13 December 1999
Bolton	St. James's CofE School	24 July 1998
Bristol	Monks Park Secondary School	28 October 1998
Buckinghamshire	Bellfield First and Middle Schools	22 February 1999
Buckinghamshire	Terriers County First School	10 May 1999
Buckinghamshire	Downley Middle School	12 January 2000
Buckinghamshire	Heights First School	12 January 2000
Calderdale	Brooksbank School	1 July 1998
Cheshire	St. James CofE Junior School	30 November 1998
Cheshire	Colshaw CP School	30 June 1999
Cheshire	Westlands High School	17 November 1999
Cheshire	Manor Park Infant School	27 November 2000
Cheshire	Brookside County Infant School	5 February 2001
Croydon	Haling Manor High School	4 January 1999
Derbyshire	Noel Baker Community School	2 November 1998
Derbyshire	Western Mere School	2 February 1999
Derbyshire	Pingle School	26 July 2000
Devon	Highweek Primary School	17 August 1999
Dorset	Fosters School	7 December 1998
Dudley	Colley Lane Primary School	11 October 2001
Dudley	Summerhill Secondary School	11 October 2001
Durham	The Avenue Comprehensive School	19 May 1999
Durham	Westwood Primary School	31 July 2000
Essex	The Stanway School	17 November 1998
Essex	Moulsham High School	18 January 1999
Essex	Oakview Special School	10 April 2000
Essex	Tabor High School	29 January 2001
Gloucestershire	Churchdown School	3 December 1997
Gloucestershire	The Catholic School of St. Gregory the Great	26 July 1999
Gloucestershire	Oxstalls Community School	25 November 1999
Halton	Ashley Special School	6 November 1998
Hammersmith and Fulham	Gibbs Green Special School	8 March 1999
Hammersmith and Fulham	Burlington Danes School	16 March 1999
Havering	Frances Bardsley School for Girls	13 August 1999
Kent	St. Thomas' Special School	12 May 1999
Kent	St. Simon Stock School	13 December 1999
Kent	Allhallows Primary School	12 July 2001
Knowsley	Sylvester School	12 August 1999
Lancashire	St. Richards RC High School	15 December 1998
Lancashire	St. Thomas Acquinas RC High School	5 February 1999
Lancashire	Baines High School	15 November 2000
Leeds	Lawnswood School	21 November 2000
Leeds	Oakwood Primary School	21 November 2000

Applications to dispose of school sports pitches which have been approved by the Secretary of State

Local education authority	*School*	*Date applied*
Leeds	Roundhay School	21 November 2000
Leeds	Wetherby High School	19 September 2001
Liverpool	Childwall Comprehensive School	9 April 2001
Milton Keynes	Denbigh School	16 November 1998
Milton Keynes	Castles First School	6 August 1999
Norfolk	Redgate Middle School	12 April 2000
North-East Lincs	Hereford Technology College	13 November 2000
North Tyneside	St. Mary's Roman Catholic School	22 December 1998
North Yorkshire	Settle CE Primary School	20 November 1998
Northamptonshire	John Lea Secondary School	14 August 2000
Northumberland	St. Benet Biscop RC Aided High School	5 February 1999
Northumberland	Gallowhill Hall Special School	18 February 2000
Nottinghamshire	Manor Comprehensive School	14 April 2000
Nottinghamshire	Lincoln Street Infant School	14 July 2000
Oldham	Kaskenmoor Secondary School	29 October 1999
Oxfordshire	Wallingford School	16 June 2000
Peterborough	The King's School	8 May 1998
Peterborough	Deacons School	28 July 1998
Peterborough	The King's School	27 September 2000
Rochdale	Spring Hill High School	7 May 1999
Rochdale	Middleton Technology School	28 March 2001
Sefton	Litherland Moss County Primary School	22 March 1999
Shropshire	Lower Grove School	2 February 2001
Somerset	King Arthur's Comprehensive School	24 March 1999
Somerset	Ladymead Comprehensive School	6 April 1999
Staffordshire	Sir Graham Balfour High School	25 June 1999
Surrey	Rosebery School	6 January 1998
Surrey	Okewood District CE School	30 November 1998
Surrey	Merland Rise CP School	8 January 1999
Surrey	Banstead County Junior School and St. Anne's RC Primary School	27 May 1999
Surrey	Park Mead Junior School	8 March 2000
Surrey	Boxgrove Primary School	13 April 2000
Tameside	Egerton Park High School	17 January 2000
Telford and Wrekin	Blessed Robert Johnson School	26 March 1999
Wakefield	South Elmsall Middle School	10 December 1998
Wakefield	Kinsley First School	13 January 1999
Wakefield	Kinsley First School	30 July 1999
Walsall	Beacon School	18 December 1998
Walsall	St. Thomas More Catholic Comprehensive School	18 April 2001
Warwickshire	Attleborough First School	11 December 1998
Warwickshire	Exhall First School	21 July 1999
Warwickshire	Binley Woods First School	3 August 1999
Warwickshire	Stratford-upon-Avon High School	14 August 2000
Warwickshire	Marie Corelli School	21 August 2000
West Sussex	Hazelwick School	7 February 2000
Wigan	Hindley Borsdane Brook Special School	11 February 1999
Wigan	Rose Hill Special School	11 February 1999
Wigan	Tyldesley Highfield Special School	11 February 1999
Wigan	Orrell Holgate Primary School	4 December 2000
Wiltshire	Castle Combe Primary School	7 August 2000
Wolverhampton	St. Peters Collegiate School	25 November 1998
Wolverhampton	Aldersley High School	4 December 1998
Worcestershire	Callowbrook First School	6 November 2000

Notes:

1. 'Sports pitch' means areas of open grassed land which are equal to, or larger than, the Football Association's recommended area for games played by under-10s, that is 2,000m^2 and which have a configuration making them suitable for sports pitches (whether they are so laid out or not).
2. The table excludes applications withdrawn by the applicant and applications where schools would retain the same, or a better, level of access to the same sports pitch or to an equivalent sports pitch.
3. The table includes applications from grant-maintained schools, where the application was made under section 231 of the Education Act 1996 but the decision was made in accordance with the draft criteria and then the criteria published in Circular No. 3/99, "The Protection of School Playing Fields". It also includes applications in respect of foundation and voluntary schools considered under Schedule 22 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 since 1 September 1999.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* colleges of further education and *(d)* local authorities have (i) playing fields, (ii) sports pitches, (iii) swimming pools and (iv) athletic tracks; and if she will provide the figures for each year since 1992. [36726]

John Healey: As part of the data collected for local education authorities asset management plans, the Department has information on the numbers of playing fields, team game playing fields and swimming pools at primary and secondary schools. The team game playing field data do not distinguish between sports pitches, athletic tracks, or other outdoor team game areas. The Department is currently validating the data with a view to publishing the analysis later this year.

The data referred to above were collected mainly in 2000. The Department does not hold data for previous or subsequent years.

The Department does not hold the requested information for colleges of further education or for local authorities.

Research Assessment

Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is in respect of the latest research assessment exercise. [33699]

Margaret Hodge: The Department's policy is to strengthen research excellence and support world-class research. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is a mechanism devised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the other UK funding bodies to establish the relative quality of research in higher education institutions and to provide a mechanism to allocate the funding available. The RAE does not of itself lead to an increase in resources. Nevertheless, in the light of the significant increase in the quality of research in the 2001 RAE, my Department has made available an extra £30 million in 2002–03 to allow the Higher Education Funding Council for England better to support high quality research in higher education.

University, East Lancashire

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will establish a university in East Lancashire; and if she will make a statement. [32991]

Margaret Hodge: The Secretary of State has no such plans. This would initially be a matter for the interested bodies in the region to consider with the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what contracts her Department has had since 1997 with *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture for (i) accountancy, (ii) audit and (iii) consultancy work; and what staff have been seconded (A) to her Department from and (B) from her Department to these firms. [32428]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Arthur Andersen was part of a consortium (including Birmingham City Council and APS Keele) contracted to the Department to provide consultancy services to failing local education authorities following critical Ofsted inspections. The contract was agreed in May 1999; Arthur Andersen withdrew from the consortium in January 2001. Apart from that, the Department has had no contracts with Arthur Andersen or Accenture for the services specified, nor have any staff been seconded to or from my Department to these firms during the period in question.

University Staff

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of additional university staff required to meet the target of increasing the proportion of 18 to 30-year-olds who take higher education courses to 50 per cent. by 2010. [28527]

Margaret Hodge: There will need to be a significant increase in the number of university staff. The extra staff needed in each year will depend upon: the number of students each year as we progress to the target; the number of students to each member of staff; and staff turnover. The number of students each year will be affected by the following factors: the size and age distribution of the population; the proportion of the population attaining the qualifications necessary for higher education; and the proportion of those qualified who choose to enter high education. This will in part depend on the funding levels that are subject to discussion in the spending review. The outcome of the review will be announced in the summer of 2002.

MMR Vaccine

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent guidance her Department has given to nursery schools and other providers of early years education and child care about accepting children who *(a)* have and *(b)* have not had the MMR vaccine. [36503]

Margaret Hodge: The MMR vaccine is the safest and most effective way to protect children against measles, mumps and rubella. Though strongly recommended, the MMR is not compulsory and we have issued guidance to local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships to say that child care and nursery education providers should not exclude a child who has not had the vaccination.

Level 3 Qualifications

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people undertook level 3 qualifications in 2000–01 who already had level 4 or 5 qualifications; and what the average cost per student of these level 3 courses was in (i) tuition costs and (ii) maintenance support; and if she will make a statement. [36578]

Margaret Hodge: Information from the Labour Force Survey suggests that approximately 60,000[1] people undertook level 3 qualifications in 2000–01 who already held a level 4 or 5 qualification. Average costs per student for these courses are not available.

[1] The 95 per cent. Confidence Interval for the LFS estimate of 60,000 is 60,000 ±9,000.

Skills Shortages

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the level of skill shortages in *(a)* the building industry and *(b)* the road haulage industry. [36868]

John Healey: Employers and their representative bodies have the lead responsibility for identifying and tackling skill needs in their sector. The Department does however monitor broad trends and supports National Training Organisations, Industry Training Boards and the new Sector Skills Councils in carrying out this work. A number of recent assessments have been made.

The Employers Skill Survey 2001 covers 27,000 employers, is commissioned by the Department and carried out by independent researchers. This work reported on skills shortages and skills needs across all sectors of the economy, including the two sectors in question. This shows that 7 per cent. of employers in the construction industry, and 6 per cent. in the Other Land Transport[1] industry reported skill shortage vacancies, compared to 4 per cent. of employers overall.

Each sector is also assessed in a series of Skills Dialogues, reports resulting from collaboration between National Training Organisations, Government, funding agencies and education and training bodies to discuss skill needs and skill gaps in the major industrial, business and service sectors. Two relevant assessments from this series are:

An Assessment of Skill Needs in Construction and Related Industries (2001)

An Assessment of Skill Needs in Transport (2001).

Copies of all three reports are available in the House of Commons Library.

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[1] Other Land Transport includes road passenger transport as well as freight transport by road as the data are not disaggregated to the level of road haulage.

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to address the shortage of skilled workers in *(a)* the building industry and *(b)* the road haulage industry. [36867]

John Healey: Arrangements for training in these industries are a matter for the employers, as in any other industry. A network of National Training Organisations (NTOs), set up by employers and formally recognised by the Government, provides strategic leadership and practical guidance about the learning, skills and qualification needs for a defined sector. The Construction Industry Training Board is the NTO for the building and civil engineering sector and the Road Haulage and Distribution Training Council covers the road haulage industry.

The Government recently announced plans to build a stronger sector network that will engage employers more fully in the planning and delivery of learning and skills. Sector Skills Councils are being set up which build on the achievements secured by NTOs.

The Government have introduced a clear vocational pathway from key stage 3 through Modern Apprenticeships, Foundation Degrees and Graduate Apprenticeships to provide high-level vocational skills across sectors. In addition, it is the Government's intention that 50 per cent. of Further Education Colleges will become Centres of Vocational Excellence. Our commitment was strengthened through our proposals to provide more high-quality, rigorous vocational qualifications at GCSE level as set out in the consultation document "14–19 extending opportunities, raising standards".

Additionally, DfES is supporting three projects totalling £5 million funded by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions as part of the £100 million Road Haulage Modernisation Fund. These are a feasibility study into Transferable Loans Scheme, the Expansion of Young Drivers Scheme and the Demonstration Modern Apprenticeship (MA) Based Project in Road Haulage.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when a substantive reply will be given to Mrs. F. Cuthbert's letter of 6 November 2000, concerning PC repairs and maintenance. [36837]

John Healey: I replied to the hon. Member's letter of 19 November 2001 on the 14 February 2002.

Sector Skills Development Agency

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to appoint a chief executive and chairman of the Sector Skills Development Agency. [37020]

John Healey: On 14 February I announced the appointment of Margaret Salmon as chair of the Sector Skills Development Agency. Margaret Salmon is currently a non-executive director with Kingfisher plc and a director of the University for Industry. She is a former chief executive officer of BBC Resources and group personnel director, the Burton Group. Her appointment takes effect from 14 February.

We shall announce shortly the appointment of the chief executive of the agency.

SSA Estimates

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate the size of SSA and expenditure on relevant functions in Newcastle upon Tyne in 2001–02 which is implied by the transfers of SSA expenditure to the Learning and Skills Council and the National Care Standards Commission for 2002–03. [36704]

Mr. Timms: The Learning and Skills Council allocation for Newcastle upon Tyne for 2002–03 is £9.137 million, which is equivalent to £8.914 million of the authority's 2001–02 Education SSA. Figures for expenditure on post-16 education by the authority for 2001–02 are not available. The transfer of funding for the National Care Standards Commission is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate for each local education authority the SSA per student provided for 11 to 15-year-old pupils in real terms. [37044]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is in the following table.

SSA per secondary pupil aged 11 to 15 for 2002–03

	Local education authority	*£*
201	City of London	7,606
202	Camden	4,766
203	Greenwich	4,650
204	Hackney	5,381
205	Hammersmith	4,857
206	Islington	5,176
207	Kensington and Chelsea	4,813
208	Lambeth	5,623
209	Lewisham	4,912
210	Southwark	5,030
211	Tower Hamlets	5,320
212	Wandsworth	4,458
213	Westminster	4,507
301	Barking	4,050

SSA per secondary pupil aged 11 to 15 for 2002–03

	Local education authority	*£*
302	Barnet	3,757
303	Bexley	3,589
304	Brent	4,399
305	Bromley	3,518
306	Croydon	3,945
307	Ealing	4,185
308	Enfield	3,936
309	Haringey	4,587
310	Harrow	3,823
311	Havering	3,562
312	Hillingdon	3,741
313	Hounslow	3,946
314	Kingston on Thames	3,554
315	Merton	3,837
316	Newham	4,520
317	Redbridge	3,801
318	Richmond on Thames	3,475
319	Sutton	3,534
320	Waltham Forest	4,211
330	Birmingham	3,721
331	Coventry	3,457
332	Dudley	3,182
333	Sandwell	3,531
334	Solihull	3,119
335	Walsall	3,334
336	Wolverhampton	3,533
340	Knowsley	3,924
341	Liverpool	3,816
342	St. Helens	3,357
343	Sefton	3,304
344	Wirral	3,454
350	Bolton	3,316
351	Bury	3,222
352	Manchester	4,015
353	Oldham	3,424
354	Rochdale	3,472
355	Salford	3,541
356	Stockport	3,163
357	Tameside	3,310
358	Trafford	3,232
359	Wigan	3,185
370	Barnsley	3,371
371	Doncaster	3,441
372	Rotherham	3,274
373	Sheffield	3,392
380	Bradford	3,574
381	Calderdale	3,351
382	Kirklees	3,389
383	Leeds	3,346
384	Wakefield	3,249
390	Gateshead	3,405
391	Newcastle upon Tyne	3,606
392	North Tyneside	3,317
393	South Tyneside	3,482
394	Sunderland	3,414
420	Isles of Scilly	6,164
800	Bath and NE Somerset	3,064
801	City of Bristol	3,465
802	North Somerset	3,168
803	South Gloucestershire	3,087
805	Hartlepool	3,437
806	Middlesbrough	3,722
807	Redcar and Cleveland	3,416
808	Stockton-on-Tees	3,375
810	Kingston-upon-Hull	3,563
811	East Riding of Yorkshire	3,197
812	North East Lincolnshire	3,424
813	North Lincolnshire	3,352
815	North Yorkshire	3,244
816	York	3,191
820	Bedfordshire	3,408
821	Luton	3,708
825	Buckinghamshire	3,411
826	Milton Keynes	3,523
830	Derbyshire	3,196
831	Derby City	3,429
835	Dorset	3,179
836	Poole	3,133
837	Bournemouth	3,274
840	Durham	3,378
841	Darlington	3,338
845	East Sussex	3,497
846	Brighton and Hove	3,596
850	Hampshire	3,321
851	Portsmouth	3,532
852	Southampton	3,650
855	Leicestershire	3,094
856	Leicester City	3,649
857	Rutland	3,039
860	Staffordshire	3,144
861	Stoke	3,407
865	Wiltshire	3,219
866	Swindon	3,200
867	Bracknell Forest	3,498
868	Windsor and Maidenhead	3,431
869	West Berkshire	3,280
870	Reading	3,642
871	Slough	4,147
872	Wokingham	3,177
873	Cambridgeshire	3,225
874	Peterborough	3,480
875	Cheshire	3,148
876	Halton	3,546
877	Warrington	3,147
878	Devon	3,289
879	Plymouth	3,314
880	Torbay	3,316
881	Essex	3,464
882	Southend	3,520
883	Thurrock	3,681
884	Herefordshire	3,313
885	Worcestershire	3,157
886	Kent	3,470
887	Medway	3,440
888	Lancashire	3,319
889	Blackburn	3,574
890	Blackpool	3,394
891	Nottinghamshire	3,219
892	Nottingham City	3,744
893	Shropshire	3,227
894	Telford and Wrekin	3,363
908	Cornwall	3,335
909	Cumbria	3,299
916	Gloucestershire	3,186
919	Hertfordshire	3,503
921	Isle of Wight	3,600
925	Lincolnshire	3,310
926	Norfolk	3,325
928	Northamptonshire	3,232
929	Northumberland	3,288
931	Oxfordshire	3,399
933	Somerset	3,245
935	Suffolk	3,221
936	Surrey	3,466
937	Warwickshire	3,172
938	West Sussex	3,365

Note:

All figures rounded to the nearest £

Advanced Skills Teachers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many advanced skills teachers there are. [36607]

Mr. Timms: There are 1,234 Advanced Skills Teachers. This figure is based on the annual 618g survey (January 2001) and all those successfully assessed since then up to 13 February 2002.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding is being made available to enable schools to recruit advanced skills teachers. [36606]

Mr. Timms: Funding for Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) posts is available to maintained schools through the Standards Fund. In the current financial year, £40,391,000 is available to enable schools to recruit ASTs, and in 2002–03 this figure will rise to £56,658,850. This total Standards Fund AST grant includes contributions from local education authorities (LEAs) as well as DfES.

Schools are able to claim the additional cost of placing an AST at an appropriate point on the AST pay spine and a fixed amount towards the cost of outreach work. In addition, the grant includes funding for each LEA to use for the co-ordination of AST outreach work and to support and develop its cadre of ASTs.

While specific allocations for ASTs have been made available to LEAs, the Standards Fund does allow some virement between grants.

Primary Schools

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many primary schools had over 600 pupils in 2000. [36099]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* In January 2000 there were 132 maintained primary schools in England with over 600 full-time pupils.

Skills Policies

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her policies to improve the UK's skills base. [33794]

John Healey *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* My Department has a wide range of policies designed to improve the UK's skills base. There are four key elements to our strategy for achieving a high skills, high value added economy. They are to:

strengthen the links between learning and employment;

create excellence in vocational learning;

work with employers to boost skills and productivity;

promote the adult basic skills strategy.

We will strengthen the links between what people learn and the jobs they will have in future. We will extend the Connexions Service to all parts of England by 2003, and we are investing £5.5 billion in the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) budget to encourage greater participation and attainment in learning. We are addressing the under-representation of certain groups in Higher Education (HE) and have developed initiatives to widen participation and equip the country with the high level skills that will be needed in the 21st century. By 2010, I want to ensure that young people and adults in England have knowledge and productive skills that match the best in the world. We will use the new Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to identify and anticipate sector skills needs, building an effective employer network to reduce skills gaps and to improve productivity and performance.

The vocational ladder will offer young people wanting to follow programmes of vocational study a clear set of routes that will allow them to progress to further and higher study, as well as being relevant to work. We are putting in place a new generation of Modern Apprenticeships, forming part of a coherent vocational learning system from age 14 which meets the needs of the individual, is broader and more coherent than before, and offers greater opportunities for progression. We have introduced—and will be developing—Foundation Degrees, Graduate Apprenticeships and Centres of Vocational Excellence. The Green Paper "14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards" published 12 February 2002 sets out proposals designed to enable all pupils to fulfil their potential, and put an end to the waste of young talent in this country.

We are working with employers to boost competitiveness and productivity by giving everyone the chance to develop their skills and realise their potential. We are promoting Investors in People and Learndirect, we are reviewing ICT qualifications and actively encouraging links between SSCs, the LSC and all those organisations who have a role in identifying and delivering the skills the UK needs.

'Skills for Life', the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy, was launched on 1 March 2001. By 2004, I aim to have reduced by at least 750,000 the number of adults who have difficulties with literacy or numeracy. My policies are designed to increase demand for basic skills courses and reduce barriers to learning so that those needing to improve their skills feel empowered to take up learning and are helped to succeed.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many employees in her Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36698]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, effective January 1993, require employers to provide and pay for, upon request from an employee, an eye and eyesight test. There is a requirement for further tests at regular intervals; the optometrist doing the first test can recommend when the next one should be. In addition, employers must pay the cost of special spectacles required where normal ones cannot be used.

This facility is published on the Department's intranet and within its staff handbook.

Information is not held centrally by my department on the number of employees who have taken up this provision and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Student Support

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the assessed contribution of parents to student fees and loans for 2002–03 implied by her proposals for new loan, grant and fees rates for 2002–03 is; and if she will set out the allowances against gross parental income she proposes to allow in 2002–03, including those for other dependent children, which determine the residual income for assessment of loans and fees. [31471]

Margaret Hodge: The residual income threshold above which parents are assessed for a contribution towards higher education student tuition fees and loans is raised annually in line with the latest forecast change in the Retail Prices Index. In 2002–03, parents will not be expected to contribute towards their children's fees or living costs support if their residual income is below £20,480. If their residual income is higher than £20,480, they will be expected to make a contribution towards their children's fees, rising with every pound of residual income. The maximum level of contribution towards tuition fees will be £1,100, which is broadly 25 per cent. of full tuition costs. If their residual income is higher than £30,502, parents will be expected to contribute towards their children's living costs support as well as their fees.

The calculation of a parent's residual income in 2002–03 will allow the following specified sums to be deducted from the parent's gross income:

In respect of any person other than the student who is dependent upon the parent: £2,360

If the parent is also a student and is eligible for support: £950

If the parent being assessed is incapacitated: £1,850

If the parent has a cohabiting spouse or cohabiting partner who is incapacitated and is financially dependent upon the assessed parent: £1,850.

Schools (Portsmouth, South)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children have been excluded from school in the constituency of Portsmouth, South in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [35445]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table:

Permanent exclusions from primary, secondary and special schools in the Parliamentary constituency of Portsmouth, South

	Academic year			
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Portsmouth, South				
Number of permanent exclusions	48	26	19	9
Percentage of school population[1]	0.40	0.22	0.15	0.07
England				
Number of permanent exclusions	12,668	12,298	10,438	8,323
Percentage of school population[1]	0.17	0.16	0.14	0.11

[1] Number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) of full and part-time pupils of all ages (excluding dually registered pupils in special schools) in January each year.

Source:

Annual Schools Census

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children have been statemented as having special needs in the constituency of Portsmouth, South in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [35446]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table:

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs in schools in the constituency of Portsmouth, South[1] (position at January each year)

	2001	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
Pupils with statements of SEN	207	216	225	225	229
Percentage of pupils with statements	1.66	1.74	1.83	1.87	1.93
Total pupils	12,437	12,380	12,288	12,010	11,877

[1] Includes maintained primary and secondary schools and all maintained special schools

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Sector Skills Council

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how long it will take to review and respond to the bids submitted for the Sector Skills Council. [37022]

John Healey: Employers wanting to form a Sector Skills Council (SSC) will submit an expression of interest to the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). A reply will be made normally within six weeks. Expressions of interest accepted by the SSDA will lead to a development period of up to six months. At the end of this period a firm proposal to form an SSC will be submitted for consideration by the SSDA. There is no set time limit for the consideration of a proposal. If the proposal is acceptable the SSDA will make a positive recommendation to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the responsible Ministers in the devolved Administrations for the award of a SSC license.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by when the Sector Skills Council bids have to be submitted. [37021]

John Healey: A deadline for the submission of an expression of interest to form a Sector Skills Council has not been set. It is important that a Council has influential employer leadership and broad support from its sector. The Sector Skills Development Agency therefore will consider an expression of interest from employers when they have committed to deliver action to drive up skills and productivity performance in a sector.

Higher Education

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students are taking higher education courses in further education colleges *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of the overall total number of higher education students. [31555]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The latest available figures for the 2000–01 academic year show that there were 218,200 students on HE courses in FE colleges, which represents 10.8 per cent. of the total number of HE students in the UK.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students entered *(a)* higher education and *(b)* further education in each of the last 20 years. [25126]

Margaret Hodge: Information on entrants to higher and further education courses in English institutions is not available for all the years requested. The available information on total student numbers is shown in the table.

Number of students on higher and further education courses

England

Academic year	*Higher education*[1]	*Further education*[2]
1981–82	702,400	1,385,200
1982–83	717,600	1,419,100
1983–84	735,400	1,495,100
1984–85	742,800	1,527,800
1985–86	765,900	1,561,500
1986–87	796,200	1,629,500
1987–88	811,500	1,672,300
1988–89	842,600	1,755,100
1989–90	896,500	1,799,800
1990–91	968,100	1,767,900
1991–92	1,071,400	1,815,300
1992–93	1,188,200	1,761,400
1993–94	1,301,900	1,929,100
1994–95	1,419,300	2,924,200
1995–96	1,494,200	3,399,800
1996–97	1,533,900	3,802,100
1997–98	1,568,200	3,767,200
1998–99	1,591,500	3,662,300
1999–2000	1,610,000	3,608,100
2000–01[3]	1,651,600	3,671,500

[1] Census count as at December 31 in years up to 1993–94, and as at December 1 in subsequent years. Includes HE students in FE colleges and the Open University.

[2] Includes FE students in HE institutions in all years, and sixth form colleges as from 1993–94. Due to a change in data collection, the figures for FE sector colleges for the years 1994–95 to 2000–01 are not comparable with those for earlier years; as from 1994–95 the figures are based on a whole year count of students, whereas in previous years they a based on a snapshot count at November 1. As from 1994–95, includes funded and non-funded students.

[3] Provisional. The figures for FE sector colleges are estimated.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will state for each local education authority the size of special grant paid where funding changes as a result of the transfer of functions to learning and skills councils of responsibility for post-16 education occurred. [37042]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 412W.

Post-16 Education

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will express, in real terms, the SSA per student in respect of post-16 education in each local education authority in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and what her estimate is of SSA per student transferred to the Learning and Skills Council in 2002–03. [37043]

Mr. Timms: The Post-16 SSA cannot be expressed meaningfully as a per pupil amount because education for this group is not compulsory and a large part of the post-16 SSA is determined on the basis of population aged 11 to 15. For local education authorities without school sixth forms, and consequently with very small numbers of post-16 pupils, this would produce disproportionately high figures. Participation rates in schools post-16 can also vary significantly in authorities with sixth forms, which would make the figures for post-16 SSA per pupil vary significantly from year to year.

Amy Gehring

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether her Department received correspondence about Amy Gehring prior to the circumstances that led to the recent court case. [36602]

Mr. Timms: The Department received a letter on 20 November 2000 from Surrey police which contained factual information about allegations made against Miss Gehring, and stated that no further police action would be taken. This was the first notification the Department received of her case.

Prior to this, on 1 November 2000, Timeplan had already allowed Miss Gehring to return to teaching in Surrey on a supply basis. On 9 November 2000 Surrey Child Protection Unit wrote to Timeplan warning them that the unit considered that Miss Gehring was a serious risk to children. Timeplan did not withdraw Miss Gehring from her teaching post and failed to inform the LEA, DfES or the schools of this warning.

The allegations considered by the court are alleged to have taken place between 19 November 2000 and 31 December 2000.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Restricted Videos (Mail Order)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Solicitor-General what action she plans to take to combat the breach of the provisions of the Video Recordings Act 1984 by those selling Restricted 18 videos via mail order advertisements. [35653]

The Solicitor-General: It falls to the police to investigate the possible commission of any offences under the Video Recordings Act 1984 by those selling Restricted 18 videos via mail order advertisements. I share your concerns over this issue and shall refer the matter to the Home Office.

Where the police have instigated proceedings, or referred a case to the Crown Prosecution Service for advice, the CPS will decide whether a prosecution should follow having applied the tests set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

Discontinued Cases

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many criminal and magistrate court cases were discontinued per year in absolute terms and as a percentage of all cases, in each region and as a percentage of the total acquittals; and how many arose *(a)* from the jury and *(b)* following an order or direction of the judge. [35961]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* Table 1 shows the number of defendants whose cases were discontinued in each of the last three years, and expresses these as a percentage of completed cases in magistrates courts.

Table 2 shows for the same period the number of defendants whose case resulted in a judge ordered acquittal after the prosecution offered no evidence; the number resulting in a judge directed acquittal; and the number acquitted on the verdict of the jury after a full trial.

Each of these outcomes is also shown as a percentage of completed cases in the Crown court.

Discontinuance in magistrates courts—Table 1

	1999		*2000*		*2001*	
Total	*Discontinued*	*Percentage*	*Discontinued*	*Percentage*	*Discontinued*	*Percentage*
P01 Avon and Somerset	164,682	12.1	166,001	12.8	172,398	13.1
P02 Bedfordshire	1,132	10.5	1,148	11.9	1,575	14.4
P03 Cambridgeshire	1,537	9.1	1,249	8.5	1,153	10.4
P04 Cheshire	1,915	8.6	2,140	10.1	2,028	9.8
P06 Cleveland	2,206	11.2	2,002	10.0	2,326	11.5
P07 Cumbria	1,627	9.7	1,315	9.6	1,287	9.5
P08 Derbyshire	2,290	11.7	2,215	12.0	2,167	11.1
P09 Devon and Cornwall	3,473	12.2	3,438	12.1	3,089	12.2
P10 Dorset	1,269	9.6	1,636	12.0	1,471	11.6
P11 Durham	1,740	9.7	1,536	9.8	1,509	10.1
P12 Dyfed Powys	1,696	11.5	1,716	12.5	1,717	13.7
P13 Essex	3,477	12.0	3,432	13.7	2,997	11.5
P14 Gloucestershire	2,254	15.1	2,410	16.9	2,318	16.4
P15 Greater Manchester	9,480	10.6	9,410	10.8	9,985	11.1
P16 Gwent	2,364	12.5	2,303	12.3	2,217	12.0
P17 Hampshire	4,333	10.1	3,842	9.2	3,769	10.0
P18 Hertfordshire	1,695	10.0	2,161	11.1	2,280	11.8
P19 Humberside	1,852	8.1	1,962	9.1	2,121	9.9
P20 Kent	4,793	14.4	4,390	13.8	3,816	12.1
P21 Lancashire	8,769	15.5	9,064	16.3	8,834	17.0
P22 Leicestershire	2,925	12.6	2,658	12.3	2,714	12.2
P23 Lincolnshire	1,651	11.0	1,804	12.1	2,463	13.1
P24 Merseyside	5,022	10.9	5,655	12.3	5,074	12.5
P25 Metropolitan and City	20,779	12.3	19,945	12.8	21,477	12.9
P26 Norfolk	1,472	8.4	1,939	11.1	1,850	10.6
P27 Northamptonshire	1,672	12.9	2,060	13.9	2,324	14.7
P28 Northumbria	6,030	11.4	6,659	12.8	6,090	12.0
P29 North Wales	1,579	9.3	1,614	9.6	1,944	11.9
P30 North Yorkshire	1,938	11.3	1,707	11.6	1,577	12.0
P31 Nottinghamshire	3,795	12.5	4,103	13.9	3,866	13.7
P32 South Wales	6,308	13.8	6,276	14.6	6,349	14.6
P33 South Yorkshire	4,049	11.4	4,192	11.7	4,464	12.6
P34 Staffordshire	3,882	13.0	3,536	12.7	3,357	13.2
P35 Suffolk	1,220	9.3	1,361	11.7	1,487	12.1
P36 Surrey	1,660	10.2	1,924	12.1	1,998	13.0
P37 Sussex	3,480	12.9	3,942	15.4	4,043	15.7
P38 Thames Valley	5,449	13.7	5,250	14.5	8,623	16.1
P39 Warwickshire	714	8.4	685	8.5	786	9.1

Discontinuance in magistrates courts—Table 1

Total	*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
	Discontinued	*Percentage*	*Discontinued*	*Percentage*	*Discontinued*	*Percentage*
P40 West Mercia	2,969	11.4	2,987	11.4	3,415	12.6
P41 West Midlands	12,320	15.3	11,659	14.8	11,607	13.7
P42 West Yorkshire	12,142	14.4	14,275	18.0	16,528	20.6
P43 Wiltshire	1,159	9.2	1,056	8.7	1,155	9.00

Crown court acquittals—Table 2

	Judge ordered acquittals (percentage)	*Judge directed acquittals (percentage)*	*Acquittals after trial (percentage)*
1999			
Total	9,331 (10.7)	1,849 (2.1)	6,958 (8.0)
P01 Avon and Somerset	220 (9.7)	48 (2.1)	178 (7.8)
P02 Bedfordshire	69 (9.6)	27 (3.8)	86 (12.00
P03 Cambridgeshire	69 (6.6)	19 (1.8)	81 (7.8)
P04 Cheshire	121 (7.6)	35 (2.2)	119 (7.50
P06 Cleveland	112 (9.2)	14 (1.2)	55 (4.5)
P07 Cumbria	60 (9.0)	9 (1.3)	35 (5.2)
P08 Derbyshire	102 (7.7)	16 (1.2)	70 (5.3)
P09 Devon and Cornwall	214 (11.9)	41 (2.3)	111 (6.2)
P10 Dorset	72 (8.5)	15 (1.8)	74 (8.7)
P11 Durham	84 (7.8)	18 (1.7)	59 (5.5)
P12 Dyfed Powys	58 (9.0)	18 (2.8)	68 (10.5)
P13 Essex	250 (12.7)	39 (2.0)	212 (10.8)
P14 Gloucestershire	68 (13.1)	10 (1.9)	32 (6.1)
P15 Greater Manchester	623 (11.2)	144 (2.6)	477 (8.5)
P16 Gwent	80 (7.6)	12 (1.1)	89 (8.5)
P17 Hampshire	346 (11.3)	82 (2.7)	321 (10.5)
P18 Hertfordshire	124 (10.4)	32 (2.7)	128 (10.8)
P19 Humberside	82 (6.5)	18 (1.4)	57 (4.5)
P20 Kent	281 (13.8)	80 (3.9)	179 (8.8)
P21 Lancashire	402 (13.8)	51 (1.8)	153 (5.3)
P22 Leicestershire	174 (11.0)	17 (1.1)	103 (6.5)
P23 Lincolnshire	56 (8.2)	11 (1.6)	35 (5.1)
P24 Merseyside	399 (11.6)	49 (1.4)	259 (7.5)
P25 Metropolitan and City	1,864 (13.7)	461 (3.4)	1,888 (13.9)
P26 Norfolk	78 (10.5)	16 (2.2)	53 (7.1)
P27 Northamptonshire	111 (12.0)	8 (0.9)	41 (4.4)
P28 Northumbria	337 (11.2)	55 (1.8)	131 (4.3)
P29 North Wales	45 (6.8)	11 (1.7)	39 (5.9)
P30 North Yorkshire	103 (9.7)	9 (0.8)	67 (6.3)
P31 Nottinghamshire	252 (9.1)	23 (0.8)	101 (3.7)
P32 South Wales	212 (8.3)	45 (1.8)	192 (7.5)
P33 South Yorkshire	268 (9.2)	40 (1.4)	119 (4.1)
P34 Staffordshire	170 (11.1)	35 (2.3)	99 (6.5)
P35 Suffolk	41 (5.1)	22 (2.7)	98 (12.1)
P36 Surrey	97 (11.8)	15 (1.8)	86 (10.5)
P37 Sussex	182 (11.4)	43 (2.7)	152 (9.5)
P38 Thames Valley	125 (8.8)	35 (2.5)	151 (10.6)
P39 Warwickshire	16 (4.6)	6 (1.7)	5 (1.4)
P40 West Mercia	114 (9.5)	24 (2.0)	75 (6.3)
P41 West Midlands	678 (11.8)	121 (2.1)	369 (6.4)
P42 West Yorkshire	542 (8.5)	71 (1.1)	271 (4.2)
P43 Wiltshire	30 (7.1)	4 (0.9)	40 (9.4)

	Judge ordered acquittals/ percentage	*Judge directed acquittals/ percentage*	*Acquittals after trial/ percentage*
2000			
Total	10,070 (11.9)	1,789 (2.1)	6,729 (8.0)
P01 Avon and Somerset	255 (12.3)	28 (1.8)	177 (8.5)
P02 Bedfordshire	75 (10.5)	22 (3.1)	101 (14.1)
P03 Cambridgeshire	89 (8.3)	10 (0.9)	97 (9.0)
P04 Cheshire	135 (8.4)	47 (2.9)	144 (9.0)
P06 Cleveland	113 (9.5)	9 (0.8)	76 (6.5)
P07œ @'bria	57 (7.6)	14 (1.9)	58 (7.8)
P08 Derbyshire	184 (11.3)	32 (2.0)	122 (7.5)
P09 Devon and Cornwall	196 (11.8)	40 (2.4)	129 (7.8)
P10 Dorset	62 (8.6)	36 (5.0)	62 (8.6)
P11 Durham	113 (11.7)	27 (2.8)	44 (4.6)
P12 Dyfed Powys	40 (8.5)	22 (4.7)	54 (11.4)
P13 Essex	155 (10.6)	26 (1.8)	147 (10.1
P14 Gloucestershire	47 (11.1)	9 (2.1)	44 (10.4)
P15 Greater Manchester	727 (12.9)	144 (2.5)	399 (7.1)
P16 Gwent	81 (7.6)	13 (1.2)	77 (7.3)
P17 Hampshire	390 (12.2)	101 (3.2)	364 (11.4)
P18 Hertfordshire	127 (12.1)	20 (1.9)	135 (12.9)
P19 Humberside	87 (7.4)	18 (1.5)	60 (5.1)
P20 Kent	254 (12.1)	54 (2.6)	212 (10.1)
P21 Lancashire	430 (14.7)	40 (1.4)	139 (4.7)
P22 Leicestershire	207 (12.4)	14 (0.8)	59 (4.1)
P23 Lincolnshire	68 (9.7)	16 (2.3)	37 (5.3)
P24 Merseyside	524 (14.4)	61 (1.7)	263 (7.2)
P25 Metropolitan [illegible]d City	1,853 (14.4)	411 (3.2)	1,668 (13.0)
P26 Norfolk	100 (12.4)	17 (2.1)	83 (10.3)
P27 Northamptonshire	124 (15.4)	11 (1.4)	45 (5.6)
P28 Northumbria	327 (11.5)	38 (1.3)	108 (3.8)
P29 North Wales	40 (5.4)	12 (1.6)	72 (9.7)
P30 North Yorkshire	119 (13.6)	13 (1.5)	47 (5.4)
P31 Nottinghamshire	300 (11.8)	38 (1.5)	96 (3.8)
P32 South Wales	194 (7.8)	41 (1.7)	214 (8.6)
P33 South Yorkshire	251 (8.7)	24 (0.8)	96 (3.3)
P34 Staffordshire	201 (13.4)	31 (2.1)	85 (5.7)
P35 Suffolk	60 (8.0)	15 (2.0)	70 (9.3)
P36 Surrey	88 (12.2)	14 (1.9)	70 (9.7)
P37 Sussex	219 (14.0)	32 (2.0)	140 (9.0)
P38 Thames Valley	95 (6.8)	44 (3.2)	161 (11.6)
P39 Warwickshire	23 (6.9)	(0.0)	12 (3.6)
P40 West Mercia	93 (7.2)	39 (3.0)	79 (6.1)
P41 West Midlands	858 (13.7)	106 (1.7)	388 (6.2)
P42 West Yorkshire	685 (12.5)	75 (1.4)	260 (4.8)
P43 Wiltshire	24 (7.0)	16 (4.3)	23 (6.7)

	Judge ordered acquittals/ percentage	*Judge directed acquittals/ percentage*	*Acquittals after trial/ percentage*
2001			
Total	11,292 (13.7)	1,495 (1.8)	6,630 (8.0)
P01 Avon and Somerset	243 (12.9)	31 (1.7)	151 (8.0)
P02 Bedfordshire	43 (6.7)	6 (0.9)	83 (13.0)
P03 Cambridgeshire	68 (7.3)	17 (1.8)	58 (6.2)
P04 Cheshire	142 (9.7)	22 (1.5)	148 (10.2)
P06 Cleveland	172 (12.1)	18 (1.3)	86 (6.0)
P07 Cumbria	88 (10.7)	8 (1.0)	65 (7.9)
P08 Derbyshire	210 (12.9)	27 (1.7)	98 (6.0)
P09 Devon and Cornwall	186 (13.3)	31 (2.2)	109 (7.8)
P10 Dorset	74 (10.5)	20 (2.8)	72 (10.2)
P11 Durham	170 (14.7)	12 (1.0)	61 (5.3)
P12 Dyfed Powys	62 (12.3)	5 (1.0)	33 (6.6)
P13 Essex	159 (12.1)	12 (0.9)	138 (10.5)
P14 Gloucestershire	42 (8.9)	6 (1.3)	49 (10.3)
P15 Greater Manchester	808 (14.5)	131 (2.3)	368 (6.6)
P16 Gwent	71 (7.3)	12 (1.2)	100 (10.2)
P17 Hampshire	363 (13.9)	71 (2.7)	293 (11.2)
P18 Hertfordshire	138 (10.9)	24 (1.9)	158 (22.5)
P19 Humberside	92 (7.7)	16 (1.3)	64 (5.4)
P20 Kent	220 (12.6)	52 (3.0)	173 (9.9)
P21 Lancashire	477 (16.0)	52 (1.7)	210 (7.0)

	Judge ordered acquittals/ percentage	*Judge directed acquittals/ percentage*	*Acquittals after trial/ percentage*
P22 Leicestershire	217 (14.3)	9 (0.6)	70 (4.6)
P23 Lincolnshire	56 (9.7)	14 (2.4)	34 (5.9)
P24 Merseyside	613 (17.1)	64 (1.8)	330 (9.2)
P25 Metropolitan and City	2,245 (16.7)	376 (2.8)	1,675 (12.5)
P26 Norfolk	63 (8.9)	11 (1.6)	56 (7.9)
P27 Northamptonshire	82 (12.0)	7 (1.0)	46 (6.8)
P28 Northumbria	362 (12.1)	30 (1.0)	118 (3.9)
P29 North Wales	66 (9.7)	6 (0.9)	41 (6.0)
P30 North Yorkshire	68 (8.0)	19 (2.2)	29 (3.4)
P31 Nottinghamshire	329 (15.1)	16 (0.7)	65 (3.0)
P32 South Wales	295 (11.7)	33 (1.3)	204 (8.1)
P33 South Yorkshire	397 (12.8)	32 (1.0)	146 (4.7)
P34 Staffordshire	159 (11.9)	11 (0.8)	76 (5.7)
P35 Suffolk	55 (7.7)	23 (3.2)	103 (14.4)
P36 Surrey	95 (11.6)	19 (2.3)	80 (9.8)
P37 Sussex	292 (16.1)	29 (1.6)	164 (9.0)
P38 Thames Valley	157 (10.4)	51 (3.4)	133 (8.8)
P39 Warwickshire	18 (5.6)	1 (0.3)	9 (2.8)
P40 West Mercia	134 (11.0)	29 (2.4)	88 (7.2)
P41 West Midlands	1,248 (18.1)	88 (1.3)	389 (5.6)
P42 West Yorkshire	480 (12.4)	47 (1.2)	222 (5.7)
P43 Wiltshire	33 (9.0)	7 (1.9)	35 (9.5)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the groups of crimes to which discontinuance statistics apply and provide statistics for these crimes on a regional basis for each year since 1992. [35959]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* Discontinuance statistics apply to the full range of crimes handled by the Crown Prosecution Service. Any offence, from relatively minor traffic matters to the most serious crimes, may lead to discontinuance if the evidential and public interest criteria specified in the Code for Crown Prosecutors are not met.

However, the CPS holds no central record on the outcome of particular crimes: the information is held on individual files and could be retrieved only at disproportionate cost.

The table therefore shows the total number of discontinuances in each year since 1992, and expresses this as a proportion of cases completed in magistrates courts. The same information is also shown for each of the 42 Areas of the Service since present records began.

Discontinuance 1992–2001

	1992		*1993*		*1994*		*1995*		*1996*	
	Total	*%*	*Total*	*%*	*Total*	*%*	*Total*	*%*	*Total*	*%*
42 Areas	193,110	13.3	175,025	12.8	159,803	11.7	156,628	12.0	153,274	12.0
P01—Avon and Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,941	—	3,833	17.6
P02—Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,563	—	1,665	18.3
P03—Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,686	—	1,636	14.8
P04—Cheshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,567	—	1,655	10.6
P06—Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,821	—	2,598	23.8
P07—Cumbria	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,705	—	1,715	13.9
P08—Derbyshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,009	—	2,606	19.3
P09—Devon and Cornwall	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,796	—	3,179	16.1
P10—Dorset	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,383	—	1,898	16.0
P11—Durham	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,811	—	1,355	16.2
P12—Dyfed Powys	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,513	—	1,511	15.9
P13—Essex	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,400	—	2,669	14.1
P14—Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,009	—	2,312	24.5
P15—Greater Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	7,454	—	9,101	13.3
P16—Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,049	—	2,178	21.3
P17—Hampshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,374	—	3,084	11.3
P18—Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,782	—	1,973	17.0
P19—Humberside	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,748	—	1,909	12.7
P20—Kent	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,336	—	3,529	17.0
P21—Lancashire	—	—	—	—	—	—	4,113	—	4,532	15.2
P22—Leicestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—	4,389	—	3,606	23.0
P23—Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,016	—	1,783	20.9
P24—Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—	—	4,032	—	4,176	13.5
P25—Metropolitan and City	—	—	—	—	—	—	31,338	—	25,339	17.5
P26—Norfolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,409	—	1,578	14.0
P27—Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,073	—	1,819	23.1
P28—Northumbria	—	—	—	—	—	—	6,056	—	5,123	17.2
P29—North Wales	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,998	—	2,091	15.3
P30—North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,474	—	1,401	13.5
P31—Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,281	—	4,095	20.0
P32—South Wales	—	—	—	—	—	—	5,597	—	6,074	19.6
P33—South Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	5,725	—	4,919	21.5
P34—Staffordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,461	—	3,068	15.4
P35—Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	905	—	1,210	13.8
P36—Surrey	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,913	—	1,926	16.1
P37—Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,146	—	3,023	15.4
P38—Thames Valley	—	—	—	—	—	—	4,744	—	4,854	16.7
P39—Warwickshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	926	—	852	11.8
P40—West Mercia	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,543	—	2,416	14.6
P41—West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	6,636	—	7,035	14.3
P42—West Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	11,473	—	10,503	20.2
P43—Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,432	—	1,420	13.2

Discontinuance 1992–2001

	1997		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
	Total	%	*Total*	%	*Total*	%	*Total*	%	*Total*	%
42 Areas	161,461	12.2	162,661	12.0	164,682	12.1	166,001	12.8	172,398	13.1
P01—Avon and Somerset	3,922	12.5	4,152	12.0	4,574	13.1	3,345	10.4	2,548	8.3
P02—Bedfordshire	1,784	12.4	1,451	11.6	1,132	10.5	1,148	11.9	1,575	14.4
P03—Cambridgeshire	1,734	10.0	1,667	9.5	1,537	9.1	1,249	8.5	1,153	10.4
P04—Cheshire	1,617	7.3	1,776	7.6	1,915	8.6	2,140	10.1	2,028	9.8
P06—Cleveland	2,421	13.8	2,418	12.9	2,206	11.2	2,002	10.0	2,326	11.5
P07—Cumbria	1,848	10.3	1,582	9.2	1,627	9.7	1,315	9.6	1,287	9.5
P08—Derbyshire	2,472	13.3	2,666	12.1	2,290	11.7	2,215	12.0	2,167	11.1
P09—Devon and Cornwall	3,589	12.5	3,651	13.0	3,473	12.2	3,438	12.1	3,089	12.2
P10—Dorset	1,643	12.1	1,453	11.0	1,269	9.6	1,636	12.0	1,471	11.6
P11—Durham	1,391	11.5	1,631	10.9	1,740	9.7	1,536	9.8	1,509	10.1
P12—Dyfed Powys	1,423	11.1	1,389	10.1	1,696	11.5	1,716	12.5	1,717	13.7
P13—Essex	3,170	11.2	3,042	10.4	3,477	12.0	3,432	13.7	2,997	11.5
P14—Gloucestershire	2,390	17.4	2,369	15.3	2,254	15.1	2,410	16.9	2,318	16.4
P15—Greater Manchester	8,588	9.9	9,410	10.3	9,480	10.6	9,410	10.8	9,985	11.1
P16—Gwent	2,605	14.8	2,494	13.0	2,364	12.5	2,303	12.3	2,217	12.0
P17—Hampshire	3,530	8.9	3,196	8.2	4,333	10.1	3,842	9.2	3,769	10.0
P18—Hertfordshire	2,214	13.0	2,238	13.0	1,696	10.0	2,161	11.1	2,280	11.8
P19—Humberside	1,841	8.8	2,042	9.4	1,852	8.1	1,962	9.1	2,121	9.9
P20—Kent	3,932	13.4	4,356	14.0	4,793	14.4	4,390	13.8	3,816	12.1
P21—Lancashire	8,417	14.9	8,806	15.2	8,769	15.5	9,064	16.3	8,834	17.0
P22—Leicestershire	3,466	14.3	2,965	12.8	2,925	12.6	2,658	12.3	2,714	12.2
P23—Lincolnshire	1,807	13.9	1,746	12.0	1,651	11.0	1,804	12.1	2,463	13.1
P24—Merseyside	4,418	9.7	4,479	10.2	5,022	10.9	5,655	12.3	5,074	12.5
P25—Metropolitan and City	24,834	12.7	20,985	11.4	20,779	12.3	19,945	12.8	21,477	12.9
P26—Norfolk	1,790	10.9	1,591	9.8	1,472	8.4	1,939	11.1	1,850	10.6
P27—Northamptonshire	1,492	14.2	1,860	13.8	1,672	12.9	2,060	13.9	2,324	14.7
P28—Northumbria	5,183	11.9	5,677	10.9	6,030	11.4	6,659	12.8	6,090	12.0
P29—North Wales	1,939	11.6	1,648	9.9	1,579	9.3	1,614	9.6	1,944	11.9
P30—North Yorkshire	1,724	10.7	1,624	10.6	1,928	11.3	1,707	11.6	1,577	12.0
P31—Nottinghamshire	3,685	13.8	4,258	13.6	3,795	12.5	4,103	13.9	3,866	13.7
P32—South Wales	6,642	14.1	6,850	14.5	6,308	13.8	6,276	14.6	6,349	14.6
P33—South Yorkshire	4,732	14.3	3,998	13.1	4,049	11.4	4,192	11.7	4,464	12.6
P34—Staffordshire	3,670	13.2	3,796	13.1	3,882	13.0	3,536	12.7	3,357	13.2
P35—Suffolk	1,255	10.3	1,190	9.9	1,220	9.3	1,361	11.7	1,487	12.1
P36—Surrey	1,849	11.1	1,464	9.6	1,660	10.2	1,924	12.1	1,998	13.0
P37—Sussex	3,468	12.3	3,604	12.8	3,480	12.9	3,942	15.4	4,043	15.7
P38—Thames Valley	4,616	11.8	5,407	13.4	5,449	13.7	5,250	14.5	8,623	16.1
P39—Warwickshire	729	8.0	717	8.4	714	8.4	685	8.5	786	9.1
P40—West Mercia	2,283	10.5	2,613	10.8	2,969	11.4	2,987	11.4	3,415	12.6
P41—West Midlands	8,934	11.8	10,714	13.3	12,320	15.3	11,659	14.8	11,607	13.7
P42—West Yorkshire	11,070	14.3	12,108	15.0	12,142	14.4	14,275	18.0	16,528	20.6
P43—Wiltshire	1,344	9.4	1,578	10.8	1,159	9.2	1,056	8.7	1,155	9.0

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what research has been carried out to investigate the reasons for differences in the discontinuance rates for charges of violence against the person, criminal damage and motoring offences. [35953]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* A survey of discontinuance was conducted in six branches of the Crown Prosecution Service during the period October to December 1998.

Data were collected on a matrix of 25 reasons for discontinuance and 11 types of offence, as shown in the table. The survey showed that 18.5 per cent. of all discontinuances related to violence against the person, 7.9 per cent. to criminal damage, and 29 per cent. to motoring offences.

The survey showed considerable variations in the reason for discontinuance for the various types of offence. The most common reasons were as follows.

In offences of violence against the person most discontinuances were recorded where a victim refused to give evidence or retracted a complaint. These amounted to almost 9 per cent. of total discontinuances for the period. In offences of criminal damage the most common reason was the lack of an essential legal element in the prosecution case. These amounted to 1.4 per cent. of all discontinuances. In motoring offences the most common reason was the lack of an essential legal element in the prosecution case: these amounted to 7.4 per cent. of all discontinuance. Other significant reasons were unreliable evidence of identification (4.5 per cent.) and the likelihood of conviction resulting in only a small or nominal penalty (4.5 per cent.).

Discontinuance survey October to December 1998—Reasons for discontinuance as percentage of all discontinuances

Reason for discontinuance	*Violence against person*	*Sexual offences*	*Burglary*	*Robbery*	*Theft and handling stolen goods*	*Fraud and forgery*	*Criminal damage*	*Drug offences*	*Motoring offences*	*Public order*	*Other offences*	*Total*
1. Inadmissible evidence—Breach of PACE	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1
2. Inadmissible evidence—Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.2
3. Unreliable confession	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
4. Conflict of evidence	0.7	0.2	0.8	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.2	0.1	1.1	0.6	0.1	4.4
5. Essential legal element missing	2.3	0.3	1.9	0.2	6.4	0.4	1.4	0.7	7.4	1.8	1.6	24.4
6. Unreliable witness(es)	2.9	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.1	1.1	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.1	6.1
7. Identification unreliable	0.4	0.0	1.0	0.4	0.7	0.0	0.1	0.0	4.5	0.7	0.3	8.1
8. Effect on victims health	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.4
9. Defendant elderly/suffering significant ill health	0.1	0.5	0.4	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.3	0.2	2.7
10. Genuine mistake or misunderstanding	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.8
11. Loss/harm minor and one incident	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.2	1.1
12. Loss/harm put right	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.6	0.1	0.0	1.4
13. Long delay between offence and charge/trial date	0.5	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.4	1.1	0.0	0.0	2.3
14. Very small/nominal penalty likely	0.3	0.0	1.1	0.0	3.2	0.6	1.1	0.6	4.5	1.4	1.6	14.4
15. Information likely to harm national security/international relations	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
16. Caution more suitable	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.1	0.9	0.6	0.1	1.6	0.5	5.4
17. Youth of offender	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.5
18. Case not ready/adjournment refused	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.0	1.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	1.0	0.2	0.1	3.1
19. Offence taken into consideration elsewhere	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.1	1.2
20. Victim refuses to give evidence/retracts	8.9	0.2	0.5	0.0	0.9	0.1	0.9	0.0	0.3	1.0	0.3	12.9
21. Other civilian witness refuses to give evidence/retracts	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	1.4
22. Victim fails to attend unexpectedly	0.8	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.0	1.7
23. Other civilian witness fails to attend unexpectedly	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.6
24. Police witness fails to attend unexpectedly	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	1.1	0.1	0.0	1.2
25. Documents produced at court	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0	5.4
Total	18.5	1.7	6.7	1.0	17.0	1.7	7.9	2.5	29.1	8.7	5.4	100

Victims Charter

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General when the Victims Charter was last revised. [35963]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I have been asked to reply.

The Victims Charter was last revised in 1996, and is currently under review. A new Charter, or equivalent document, will take account of recent developments, and will reflect the Government's success in improving support and services for victims.

Crime Statistics

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on how the balance of serious crime and minor crime changed since 1992 as a percentage of total crimes committed. [35948]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

According to the British Crime Survey (BCS), the proportion of violent crime was 18 per cent. in 1991, 20 per cent. in 1993 (there was no survey undertaken in 1992), and 20 per cent. in the year 2000. The British Crime Survey also shows that the number of violent offences has decreased by 28 per cent. between 1993 and 2000.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prison Service Medal

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish the Royal Warrant for the Northern Ireland Prison Service Medal. [37658]

Dr. John Reid: I am pleased to inform my hon. Friend that the Royal Warrant for the Northern Ireland Prison Service Medal was published today and I have placed copies in the Libraries of the House.

I am delighted that the staff of the Northern Ireland Prison Service are being recognised for the invaluable work they have carried out on behalf of the community over the last 30 years, often at great personal cost.

Twenty nine officers have been murdered and others, and their families, subjected to threats and intimidation. Despite that they have continued to act professionally and have provided an invaluable service to all the people of Northern Ireland.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public funding has been provided to the legal representatives of the families appearing at the Saville Inquiry, broken down by each *(a)* barrister and *(b)* firm of solicitors involved. [34444]

Mr. Browne: The payments made to the legal representatives appearing at the Bloody Sunday Inquiry on behalf of the families or the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) are set out in the following table. The figures include VAT, where that is paid, and, in most cases, expenses as well as fees.

The figures represent the position as at 12 February 2002. The prospective Judicial Review on Barristers' fees and the prospective judgment of the Senior Costs Judge on Solicitors' fees could affect the level of payments already made in respect of the period of work covered.

		Period covered	
	Payments made (£)	*From*	*To*
Senior counsel representing the families[1]			
Lord Gifford	309,944	October 1998	September 2001
Arthur Harvey	398,855	July 1998	November 2001
Michael Lavery	215,317	November 2000	December 2001
B. J. MacDonald[2]	142,101	September 1998	September 2000
P. T. MacDonald[3]	65,800	April 1998	June 1999
Michael Mansfield	296,857	March 1999	October 2001
Elish McDermott	105,309	March 2000	June 2001
Seamus Treacy[4]	370,301	March 1998	June 2001
Senior counsel representing NICRA			
Sir Louis Blom-Cooper	190,647	December 2000	December 2001
Junior counsel representing the families			
John Coyle	213,931	September 1999	May 2001
Fiona Doherty	92,967	October 2000	May 2001
Ciaran Harvey	165,969	December 2000	November 2001
Richard Harvey	101,463	October 2000	March 2001
Brian Kennedy	303,498	July 1999	November 2001
Philip Magee[5]	83,175	June 1998	September 2000
Kieran Mallon	361,005	March 1999	December 2001
Brian McCartney	319,512	July 1998	June 2001
Karen Quinlivan	84,169	March 1999	June 2000
Patricia Smyth	241,096	October 1998	September 2001
Michael Topolski[6]	139,940	November 2000	June 2001
Junior counsel representing NICRA			
Paddy O'Hanlon	101,106	November 2000	January 2001
Solicitors representing the families[7]			
Barr and Co.	170,061	February 1999	August 2001
Brendan Kearney	531,452	July 1999	November 2001
Desmond Doherty and Co.	553,320	November 1998	December 2001
MacDermott and McGurk	529,944	November 1998	December 2001
Madden and Finucane	4,511,193	January 1998	November 2001
McCann and McCann	183,834	October 1998	December 2001
McCartney and Casey	535,084	November 1998	December 2001
Solicitors representing NICRA[8]			

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[1] In addition, the following senior counsel have represented/are representing some of the families but have yet to submit fee claims: Kevin Finnegan, Eoin McGonigal, Declan Morgan and Reg Weir.

[2] Left the case (as a junior) in September 2000 and rejoined the case (as a senior) July 2001.

[3] Left the case June 1999.

[4] Having started as a junior in March 1998, became a senior counsel in September 2000.

[5] Left the case September 2000.

[6] Left the case June 2001.

[7] Includes payments made in respect of witness statement-taking work.

[8] The firm of solicitors representing NICRA, Francis Keenan, has yet to submit a claim for payment.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many employees in his Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36684]

Dr. John Reid: 115 officers who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test since 1 April 2001.

As eyesight testing procedures are revised staff are notified by an internal circular.

New staff are advised of the provision of free eye tests at the induction session, which takes place within two weeks of an officer joining the Department.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33672]

Dr. John Reid: The following table relates to contracts exceeding £50,000.

Year	*England and Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*Total IT systems and support expenditure (£)*
1997–98		Ramick Computing (NI) Ltd.	3,048,148
1998–99	Bull Information Systems Ltd.	HCP Electronics EDC Communications	2,030,657
1999–2000	Compaq Computers Ltd.	Hallmark Solutions (NI) Core Systems Sanderson (NI) Ltd.	4,050,710
2000–01	Pecaso Ltd. Photobase (UK)	Elite Training	5,848,049
2001–02	PA Consultants Ltd. Partnerships UK Compaq Computers Ltd.	ICS Computing Ltd.	[1]2,686,083

[1] Estimate, figures unavailable until the end of this financial year

No contracts have been let to companies in Scotland or abroad except a contract with Microsoft (2000) where the contract office is Dublin.

Police Service

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target of increasing Catholic representation in the police service. [24834]

Jane Kennedy: The response from the Catholic community to the recruitment competitions for the Police Service of Northern Ireland has been very positive. At present this is enabling the chief constable to appoint significantly greater numbers of recruits on a 50 per cent. Catholic 50 per cent. non-Catholic basis than was envisaged by the Independent Commission on Policing. The recruitment arrangements will be kept under regular review, with regard to the progress made towards achievement of a police service which is representative of the Northern Ireland community.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26964]

Jane Kennedy: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

The Northern Ireland Office is committed to meeting the targets for reducing sickness absence which form part of the Department's service delivery agreement.

Interpreters

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* in-house and *(b)* external (i) Irish-English and (ii) other language translators and interpreters have been employed by criminal justice agencies in the most recent year for which records are available; how many hours of work were contracted externally and at what cost; and what steps he is taking to produce the common list of interpreters recommended by the Criminal Justice Review. [29949]

Mr. Browne: None of the criminal justice agencies employ in-house interpreters or translators.

Provision of translators and interpretation for the police was contracted to a private agency on 1 February 2001. Records show that since 1 February:

Four Irish-English translators have been used;

25 interpreters were used for other languages;

Approximately 1,271 hours of work has been contracted out;

Costs stand at £48,300.

In respect of the Northern Ireland courts service, specific costs are not available. Records show that from March 2001 requests have been made on 14 occasions for translations and, since April 2001, 24 requests have been made for the provision of interpreters. None of these have involved Irish.

Figures provided by the Northern Ireland prison service indicate that 140 minutes of work at a cost of £4,079.68 was contracted externally in the financial year 2000–01. A payment of £300 was also made to a Mandarin interpreter. In addition existing staff are used to provide Irish/English translations when necessary.

The development of a common list of interpreters is being considered jointly by the agencies.

Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to commission the production of a child-friendly guide to the proposed changes under the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill in the event of its legislative passage. [34848]

Mr. Browne: The Government will be considering this as part of the work being taken forward on the recommendation, under the review of the criminal justice system, that there should be a public information and education strategy for the criminal justice system. Features proposed by the review (recommendation 14) include the production and distribution of guides to various aspects of criminal justice to target specific groups, including children; publication by all agencies of codes of practice in accessible language; consideration of innovative methods for increasing public understanding such as open days at courts for schools, colleges and the public, and the creation of videos explaining aspects of the criminal justice system; and the inclusion of a criminal justice module in the school civics curriculum.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32324]

Dr. John Reid: No employees in either *(a)* the Department or *(b)* the Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in any year since 1997–98.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32827]

Dr. John Reid: The information is as follows:

Northern Ireland civil servants (NICS)

	Maximum retirement age	Number of staff in post
Grade D2 and D1 appointed before 1 April 1996	65	318
Grade D2 and D1[1] appointed after 1 April 1996	60	267
All grades (excluding D2 and D1)[1]	60	912
Exceptional cases[1]	65	8

[1] The Department may, in exceptional cases, retain an officer, who would otherwise be required to retire at 60 where it is satisfied that it is in the overriding interest of the service to do so.

Home civil servants (HCS)

Category	Maximum retirement age	Number of staff ain post
All grades	60	176
Exceptional cases at departmental discretion	0	10

NICS retirement policy

The current normal age of retirement rules require that all staff, with the exception of those in grades below grade C who were in post on 31 March 1996, are normally retired at age 60. This policy was adopted in 1996 after detailed analysis of business needs indicated it was necessary, in light of severe financial pressures and to help avoid the need for compulsory redundancies.

Conditions have changed since then and the policy is currently under review, although it is too early yet to give any indication of what the outcome might be.

HCS retirement policy

The normal age is 60 for all grades. However, retention beyond age 60 in exceptional cases remains at departmental discretion.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33870]

Dr. John Reid: No staff have been seconded between PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, KPMG, and the NIO in 1999–2000, 2000–01, or April 2001 to date.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34292]

Dr. John Reid: The legal costs incurred by the Northern Ireland Office in each of the last four years are:

	£
1998–99	6,300,016
1999–2000	6,646,533
2000–01	7,386,657
2001–02	5,652,899

These figures do not include any figures relating to the Bloody Sunday Inquiry.

Police Secondments

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent steps he has taken to encourage secondments between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda. [32990]

Jane Kennedy: The Government are working closely with the Irish Government to take forward the implementation of North/South co-operation measures, including lateral entry and secondment, on a reciprocal basis. The two Governments published a timetable on 13 December. Negotiations are progressing on an inter-governmental agreement with the Irish Government, which we hope to sign shortly. This will provide a framework for the development of formal protocols between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Síochána covering issues such as long-term personnel exchanges and co-operation on training. Amendments to the legislation will also be taken forward in both jurisdictions, as required.

Right of Silence

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the terms of reference are for the proposed research into the effect of Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and restrictions on the right of silence at the stage of police questioning; what measures he has proposed to address the needs of those at risk with particular reference to *(a)* children, *(b)* members of ethnic or linguistic minorities and *(c)* people with disabilities; and what steps he has taken to ensure an (i) independent, (ii) cross-community and (iii) lay dimension to the (A) management and (B) evaluation of the research. [29783]

Jane Kennedy: Research into the impact of PACE at the stage of police questioning of juveniles is due to be commissioned in March 2002 following the usual competitive tendering procedures. The terms of reference aim to address recommendations 13 and 180 and of the Criminal Justice Review and are currently being finalised. Advice from a leading academic has been sought on the development of the research plan.

Management of the research will be undertaken by a group comprising, at a minimum, the independent researcher(s), a representative of the commissioning police division, and a representative of the statistics and research branch.

A report on the research will be published in due course following a process of peer review.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list his Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32792]

Dr. John Reid: Details of my Department's, including its agencies, total gross expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98:

	£
1997–98	[1]1,012,450,000
1998–99	
April	55,894.107
May	64,395,682
June	93,772,629
July	92,608,368
August	76,573,205
September	81,194,294
October	74,110,636
November	82,771,176
December	79,652,458
January	80,805,693
February	79,482,183
March	124,729,274
Total	985,989,705
1999–2000	
April	49,516,855
May	93,721,010
June	100,974,430
July	81,889,640
August	78,134,679
September	80,617,464
October	74,467,946
November	82,728,769
December	86,010,979
January	74,319,563
February	95,166,969
March	146,783,865
Total	1,044,332,169
2000–01	
April	58,102,920
May	79,050,965
June	66,382,783
July	84,767,165
August	70,880,829
September	63,154,414
October	[2]226,044,615
November	65,891,921
December	81,588,559
January	109,426,975
February	80,303,727
March	[3]214,022,763
Total	1,199,617,636
2001–02	
April	119,824,120
May	97,830,738
June	93,147,672
July	102,700,197
August	80,643,315
September	93,488,332
October	90,034,565
November	93,312,082
December	85,091,525
January	[4]140,674,727
February	[4]99,674,727
March	[4]99,674,727
Total	[5]1,196,096,727

[1] In total—unable to provide monthly breakdown for this financial year.

[2] Includes greater than £100 million for prison redundancy costs.

[3] Includes greater than £100 for police redundancy costs.

[4] Estimate.

[5] Estimate only-exact figures not known until end of financial year.

President of the Irish Republic

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* official and *(b)* working visits have been carried out in Northern Ireland by the President of the Irish Republic in each year since 1990. [35306]

Dr. John Reid: Since 1990 the President of the Irish Republic has visited Northern Ireland on 75 occasions. None of the visits was classified as official visits: all were either working or private, although a number included an element of both. A breakdown of those visits by calendar year is shown in the table.

Visits to Northern Ireland by the President of the Irish Republic: 1990–2001

	Number of visits
1990	2
1991	0
1992	3
1993	1
1994	3
1995	3
1996	5
1997	3
1998	8

Visits to Northern Ireland by the President of the Irish Republic: 1990–2001

	Number of visits
1999	16
2000	17
2001	14
Total	75

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the costs to the public were of each visit to Northern Ireland by the President of the Irish Republic in each year since 1997. [35333]

Dr. John Reid: Apart from the usual security requirements, any costs arising from visits to Northern Ireland by the President of the Irish Republic since 1997 were borne by the organisation visited.

Police Vehicles

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many armour-protected police vehicles have been taken out of service in the past 12 months. [30416]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable advises me that no armour protected police vehicles have been taken out of service in the last 12 months.

Section 42 Certificates

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 516W, how many section 42 certificates have been issued in each year since 1976; what further consideration he has given the terms of the Devlin judgment; and how many cases involving section 42 certificates are being considered by a fair employment tribunal. [29810]

Jane Kennedy: The information pertaining to section 42 certificates is not recorded centrally but a check of our records shows that 43 certificates have been issued, in respect of 39 individuals, under section 42 of the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1976. The following table gives a breakdown by year.

Year	Number of certificates
1977	1
1978	3
1980	2
1981	4
1982	1
1983	1
1984	[1]6
1985	2
1986	1
1987	2
1988	7
1989	1
1990	3
1991	4
1993	4
1994	[1]1

[1] Of the certificates issued in 1984 and 1994, four were reissues.

No further certificates have been issued since 1994.

Following further consideration of the implications of the Devlin judgment, it has been decided not to seek a reference of this case to the Grand Chamber of the Court in Strasbourg.

We are aware of seven outstanding section 42 cases before a fair employment tribunal, five of which we believe are being handled by the devolved Administration in Northern Ireland.

Police Service Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost was of the first and second recruitment competitions for the PSNI; and how many recruits were taken on. [29812]

Jane Kennedy: The recruitment agent is contracted to run two recruitment competitions, with the costs spread across both competitions. It is not therefore possible to quantify the costs as appointments are still being made from the qualifying pool in competition one, and the section process for competition two is not expected to be completed before the end of April. Around 300 recruits from the first competition will be appointed on a 50:50 basis.

Heads of State (Visits)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who decides whether a visit by a foreign head of state to Northern Ireland is categorised as *(a)* official, *(b)* private and *(c)* working; and what criteria are applied in each case. [35307]

Dr. John Reid: When a visiting head of state is invited by Her Majesty's Government, the visit is described as a guest of Government or official visit. Working or private visits take place on the initiative of the visitor or at the invitation of third parties.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36184]

Dr. John Reid: None.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36204]

Dr. John Reid: The figures are as follows:

For Civil Servants

In 1998, 19 staff received paid leave to undertake union duties. The total days taken were 56 at a cost of £2,511.

In 1999, 14 staff received paid leave to undertake union duties. The total days taken were 56 at a cost of £2,348.

In 2000, nine staff received paid leave to undertake union duties. The total days taken were 49 at a cost of £2,036.

In 2001, 11 staff received paid leave to undertake union duties. The total days taken were 43 at a cost of £1,960.

Local paid absence from work is granted where the duties are of a limited extent (normally for absences of up to half a day). Paid special leave may also be granted within the limit for each leave year of 15 days.

For Prison Officers

The Prison Officers Association has 31 staff who receive paid leave for union duties, and a full-time area chairman. The Prison Governors Association has six staff who receive paid leave for union duties.

In 1998, staff spent a total of 7,391.30 hours on union duties at a cost of £120,478.

In 1999, staff spent a total of 7,863.00 hours on union duties at a cost of £131,390.

In 2000, staff spent a total of 7,066.30 hours on union duties at a cost of £122,247.

Figures are not yet available for 2001.

The annual facility time entitlement for the Prison Officers Association, excluding the area chairman, is 572 days. In addition, other accredited representatives are afforded time off (no set figure) for trade union activities to meet local requirements.

The annual facility time entitlement for the Prison Officers Association is 44 days.

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31773]

Dr. John Reid: The number of staff who have been seconded to the private and public sector in the last four years is as follows:

Year	*Private sector*	*Public sector*	*Total*
1997–98	1	46	47
1998–99	2	5	7
1999–2000	5	6	11
2000–01	3	4	7

Lisnevin Juvenile Justice Centre

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made to ensure the closure of Lisnevin juvenile justice centre by autumn 2002; and what subsequent use will be made of the building. [34847]

Mr. Browne: The project is being advanced in two phases. Phase 1, an interim measure until the purpose-built centre is constructed and successfully commissioned, involves upgrading security and refurbishing the accommodation on the existing Rathgael site and transferring the boys currently in Lisnevin. Phase 2 will be the provision of the purpose-built juvenile justice centre. Phase 1 is currently under way and a building contractor has been appointed to complete the work by early autumn 2002. In tandem with the building work, the Juvenile Justice Board is addressing the operational and staffing issues associated with the development of a single centre. It is anticipated that the interim centre will be commissioned before the end of 2002. At that time, children will transfer from Lisnevin. Discussions are on-going at present between Criminal Justice Division, NIO and the Northern Ireland Prison Service addressing the short and medium term use of Lisnevin. At present, the Northern Ireland Prison Service has no long term plans for the building.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Winning the Generation Game

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, 'Winning the Generation Game', *(a)* what progress his Department has made and *(b)* what future plans his Department has for acting on them; and if he will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24208]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Barbara Roche) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 335W.

Departmental Helplines

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many calls have been received by each telephone helpline administered by his Department in each month since May 2000. [27764]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information on the number of calls answered by each current helpline is set out in the tables.

Telephone helplines—2000 (May to December)

	May	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*
Benefits Agency Chief Executive's helpline	0	0	0	0	182	287	329	292
Employment Service Direct	208,291	255,045	242,992	213,441	273,842	228,299	223,030	161,457
CSA National Enquiry Line and Client Helpline (NEL)	73,583	95,232	77,755	79,269	92,333	69,653	67,395	47,936
National Benefit Fraud Hotline	21,674	18,212	17,440	20,289	15,851	13,980	15,243	9,073
Disability Allowance Customer Care helpline	363,113	359,069	352,325	336,994	347,049	362,133	359,659	258,494
Retirement Pensions Teleclaim Line	0	0	2,611	5,888	10,239	14,736	22,120	18,194
Pensions Direct	79,142	74,873	69,703	70,798	69,885	76,988	100,998	81,511
Customer Liaison Team'	7,955	9,436	11,208	9,253	10,283	12,754	10,561	8,964
Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) Claimline	0	0	0	65,269	49,162	44,864	78,170	24,347
Retirement Pension Forecasting and Advice (RPFA)	29,206	27,351	25,841	27,018	30,104	26,818	28,298	15,989
Public Enquiry Office	6,124	5,107	6,552	5,954	5,427	6,699	5,758	3,368
Employer Direct	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Benefit	3,578	4,238	4,304	4,373	3,954	3,805	3,332	2,090

Telephone helplines—2000 (May to December)

	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
New Deal for Lone Parents	2,158	2,022	2,370	1,736	2,106	2,334	1,671	1,222
BA Publicity Register	1,235	4,753	1,352	2,130	1,050	875	1,187	423
Inherited SERPS Enquiry Line	1,708	1,279	777	3,008	2,223	2,807	3,218	911
Winter Fuel Payment Orderline (WFP)	0	0	0	826	2,264	663	642	564
Pensioner Guide Orderline	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Winter fuel payment Helpline	78,960	109,812	83,136	100,125	84,255	84,429	157,594	122,653
Pensions Information line	4,414	3,198	3,279	3,560	3,712	5,121	4,682	4,636
Child Benefit Enquiry line	164,238	187,530	191,635	195,484	189,830	186,836	180,218	135,993
Benefit Enquiry Line (BEL)	93,584	115,008	92,595	105,683	95,307	91,634	117,619	60,888
Client Help Line (CHL)	273,969	314,703	252,824	253,399	323,135	247,701	240,207	242,189

[1] Formerly Overseas Customer Service helpline

Telephone helplines—2001 (January to June)

	January	February	March	April	May	June
Benefits Agency Chief Executive's helpline	359	250	305	250	267	281
Employment Service Direct	268,050	274,128	340,913	260,997	264,149	360,616
CSA National Enquiry Line and Client Helpline (NEL)	53,379	51,641	63,187	42,394	43,279	54,482
National Benefit Fraud Hotline	17,340	18,191	27,580	17,261	18,461	14,086
Disability Allowance Customer Care helpline	369,324	333,297	361,665	312,256	335,885	331,229
Retirement Pensions Teleclaim Line	30,603	28,861	31,398	41,000	48,500	43,500
Pensions Direct	96,040	103,691	123,515	92,948	94,321	82,661
Customer Liaison Team[1]	14,238	10,333	10,516	8,855	9,842	12,054
Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) Claimline	15,290	13,202	52,814	25,061	13,843	10,723
Retirement Pension Forecasting and Advice (RPFA)	35,640	32,650	36,496	30,994	31,330	20,609
Public Enquiry Office	6,017	4,741	5,130	5,248	2,727	3,708
Employer Direct	0	0	0	18,183	59,907	108,707
Medical Benefit	3,378	2,678	3,188	2,343	3,213	3,628
New Deal for Lone Parents	2,160	2,284	12,167	6,831	2,565	2,348
BA Publicity Register	1,338	1,729	1,149	1,226	1,454	1,588
Inherited SERPS Enquiry Line	690	1,933	4,636	1,615	1,023	508
Winter Fuel Payment Orderline (WFP)	228	194	71	0	0	0
Pensioner Guide Orderline	0	771	6,470	1,496	1,832	1,186
Winter fuel payment Helpline	143,162	78,820	73,487	30,317	19,313	13,857
Pensions Information line	23,970	23,339	23,525	14,956	5,516	5,000
Child Benefit Enquiry line	224,406	190,057	201,576	169,933	184,934	204,969
Benefit Enquiry Line (BEL)	125,715	105,292	107,656	91,520	108,469	92,295
Client Help Line (CHL)	247,059	248,327	337,343	223,630	223,366	277,883

[1] Formerly Overseas Customer Service helpline

Telephone helplines—2001 (July to December)

	July	August	September	October	November	December
Benefits Agency Chief Executive's helpline	283	287	310	395	407	342
Employment Service Direct	326,002	388,892	322,932	338,596	422,070	197,595
CSA National Enquiry Line and Client Helpline (NEL)	44,664	52,883	45,728	44,722	56,039	28,776
National Benefit Fraud Hotline	13,360	14,503	25,001	21,363	19,535	9,738
Disability Allowance Customer Care helpline	333,211	305,652	294,536	335,118	329,134	238,877
Retirement Pensions Teleclaim Line	51,000	50,000	43,999	45,091	28,565	27,134
Pensions Direct	84,145	84,337	78,755	88,502	106,923	73,849
Customer Liaison Team[1]	15,145	11,597	16,361	13,512	13,958	11,169
Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) Claimline	7,906	7,509	7,638	10,003	16,583	8,572
Retirement Pension Forecasting and Advice (RPFA)	30,378	30,923	27,323	32,946	29,366	15,448
Public Enquiry Office	5,250	5,389	5,246	6,191	4,598	4,321
Employer Direct	100,691	135,768	125,684	116,182	144,363	66,428
Medical Benefit	3,888	4,225	3,988	4,365	3,741	2,457
New Deal for Lone Parents	2,624	1,864	2,645	3,055	2,139	1,373
BA Publicity Register	1,171	1,278	1,093	857	1,647	692
Inherited SERPS Enquiry Line	432	10,980	10,044	3,166	3,385	1,861
Winter Fuel Payment Orderline (WFP)	0	0	1,675	1,024	595	185
Pensioner Guide Orderline	3,389	1,834	2,036	1,478	5,081	1,436
Winter fuel payment Helpline	24,929	33,849	30,046	37,340	162,673	92,974
Pensions Information line	8,061	9,684	13,420	7,410	4,543	3,010
Child Benefit Enquiry line	222,978	223,995	225,073	262,668	214,731	158,633
Benefit Enquiry Line (BEL)	86,139	91,250	90,612	116,650	92,632	61,519
Client Help Line (CHL)	216,045	244,198	223,648	221,737	285,016	182,787

[1] Formerly Overseas Customer Service helpline

Ministerial Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team in each of the last four years specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30185]

Mr. Darling: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister gave him on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 707W.

Pensions Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff will be employed by the new Pensions Service; how he plans to advertise the service; and if he will make a statement. [32621]

Mr. McCartney: Departmental allocations for 2002–03 are being finalised but the current assumption is that there will be the order of 13,500 front line staff in the Pension Service next year. We will promote the Pension Service using a variety of different media targeted to the specific needs of individual audiences. Our plans include leaflets, individual letters, internet, interactive digital television, radio, as well as continuing our involvement with partner organisations who are crucial to the successful delivery of the Pension Service.

Pensioners

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioner households there are in England and Wales. [32721]

Mr. McCartney: There are 6.7 million pensioner households in England and Wales.

Notes:

1. We have defined a pensioner household as any household containing a person of state pension age.
2. Figures rounded to nearest 100,000.

Source:

2000–01 Family Resources Survey.

Bereavements Benefit

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many widowers are estimated to have failed to claim bereavement benefit as a result of the confusion over form BD8. [32742]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 5 February 2002]*: The information requested is not available.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the north-west of England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the UK have (i) received winter fuel allowance for the 2001–02 season and (ii) are deemed eligible for the winter fuel allowance and are yet to receive the payment for the season 2001–02. [32924]

Mr. McCartney: Figures for the number of payments made this winter are not yet available and information will not be available in the format requested. Last year's figures are shown in the table and we expect that the number this year will be similar.

Number of people receiving a winter fuel payment in Lancashire, the north-west of England, Wales and GB in 2000–01

Thousand

	Number
Lancashire	223.6
North-west England	1,336.0
Wales	614.0
GB	11,123.5

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.
2. Figures exclude Northern Ireland cases.

Source:

Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service Winter Fuels Payment 2000–01 exercise.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many instances in the last five years his Department has recorded of overpayment of winter fuel payments. [36919]

Mr. McCartney: The amount paid to individuals depends on their household circumstances. Provisions in regulations allow for the automatic payment of a Winter Fuel Payment based on records held by the Department. If departmental records need updating, or the customer has failed to report a change in circumstances affecting the payment, the Department can accept the return of the payment. However, we do not collect centrally the reasons for the return.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of the impact of overpayment of winter fuel payments to some households on other eligible households awaiting payment. [36921]

Mr. McCartney: In order to receive a Winter Fuel Payment, certain conditions have to be met. Payment is, therefore, based on the individual's entitlement rather than the circumstances of other, non-related, households.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by his Department and how much reclaimed. [34447]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public Bodies (Contracts)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33886]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is as follows. It excludes past and present political affiliation which is not collected.

£

Bodies	*Chairmen* *Name*	*Term of office*	*Salary*
(a) Non-departmental public bodies			
ACDET—Advisory Committee for Disabled People in Employment and Training	Sue Maynard-Campbell	July 1999 to March 2000	Nil
DLAAB—Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board	Rodney Grahame	April 1993 to April 2003. Re-appointed: April 1995, April 2000	[1]280
IIAC—Industrial Injuries Advisory Council	Anthony Newman Taylor	July 1996 to July 2002. Re-appointed: July 1999	[1]227
OPRA—Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority	John Hayes CBE	April 1996 to March 2001	[2]95,672
	Harriet Maunsell OBE	April 2001 to March 2006	[2]53,000
PCB—Pensions Compensation Board	Dr. Julian Farrand	August 1996 to August 2001	[2]8,824
	Sir Bryan Carsberg	September 2001 to August 2004	[1]343
PO—Pensions Ombudsman	Dr. Julian Farrand	August 1996 to August 2001	[2]89,216
	David Laverick	September 2001 to August 2004	[2]100,000
Remploy Ltd.	David Heywood CBE	September 1993 to September 1999	14,250
	Alan Pedder	January 2001 to January 2003	[2]72,500
SSAC—Social Security Advisory Committee	Thomas Boyd-Carpenter	August 1995 to August 2001. Re-appointed: August 1998	[1]277
(b) Commissions			
DRC—Disability Rights Commission	Bert Massie, CBE	January 2000 to March 2004	[2]69,528
(c) Inquiries			
Hosker Inquiry	Sir Gerald Hosker	February 2001 to May 2001	39,307
(d) Agencies			
The Appeals Service TAS (previously the Independent Tribunal Service—ITS)	Judge Michael Harris	October 1999 to September 2002	[2]107,346

[1] Per day

[2] Annually

(e) Information on the number, remit, and membership of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000 and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 13 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report, "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews", was issued in October 2001 and covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) for telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34318]

Mr. McCartney: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Mobile telephone running costs for DWP (formerly DSS)

£000

Year	*Departmental total*
1997–98	1,330
1998–99	1,213
1999–2000	1,447
2000–01	1,344
2001–02[1]	1,423

[1] To date

Benefits

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on GP compliance with the appeals system for benefit reduction. [34424]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: General Practitioners (GPs) play an important role in providing factual information to this Department about patients who have claimed a state incapacity or disability benefit. Where necessary, information is obtained by the Department to ensure that initial decisions on benefit entitlement are based on appropriate medical evidence. In relation to state incapacity benefits NHS GPs are required to provide information to a DWP medical officer where they have issued a medical statement to the patient. GPs are not required as part of the NHS terms of service to provide their patients with medical evidence to support an appeal against benefit disallowance.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many recipients of benefits there were by region as *(a)* a percentage of population and *(b)* a total number, in descending order according to percentage figures in 2000. [30606]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The available information is in the table.

Recipients of key benefits[1] by Government office region—May 2000

	Benefit recipients[2]	Percentage of the population
England (North East)	820	32
Wales	920	31
England (North West)	2,030	29
Scotland	1,510	29
England (Yorks and Humber)	1,400	28
England (South West)	1,370	28
England (West Midlands)	1,450	27
England (East Midlands)	1,100	26
England (Eastern)	1,340	24
England (London)	1,760	24
England (South East)	1,910	24

Notes:

1. Key benefits are jobseeker's allowance, retirement pension, incapacity benefit, housing benefit, council tax benefit, severe disablement allowance, disability living allowance (DLA), minimum income guarantee and income support.

2. Figures are expressed as thousands and rounded to the nearest ten thousand.

3. Although a person can receive one or more of these benefits, double counting is eradicated. However, it is possible that some under-16's receiving DLA may live in the same family as an adult receiving a key benefit.

4. Figures exclude cases where people receive national insurance credits only.

Source:

Client Group Analysis of DWP Information Centre 5 per cent. statistical samples—May 2000, Extract of Disability Living Allowance Computer System, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Annual 1 per cent. sample taken in May 2000. Population figures are provided by Office of National Statistics.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34214]

Mr. McCartney: Under Government Accounting, Management of Assets, Departments are required to record assets above the capitalisation threshold limit (currently set at £2,000) for the purpose of their accounts. In addition, they are required to maintain records of "attractive" items (eg those vulnerable to theft) whose value falls below the agreed capitalisation threshold. Guidance within the Department for Work and Pensions outlines the requirement for offices to list and control such items. However, items of nugatory value, for example stationery, are numerous and time consuming to record. Therefore, the Department does not have records for all the items that may be lost/stolen within this category.

Recorded thefts under £50 in DWP and the former DSS in last four years: 1998–2001

Year/category	Quantity
1998	
Computer mouse	5
Telephone	8
Computer memory	1
Scanner	1
Tape	1
Memory chip	1
Floppy disks	99
Disk drive	1
Keyboard	5
1999	
Computer mouse	7
Keyboard	1
Pair of speakers	1
Microphone	1
2000	
Computer mouse	2
Computer keyboard	1
Cat B	1
Wallet and business cash card	1
2001	
Computer mouse	3
Keyboard	2
Floppy disks	2

Tomorrow Project

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the *(a)* remit and *(b)* estimated cost of the report his Department has commissioned from the Tomorrow Project; and what plans he has to publish it. [35280]

Mr. McCartney: The Department has not commissioned a report from the Tomorrow Project. The project is an independent organisation proposing to examine the future of retirement in the UK. In recognition of our interest in this wide ranging review we will make a small financial contribution to the Tomorrow Project, subject to funds from other sources becoming available. Findings from the review will be published by the project, not by the Department.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners qualify for the minimum income guarantee; and how many are in receipt of it. [35622]

Mr. McCartney: As at August 2001 there were 1,736,200 pensioners claiming the minimum income guarantee (MIG). Figures for the number of pensioners who may be entitled to but who have not claimed the MIG are contained in the publication "Take Up of Income Related Benefits: Statistics for 1999/00".

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners claim the minimum income guarantee in each parliamentary constituency in Stoke-on-Trent. [37268]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the table:

Income support MIG claimants by parliamentary constituencies in Stoke-on-Trent, as at August 2001

Thousand

Parliamentary constituency	*Number of claimants*
Stoke-on-Trent, Central	2.8
Stoke-on-Trent, North	3.1
Stoke-on-Trent, South	3.4

Benefit Take-up

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what benefit take-up campaigns have been launched since 1997; and what the cost was of each. [15153]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The MIG take-up campaign was launched in spring 2000. It has resulted in 127,000 extra MIG claims in addition to the 1.7 million pensioner households already receiving MIG. These newly eligible pensioners are on average an extra £20 per week better off. The advertising and media costs of the campaign have amounted to £4.015 million.

Pensions

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the pension situation of people with periods of residence in Australia started during the currency of the social security agreement between Australia and the UK who retire permanently in the UK; and when he expects to introduce primary legislation in relation to this group. [31583]

Mr. McCartney: Arrangements are in place to protect the pension position of those people with periods of residence in Australia who retire permanently in the United Kingdom. Such periods of residence before 6 April 2001 can be converted, if necessary, to qualifying years to enhance the basic retirement pension of these people. We shall be looking to legislate at an early opportunity.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of widows in each region and nation who are in receipt of occupational pension payments. [37041]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

Government office region	*(a) Number of widows and widowers*	*(b) Percentage in receipt of occupational pension payment*
North East	217,000	50
North West and Merseyside	413,000	53
York and Humberside	309,000	55
East Midlands	259,000	49
West Midlands	302,000	49
Eastern	289,000	56
London	376,000	50
South East	379,000	59
South West	263,000	51
Wales	219,000	52
Scotland	357,000	53
England	2,807,000	53
Great Britain	3,383,000	53

Source:

Family Resources Survey 2000–01

Child Poverty

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made towards achieving the Government's objective of halving child poverty by 2010. [35619]

Malcolm Wicks: Details of the progress being made can be found in our third annual report on poverty and social exclusion, Opportunity for all—making progress (CM 5260), which was published on 19 September 2001.

Hospital Stays (Pensions and Benefits)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement regarding loss of entitlement to pension and other benefits of the elderly who are hospitalised. [28063]

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the downrating of pensions and benefits during hospital stays on the elderly and the sick. [29255]

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to revise the legislation reducing benefit payments to patients after six weeks residence in hospital. [34857]

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement regarding loss of entitlement to pensions and other benefits of elderly people during hospital stays. [37732]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* As previously promised we have considered carefully the impact of the current rules which reduce certain benefits paid to pensioners and people of working age after six weeks of hospitalisation. The downrating of benefits preserves the principle that the state should not make double provision. It also recognises that a substantial number of people leave hospital before six weeks.

However, we also recognise that people have on-going financial commitments while in hospital, and although we consider the six week rule strikes a fair balance between what the state should provide financially and the provision individuals should make for themselves, we have none the less decided to extend the period before benefits are downrated by a further seven weeks to the 13 week stage. This will mean that people previously affected by the six week rule will be able to keep their benefits untouched if their period of stay in hospital is under 13 weeks.

We will introduce this change to coincide with the introduction of Pension Credit.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33874]

Mr. McCartney: We have had no secondments between this Department (including Employment Service and the former Department of Social Security) and PWC Consulting and PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Ernst & Young, KPMG and Andersen for the periods listed.

However, as part of the One Project to pilot welfare reform options for clients of working age, a number of staff from the Benefits Agency and Employment Service have been seconded into Deloitte Consulting, which is an operating arm of Deloitte & Touche. The numbers are set out in the table.

Secondments to One pilots run by Deloitte Consulting

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Benefits Agency	45	67	101
Employment Service	84	69	64
Total	129	136	165

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31797]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department takes its responsibilities to protect its assets from theft and fraud very seriously and has put in place a wide range of security measures designed to deter and detect such events.

We have appointed a senior accountable official to ensure that we have effective measures for deterring internal fraud and for investigating it vigorously if it should happen. A central probity team supports the senior accountable official and provides guidance and advice to managers and staff, security specialists and internal investigators. Our recruitment security measures fully meet Cabinet Office requirements.

Staff have a policy statement setting out their personal responsibilities in combating internal fraud and theft, and detailed guidance outlining what to do if they suspect fraud. Later this year we shall be publishing a guide to security for all managers and a guide for staff emphasising their duties and responsibilities, and introducing security awareness induction training for all new staff. Our whistleblower's hotline allows staff to report, in confidence, any suspicions they may have about possible fraud or abuse by staff.

Our management controls include mandatory checks and audit trails targeted at areas of high risk. As well as acting as a deterrent, these checks allow us to identify and tackle potential weaknesses in our systems. We have a network of security specialists to help managers identify risks and put in place counter measures, and teams of internal investigators to investigate cases of suspected internal fraud and theft when they arise.

To emphasise to staff that we will not tolerate wrongdoing, we publish within the Department the outcomes of internal investigations. Penalties may include dismissal and prosecution for serious offences.

We keep all of these measures under review to ensure they continue to support our vigorous approach to tackling fraud and theft.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32009]

Mr. McCartney: Less than a third (31 per cent.).

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33687]

Mr. McCartney: The Department of Social Security and the Employment Services both had made their own contractual arrangements for Information Technology (IT) prior to the formation of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Department of Social Security

The Department spent £1.6 billion on Information Technology (IT) between May 1997 and December 2001.

The Department has let four contracts from May 1997 to date. These contracts were the ACCORD IS/IT contract let to three main parties, EDS (let 23 February 1999), ICL (let 25 February 1999) and BT plc (let 25 March 1999), all of whom have their registered offices in England and the SASA contract let in August 1997 to SEMA Group UK who also have their registered offices in England. Under the ACCORD contract there have been four specific businesses allocations awarded to date.

Employment Service

The Department spent £286 million on Information Technology (IT) between May 1997 and December 2001.

On 1 August 1998 the Employment Services (ES) entered into a partnership agreement with EDS (Electronic Data Systems). The registered office for EDS is Stockley Park, England.

ES entered into an IT contract with International Computers Ltd. (ICL) between 1 April 1997 and 30 September 2000. The ICL registered office is in England.

On 3 February 1997 ES entered into a contract with Siemens Nixdorf Systems Ltd. The SNS registered office is in England.

Retirement Pension Payday

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases of retirement pension payday beginning on the Monday after the person's birthday there were in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [35993]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the table.

Estimated number of newly retired pensioners whose pension payday began on the Monday after the person's birthday

Thousand

	Number
1997–98	410
1998–99	400
1999–2000	400
2000–01	410
2001–02	400

Note:

Numbers rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Source:

September PSCS data, 5 per cent. sample.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money has been saved in each year since 1997 through starting retirement pension payday on the Monday after a person's birthday; and if he will make a statement. [35994]

Mr. McCartney: There are no overall savings under the current regulations which provide for the payment of retirement pension in whole weeks at the start and end of a claim.

If payment were made for part weeks at the start of a claim only, and there was no recovery of overpaid benefit at the end of a claim, we estimate that this would have incurred a cost of up to £20 million per annum in each year since 1997.

Compulsory Retirement

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on compulsory retirement of employees before the legal retirement age; [37428]

(2) what regulations exist to permit companies to enforce retirement on male employees at the age of 60 instead of 65. [37426]

Mr. McCartney: There is no legal retirement age and there are no regulations covering retirement age. The employer sets the age of retirement from a company, often based on the state pension age. If the employer has an occupational pension scheme, the retirement age may be linked to the normal age at which the pension becomes payable.

The Department encourages employers, through the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment, and the Age Positive campaign, to adopt flexible approaches to retirement that benefit both them and their employees. Flexible retirement policies can bring business benefits to employers, and give individuals the opportunity to remain in work longer.

Departmental Overseas Visits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in his Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36820]

Mr. Darling: Parliamentary private secretaries supporting Ministers in this Department have not travelled overseas on Government business on any occasion within the last two years. Information requested for the two preceding years is not available.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Public Sector Transport Activities

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much private finance has been raised for public sector transport activities in the last month; and how much he plans to raise by the end of this financial year. [9778]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 23 October 2001]:* In 2001–02 to date, we have signed an £85 million contract for the Highways Agency's traffic control centre project. Public-private partnership contracts for transport signed since May 1997 will deliver new capital investment in excess of £1,180 million. In addition, the National Air Traffic Services PPP, signed last year, is expected to deliver £800 million of new investment over the next 10 years. London Underground's Tube Modernisation Plans, the contracts for which are expected to be signed shortly, will deliver £13 billion of investment over 15 years.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether Mr. Iain Coucher is *(a)* drawing a salary and *(b)* receiving another form of payment for working on the establishment of a company limited by guarantee to bid for Railtrack. [30238]

Mr. Jamieson: The services of Iain Coucher are obtained through a contract with the Strategic Rail Authority and Coucher Pender Ltd.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what basis Mr. Iain McAllister is employed to develop a company limited by guarantee to bid for Railtrack. [30239]

Mr. Jamieson: Iain McAllister has been appointed to give strategic direction to the CLG team. He continues to be employed by Ford Motor Company Ltd., who have agreed his availability for this part-time role.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government have received a request to guarantee or underwrite the finances of the proposed company limited by guarantee for Railtrack. [33997]

Mr. Spellar: Discussions between Government and potential bidders for Railtrack are commercially confidential.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether his Department has a right of veto over the recommendations of an interim review by the Rail Regulator into the financial requirements for Railtrack in administration for Control Period 2. [36611]

Mr. Jamieson: No.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will hold an inquiry into the dealings between Railtrack and Newt International of Portsmouth; what *(a)* working relationship and *(b)* outstanding contracts there are between Railtrack and Newt International; and if he will make a statement. [36307]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given today [Ref: 35005].

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contingency plans he has made for the provision of extra funding to the Railtrack administrator if the administration period is not over by the end of September. [36312]

Mr. Jamieson: We keep the progress of administration under close scrutiny.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the total amount of the application for state aid consent from the European Commission for Railtrack was communicated to the *Financial Times*. [36314]

Mr. Jamieson: The *Financial Times* has not been briefed by my Department on this matter.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the allocation of the projected funding requirement by the Railtrack administrator by the end of September. [36311]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the administrator.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his latest estimate is of the public sector *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect financial support expected to be required by Railtrack in administration. [34614]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack will continue to receive income from grant and other sources as set out in the regulator's October 2000 periodic review and in the 2 April 2001 agreement between Government and Railtrack.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1188W, on Railtrack, if he will provide examples of failure for each of the key areas of failure listed; what lessons have been learned from each of the key areas of failure listed; and what assessment of those examples of companies limited by guarantee listed has been conducted by his Department. [37581]

Mr. Jamieson: The failures are well known and well documented. Examples are set out in the report of the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, entitled "Rail Investment: renewal, maintenance and development of the national rail network" (Sixth Report of Session 2000–01, 29 March 2001) and in the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee report on "Passenger Rail Franchising and the Future of Railway infrastructure" (First Report of Session 2001–02, Vol 1, 31 January 2002).

It will be for potential bidders to set out their proposals for addressing them in the light of the guidelines issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 31 October 2001.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which *(a)* train operating companies and *(b)* trade union bodies are to be represented on the board of the proposed company limited by guarantee that seeks to be Railtrack's successor. [37239]

Mr. Spellar: It is for the team developing a bid based on the concept of a company limited by guarantee to make a proposal to the administrator, including proposals on the membership of the proposed company.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much the Government have invested through *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* Ernst and Young and *(c)* other associated individuals and organisations since Railtrack was put into the hands of receivers; and if he will make a statement; [36724]

(2) since Railtrack was put into the hands of receivers whether an upper limit *(a)* has been and *(b)* will be put on the amount the Government will invest in Railtrack. [36723]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack plc is currently in railway administration, not receivership. During this period the Government have entered into a loan agreement with the administrator, copies of which were placed in the House Library on 17 October 2001, and through support set out in the October 2000 regulatory settlement and the 2 April 2001 agreement between Government and Railtrack.

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32005]

Dr. Whitehead: The proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2001–02 that will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions will be 2.7 per cent.

Greenhithe Rail Station

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if his Department will make a financial contribution towards the cost of the planned reconstruction of Greenhithe rail station; and if he will make a statement. [31754]

Mr. Spellar: We plan to make an announcement on this in the near future.

Financial Irregularities

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent financial irregularities in the Department have been brought to his attention in the last three months; for how long investigations have been conducted; what action has been taken in response; and what external auditors or other advisers will be appointed to investigate. [34474]

Dr. Whitehead: I am aware of five investigations which have commenced in the last three months, all of which are on-going. All are being led by appropriately qualified staff in the Department, agency or non-departmental public body concerned. Where necessary, the in-house resource will be supplemented by expert advice.

It is too soon to say what the outcomes will be. In each case the evidence will be weighed carefully and, where appropriate, further action, which may include reference to the police, will be initiated.

10-Year Transport Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide an updated version of Table A3 from the 10-year transport plan of July 2000 that accounts for changes which have taken place between its publication and the present time. [34557]

Mr. Jamieson: I have placed an updated version of Table A3 from "Transport 2010: The 10-Year Plan" in the House Library today.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date his Department allocated £290 million of unused rail provision in 2000–01 to the 10-Year Transport Plan. [36795]

Mr. Jamieson: The transfer of resources through end year flexibility arrangements were sought through the summer and winter supply supplementary procedures.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason rail provision budgeted for use in 2000–01 was not allocated to the 10-Year Transport Plan from the date of publication of the plan. [36798]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-Year Plan for Transport, published in July 2000, covers spending plans for the 10 years from 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2011. As such, rail expenditure in 2000–01 falls outside of the plan period.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if there was unused rail provision in 2000–01 in excess of the £290 million now allocated to the 10-Year Transport Plan. [36794]

Mr. Jamieson: No. Unused rail provision in 2000–01 was less than the End Year Flexibility transfers to the rail budget in 2001–02.

London Underground

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he sent Transport for London *(a)* detailed risk registers and *(b)* London Underground Ltd.'s Business Plan in connection with the financial risk of the public private partnership of the London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [34893]

Mr. Jamieson: The provision of information by London Underground Ltd. to Transport for London is a matter for those two organisations.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 289W, on London Underground, if he will place the letters of comfort which have subsequently been issued in the Library; on what date they were issued; and if he will make a statement. [37045]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering issuing a comfort letter in relation to the tube modernisation contracts, but has not yet done so. Such a letter will only be issued after it has first been reported to Parliament.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in the plans for modernising London Underground, how many stations the Government will ensure are wheelchair accessible; and what increase that is on the present figure. [36729]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground and the Government remain committed to improving accessibility of the underground and the modernisation plans will result in real improvements.

I understand from London Underground that 29 of their stations currently provide full step-free access (a further seven stations with step-free access are served by London Underground trains but not owned by London Underground). In addition, 16 stations provide partial step-free access, usually to one platform only. Five stations will gain full step-free access this year. The modernisation contracts specifically require a further 13 stations, where designs are sufficiently developed, to be made step-free. The contracts also provide for London Underground to take forward further schemes as designs are developed. London Underground plans to develop a network of around 100 stations with step-free access by 2020. Once London Underground has transferred to Transport for London, decisions on priorities will be for the Mayor and TfL.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many broken down escalators there were on London Underground stations in each of the last 10 years. [37574]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground who inform me that they track escalator performance through keeping records of the percentage of machines available for service. They believe that these figures give the best indication of service levels but, because they include the effects of planned works (overhauls and renewals) as well as faults, this means that in practice it would be virtually impossible to achieve 100 per cent. availability.

The figures are as follows:

London Underground escalator availability 1994–95 to 2000–01

Year	*Escalator availability (percentage)*
1994–95[1]	93.1
1995–96	92.7
1996–97	92.8
1997–98	93.3
1998–99	92.7
1999–2000	92.0
2000–01	91.4

[1] Data for years prior to 1994–95 could be provided only at disproportionate cost

Escalator availability across the network fell in the last two years because cracks were detected in the top-shafts and steps of three types of escalator at various stages in 1999 and 2000. 52 escalators were affected by these faults, and all have now been repaired and are back in service. The completion of these works has had a notable impact on recent escalator performance—with performance comfortably above 93 per cent. since the beginning of 2001–02.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the *(a)* maintenance backlog at London Underground and *(b)* speed at which the maintenance backlog would be dealt with under a public-private partnership of the tube. [37228]

Mr. Spellar: I understand that in 1997 London Underground estimated that there was a backlog of £1.2 billion. The Government have provided sufficient funding to prevent any worsening of the backlog and to enable renewal and replacement of essential assets. It is only possible to eliminate the backlog through a stable, long-term investment programme, which the 30 year modernisation plans are designed to provide. The plans will eliminate the maintenance backlog and deliver increased capacity, improved reliability and higher quality as quickly as is possible without excessive disruption to current services.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average number of trains in service was broken down by line on London Underground in each of the last 10 years. [37242]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground, who inform me that information is not available in the form requested, because they measure service reliability by total train kilometres operated, rather than the number of trains in service.

London Underground use this measure because the provision of a full schedule requires trains to enter and be withdrawn from service continuously and follow diverse journey patterns. Consequently, the number of trains operating on each line varies considerably by hour, as trains are put into or are withdrawn from service.

Rail Inspection

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment was made of the suitability of the U14 Ultra Sonic line inspection equipment used to inspect railway lines for gauge and corner cracking; and if he will make a statement; [35005]

(2) on what basis the assessment by Railtrack representatives was made regarding Lizard rail inspection technology in a meeting with the Office of the Rail Regulator on 4 January; and if he will make a statement. [35193]

(3) what tests were conducted on the U14 Ultra Sonic line to ensure that it could detect flaws and cracks in rails; and if he will make a statement; [35004]

(4) how much of the rail network has been checked using the U14 Ultra Sonic line inspection equipment; when he expects the task to be completed; and if he will make a statement; [35003]

(5) who manufactures the U14 Ultra Sonic rail track inspection equipment; how many units are involved in inspecting the track within the equipment; and if he will make a statement. [35006]

Mr. Jamieson: These are operational matters for Railtrack plc in railway administration, which remains subject to regulation by the rail regulator in respect of its network stewardship and maintenance and renewal practices; and by the Health and Safety Executive in respect of health and safety.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many units of affordable housing have been built through the exceptions site policy in each year since 1991. [35076]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities are asked to provide information on affordable housing delivered through the planning system as part of their annual Housing Investment Programme returns. On the basis of their responses, there were 466 affordable homes completed in 1999–2000 and 321 in 2000–01 on rural exception sites. In previous years this information was not collected centrally.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how he intends to evaluate the results of the proposed local development frameworks and the action plans in the provision of sufficient affordable housing. [35074]

Ms Keeble: Planning policy guidance note 3: 'Housing', sets out guidance on monitoring, including the supply of affordable housing delivered through the planning system. Further advice is given in "Monitoring provision of affordable housing through the planning system: towards better practice". We propose no change in these arrangements.

Council Properties

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the net change has been in each rural community with a population of less than 3,000 in England in the number of council-owned rented properties since 1991. [35056]

Ms Keeble: Stock data at 'settlement of population' level is only collected centrally in the Census, but initial results from the 2001 Census are being processed and are unlikely to be available until early spring next year.

Humber Bridge

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the cost to his Department of the suspension of debt payments on the Humber Bridge since 1 April 1998. [34781]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* Since 1 April 1998, the suspension of debt payments on the Humber Bridge has cost the Department interest on the debt of approximately £70.7 million.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much debt in respect of the Humber Bridge has been repaid to his Department in each of the last four years. [34782]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The Department has received the following capital repayments:

	£
1998–99	5,000,000.00
1999–2000	5,355,000.00
2000–01	[1]0
2001–02	[1]0

[1] Capital repayments between 2000 and 2002 have been waived so that essential maintenance work at the Humber Bridge can be undertaken.

The Department has also received the following interest repayments:

	£
1998–99	9,149,432.38
1999–2000	9,614,432.38
2000–01	8,782,894.88
2001–02	[1]5,352,479.44

[1] The Department is due to receive a further £5,552,479.44 by 31 March 2002.

Rail Safety

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list each occasion on which a vehicle has encroached on to a railway line causing disruption to rail services in the past three years. [32774]

Mr. Jamieson: The information held by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) showing the number of incidents over the last three years where vehicles have encroached on to railway lines is contained in the table. The figures provided do not however include information on whether there was any consequent disruption to services, as this information is not provided to the HSE's Railway Inspectorate. A list giving details of individual incidents over the last three years has been placed in the House Library.

Incidents of road vehicles obstructing the line not at a level crossing

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*Total*
Motorist losing control of vehicle	13	10	11	34
Loss of control from road over rail bridge	0	1	5	6
Criminal intent/vandalism	15	12	11	38
Other	5	5	4	14
Total	33	28	31	92

Closed-circuit Television

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of *(a)* underground station entrances, *(b)* railway station entrances and *(c)* bus stations in London have CCTV installed; what plans exist to extend CCTV coverage at such locations; when it is expected all such areas will have CCTV; and if he will make a statement. [33377]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that 80 per cent. of London Underground station entrances, all entrances to London main line stations directly managed by Railtrack and all major bus stations owned by Transport for London (TfL) have CCTV installed.

Stations that are the responsibility of train operating companies, and do not currently have CCTV, will generally have CCTV installed when they undergo refurbishment.

Under PPP proposals all underground station entrances will be equipped with CCTV over eight years. TfL is currently considering how smaller off-highway bus parking facilities, some of which are used by passengers, can be installed with CCTV systems.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy that the revaluation of domestic properties for the purposes of council tax should be yield-neutral within each local authority. [33702]

Dr. Whitehead: Revaluation will not affect the overall yield from council tax nationally, but yield in individual local authorities may go up or down. Central Government grant will take account of changes in authorities 'local tax base'.

Railway Industry

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps has he taken to prevent a conflict of interest between officials in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the SRA working on the company limited by guarantee and decision making about the future of the industry in order to satisfy the requirements of the administrator. [35798]

Mr. Jamieson: Steps have been taken to ensure appropriate demarcation between officials involved with policy relating to a CLG bid and those who will advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the appraisal of a transfer scheme put forward by the administrator. In addition, my Department has appointed an independent

Compliance Officer to establish and administer ground rules for the flow of information between Government and the CLG team and other bidders. This is to ensure that the CLG bid is not unfairly advantaged and that commercially confidential information provided to Government by any bidder is handled correctly. The Compliance Officer will report directly to my right hon. Friend on this. The SRA is putting in place similar arrangements to ensure fairness between bidders.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions from what budget additional financial support to Railtrack and the administrator will be provided to cover costs from 15 April to 30 September. [35800]

Mr. Jamieson: It is anticipated that the administrator will shortly repay the current loan facility provided by the Government and that by 15 April the finance required by him will come from commercial banking facilities. Railtrack plc will continue to receive income from grant and other sources as set out in the regulator's October 2000 periodic review and in the 2 April 2001 agreement between Government and Railtrack.

Congestion Charging

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what his latest estimates are of the contributions that will be made to infrastructure investment under the 10-year plan by revenue from congestion charging schemes; [35801]

(2) if he will list the locations in which he expects congestion charging schemes to be in operation by 2010; [35813]

(3) how many congestion charging schemes he expects to be in operation by 2010. [35812]

Ms Keeble: The information can be found in Annexe 3 of Transport 2010: The 10-Year Plan.

Coal Wagons (Speed Limits)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reasons for different rail speed limits for coal wagons in England and Scotland. [35714]

Mr. Jamieson: The maximum permitted speed for coal wagons on class one routes in both England and Scotland is 60 mph. On other routes the maximum permitted speed is 45 mph. Most coal wagons in Scotland do not operate on class one routes, which have higher maintenance standards than other routes.

E-Government

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish local authorities e-Government implementation reports; and if he will place these in the Library. [35467]

Dr. Whitehead: I am making arrangements for copies of 'Implementing E-Government' statements to be placed in the House of Commons Library, and in my Department's own library. At the same time we will be asking local authorities to place their statements on their website, though many have done so already.

Trans-European Transport Networks

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Government's position is on Trans-European Transport Networks; and if he will make a statement. [35855]

Mr. Spellar: On 3 October 2001, the European Commission adopted proposals to amend the guidelines which govern the development of the network. An explanatory memorandum (12597) on the proposals was submitted to Parliament on 2 November 2001. A public consultation exercise was mounted on 17 January and the closing date for responses is 28 February. The Government will determine their formal position on the Commission's proposals in the light of the comments they receive. On 3 January 2002 the Commission adopted a proposal to amend the regulation which lays down general rules for Community financing of the trans-European networks. An explanatory memorandum (15111) on that proposal was submitted to Parliament on 31 January. The memorandum makes clear that the Government support the development of the trans-European network but do not support the Commission's proposal to increase the maximum level of EU support for certain transport projects from 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of total investment costs.

RMT Action

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many days have been lost to industrial action since 1 January 2002 as a result of action taken by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union. [35987]

Mr. Spellar: There have been four days of industrial action on Arriva Trains Northern and six days on South West Trains by members of the RMT.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36202]

Dr. Whitehead: The number of staff who received paid leave to undertake union duties (excluding health and safety activity) in my Department and its agencies[1] in each of the last four years are set out as follows, the majority of whom are part-time representatives:

	Number
1998	277
1999	267
2000	263
2001	270

The total number of days allocated to the staff above in each of the last four years are as follows:

	Number
1998	7,138
1999	7,064
2000	7,043
2001	7,090

The costs of time spent on industrial relations and/or trade union activities, based on average salary costs, in each of the last four years are as follows:

	£
1998	625,000
1999	655,893
2000	605,380
2001	684,166

[1] The figures given do not include the Fire Services College who only became an executive agency within DTLR as a result of the Machinery of Government Changes in June 2001.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36167]

Dr. Whitehead: For details of how my Department assesses its campaigns, I refer the hon. Member to the reply by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 20 December 2000, *Official Report,* columns 168–69W.

For details of expenditure on advertising over the years requested and our estimate for expenditure in the current financial year, I refer the hon. Member to the above reply and to my reply to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 24 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 1037W.

For details of expenditure on PR consultants in support of our campaigns, I refer the hon. Member to my previous reply to the hon. Member on 15 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 207W. Following the change of Department responsibilities after the last general election, figures for 1997–98 could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The details requested for DTLR's Agency and NDPB expenditure are not held centrally and could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36140]

Dr. Whitehead: The estimated cost of the main DTLR website (www.dtlr.gov.uk) in 2001–02 is £396,000. This covers the period from 8 June 2001 to 31 March 2002 and includes direct staff costs (e.g. salaries), development and HTML coding costs. Overhead costs, such as accommodation are not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Since the creation of DTLR, to 31 January 2002, this site has had approximately 22,700,000 page requests. The estimated total to 31 March 2002 is 28,700,000.

Information, prior to 8 June 2001, relating to DTLR's ambit of responsibilities, is not available in a comparable format and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Channel Tunnel (Freight)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the full resumption of channel tunnel freight services to be announced; what discussions he has had with the French authorities on the resumption of channel tunnel freight services; and what compensation is available to British companies denied full access. [36044]

Mr. Spellar: Early resumption of full services is dependent on the implementation of additional security measures—both physical and police resources—at the Calais Fréthun yard so that SNCF can effectively prevent disruptions to operation.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Home Secretary have all written to their French counterparts to ask that all necessary measures are put in place as soon as possible, to enable full rail freight services to resume. The Home Office and their French opposite numbers are working together closely to deal with the underlying immigration issues. I am keeping closely in touch with developments. The British Ambassador visited Calais on 31 January and discussed the problem with the Prefect.

Compensation is a contractual matter between SNCF and its customers.

Health and Safety Laboratory

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost of the PFI project to rationalise the estate of the Health and Safety Laboratory has been in each year since 1997. [36288]

Dr. Whitehead: The resource accounting costs of external advisers to the project, as provided in HSL's published annual report and accounts, are:

	£000
1997–98	496
1998–99	554
1999–2000	732
2000–01	890

Information for 2001–02 is not yet available.

The internal staff costs of the Department and of HSE have not been separately maintained.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost of the delay in taking forward the PFI project to rationalise the estate of the Health and Safety Laboratory. [36287]

Dr. Whitehead: The work of the Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL) is varied and often unique. It has been important, therefore, to ensure that both the output specification for the laboratory has been carefully defined and that the preferred bidder's response has fully reflected the specialist nature of the requirement. This has taken some time to achieve. The costs associated with these activities have not been separately kept, nevertheless the overall scheme has been shown to be affordable to HSL and to represent best overall value for money both for the tax payer and for HSL. It is anticipated that negotiations will now be successfully concluded very shortly enabling construction work to begin, with anticipated completion in the late summer of 2004.

Rail Passenger Numbers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 872W, on railways, what estimate he has made of the likely resource requirements generated by growth in passenger numbers when setting the level of annual resource spending. [36319]

Mr. Jamieson: Revenue support to train operators is projected on the basis of a basecase growth scenario, as set out in the 10-year plan background analysis, plus anticipated additional growth through investment at a sectoral level. The actual levels of subsidy to or premiums from a passenger train operator are set through commercial franchise negotiations.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the relationship between projected rail passenger growth in the 10-year plan and inter-urban fares if such fares rise by more than the retail prices index. [36451]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is carrying out a review of fares regulation, which will include an assessment of the relationship between fares levels and patronage.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2002, Question 32547, on future rail passenger demand, if he will place a copy of the spreadsheet reports and the report on future rail passenger demand for Eurostar in the Library. [37224]

Mr. Jamieson: No. It is not normal practice to disclose such information under Section 13 of Part 2 of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the target increase in passengers on the railways over the next 10 years is accounted for by population increase in the south-east. [37460]

Mr. Byers: The modelling of passenger rail demand is detailed in the 10-year plan year background analysis document. Changes in population will be closely correlated with and will impact upon the principal factors driving future demand but this impact cannot be separately identified.

Rail Investment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the public sector capital investment in the railways falls on a year by year basis between 2005–06 and 2010–11. [36318]

Mr. Jamieson: The fall in public investment in the railways in the latter years of the 10-year plan is primarily due to the completion of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. Capital grants in respect of this project will greatly reduce when the link is completed in 2007.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the planned investment in the railways, at today's prices, over the next 10 years as at *(a)* 20 July 2000, *(b)* 14 January 2002, *(c)* 29 January 2002 and *(d)* 7 February 2002. [37524]

Mr. Jamieson: The planned public sector revenue and investment funding to rail over the 10 years to 31 March 2011 at the particular dates was:

(a) £29.1 billion, as set out in Table A.3 of the Ten Year Plan for Transport.

(b) £33.5 billion, incorporating a £4.5 billion increase in public funding for rail since the 10-year plan. This total was included in the SRA Strategic Plan, and its profile is set out in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 871–72W.

(c) the same as *(b)*.

(d) the same as *(b)*.

The totals are given in cash prices. At each date the projected private sector investment in rail over the same 10 year period is £34.3 billion.

Car Traffic Growth

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes his Department has made to the projection for car traffic growth in the period covered by the 10-year plan; and if he will make a statement. [36310]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-year plan was developed on the basis of a modelled forecast increase in all traffic in England between 2000 and 2010 of 17 per cent., compared to an increase of 22 per cent. without the plan ("Transport 2010: The Background Analysis", figure 13). The plan did not include separate figures for different vehicle types, but car traffic accounts for about 80 per cent. of vehicle kilometres travelled. No new traffic growth forecasts have been issued by the Department since the 10-year plan was published in July 2000.

The current review of the plan is being informed by further modelling, using our national model that we have been revising over the past year. We intend to publish the review in the summer.

Rail Strategic Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 730W, on what calculations the assumption about peak period growth in London was based; and on what basis his Department reached the assumption about inter-city growth detailed in the footnote. [36238]

Mr. Jamieson: It reflects the Department's judgment, as set out on pages 8 to 10 of the background analysis, of the estimated basecase growth in rail passenger traffic by the particular sectors and on the current and expected capacity without the additional 10-year plan investments.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1190, on the strategic rail plan, if he will list the projects to which contractual commitments have been made; and in what years the remaining £8.1 billion has been provisionally allocated. [36320]

Mr. Jamieson: Contractual commitments for public investment support have been entered into for around £7 billion of network grants, £3.5 billion of capital grants to the CTRL and around £30 million of freight facilities grants. These commitments are included in the profile of public investment support set out in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 872W.

Port Charges

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reduce port charges in the UK; and if regional ports will receive subsidies to help alleviate port charges and increase their competitiveness. [36132]

Mr. Jamieson: I have no plans to intervene in the commercial operations of harbour authorities, which charge users of harbours for the services that they provide. We believe that port operations should not in general need public subsidy.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to his Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36269]

Dr. Whitehead: Currently all ministerial boxes are carried by the Royal Mail. On one occasion (3 February 2002) a private company was used to transport the boxes of the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), boxes due to local difficulties due to the late opening of the Northampton office. The cost of this was £147.00 compared to £70.83 plus unspecified charges for bringing staff in to open the depot and collect the boxes. The courier firm used was Racer. Local difficulties have now been resolved and the Royal Mail are now again collecting the boxes.

Departmental Staffing

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his staff complement dealing with walking and cycling policy in May 1997 was; and what the complement is now. [36155]

Mr. Spellar: I have recently increased the complement of full-time posts wholly or mainly concerned with cycling and/or walking from 11 to 12. The number had been 11 since early 1999. Comparable figures for earlier years are not available.

In addition I am at present inviting tenders for a three-year contract to promote the cycling strategy in the English regions. I expect the contractor to employ about 20 people on this task.

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the complement in his cycling and walking division to be able to meet the demands to deliver the national cycling strategy target of raised cycling levels. [36153]

Mr. Spellar: I keep all staff complements under regular review. My assessment is that the present complement for cycling and walking, together with the contract mentioned in my reply to the right hon. Member's previous question, is adequate for the task in hand.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the statutory instruments issued by his Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36232]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department was responsible for making 216 general statutory instruments in the year 2001. A list identifying these has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Included on each instrument is an explanatory note which explains the purpose of the instrument in general terms and, where a regulatory impact assessment is appropriate, indicates from where a copy may be obtained. Copies of regulatory impact assessments are routinely made available in the Libraries of the House on publication of the relevant instrument.

The remainder of the information is not held centrally in a form which would enable my Department to answer it without incurring disproportionate costs.

Disability Discrimination Act

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what responsibility *(a)* train operating companies and *(b)* Railtrack have for railway stations to be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [36717]

Mr. Jamieson: Most railway stations are operated on a day to day basis by train operating companies who lease the stations from Railtrack. The largest stations are operated directly by Railtrack. In respect of the DDA the operator of the station is regarded as the service provider and they are responsible for ensuring compliance. Where

Railtrack's role is solely that of landlord they are required not unreasonably to withhold consent to any proposed changes to meet DDA requirements.

Coastguard

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many incidents were dealt with by each coastguard station in 2001. [36772]

Mr. Jamieson: During 2001, HM Coastguard dealt with a total of 12,518 incidents. A breakdown for each coastguard station is given in the table.

Coastguard Stations	*Total incidents*
2001	
Aberdeen	851
Belfast	331
Brixham	828
Clyde	653
Dover	654
Falmouth	805
Forth	346
Holyhead	653
Humber	648
Liverpool	751
Milford Haven	462
Portland	985
Shetland	300
Solent	1,405
Stornoway	383
Swansea	833
Thames	595
Tyne Tees[1]	394
Yarmouth	641
Total	12,518

[1] MRSC Tyne Tees was decommissioned from 29 September 2001 as part of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's wider introduction of digital communications technology.

Road Safety (Mobile Phones)

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to raise public awareness about the dangers of using a hand held mobile phone while driving. [36463]

Mr. Jamieson: The *Highway Code* makes it clear that drivers should never use hand-held mobile phones while driving and that it is best not to use hands-free phones. The Department will continue to educate drivers about the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving. Over 2 million copies of its advisory leaflet, "mobile phones & driving", have been issued to road safety officers, the police and others on request. A new campaign is planned for the spring.

Solway Harvester

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been paid by his Department for the salvage and subsequent storage of the fishing vessel, Solway Harvester, to *(a)* the Government of the Isle of Man and *(b)* other parties; and if he will list them. [36748]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the salvage of the fishing vessel Solway Harvester the marine accident investigation branch has paid £124,136.77 to the Government of the Isle of Man. This payment was 50 per cent. of the costs incurred for the final raising of the wreck and subsequent work. No money has been paid to any other organisation.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will consider delaying releasing the marine accident investigation branch report into the Solway Harvester until the conclusion of the Isle of Man police investigation into the vessel's sinking. [36734]

Mr. Jamieson: The chief inspector of marine accidents has received a letter from the Attorney General of the Isle of Man requesting he defer the publication of the marine accident investigation branch (MAIB) report into the loss of the Solway Harvester. The request has been made to enable the Attorney General to consider both the MAIB report and the Isle of Man report into the same accident. The chief inspector has acceded to this request.

Norwich Airport

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to permit Norwich city council to borrow to allow for airport expansion. [36444]

Mr. Jamieson: Statutory control over Norwich airport's borrowing was removed in 1999. The airport company's ability to borrow now depends on its financial position rather than on central Government borrowing limits.

Rail Safety (Asylum Seekers)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action his Department is taking to ensure that rail safety is not compromised by asylum seekers entering the UK through the channel tunnel. [36610]

Mr. Jamieson: The safety of the channel tunnel system is the responsibility of Eurotunnel, overseen by the Channel Tunnel Intergovernmental Commission with the advice and assistance of the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority. The Safety Authority regularly receives reports from Eurotunnel on the activity of asylum seekers, and makes reports to the Intergovernmental Commission on the changing situation and on Eurotunnel's preventive measures. It keeps the position under regular review.

The safety authority remains satisfied that Eurotunnel has taken reasonably practicable measures to ensure the safety of the channel tunnel system, including the safety of passengers and crew.

Housing

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he took into account new housing plans for the south-east in developing the 10-year plan; and if he will make a statement. [36609]

Mr. Jamieson: The analysis carried out for the 10-year plan included an allowance for regional differences in population growth, and thus in car traffic growth and resulting congestion. It did not address the detailed location of new housing.

Decisions on allocation of resources to major projects will be based on detailed scheme or programme appraisals, which will reflect regional housing strategies.

An improved model is now under development, and will be used in analysis to support the current review of the 10-year plan. This will allow better account to be taken of the predicted growth in the number of households in urban areas in the south east.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many traffic examiners and vehicle examiners were employed by the Vehicle Inspectorate in each of the past 10 years. [36843]

Mr. Jamieson: The numbers of traffic examiners and vehicle examiners employed by the Vehicle Inspectorate since 1991–92 are given in the table. The figures are calculated on the basis of the average number of staff in post over a full year.

Year	*Number of vehicle examiners*	*Number of traffic examiners*
1991–92	261	160
1992–93	263	171
1993–94	247	166
1994–95	229	163
1995–96	241	164
1996–97	243	165
1997–98	248	166
1998–99	252	169
1999–2000	276	175
2000–01	289	185

Road Safety

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government plans to implement the *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary recommendations in the Health and Safety Executive's Work-Related Road Safety Task Group report entitled "Reducing at-Work Road Traffic Incidents (2001)". [36557]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Commission have been asked to consider the recommendations of the task group, and to report to Ministers in May 2002. We will need to consider that advice carefully before any decisions on implementation can be taken.

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much his Department intends to spend in 2002–03 on *(a)* road safety publicity and *(b)* the forthcoming radio and television campaign on driver tiredness; and if he is planning to run the campaign at peak listening and viewing times. [36558]

Mr. Jamieson: For the fiscal year 2002–03 £13.4 million has been allocated for the year round Think! road safety publicity campaign.

The driver tiredness element of the Think! campaign which comprises television and radio advertising will be broadcast from March 27 to 7 April at appropriate times for the specific audience and message. This will cost approximately £720,000. The message will, however continue at suitable times throughout the year as part of the wider campaign. Over the year, the advertising will be supported by proactive public relations activities and publicity materials for use locally.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce similar obligations to those in Scotland on local highway authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent ice or snow making roads unsafe in winter. [37281]

Mr. Spellar: We are continuing to consider the legal position on the winter service provided by local highway authorities in England. In the meantime we expect them to implement winter service provisions on their roads in accordance with the code of practice for maintenance management "Delivering Best Practice in Highway Maintenance" which was published on 10 July 2001.

Rail Capacity Study

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1051W, on the rail capacity study, what was the conclusion of the first stage of the study commissioned by the Strategic Rail Authority to aid them in deciding their strategic priorities on rail capacity which reported in September 2001; when the study into the second stage is due to commence; and when that second stage study is due to be completed. [36529]

Mr. Jamieson: The study identified a number of key locations where the rail network is currently or soon to become congested. The study is now assessing possible options to relieve congestion, or to provide additional capacity at key "pinch-points". The Strategic Rail Authority expects to have an assessment of the options after Easter.

Central Railway

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on Central Railway's application for a hybrid Bill; and what the Government's response has been. [36598]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are considering carefully Central Railway's proposals for a hybrid Bill. We will take a view on the issues raised by the proposals and respond to Central Railway and to Parliament in due course.

Railways (Scotland)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the planned expenditure is by the *(a)* Government and *(b)* private sector for the introduction of the new lines (i) Milngavie to Larkhall, (ii) Stirling to Alloa and (iii) Edinburgh Crossrail, announced in the recent SRA proposals; [37030]

(2) what the planned expenditure is by *(a)* Government and *(b)* the private sector for the additional capacity increase for the lines between Glasgow and Kilmarnock announced in the recent SRA proposals; [37026]

(3) what the planned expenditure is by the *(a)* Government and *(b)* private sector for the upgrading of the 140 smaller stations in Scotland, stated in the recent SRA proposals;

(4) what is the planned expenditure by *(a)* Government and *(b)* the private sector on the refurbishment of the 318 electric trains and the reliability improvements for the 170 diesel trains announced in the recent SRA proposals;

(5) what the planned expenditure is by the *(a)* Government and *(b)* private sector for the upgrading of Waverley station in Edinburgh, stated in the recent SRA proposals;

(6) what the planned expenditure is from *(a)* Government and *(b)* the private sector for the introduction of the six new stations and interchange improvements at Partick, Gourock and Markinch announced in the SRA proposals. [37025]

Mr. Jamieson: The total public sector expenditure proposed by the Strategic Rail Authority's (SRA's) strategic plan is £33.5 billion. The SRA has not attempted to break this down on a regional or route basis.

Airport Rail Links

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions are planned between the UK Government and *(a)* the Scottish Executive and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority to consider the introduction of airport links between Edinburgh and Glasgow airports and their respective cities. [36959]

Mr. Jamieson: No such discussions are planned. This is primarily a matter for the Scottish Executive and the Strategic Rail Authority.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 54W, on airport rail links, what the time scale is for the receipt of information from the Scottish Enterprise, BAA and the SRA concerning the introduction of rail links between Edinburgh and Glasgow airports and their respective cities. [36958]

Mr. Jamieson: The Scottish Executive, in association with BAA, Scottish Enterprise, the Strategic Rail Authority and the Government have commissioned Sinclair Knight Merz to undertake a detailed economic and engineering study into rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports. The Scottish Executive is expecting to receive their report in the autumn.

Rail Expenditure

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what financial safeguards will be in place to prevent the Government spending more than the allotted £33.5 billion on the specific programmes mentioned in the recent Strategic Rail Authority report on unforeseen costs between now and the completion of any of the planned projects; and who would be liable for such extra unforeseen costs. [37051]

Mr. Jamieson: The £33.5 billion of Government support to the railways over the 10 years to 31 March 2011 will be delivered through franchise and other contractual agreements that are subject to value for money considerations and, where applicable, appropriate risk transfer. Discussions on the transfer and management of risks, on a case-by-case basis, would influence the liability for any unforeseen costs.

Selby Rail Crash

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the reports will be made available of the two working groups set up in response to the accident at Great Heck, near Selby, on 28 February 2001; and if he will make a statement. [38046]

Mr. Spellar: The reports will be published today. Both reports emphasise how rare this accident was and responses to the risks of a similar accident must be measured. The reports of the two groups contain 19 separate recommendations. I have accepted all of them and, in one case, have asked the Highways Agency to adopt the recommended approach more widely and, in another, have asked for the recommended work to be expedited. I must stress how important it is that highway authorities and rail infrastructure providers work together to assess the sites on their networks where vehicles might get onto the rail network and to take what action, if any, they consider necessary to try to prevent this. I commend to them the risk assessment framework prepared by the CSS and Railtrack to prioritise any necessary work at local roads over rail bridges. This framework will be developed to cover other circumstances where vehicles might get onto the rail network.

I accept the conclusion of the Highways Agency report that there are no serious shortcomings in the current standards for safety barriers but nevertheless commend their plans to convene a technical project board to take forward any necessary changes to barrier standards for national roads. I welcome the recommendation of the working group for a clearer and more open procedure for updating the standards relating to safety barriers and have asked the agency to adopt this more open approach for "all" standards.

I have asked that the HSC's recommended timetable for the development of a protocol to apportion responsibility and costs of improvements made at locations where roads meet, cross or run close to railways should be expedited. This is so as not to delay the carrying out of any necessary work. I have, therefore, decided that the protocol should be developed for England by June 2002. I will review the working of this protocol, as recommended by the HSC, once action on the other recommendations is underway. The work necessary to implement the 19 recommendations of the two reports will be steered by my Department and I have asked for a report on progress by 25 July 2002.

Free Travel (Pensioners)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated cost is of free public transport nationally for all those of pensionable age. [37533]

Ms Keeble: We estimate the cost of providing free local travel to those over 60 years of age and disabled people would be in the region of £900 million per year. We have no estimate for pensioners separately.

Concessionary Travel (Pensioners)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate has been made of the number of pensioners benefiting from concessionary bus fare schemes introduced in the last two years. [37512]

Ms Keeble: Since June 2001, local authorities have been required to offer a minimum of 50 per cent. reductions for all pensioners and disabled people on local bus services with a free bus pass to the benefit of 5.5 million pensioners in England and Wales.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with local authorities regarding an extension of concessionary fares for pensioners using public transport. [37518]

Ms Keeble: My ministerial colleagues and my officials regularly meet with the local authority associations to discuss a wide range of transport-related issues, including concessionary travel.

Planning Green Paper

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from county councils on the Planning Green Paper. [37261]

Ms Keeble: A number of representations have been made either as formal responses to the Green Paper proposals; through letters from county councils to their Members of Parliament who have passed on the correspondence to Ministers; through meetings with Ministers; or from the preliminary views of the county councils network of the Local Government Association. All have drawn attention to the importance of the strategic planning role of the county councils. The consultation period on the Green Paper ends on 18 March.

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37507]

Dr. Whitehead: The amounts spent by DTLR(C) are set out in the table. As much information as can be readily retrieved has been set out. Further detail, including a breakdown by grade of staff, is not available without incurring disproportionate cost.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
(a)				
Percentage first class journeys	n/a	n/a	47	46
Number of first class journeys	n/a	n/a	7,101	7,051
(b)				
Average cost of first class rail journey (£)	n/a	n/a	103	115
(c)				
Total cost of rail travel (£000)	n/a	1,064	1,184	1,206

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new entrants to the civil service were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 years and over. [36490]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office.

Town and Country Finance Issues Group

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what basis the Minister for Local Government cancelled his meeting with the parliamentary co-chairman of the Town and Country Finance Issues Group on 13 February; and what plans he has to rearrange it. [37301]

Mr. Raynsford: No such meeting was arranged. We will continue to work with local government on reforming the formula grant distribution. Ministers will be ready to meet with TACFIG and other special interest groups in due course as we develop our proposals for the new grant distribution system.

Local Councillors' Pay

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish figures for the average pay of *(a)* council leaders and *(b)* the cabinet members of local authorities which operate cabinet Government in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [37104]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department does not collect information from councils on the allowances paid to council members.

The average special responsibility allowances in those local authorities in England which made the information available to the Improvement and Development Agency, as of 4 December 2001, are as follows:

Council leaders: £12,528

Members of the council executive: £6,560.

Source:

www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk, Member Allowance Summary Survey.

Rail Budget

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) to what purpose the £290 million rail provision in 2000–01 now allocated to the 10-Year Transport Plan was originally allocated; and for what reason it was unused in 2000–01; [36796]

(2) how much unused rail provision in 2000–01 was carried forward to 2001–02 under the arrangements for end of year flexibility. [36797]

Mr. Jamieson: The summer and winter supplementary supply estimates transferred a total of £284.993 million to the rail budget in 2001–02 through the End Year Flexibility arrangements. I refer the hon. Member to the Supplementary Supply Estimates for a detailed analysis of the transfers.

NATS

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what expenditure the Government have made on the NATS PPP; on what dates; for what purpose; and what further expenditure is planned. [37055]

Mr. Jamieson: Since October 1998, the Government have so far incurred costs of £52.2 million in the setting up of the NATS PPP. It is estimated that remaining residual costs amount to £3.5 million.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what payments have been made to the NATS employee Share Trust Ltd. to date; and when they will be completed. [37056]

Mr. Jamieson: The allocation of the first tranche of shares to staff was completed on 21 September 2001. The second allocation, which has been triggered by the successful introduction into service of the Swanwick Centre, will proceed once a further valuation of the shares has been completed and Inland Revenue approval obtained.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government received the NATS business plan. [37060]

Mr. Jamieson: A draft of the NATS business plan was received at the end of last November.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has had concerning the NATS price cap since 11 September 2001. [37058]

Mr. Jamieson: The price cap for en route air navigation services provided by NATS is a matter for the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). I understand that NATS applied to the CAA on 4 February seeking a relaxation of the price cap over the period 2003–05.

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the consequences for National Air Traffic Services arising from the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001 have been; and if he will make a statement. [38047]

Mr. Byers: The terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September led to a downturn in air traffic which has had a serious impact on NATS' revenues. Since that time, NATS' financial position has been regularly discussed by NATS, the Airline Group, the Government as the other main shareholder, the Civil Aviation Authority as regulator and the banks. All these parties are making a contribution to ensuring that NATS has a robust financial structure for the foreseeable future.

The banks and Government are being asked to make a contribution through the provision of short-term financial support, likely to be in the form of commercial loans. The terms of the Airline Group's contribution are being discussed. This needs to be settled before the terms of the loan are finalised.

I will report the outcome of those discussions to the House.

Without the PPP, the Government would have borne the full shareholder and financing risk of the downturn in revenue.

Swanwick

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received regarding the operability of the Sony air traffic control screens at the new en route centre at Swanwick; how many employees have expressed difficulties in reading these screens; what steps he has taken to ensure that these screens are not compromising air navigational safety; and if health and safety concerns expressed by staff are being addressed. [37061]

Mr. Jamieson: Just prior to the opening of the Swanwick centre on 27 January, a few air traffic control officers (ATCOs) expressed concern about the legibility of the screens which they would be using. I understand one ATCO wrote to the NATS Board on the subject and as a result, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) was asked to make an inspection.

The findings were presented to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), who as the independent aviation safety regulator had to take a view on the air safety implications. On 22 January the CAA gave National Air Traffic Services (NATS) its full and final approval to take Swanwick into operation.

Prestwick

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what stage discussions on building the new scottish centre for air traffic at Prestwick have reached; and when he expects this centre to be built. [37059]

Mr. Jamieson: Site preparations continue, as does the evaluation of systems. The Centre is now expected to be completed during 2008 or 2009.

Braunstone Community Association

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the aims are of the Braunstone Community Association, Leicestershire New Deal regeneration project; what the estimated cost is; for what period it will run; for what reason his Department has sent in departmental auditors; how long the investigation will take; and when the result will be published. [36960]

Ms Keeble: The New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme addresses local regeneration needs by putting residents at the heart of processes to develop community led solutions. In 1998 Braunstone in Leicester was one of 17 areas selected to be a round 1 NDC pathfinder. Braunstone is the most deprived ward in the East Midlands on the National Index of Local Deprivation.

The Braunstone Community Association (BCA) was formed as a company limited by guarantee to deliver the NDC programme. A majority of the BCA Board is made up of residents who have been elected through a democratic process. Following community consultation, the BCA produced a Braunstone NDC delivery plan, which identified key issues affecting Braunstone. The delivery plan sets out a vision centred around the five cornerstones of regeneration: work, crime, health, education and the physical environment. On the strength of the delivery plan, the BCA was allocated NDC funding of up to £49.5 million for the regeneration of Braunstone over at least seven years.

The Braunstone NDC programme is now in its second year of project delivery. It has already implemented a range of projects and initiatives to begin to tackle some of the key issues affecting Braunstone, with further projects under development. Over half of the people employed by the BCA in delivering the NDC Programme are local residents.

In November 2001 the BCA Board established an Independent Investigation Panel to examine various stories appearing in the local press that related to its internal relationships. The BCA Board considered the report of investigation panel at its meetings on 20 December 2001 and 7 January 2002. As a result, the BCA has adopted various resolutions to improve processes and partnership working.

In view of the nature of some of the unsubstantiated allegations the Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) commissioned an audit of the Braunstone NDC Programme by a Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) audit team. The audit team expects to report to GOEM early in March. It is not customary to publish findings of internal audits.

The audit findings, together with evidence arising from the findings of the independent investigation, will allow the Government Office to decide what further steps it needs to take in order to secure the future of the Braunstone NDC Programme.

Capital Receipts (Islington)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total income from capital receipts of the London Borough of Islington was for each of the past three years from non-right to buy sales. [36630]

Ms Keeble: The available information reported by Islington LBC is as follows:

Gross income from housing capital receipts

£000

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Sales of fixed assets	20,412	33,843	46,852
of which:			
Right to Buy sales[1]	12,522	n/a	n/a
Capital Repayments/leasing disposals	1,305	676	1,048
Total housing capital receipts	21,717	34,519	47,900

[1] DTLR P1(B) quarterly housing activity returns

Source:

DTLR Capital Outturn Return (COR) returns, except for [1] DTLR P1(B) quarterly housing activity returns

Local Authority Houses

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has on the cost of promoting ballots of council tenants on stock transfer; and if he will state the cost for each English housing authority area of ballots during the past year. [36617]

Ms Keeble: The costs of housing transfer ballots are met by local authorities from their housing revenue accounts. The Department does not hold information on the amounts involved.

Galileo Satellite Navigation System

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funds have been committed to the Galileo satellite navigation system; and what estimate he has made of the total final cost of the system to *(a)* public and *(b)* private funds. [37292]

Mr. Jamieson: The Galileo satellite navigation programme is being carried out jointly by the European Union (EU) and the European Space Agency (ESA). They are each planning to contribute euro 550 million to the development and validation phase (2001–05). In April 2001 the Transport Council released euro 100 million of the EU contribution. A decision on whether to release the remaining euro 450 million may be taken at the Transport Council on 26 March. A declaration for subscriptions to ESA's share of the costs was opened at the ESA ministerial meeting held in November 2001. A majority of ESA member states subscribed but the UK indicated that it would await the outcome of the Transport Council's decision before finalising its contribution.

Originally, the European Commission estimated that the capital costs of Galileo would be euro 3.25 billion (2001–08) with annual operational costs of euro 220 million from 2008. The public sector would provide euro 1.75 billion of the capital costs, the private sector the balance of euro 1.5 billion, and operational costs would be met from revenues.

A recent study carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) on behalf of the Commission has put the capital cost at euro 3.4 billion, with annual operating costs of euro 224 million over a 20-year concession period. PWC considered that the programme would require some continued public funding for deployment of the system and payments during operation. Total public sector funding was estimated at some euro 3.8 billion, depending on the private sector assessment of revenues and risks, and subject to the outcome of a competitive tendering process.

Rent Officers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many appeals against the decision of rent officers covering the Greater London area there have been in each of the last three years. [37111]

Ms Keeble: The number of appeals against the decision of rent officers covering the Greater London area in each of the last three years was as follows:

	Number of appeals		
	Housing benefit cases	*Fair rent cases*	*Total*
1998–99	2,970	2,583	5,553
1999–2000	2,856	2,607	5,436
2000–01	2,166	1,780	3,946

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people with an ethnic minority background serve as rent officers in the Greater London area. [37110]

Ms Keeble: The Rent Officer Service (TRS) currently employs 13 rent officers in Greater London who belong to an ethnic minority. In percentage terms this is 13 per cent. of the overall number of rent officers.

Train Speed Restrictions

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many train speed restrictions are in force in the UK rail network system. [37265]

Mr. Jamieson: At the end of January 2002 there were 652 temporary speed restrictions on the network.

Empty Properties (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many properties have been empty for up to five years in each Greater London borough. [37108]

Ms Keeble: Information for the number of dwellings that have been vacant for five or more years is not available centrally.

The number of all vacant local authority and Registered Social Landlords' dwellings in each local authority area in London on 1 April 2001 (the latest available data) are set out alongside the local authorities' estimates of 'Other private' and 'Other public' sector dwellings. Also included are the number of local authority dwellings that have been vacant for more than six months and the estimated number of 'Other private' sector dwellings vacant for more than six months.

Number of vacant residential dwellings in London on 1 April 2001, by local authority and tenure

Local authority	*LA*[1]	*of which: vacant over six months*[2]	*RSL*[3]	*'Other public' sector*[1]	*'Other private' sector*[1]	*of which: vacant over six months*[1]	*Total vacant dwellings*
Barking and Dagenham	479	101	102	1	747	380	1,329
Barnet	154	33	120	59	2,820	1,545	3,153
Bexley	0	0	163	0	1,819	942	1,982
Brent	146	65	380	244	4,734	2,757	5,504
Bromley	0	0	448	0	3,870	2,083	4,318
Camden	377	161	205	0	3,753	2,143	4,335
City of London	3	3	3	11	14	—	31
Croydon	154	8	180	3	4,064	2,739	4,401
Ealing	272	74	183	4	1,990	44	2,449
Enfield	280	131	228	—	3,361	—	—
Greenwich	526	222	274	20	2,238	1,296	3,058
Hackney	1,028	616	1,237	5	984	377	3,254
Hammersmith and Fulham	297	72	321	37	3,902	1,981	4,557
Haringey	245	64	160	0	4,410	2,936	4,815
Harrow	63	8	49	27	1,079	1,062	1,218
Havering	299	55	49	3	2,351	1,387	2,702
Hillingdon	114	24	60	237	2,100	806	2,511
Hounslow	287	136	63	12	688	238	1,050
Islington	548	288	292	6	2,391	2,351	3,237
Kensington and Chelsea	108	25	219	0	5,740	219	6,067
Kingston upon Thames	97	16	16	—	1,028	—	—
Lambeth	970	680	524	59	1,019	917	2,572
Lewisham	1,000	518	190	0	2,835	1,700	4,025
Merton	60	3	79	19	1,956	891	2,114
Newham	321	114	193	12	4,576	3,203	5,102
Redbridge	86	33	145	—	2,500	1,418	—
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	146	6	1,605	1,201	1,757
Southwark	1,773	1,215	381	3	4,210	—	6,367
Sutton	103	7	30	0	2,105	499	2,238
Tower Hamlets	661	331	402	4	4,362	3,049	5,429
Waltham Forest	120	30	193	120	2,306	1,020	2,739
Wandsworth	290	43	251	28	1,510	—	2,079
Westminster	224	84	355	0	2,378	1,114	2,957

[1] Housing Investment Programme (HIP) data from the 2001 Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix.

[2] Housing Investment Programme (HIP) data from the 2001 Business Plan Statistical Appendix.

[3] Annual Regulatory and Statistical Returns (RSR 1) made by RSLs to the Housing Corporation.

Notes:

1. RSL—Registered Social Landlord.
2. 'Other public'—includes Government Department, public sector agencies and dwellings owned by other local authorities within the area.
3. '—' not known/available data.

There will always be a certain level of empty property for operational reasons, including those vacant for very short periods between tenants.

Exhaust Emissions

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many roadside tests of car exhaust emissions have taken place in the UK during the last 12 months. [37113]

Mr. Jamieson: Such tests are undertaken by the Vehicle Inspectorate and by certain local authorities piloting a scheme to improve air quality. The Inspectorate conducted 68,549 tests in 2000–01, and expect to complete a similar number in 2001–02. Local authorities have conducted 1,514 tests since April 2001.

Freight Modelling

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the contract for research commissioned by his Department from ME&P on freight modelling was awarded; when the research project began; what research questions are to be answered; when the study is to conclude; what form the final research report will take; and if he will place related documentation in the Library. [37527]

Mr. Jamieson: The review of freight modelling was awarded to ME&P on 2 November 2001. It began at the start of December 2001 and the end date of the contract is 31 May 2002.

Methods used for modelling and forecasting freight both in the UK and abroad will be reviewed and recommendations made on the most appropriate techniques for use by the Department, having regard to the availability of UK data and the opportunities for collecting additional data. The review will include road, rail and other freight modes and will also include the modelling of light goods vehicles.

The review will in particular examine the scope for modelling the effect on freight movements of changes in the location of activities such as manufacturing, retail and warehousing.

The findings of the review will be assembled in a final report and this will be placed in the Library.

Research Documents

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide a classification of the different categories of written and printed documentation from research conducted by and commissioned by his Department; and if he will state which of these are *(a)* available to the public, *(b)* available to hon. Members, *(c)* regarded as commercially sensitive and unavailable externally and *(d)* other. [37094]

Mr. Jamieson: Information about all my Department's research is made widely available through publications, websites and events. Each programme, however, selects the best method of publication which can range from formal publication of full reports to simple availability on demand, depending on subject matter and likely interest. The exceptions to this policy are work related to national security or which involves issues of commercial confidentiality.

Full details of my Department's policy on publication of research material are included in the science and innovation strategy on the website. The website also includes details of the research programmes (including for most programmes summaries of research results).

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the titles of all *(a)* unpublished research reports, *(b)* other documentation from research and *(c)* other work (i) conducted and (ii) commissioned by his Department (A) between May 1997 and March 2001 and (B) since 1 April 2001. [37095]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given today [ref: 37094]. Details of the Department's research are available on the website, except where it relates to matters of national security or commercial confidentiality. Currently a complete record of research is not held centrally. An improved database facility is near completion.

Train Delays

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 524W, on train delays, if he will place in the Library the latest information available on delay and cancellation information, distinguishing between peak and off-peak, as referred to in his reply. [37577]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA publishes every quarter a bulletin (National Rail Trends) which includes Public Performance Measure (PPM) data by network sector, the overall network and for London and the south-east peak hours. This information is placed in the Library and on the SRA web site.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 741W.

On Monday 18 February my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published the DTLR rail performance scorecard which includes PPM information on train operating companies (TOCS) as well as by sector, overall and for London and the south-east peak hours. The information is on the DTLR website and can be accessed through http://www.railways.dtlr.gov.uk. A copy of the press release has been placed in the Library of the House.

The next report (showing punctuality and reliability for the period from October to December 2001) will be published on 18 March, alongside the SRA's quarterly performance figures for the period.

Train Drivers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 323W, on train drivers, whether the plan, including the part relating to the recruitment and training of 800 new drivers, was agreed with the industry in November 1998; what the timetable is for recruitment and training of the new drivers in this plan; and what progress has been made towards this. [37582]

Mr. Jamieson: There was no fixed timetable for the new driver training and recruitment announced in 1998. As at 5 January 2002, 2,433 new drivers have been recruited since November 1998 of whom 1,168 are currently being trained.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 25W, on train drivers, if he will list the enforcement action taken by the strategic rail authority against *(a)* South West Trains in 1997 and *(b)* on Arriva Trains Northern at the end of 2001; and what timetable for increasing driver numbers was agreed between the Strategic Rail Authority and GNER. [37578]

Mr. Jamieson: In 1997, South West Trains were threatened with enforcement action and a £1 million penalty. However, as performance improved the penalty was not enforced.

In October 2001 the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) consulted on a £2 million penalty and final order against Arriva Trains Northern. The SRA are currently considering and evaluating the responses received from the consultation exercise and will be making a further announcement in due course.

The SRA and GNER have discussed GNER's need for increased driver numbers, but the SRA has not sought to agree any particular timescale for recruitment.

Rail Freight

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 12 February 2002, ref 32546, on rail freight, if he will place the written report in the Library. [37573]

Mr. Jamieson: No. It is not normal practice to disclose such information under Section 13 of Part 2 of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Regional Assemblies

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what local authorities have written to his Department to *(a)* support the establishment of regional assemblies based on a Government defined region, *(b)* support the establishment of regional assemblies not based on Government defined regions, *(c)* oppose regional assemblies based on Government defined regions and *(d)* oppose the policy of setting up regional assemblies. [36961]

Dr. Whitehead: Since the general election in 2001 the Department has received four representations from local authorities in support of the establishment of regional government based on the Government office regions, and one in support of the establishment of regional assemblies not based on a Government office region. We have not received any under (c) and (d) above.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people have indicated their support to him for the setting up of a regional assembly for their region, whether Government-defined or not, through *(a)* letters, *(b)* meetings, *(c)* partitions and distributions and *(d)* other means in the last six months. [36634]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department has received 29 written representations in favour of directly elected regional government for their region since the general election in 2001, including a petition signed by over 50,000 people in Cornwall, 17 per cent. of whom gave addresses outside of Cornwall. The Secretary of State and Ministerial colleagues have met many individuals and organisations that have expressed support for regional government, but numbers for these are not recorded.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings he has had with representatives of constitutional conventions and similar bodies seeking to achieve regional assembly status since the general election. [36635]

Dr. Whitehead: The Secretary of State and Ministerial colleagues have met formally with representatives of a number of campaigns and constitutional conventions since the general election. These include the Campaign for the English Regions (whose membership includes the constitutional conventions from the North East, North West, West Midlands and South West and the Campaign for Yorkshire), as well as the Cornish Constitutional Convention.

Disused Railway Lines

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what financial support is available in 2001–02 to re-open disused railway lines; [37282]

(2) what support is available from his Department for feasibility studies to examine the possibility of re-opening disused railway lines. [37283]

Mr. Jamieson: Projects to reopen disused railway lines would be eligible to apply for Government support from the Rail Passenger Partnership scheme. Already the RPP scheme has supported reopenings in the Vale of Glamorgan, Swanage and Beaulieu station.

The RPP scheme was re-launched in December 2001 with an extended budget of £430 million over the next 10 years.

Transport (Salisbury)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what was the local transport plan capital settlement for the Salisbury transport package; and how much was identified for *(a)* roads and *(b)* the non-roads element of the scheme; [36786]

(2) what annual spending profiles have been agreed for *(a)* the roads and *(b)* the non-roads elements of the Salisbury package of the LTP capital settlement. [36785]

Ms Keeble: The annual spending profiles agreed for the road and non-road elements of the Salisbury transport package are as follows.

£ million

	Non-road	*Roads*
2001–02	3.58	0.0
2002–03	5.8	0.0
2003–04	3.72	1.38
2004–05	0.35	11.05
2005–06	0.13	0.650

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date the Government office of the south-west *(a)* signed a contract with and *(b)* issued a decision letter to Salisbury district council specifying the annual percentage increase in the city parking changes to be imposed as part of the Salisbury transport capital settlement; in what way those increases are conditional on the opening of the first to the fifth park and ride sites; and if he will place a copy of that document in the Library. [36784]

Ms Keeble: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has not signed a contract nor issued a decision letter to Salisbury DC specifying the annual percentage increase in the city parking charges. A failure to implement any significant part of the package of measures, including both the park and ride sites and the increase in parking charges, contained in Wiltshire's LTP for Salisbury could undermine the benefits that the £13.7 million we have earmarked for this scheme will provide.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the A36T detrunking has been delayed; when it will come into effect; and what are the implications for *(a)* the Wylye Valley relief road, *(b)* the Brunel Link in Salisbury and *(c)* the Harnham relief road. [36787]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State confirmed in December 2000 that the A36/A46 route was to remain non-core, and would be detrunked in due course. Negotiations on detrunking between the Highways Agency and the local highway authorities commenced early in 2001. However, the South West Regional Assembly placed a holding objection to detrunking, pending the outcome of a further study into the management of the route and the traffic problems in Bath. This study, entitled the "Bristol/Bath to South Coast Study" is to be commissioned shortly, and is due to report at the end of 2002. Detrunking negotiations are therefore likely to be on hold until early 2003.

The Wylye Valley relief road will be constructed by Wiltshire county council as a local road scheme following detrunking.

The Brunel Link and the Harnham relief road is a local road scheme promoted by Wiltshire county council and is not directly affected by the detrunking of the A36.

Alternative Fuels

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the regulatory impact assessment will be agreed and published on the *(a)* Commission Communication on alternative fuels for road transportation and on a set of measures to promote the use of biofuels, *(b)* draft directive on the promotion of the use of biofuels for transport and *(c)* draft directive amending Directive 92/81/EEC with regard to the possibility of applying a reduced rate of excise duty on certain mineral oils containing biofuels and on biofuels. [R] [37237]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government will shortly be publishing a preliminary regulatory impact assessment covering the draft directive on the promotion of biofuels for transport, copies of which will of course be laid in the Library of the House; there are no plans to publish a regulatory impact assessment for the Commission Communication on alternative fuels as this has no formal legislative implications for the United Kingdom.

The draft directive amending Directive 92/81/EEC with regard to the possibility of applying a reduced rate of excise duty on certain mineral oils containing biofuels is fiscal legislation and the responsibility of Her Majesty's Treasury.

Lorry Parks

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has for the development of new lorry parks. [37086]

Mr. Jamieson: I am concerned to ensure that lorry drivers have the facilities they need. We have already agreed to provide signs from motorways to nearby lorry-only facilities where existing motorway service areas are unable to meet the demand for lorry parking. My officials will shortly be meeting service area operators and representatives of the haulage industry and drivers themselves to explore what more might be done to provide more and better facilities on both motorways and other roads.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many meetings he has had with the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority since 24 October 2001. [37459]

Mr. Byers: I, and other departmental Ministers, meet the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority on a regular basis.

Haven Gateway

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the improvements to the road and rail infrastructure needed to support the contribution that the Haven Gateway sub-region can make to the economic and social regeneration aspirations of the Eastern Region. [37226]

Ms Keeble: The London to Ipswich Multi-Modal Study is investigating ways in which the road and rail network in the A12 and A120 corridors between London and Ipswich and Harwich can be improved. This will help to increase the accessibility of the Haven Gateway sub-region. The study will shortly be presenting options to the public and is expected to report in the summer.

The Cambridge to Huntingdon Multi-Modal Study has identified improvements to the A14 which will also assist in improving access to Felixstowe, and the SRA is assessing the work required to upgrade the railway line between Felixstowe and Nuneaton to enable trains carrying the larger containers which are now being utilised to run on that particular stretch of track.

The results of all these studies will be incorporated into the Regional Transport Strategy for the East of England which is currently being prepared and will form the basis of transport policy in the Region in future.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to support the work of the Haven Gateway Partnership; and if he will give to the Partnership recognition similar to that bestowed on the Thames Gateway Partnership. [37225]

Ms Keeble: We warmly welcome the Haven Gateway initiative and when it begins to show some concrete achievements I would be happy to include an engagement with the Partnership as part of a visit to the area.

The Government Office for the East of England is participating in a number of the initiatives which are being undertaken and is represented at all partner meetings of the Partnership.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns his Department undertook in the past five parliamentary sessions including the current parliamentary session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary sessions and the current session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and (D) Northern Ireland; [37399]

(2) what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary sessions including the current session, for his Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary sessions and the current parliamentary session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland; [37411]

Dr. Whitehead: For details of my Department's five most expensive campaigns over the years requested, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1037W; and to the reply by the then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport, and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 20 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 168–69W.

Expenditure on our "Think!" road safety campaign is ongoing and covers England, Scotland and Wales as too is our fire safety campaign which covers England and Wales. "Are you doing your bit?" campaign expenditure commenced in March 1998 and focused on England following budgetary transfers to the Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly. Responsibility for that campaign transferred to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs after the last General Election. Foot and mouth public information ran in March to April 2000 in England and Wales. "Traveline" campaign expenditure commences in three English regions in March 2002.

UK campaign spend is normally divided by region by percentage of population, although advertising on satellite TV is carried nationally.

Campaign expenditure occurs at various times during the year. While campaign budgets are monitored constantly, we do not keep records of individual campaign expenditure on a monthly basis. Such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Rail Routes (Scotland)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what recent discussions his Department has had with the *(a)* Scottish Executive and *(b)* Strategic Rail Authority concerning the re-introduction of the rail route from Edinburgh to the Borders; [37562]

(2) what plans he has to meet representatives from the *(a)* Scottish Executive and *(b)* Strategic Rail Authority to discuss the re-introduction of the Edinburgh to the Borders rail route. [37563]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no such discussions. This is primarily a matter for the Scottish Executive and the Strategic Rail Authority.

Terrorism

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what UK Government-supported schemes exist and at what expense to offer terrorism and war risk cover in the aviation and shipping industries; and what representations he has made about extending such schemes. [37284]

Mr. Jamieson: In relation to the maritime sector, a scheme under the Marine and Aviation Insurance (War Risks) Act 1952 has been in place for many years by which the Secretary of State provides reinsurance in return for the payment of a premium which, during periods of low risk, is waived.

In relation to the aviation sector, the Government introduced a scheme in September 2001 to address the withdrawal of third party war risk and terrorism cover by the insurance industry in the light of the terrorist attacks in America. In accordance with guidelines adopted by the European Commission, the UK charges a premium of up to $1 per passenger per flight, depending on the amount of cover requested by the airline concerned. Airports and other ground service providers are charged a proportion of the premium they paid before cover was withdrawn. The total costs to Government are unquantifiable at this time, as they depend on potential claims, if any, made under the scheme. There are also legal costs, the final amounts of which are not known. The Government will consider whether any residual insurance support may be justified after the present arrangements expire on 20 March.

The Secretary of State has received representations from the British Air Transport Association, seeking an extension of the scheme until the insurance market has stabilised or other arrangements have been put in place.

A3

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what representations he has received about the A3 at Hindhead; and if he will make a statement; [36905]

(2) when he estimates that construction on the A3 at Hindhead *(a)* will commence and *(b)* will be completed. [36904]

Mr. Spellar: We continue to receive a number of representations about the A3 Hindhead scheme covering a wide range of topics. The two most important current issues are the proposal to close the existing A3 across Hindhead Common once the new tunnel is completed and the possibility of additional traffic using local roads in and around Grayshott to access the new A3 route.

The Highways Agency has been carrying out further work on both these issues which is nearing completion. The results will be presented to the Project Advisory and Wider Reference Group meetings later this month. Details will also be contained in a newsletter to be issued shortly.

Subject to the satisfactory completion of the necessary statutory procedures, we aim to start construction on the scheme in 2005–06. Work will take three to four years.

Rural Services

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with Town and County Finance Issues Group concerning the additional costs of providing services in rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [36931]

Dr. Whitehead: I met with the Town and Country Finance Issues Group last September to discuss the review of local government finance, in particular revenue grant distribution.

Our aim is to make the revenue grant distribution system fairer and more intelligible. The rural case will be considered carefully, alongside others, before we decide the way forward. Groups representing both counties and districts are on the working groups.

Aircraft Noise

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking *(a)* to monitor and *(b)* to reduce aircraft noise in the Dunsfold vicinity; what representations he has had on this subject; and if he will make a statement. [36909]

Mr. Spellar: Discretionary noise monitoring (in addition to the monitors specified by the Secretary of State for the purposes of the departure noise limits) is the responsibility of the relevant aerodrome, in this case principally Gatwick airport, to whom requests for deployment of mobile monitors should be addressed.

The Secretary of State has set requirements for controlling noise from aircraft using Gatwick by notice under s.78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. Recently the Department, together with BAA and others, has jointly issued a code of practice on noise from arriving aircraft.

The Department has received and replied to a small number of representations about aircraft noise near Dunsfold since the Adjournment debate on 11 January 2000.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many employees in his Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36694]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 require employers to ensure that employees are provided at their request with an appropriate eyesight test. The procedures for such eyesight testing within my Department are publicised periodically in the weekly staff Bulletin. Details are also available on the Department's 'Health and Safety—Good Practice' site on the InfoNet and the Departmental Staff Handbook. Eyesight testing is also covered during the risk assessment process, which is undertaken for all new members of staff and for staff who move or have a major change of hardware, software or workstation furniture. Local line managers' hold budgets for eyesight testing. Information on the take-up of this facility is not held centrally.

Passenger Transport Authorities

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the cost of each PTA in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [36460]

Ms Keeble: PTAs are funded through a levy on constituent district councils and grants from central Government, as in the following table

Cost ofPTAs in 2001–02

PTA	*District Levy*	*Grants*	*Total cost*
Greater Manchester	102.2	60.3	162.5
Merseyside	81.0	45.3	126.3
South Yorkshire	60.7	13.9	74.6
Tyne and Wear	43.4	12.9	56.3
West Midlands	111.6	28.7	140.2
West Yorkshire	54.1	35.6	89.7

Public Transport

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what means the relative efficiency of different regimes for public transport provision as between shire counties, unitary and metropolitan authorities, and cities is measured. [36459]

Ms Keeble: The Transport Act 2000 places specific requirements upon all local transport authorities to formulate transport policies and publish them as a local transport plan (LTP). It also requires them to prepare as part of their LTP, a bus strategy containing policies detailing how they will carry out their functions in order to secure the provision of bus services.

Our guidance to authorities on LTPs sets out a range of detailed criteria against which each LTP is assessed. These criteria include the development of a bus strategy and the contribution of passenger rail services. The overall assessment of LTPs forms part of our consideration of authorities' bids for capital resources.

In addition, the Local Government Act 1999 places a specific requirement on local authorities to produce Best Value Performance Plans (BVPP) each year. The BVPP should include a summary of the authority's assessment of its performance in the previous financial year with regard to a range of Best Value performance indicators, including those for transport, along with comparisons with similar authorities.

South East England Development Agency

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what account he has taken for planning purposes of SEEDA's decision to seek to alleviate pinch points in respect of traffic congestion in the south east region, as discussed in the Agency's regional Economic Strategy document, and in particular for a bypass around Arundel; and if he will make a statement. [36457]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport objectives set out in SEEDA's Regional Economic Strategy include selective investment to alleviate pinch points on the road and rail network, pursued within the framework of the Regional Transport Strategy.

A multi-modal study of the transport problems of the South Coast Corridor is currently being undertaken. As well as providing an over-arching strategy for the corridor, the study is required to consider a number of schemes specifically remitted to it, including the proposed bypass at Arundel. The study is expected to report in summer 2002.

Traffic Congestion

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs, of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 566W, on traffic congestion, whether the consultation exercise on fast-track procedures for building roads in excess of 30 kilometres has been undertaken; and if he will make a statement. [36479]

Ms Keeble: Our consultation paper "New Parliamentary Procedures for Processing Major Infrastructure Projects" covers a wide range of major infrastructure projects; including construction, on a new route, of a dual carriageway trunk road in excess of 30 kilometres in length. An announcement was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my right hon. Friend the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 22W. Copies of the consultation paper were placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The deadline for responses is 22 March 2002.

Mineral Planning Guidance

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when he expects to publish the new MPG6; [36873]

(2) if he will make an interim statement on MPG6. [36871]

Ms Keeble: The Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" has proposed that all planning guidance, including that for minerals, should be reviewed. The consultation on the Green Paper will end on 18 March 2002 after which decisions will be taken, in the light of the responses, on the nature of future guidance and appropriate timetables for producing it. The Green Paper proposes that current minerals planning guidance notes (MPGs), including those on specific minerals such as MPG6 on aggregates, should become technical or system notes to support a statement of core policy in MPG1. Given that this could delay the present revision of MPG6, whatever form that might take, it has been decided that the quantitative national and regional guidelines for aggregates provision within MPG6 should be revised as a matter of urgency, ahead of the revision of policy in MPG1. Work is currently taking place on that basis and it is hoped that a consultation draft of this revision will be published in the late spring of this year.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the timetable is for the review of MPG1; [36872]

(2) if he will make an interim statement on the review of MPG1. [36876]

Ms Keeble: The Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" has proposed that all planning guidance, including that for minerals, should be reviewed, and that priority should be given, among the minerals planning guidance, to the headline guidance on mineral working and restoration in MPG1. The Green Paper proposes that these reviews should be time-tabled over the next two years. The consultation on the Green Paper will end on 18 March 2002 after which decisions will be taken, in the light of the responses, on the action to be taken on its proposals.

Planning Policy

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will assess the merits of making it compulsory for developers to install dropped kerbs at junctions in new building developments as part of the review of planning policy. [36576]

Ms Keeble: The Green Paper, "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" is principally concerned with the operation of the planning process. The provision of dropped kerbs is a matter for highways authorities, who would normally be involved in discussions about new developments. My Department has issued guidance to local authorities to encourage the provision of dropped kerbs to assist people with impaired mobility, and those in wheelchairs or with prams, to cross the road.

Playing Fields

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government will extend to all playing fields the procedural protection provided for school playing fields; and if he will make a statement. [36379]

Ms Keeble: I have no plans to extend the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Playing Fields) (England) Direction 1998 to cover all playing fields. Development or change of use of playing fields already requires planning permission from the local planning authority. In considering such applications, planning authorities must have regard to the policies in their own development plans and the guidance set out in Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 17: "Sport and Recreation". PPG17 makes clear that playing fields should be protected unless there is an excess of provision.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in implementing the Urban White Paper for neighbourhood renewal and its impact on the inner cities. [36981]

Ms Keeble: The Urban White Paper "Our towns and cities: the future" set out the Government's vision of a better quality of life for all in urban areas. We have provided an account of progress to date as well as the key objectives we aim to deliver on over the next two years in a six-monthly Implementation Bulletin. The next edition is due to be issued in March 2002. We also have an Implementation Plan which tracks progress on all 198 new initiatives and policies in the White Paper. Both documents can be found at www.regeneration.dtlr.gov.uk/policies/ourtowns/action.

The Urban White Paper promised that in 2002 Ministers across Government would host an Urban Summit. This will take place on 31 October and 1 November at the ICC in Birmingham. The Summit will provide the opportunity to establish and reconfirm the Government-wide commitment to urban renaissance, identify and celebrate progress by individual towns and cities, underline that there is much to do and identify where further action is needed and evaluate the recommendations of the White Paper.

The Government's vision for neighbourhood renewal was set out in the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy Action Plan, launched by the Prime Minister in January 2001. It aims to deliver economic prosperity, safe communities, high quality schools, decent housing, and better health to the poorest parts of the country.

The approach will focus main Government Programmes explicitly on deprived areas, many of which are located in inner-city areas, and will require local people and public and private sectors to work in partnership. The strategy is being spearheaded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, a cross-cutting unit based in DTLR and staffed by officials from across Whitehall and the public sector, with secondees from the private and voluntary sector. The Unit has started to roll-out the Government's 10 to 20-year commitment to turn round our most deprived areas.

Further information on the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, including updates on progress, can be found on the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit website: www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk.

Transport-Safety Legislation

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce transport legislation relating to safety this Session; and if he will make a statement. [36597]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on 19 October 2001 *Official Report*, column 1364W.

London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the Private Finance Initiative Credit for the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority integrated clothing project was rejected; and for what reason this funding is not provided as a statutory requirement. [36719]

Dr. Whitehead: The indicative bid which London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority submitted on behalf of a number of fire authorities for an Integrated Clothing Project was not selected for support in the third round of the Private Finance Initiative for the fire service. The bids were assessed according to the criteria set out in Fire Service Circular 3/2001, a copy of which is in the Library. The Integrated Clothing Project did not score as highly as some of the other bids received. The unsuccessful bidders were given feedback on their bids.

As regards funding, statutory responsibility, under section 1(1)(a) of the Fire Services Act 1947, for securing the services of a fire brigade and its supporting equipment rests locally with the fire authority. The authority receives funding under the revenue support grant arrangements and has the responsibility for setting a budget which will allow it to meet its obligations.

Social Services Spending

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for shire counties the social services standard spending assessment for the elderly, divided by the number of pensioners, adjusted for inflation at current values, in the years 1990–91 to 2001–02 and projected for 2002–03. [36763]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department does not keep data on people of pensionable age covering the entire period. A table showing the elderly personal social services standard spending assessment per person aged 65 and over, adjusted for inflation at current values, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list for Cambridgeshire *(a)* the difference between the social services budget and that county's social services block SSA in each year from 1992–93 to 2002–03 and *(b)* that sum divided by the total population financed by that social services department, adjusted for inflation at current values; [36764]

(2) if he will list the Cambridgeshire County Council spending on social services for *(a)* the elderly, *(b)* child protection and *(c)* groups other than the elderly and children under 18 (i) above SSA and (ii) in total, for 1990–91 to 2001–02 and projected for the financial year 2002–03, adjusted for inflation at current values. [36759]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is as follows:

Cambridgeshire Personal Social Services SSA and Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE) at 2001–02 prices[1]

	SSA (£000)	NRE[2] (Outturn) £000	Difference (NRE-SSA) £000	Total population[3]	Difference per head (£)
1990–91	49,552	63,030	13,478	651,626	21
1991–92	57,392	65,469	8,077	655,047	12
1992–93	59,993	66,842	6,850	664,520	10
1993–94	60,990	69,097	8,107	669,898	12
1994–95	72,327	80,234	7,907	677,689	12
1995–96	79,653	88,824	9,171	682,640	13

Cambridgeshire Personal Social Services SSA and Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE) at 2001–02 prices[1]

	SSA (£000)	NRE[2] (Outturn) £000	Difference (NRE-SSA) £000	Total population[3]	Difference per head (£)
1996–97	86,772	96,018	9,246	686,864	13
1997–98	90,606	100,501	9,895	693,871	14
1998–99[4]	68,061	75,794	7,733	544,948	14
1999–2000	70,200	79,832	9,632	555,684	17
2000–01	72,837	83,040[5]	10,204	563,794	18
2001–02	72,934	86,622[5]	13,688	568,407	24
2002–03[6]	73,974	—	—	573,730	—

Notes:

[1] Figures at 2001–02 prices using GDP deflators. NRE is expenditure funded by council tax, general Government grants and use of reserves.

[2] NRE is used to compare with SSA.

[3] SSA figures are based on population figures two years previous. For example 2000–01 population figures are used in calculating 2002–03 SSA figures and so the population figure recorded for 2002–03 in the table is actually the level of population at 2001–02.

[4] 1998–99 reorganisation of authority. Former authority included the current city of Peterborough.

[5] Budget figures.

[6] Expenditure figures are not available for 2002–03.

Sources: 1992–93—1999–2000 Revenue Summary (RS) and Revenue Grant (RG) returns. 2000–01—2001–02 General Fund Revenue Accounts Budget Estimate return (RA) and RA(SG) (Income from Specific, Special and Supplementary Grants).

The authority provides figures on expenditure and grant income on the quoted sources. However, in the calculation of Net Revenue Expenditure, certain adjustments are made, which in particular include an estimate of Capital Expenditure Charged to Revenue Account (CERA). It is not possible to provide this analysis at the sub-block level. However, the authority does provide figures on Net Current Expenditure (NCE) separately for children and families, and for older people services. This includes expenditure funded by all specific grants inside aggregate external finance (AEF). It therefore can not be compared with SSA. The table gives the required breakdown by NCE.

Cambridgeshire Personal Social Services Net Current Expenditure (NCE)[1] *at 2001–02 prices*

£000

	Childrens and families	Older people services	Total other PSS	Total PSS
1990–91	13,608	23,305	26,476	63,389
1991–92	14,023	24,309	28,324	66,656
1992–93	15,136	23,490	29,879	68,505
1993–94	16,209	26,400	34,490	77,098
1994–95	27,925	37,778	25,636	91,339
1995–96	31,268	39,760	27,220	98,248
1996–97	32,692	41,091	29,202	102,984
1997–98	35,870	39,407	31,001	106,279
1998–99[2]	22,926	32,625	24,732	80,283
1999–2000	21,158	35,634	29,077	85,869
2000–01	20,369	38,923	30,160	89,452
2001–02[3]	22,490	40,091	31,617	94,198

Notes:

[1] NCE is running expenses plus employee expenses minus sales, fees and charges and other (non-grant) income. Figures at 2001–02 prices using GDP deflators.

[2] 1998–99 reorganisation of authority.

[3] Budget figures.

Sources: 1990–91—2000–01 Revenue Summary (RS). 2001–02 General Fund Revenue Account Budget Estimate return, (NCE) column.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for shire counties, for the financial year 1990–91 to 2001–02, and projected for the year 2002–03, adjusted for inflation at current values *(a)* the total spending, *(b)* SSA spending and *(c)* under or over spending on social services for (i) the elderly, (ii) child protection and (iii) other categories. [36758]

Dr. Whitehead: The relevant information has been placed in the Libraries of the house.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the standard spending assessment for social services for elderly people, per pensioner, for (i) Cambridgeshire and (ii) Suffolk in each year from 1990–91 to 2001–02, adjusted for inflation at current values; and what is the Standard Spending Assessment for social services for child protection, per child under the age of 18, for (i) Cambridgeshire and (ii) Suffolk in each year from 1990–91 to 2001–02, adjusted for inflation at current values. [36757]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department does not keep data on people of pensionable age covering the entire period. The table gives the Elderly Personal Social Services (PSS) Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per person aged 65 and over together with the Children's PSS SSA per child aged 0 to 17, adjusted for inflation at current values[1], for Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. The SSAs have been averaged over the number of people for the period used in calculating the SSAs ie for 2001–02, the mid-1999 population estimates have been used.

£ per head

	Elderly PSS SSA per person aged 65 and over		Children's PSS SSA per child aged 0 to 17	
Year	Cambridgeshire[2]	Suffolk	Cambridgeshire	Suffolk
1990–91	270.85	264.04	89.46	82.84
1991–92	313.57	306.72	98.98	92.18
1992–93	320.24	320.50	104.10	96.73
1993–94	318.00	320.49	106.92	99.92
1994–95	374.16	369.86	131.49	114.93
1995–96	439.80	429.71	128.47	109.23
1996–97	494.24	483.29	124.30	107.31
1997–98	533.58	517.89	117.06	103.95
1998–99	528.18	533.30	102.84	105.23
1999–2000	549.29	551.14	95.68	104.30
2000–01	564.21	566.68	97.10	106.89
2001–02	565.25	574.07	91.50	100.42

[1] Deflated using the GDP Deflator, 2001–02 equals 100.

[2] The Cambridgeshire (City of Peterborough) (Structural, Boundary and Electoral Changes) Order 1996 came into force on 1 April 1998. Prior to this Cambridgeshire county council also provided services for the area now covered by Peterborough city council.

County Councillors

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much county councillors with cabinet responsibility are paid *(a)* in Lancashire and *(b)* on average in the UK. [36428]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department does not collect information from councils on the average allowances of council members. No statistics are available for the average special responsibility allowance paid to county councillors in Lancashire.

The average special responsibility allowance for county councillors with cabinet responsibility in those councils which made the information available to the Improvement and Development Agency, as of 12 October 2001, is £11,643.

Source: www. idea-knowledge.gov. uk, Member Allowance Summary Survey.

Parish Councils

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to allow postal ballots for communities which have a parish meeting and are holding elections for parish councils. [36454]

Dr. Whitehead: A postal vote is already available to any eligible elector who requests it for the election of parish and community councils. Postal votes are not currently available for parish or community polls demanded at parish or community meetings, but as part of our initiatives, following the Rural White Paper (Cm 4909) to strengthen local democracy at parish level, we will be reviewing the operation of parish polls, including the issue of allowing postal voting.

Arthur Andersen

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many contracts have been let to Arthur Andersen by his Department since 1997 on *(a)* matters relating to the railways and *(b)* other matters; [33045]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 584W, on departmental consultants, on what matters relating to Railtrack his Department is continuing to receive advice from Arthur Andersen. [33046]

Mr. Byers *[pursuant to his reply, 7 February 2002, c. 1097W]:* I have further information on the number of contracts awarded to Arthur Andersen. The additional contract was for auditing work on the Railways Pension Scheme.

The number of contracts that have been let to Arthur Andersen since 1997 are as follows:

Three—two on accountancy and taxation issues relating to the administration process and on the restructuring of Railtrack plc. One as external auditors for the Railways Pension Scheme (appointed by the corporate trustee of the scheme, Railway Pension Trustee Company Ltd.

Three—two are framework agreements (framework agreements do not guarantee work; each firm on the agreement has to bid for individual tenders). One housing research project was also completed in 1999.

Archaeological Services

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals to encourage local government archaeological services in protecting and promoting the historic environment. [35665]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's policy statement on the Historic Environment, A Force for Our Future (December 2001), recognises that archaeological remains are an integral part of the historic environment. It acknowledges that the sites and monuments records maintained by local authorities are a valuable resource with potential to be a powerful educational tool, both for professional and academic users and also for the general public. The Government consider that the services offered by the records should be enhanced and integrated with other records relevant to the historic environment, and that access should be facilitated through the use of electronic media. Accordingly, we will publish a consultation paper covering a range of options in the summer.

The Government also recognise the role played by local government archaeologists in the effective implementation of PPG16, and welcome English Heritage's work in establishing the Archaeology Training Forum to develop an education and training strategy for these and other members of the archaeology profession.

Economic Regeneration

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what further plans he has to support economic regeneration in regions dependent on declining traditional industries. [36982]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Department is responsible for the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in England. They have established regional economic strategies which consider, among other issues, the role of traditional industries and the measures which can be taken to modernise these and to broaden the region's economic base. In doing this, the RDAs work closely with sector directorates in my Department and in others with an interest and with the Small Business Service and Invest.UK. The total RDA budget is increasing from £1.3 billion in this financial year to £1.7 billion in 2003–04, and they are being given greater freedom in deploying this money.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the matters covered by the RDAs are the responsibility of the devolved Administrations.

Tower Blocks (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many tower blocks have been *(a)* demolished and *(b)* constructed since 1997 in (i) Coventry and (ii) the UK. [34923]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the demolition and construction of tower blocks is not held centrally.

Public Transport Insurance

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the number of insurers prepared to accept the provision of insurance for fleets of buses in the United Kingdom; and if he will refer the insurance industry to the Office of Fair Trading for investigation of competition conditions in the transport insurance industry. [36043]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

Insurance companies are responsible for determining the terms, conditions and price of their products, within a legal framework which aims at preserving a free and open market in which insurers can compete with each other in the provision of services.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Reporting Procedures

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what reporting procedures exist between the Northern Ireland Court Service and her office. [33288]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There is the closest possible working relationship between the Northern Ireland Court Service and the Lord Chancellor's Department both at official and ministerial level. This reflects the fact that the Northern Ireland Court Service is a department of the Lord Chancellor's and undertakes similar policy and administrative responsibilities to those undertaken by the Lord Chancellor's Department in England and Wales.

The Northern Ireland Court Service contributes to the Lord Chancellor's Department report. It also publishes an annual report to the Lord Chancellor detailing performance against its strategic objectives as set out in the court service's corporate plan. In addition, the Northern Ireland Court Service provides routine briefing on current issues to the Lord Chancellor on a monthly basis. Other policy and administrative issues are brought to the attention of the Lord Chancellor or of the LCD Parliamentary Secretary, as appropriate, by way of regular submissions.

Officials of the Northern Ireland Court Service hold regular meetings on current issues with the Lord Chancellor, the LCD Parliamentary Secretary, and with the officials of the Lord Chancellor's Department and its agencies.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the statutory instruments issued by her Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36228]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A list of statutory instruments has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. It includes those signed by or on behalf of the Lord Chancellor during the 12 months to 12 February 2002, and also Orders in Council made during that period for which the Lord Chancellor's Department was responsible. A list of Northern Ireland statutory rules signed by or on behalf of the Lord Chancellor is also included. The lists include a brief summary of the purpose of each instrument: further details will be found in instruments' explanatory notes.

Policy decisions implemented by secondary legislation may increase, reduce or have no effect on costs to others. It is not possible, save at disproportionate cost, to attribute specific cost increases or reductions to specific statutory instruments.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from the Department in each of the last four years. [34213]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 805W.

Public Guardianship Office

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints she has received about the performance of the Public Guardianship Office in each month since it was established. [32046]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office (PGO) was established on 1 April 2001. The number of complaints received about the performance of the PGO is as follows:

	Number
April 2001	47
May 2001	45
June 2001	62
July 2001	54
August 2001	41
September 2001	34
October 2001	35
November 2001	50
December 2001	39

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many new entrants to the civil service were employed in her Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 and over. [36493]

Ms Rosie Winterton: New entrants employed in the civil service in the Lord Chancellor's Department (including agencies), and those aged 50 years or over, in each of the last five years were as follows.

	New entrants	*Aged 50 and over*
1996–97	422	81
1997–98	661	142
1998–99	1,004	145
1999–2000	689	120
2000–01	824	134

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37500]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Legal Aid

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Government propose next to review fully the *(a)* salaries and *(b)* salary structure of (i) legal aid lawyers, (ii) legal aid support staff and (iii) legal aid solicitors; and if she will make a statement. [36728]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission (LSC) employs a small number of lawyers (barristers and solicitors) and support staff in the Public Defender Service. The first office was opened in May 2001 and there are no immediate plans to review salary structures.

Other than this, the LSC does not pay salaries to lawyers (barristers or solicitors) or support staff carrying out publicly funded work. The Department and the Commission are, however, concerned that the levels of remuneration paid to lawyers by the Commission from the Community Legal Service Fund and the Criminal Defence Service should ensure appropriate provision of legal advice and representation.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Government last fully reviewed the legal aid system; and when they propose to do so next. [36727]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Modernising Justice White Paper, published in December 1998, set out proposals for major reforms to the legal aid system in England and Wales. These reforms, which were introduced by the Access to Justice Act 1999, were largely implemented on or after April 2000. We are confident that the system is meeting its stated objectives. We have no plans for a full review of the system, although we do keep aspects of the system under regular review.

Freedom of Information Act

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he estimates all the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 will be implemented. [36938]

Mr. Wills: I announced the timetable for implementation of the Act on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 692W. This timetable means that the Act will be fully implemented in January 2005; 11 months before the deadline set by the Act.

Asylum Appeals

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many asylum appeals to adjudicators were *(a)* heard and *(b)* adjourned in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001 to the latest convenient date; and how many adjournments were at the request of (A) the appellant and (B) the Home Office. [36429]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Of the asylum appeals to adjudicators:

between 1 October and 31 December 2000 (earliest reliable information available):

13,127 appeals were heard, of which

3,520 cases were adjourned at hearing.

between 1 January and 30 June 2001:

25,418 appeals were heard, of which

6,691 cases were adjourned at hearing.

Comprehensive information on "adjournment by reason" is only available for cases after 1 July 2001.

and between 1 July 2001 and 31 December 2001:

29,881 appeals were heard, of which

7,914 cases were adjourned at hearing.

4,168 cases were adjourned by reason of the appellant or their representative.

1,397 cases were adjourned by reason of the Home Office.

The remaining 1,938 cases were adjourned for other reasons.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37452]

Mr. Wills: The Department and its agencies deal with and monitor correspondence in different ways, and these involve a range of time limits and targets. Information on average response times and answering letters within target is set out in the following tables. Information on percentage of letters that took longer than one and three months to respond is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lord Chancellor's Department and its agencies—average time response to correspondence

Working days

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Lord Chancellor's Department	15	13	14	13	9
Court Service	—	—	—	—	—
Public Guardianship Office[1]	—	—	—	—	—
Land Registry	—	—	—	—	—
Public Record Office	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Formerly Public Trust Office

Information from Court Service, HM Land Registry, Public Guardianship Office and Public Record Office on average response time is not readily available and could be only at disproportionate cost.

Lord Chancellor's Department and its agencies—percentage of correspondence answered within target (target in working days)

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*		*2001–02*	
	Percentage	*(Target)*	*Percentage*	*(Target)*	*Percentage*	*(Target)*	*Percentage*	*(Target)*	*Percentage*	*(Target)*
Lord Chancellor's Department	77	(20)	72	(20)	88	(20)	84	(20)	85	(15)
Court Service	[2]—	—	98	(20)	93	(15)	87	(15)	92	(15)
Public Guardianship Office[1]	95	(20)	96	(20)	92	(20)	89	(20)	92	(15)
HM Land Registry	96	(5)	96	(5)	96	5	96	(5)	96	(5)
Public Record Office	99.5	(10)	98.5	(10)	98.5	(10)	99.6	(10)	99.3	(10)

[1] Formerly Public Trust Office

[2] Not available

Power of Attorney

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether the Public Guardianship Office intends to increase the charge for registering an enduring power of attorney. [R] [35473]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office has recently conducted a review of all the fees charged. Some fees will need to be increased to reflect costs. The results of the review are being considered and the outcome will be announced in due course.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff left the service of her Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many her Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37547]

Ms Rosie Winterton: (a) in the year ended 31 March 2001, 1,086 staff left the service of the Lord Chancellor's Department and its agencies; (b) 864 staff left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years, of which 74 per cent. resigned, 12 per cent. transferred to other Government departments, 6 per cent. retired on ill health grounds and 3 per cent. were dismissed; (c) the Department and its agencies assumed responsibility for making payment until retirement age for 18 members of staff.

Sentencing

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will review the training received by judges in order to encourage consistent sentencing. [34658]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) which is an independent non-departmental public body. It is chaired by Lord Justice Waller.

All judges hearing criminal cases attend a residential induction course upon appointment and regular residential continuation seminars thereafter organised by the JSB. These include lectures and discussions on sentencing, one of the objectives of which is to encourage consistency. Recorders and Circuit Judges also attend annual circuit based seminars specifically devoted to sentencing issues. The content of the training received at these courses is kept under constant review by the Criminal Committee of the JSB, and updated to take in current issues where necessary.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) her Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34407]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Not all the information requested is available.

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Item 1[2]					
Court Service	n/a	36,131	90,179	99,411	66,142
Item 2[3]					
LCD HQ	n/a	354	2,038	1,803	1,032
Court Service	n/a	10,206	38,832	52,280	52,345
Public Guardianship Office (formerly Public Trust Office)	n/a	0	1,870	2,130	1,684
Legal Services Commission (formerly legal Aid Board)	21,125	14,578	27,653	61,422	n/a
Information Commissioner	1,069	1,273	2,189	1,492	1,185

[1] To December

[2] Mobile line rental costs are shown. These figures include the cost of handsets which are provided by the supplier as part of the mobile line rental contract.

[3] The cost of mobile telephone calls are shown.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if she will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately-provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if she will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if she will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case; [34384]

(2) if she will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by her Department and how much reclaimed. [34459]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Court Dress

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on her plans for the future of wigs as part of court dress. [34064]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Discussions between the Lord Chief Justice, the senior judiciary, the legal professional bodies and other interested parties are continuing. The Lord Chancellor will want to consider with the Heads of Division the final results of that consultation before deciding what action, if any, it would be appropriate to take.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what legal costs have been incurred by the Lord Chancellor's Department in each of the last four years. [34344]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Costs (including VAT) incurred by the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service in each of the last four years were as follows:

(a) 1998–99: £1,482,297

(b) 1999–2000: £2,296,799

(c) 2000–01: £2,170,675

(d) 2001 to date: £1,775,568.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many employees in her Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36685]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, effective January 1993, require employers to provide and pay for, upon request from an employee, an eye and eyesight test. There is a requirement for further tests at regular intervals; the optometrist doing the first test can recommend when the next one should be. In addition, employers must pay the cost of special spectacles required where normal ones cannot be used.

The eye-care scheme is publicised in the employee handbook and is mentioned to all new staff on the induction for new entrants event. In addition the scheme is regularly advertised in departmental publications which are circulated to all staff and on the departmental IT system.

In 2001 a total of 2,267 eye-test vouchers were applied for and issued. This figure represents 17.8 per cent. of the staff employed by the Department.

Bail

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what plans the Government have to review the guidelines given to magistrates on granting bail to repeat offenders; [36105]

(2) what recent guidelines he has given to magistrates on granting bail to repeat offenders. [36106]

Mr. Wills: Bail is a matter solely for the court before which a defendant appears. It would not be right for a Government Minister to interfere with the process of independent judicial discretion which magistrates exercise under the Bail Act 1976, which governs the granting of bail. Accordingly, no guidelines have been issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department in relation to the granting of bail to repeat offenders and there are no plans to review this position.

Judicial Appointments

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultation has taken place between *(a)* the Northern Ireland Court Service and *(b)* the Commissioner for Judicial Appointments with the Equality Commission concerning judicial appointments; and what recommendations have been made. [29947]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Northern Ireland Court Service, through its Diversity Unit, has regular contact with the Equality Commission in respect of appointments.

The Commissioner for Judicial Appointments for Northern Ireland, Mr. J. V. Simpson took up office on 11 December 2001. The Commissioner is undertaking an initial programme of familiarisation meetings and will be contacting the Equality Commission in this context.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff are employed to advise the Lord Chancellor on judicial appointments; and at what annual cost. [33745]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In January 2002 there were approximately 190 staff employed in the Judicial Group advising on appointments including, in addition to those working on the more than 800 specific appointments per annum, those advising on related matters such as appointments policy, terms and conditions of service including pensions, correspondence about judges and the promotion of a more diverse judiciary. The total expected pay bill cost for the financial year ending 31 March 2002 is approximately £4,700,000 including the estimated cost of new members of staff expected to take up positions with the Group before 31 March 2002.

Immigration Appellate Authority

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Appellate Authority received notice of an appeal in the case ISB/IMM/G6193; when he intends to notify the appellant of a hearing date; and if he will make a statement. [32307]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This case was received by the Immigration Appellate Authority on 8 February 2002. It has been listed for a first hearing and for a full hearing at Hatton Cross. Notice of Hearing was sent to the appellant on 13 February 2002.

Immigration and Asylum Appeals

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how she plans to consult on proposals to change the immigration and asylum appeals system. [36430]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Secure Borders, Safe Haven—Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain White Paper was published on 7 February 2002. Copies have been supplied to Parliament. The Home Office had an extensive list of consultees that included ministerial colleagues, relevant Opposition spokespersons, non-governmental bodies, and other interested parties. The consultation period ends on 21 March 2002.

County Courts

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many county courts Ministers in his Department have visited since 7 June 2001. [31862]

Mr. Wills: I have visited the following County Courts since 7 June 2001:

Newcastle Combined Court Centre on 28 November 2001; and Swindon Combined Court Centre; on 16 January 2002.

My ministerial colleagues have undertaken the following visits:

Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC: Central London County Court, on 23 January 2002; and Edmonton County Court, on 18 October 2001;

Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton): Brighton County Court on 11 September 2001; Leeds Combined Court Centre, on 26 September 2001;

The following Court Houses in Northern Ireland: Limavady, Londonderry, Larne, Antrim, Bandridge and Newry, on 22 January 2002; and Bangor and Newtownards, on 6 September 2001.

The Lord Chancellor visited the Birmingham Civil Justice Centre, which encompasses Birmingham County Court, on 7 December 2001.

Hereditary Issues

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many hereditary issues have been referred to him since taking office. [32592]

Mr. Wills: Under the House of Lords Standing Order 10, made on 26 July 1999, the Clerk of the Parliaments maintains a register of hereditary peers, other than peers of Ireland, who wish to stand in any by-election held to fill vacancies occurring due to the death of any of the 90 elected hereditary peers expected from the provisions of the House of Lords Act 1999. House of Lords Standing Order 10A, made on 13 November 2000, requires any hereditary peer who has succeeded to a title since the making of the standing order to petition the House. These petitions are referred to the Lord Chancellor to consider and report on whether a peer has established the right to be included in the register.

Since the making of Standing Order 10A, the House of Lords has referred five such petitions to the Lord Chancellor relating to the Dukedom of Sutherland and to the Baronies of Aldington, Cawley, Combermere and Terrington.

The Lord Chancellor has, in addition, considered two claims in relation to Irish peerages: the Earldom of Roden and the Barony of Dunsany.

Solway Harvester

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from the Isle of Man Government regarding the timing of the publication of the MAIB report into the Solway Harvester. [36733]

Mr. Wills: I have received no representations from the Isle of Man Government on this matter.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36144]

Mr. Wills: The total annual cost of the LCD website could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate costs because website related work is not differentiated from other work in the production and publication of departmental material.

The number of unique visitors (a more reliable indicator of individuals accessing web pages than hits) to the Department's website, www.lcd.gov.uk is as follows:

	Number
1997–98	54,688
1998–99	147,958
1999–2000	291,582
2000–01	358,161

Public Bodies (Chairmen)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33881]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The non-judicial appointments made to the chairmanship of the Lord Chancellor's non-departmental public bodies since 1 May 1997 are set out in the following tables. Information on political affiliation is not collected.

There are no appointments to be reported under *(b)*, *(c)* or *(d)*.

Information on the number, remit and membership of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000, and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 13 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report: *Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews*, was issued in October 2001, covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Non-departmental public bodies

Chairman	*Committee*	*Appointed*	*Retirement*
Advisory committees on justices of the peace			
Mr. James Tidmarsh (LL)	Avon	1 May 1997	2007
Mr. James Tidmarsh (LL)	Bristol	1 May 1997	2007
Mr. Keith Gorton	North Cleveland	2001	2006
Mr. Alfred Illingworth	South Cleveland	2001	2006
Mr. Eric Dancer (LL)	Devon	1998	2015
Mr. David Libby	Plymouth	2001	2004
Captain M. Fulford-Dobson (LL)	Dorset	1999	2006
Sir Paul Nicholson (LL)	Durham	1998	2013
Mr. Alan Willett (LL)	Kent	2002	2011
Mr. Raymond Harris	Leicester	1999	2005
Lady Juliet Townsend (LL)	Northamptonshire	1998	2011
Sir John Riddell (LL)	Northumberland	2000	2009
Lord Crathorne (LL)	North Yorkshire	1999	2014
Dr. Sheila Filshie	Nottingham	1 November 1997	2006
Lady Elizabeth Gass (LL)	Somerset	1999	2015
Mrs. Sarah Goad (LL)	Surrey	29 October 1997	2015
Mrs. P. Stewart-Roberts (LL)	East Sussex	2000	2008
Mr. Hugh Wyatt (LL)	West Sussex	1999	2008
Mrs. C. Wellingbrook	North East London	2001	2004
HH Judge Ellis	South East London	2000	2005
HH Judge Mitchell	South West London	2001	2007
Mr. Keith Goodall	Barnsley	2000	2003
Mr. Christopher Dorries	Sheffield	2000	2003
Mr. Paul Bryan	North Tyneside	2001	2004
Mr. K. Ahmed	South Tyneside	2000	2003
Mr. D. Cocking	Solihull	1999	2005
Mr. C. Sykes	Sutton Coldfield	1999	2002
Mrs. E. Rawling	Walsall	1999	2002
Mrs. R. Tyler	Warley	2001	2002
Mr. G. Dobson	Bradford	2001	2004
Mrs. E. Bavidge	Calderdale	1998	2001
Mrs. Valerie Pace	Huddersfield	2001	2004
Mr. J. Bancroft	Keighley	2001	2007
Mr. T. Moran	Leeds	1998	2004
Mr. A. Mills	Pontefract	2002	2004
Mr. Trefor Jones (LL)	Clwyd	2001	2012
Mr. G. J. Morgan	Ceredigion	2001	2002
Mr. S. Watkins	Pembroke	1998	2001
Mr. Simon Boyle (LL)	Gwent	2001	2011
Professor Eric Sunderland (LL)	Gwynedd	2000	2005
Advisory committees on general commissioners of income tax			
Mr. James Tidmarsh (LL)	Avon	1 May 1997	2007
Lord Crathorne (LL)	Cleveland	2001	2014
Mr. Eric Dancer (LL)	Devon	1998	2015
Captain M. Fulford-Dobson (LL)	Dorset	1999	2006
Mrs. Julia Davidson	Durham	2000	2003
Mrs. P. Stewart-Roberts (LL)	East Sussex	2000	2008
Mrs. A. Baglin	London Blackheath	1999	2005
Mr. T. Watson	London Middlesex	2000	2003
Mr. Peter Banks	Greater Manchester	1999	2002
Mr. Alan Willett (LL)	Kent	2002	2011
Mr. James Glynn	Lancashire	2001	2002
Lady Juliet Townsend (LL)	Northamptonshire	1998	2011
Sir John Riddel (LL)	Northumberland	2000	2009
Lord Crathorne (LL)	North Yorkshire	1999	2014
Lady Elizabeth Gass (LL)	Somerset	1999	2015
Mrs. Sarah Goad (LL)	Surrey	29 October 1997	2015
Mr. Nigel Sherlock	Tyne and Wear	2001	2011
Mr. L. Tomkins	West Midlands-1	1999	2002
Mr. Hugh Wyatt (LL)	West Sussex	1999	2008
Mr. Colin Beard	Wiltshire	1998	2002
Mr. Trefor Jones (LL)	Clwyd	2001	2012
Mrs. Lort Philips	Pembroke	1998	2007

Non-departmental public bodies

Chairman	*Committee*	*Appointed*	*Retirement*
Mr. Simon Boyle (LL)	Gwent	2001	2011
Professor Eric Sunderland (LL)	Anglesey	2000	2005
Professor Eric Sunderland (LL)	Caernarfon	2000	2005
Professor Eric Sunderland (LL)	Meirionnydd	2000	2005
Mrs. L. R. Peate	Powys	1999	2004
Mr. A. Mossford	South Glamorgan	1999	2005

Notes:

Lord Lieutenants (LL) hold office until their 75th birthday.

Others are appointed for a maximum of nine years on a Committee.

The position is unpaid.

Other NDPBs	*Individual*	*Dates*	*Current remuneration (£)*
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service	Anthony Hewson OBE	January 2001 for 4 years	400 per day
Council on Tribunals	Lord Newton of Braintree	1 October 1999 for 3 years	43,140[1]
Insolvency Rules Committee	Mr. Justice Evans-Lombe	October 1997 to September 2002	Unpaid
Judicial Studies Board	Lord Justice Waller	17 May 1999 for 3 years	[2]—
Law Commission	Lord Justice Carnwath CVO	1 February 1999 to 31 July 2002	[2]—
Legal Services Commission	Peter G. Birch CBE	1 April 2000 for 4 years	37,062
Legal Services Consultative Panel[2]	Lord Justice Potter	1 January 2001 to 31 December 2004	Unpaid
Strategic Investment Board	Dr. Colin Price	1 January 2001 for 3 years	15,000[1]

[1] Annual retainer

[2] Continues to draw judicial salary

[3] The Panel replaced the Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct, to which Lord Justice Potter was appointed as chairman on 27 May 1998. Fees were paid to members, but he continued to draw his judicial salary.

Lord Chancellor (Duties)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions *(a)* the Lord Chancellor and *(b)* her ministerial colleagues have refused to meet hon. Members to discuss constituency matters in the last 36 months; and what criteria she uses to arrive at such decisions. [30848]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested by my hon. Friend is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In deciding whether a meeting should or can take place, the Lord Chancellor's policy is to take account of (a) the nature of the issue concerned, any relevant background history, and surrounding circumstances; (b) pressure on his, and other Ministers' diaries; and (c) whether the matter can be fully and satisfactorily dealt with in correspondence.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment has been made of the effect of the working time directive on her Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps she is taking to reduce this number; and if she will make a statement. [35890]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since the working time directive was introduced we have sought to reduce the number of staff working in excess of 48 hours a week (by adjusting working hours or re-designing jobs) to an absolute minimum. Currently, of all the staff in the Lord Chancellor's Department and its agencies (the Court Service and Public Guardianship Office), around 30 staff regularly work in excess of 48 hours on a voluntary basis. They are principally based in the private offices and press office. Some other staff may work in excess of 48 hours from time-to-time to cover peaks of work or because their work is of a cyclical nature.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people are employed in her Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35364]

Ms Rosie Winterton: 2,291 staff currently work reduced hours in LCD headquarters, the Court Service and the Public Guardianship Office, a large proportion of whom are engaged on a job-share or job-split arrangement.

Job-sharing is only one of a number of alternative and flexible working patterns that employees are welcome to take up under the Department's work-life balance policies. The flexibility of the pattern is decided in conjunction with local management to suit an individual's need and the needs of their work.

95 per cent. of all vacancies advertised over the past 12 months have been suitable for job-sharing. The expectation is that jobs will be available for job-sharing unless line managers can justify otherwise.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in her Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [35930]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Detailed sick absence statistics are derived from the recording of medical and self-certificates, which are completed by staff or their

GPs. While certain illnesses, such as "depression", "anxiety", "general debility" and even "stress" may be indicated on certificates, it is not possible to determine levels of "work-related stress". Consequently, we have no details on the number of working days lost due to work-related stress or the cost to the Department.

However, we know from recent staff attitude surveys and an audit conducted in 1995 that undue stress at work is a problem for a small minority. To deal with this we have introduced a range of stress management courses for both managers and non-managers. Our in-house welfare service is fully trained, and ideally placed, to deal with issues involving work-related stress.

Both the Court Service and LCD headquarters also introduced new work-life balance policies during 2001, enabling staff to adopt more effective working patterns to better balance their work and home life.

We have a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment for all our staff and are committed to meeting targets for reducing the number of working days lost generally to work related injuries and illnesses arising from the Government's Revitalising Health and Safety initiative.

Public Record Office

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what official visits abroad officials from the Public Record Office have made since 1997; at what cost; and for what purpose. [32402]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The official visits abroad by officials from the Public Record Office are as follows:

		£
	Visits	*Average cost*
1997	15	1,000
1998	21	1,100
1999	25	650
2000	29	800
2001	24	1,900

The visits were made for the following purposes:

1. Collaboration, joint projects, research and benchmarking mainly with national archives in USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
2. Service on international committees relating to archives; mainly the International Council or Archives and the European Union, but also the International Standards Organisations; almost all within Europe.
3. Attendance at conferences on archival topics, mainly in Europe.
4. Supervisory visits to Mauritius in connection with transcriptions of the PRO on-line catalogue (PROCAT).
5. Supervisory visits to India and Sri Lanka in connection with transcriptions of the 1901 census.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by her Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34303]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not held centrally in the categories required and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the publications issued by the Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34200]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not held centrally in the categories requested; the information could be assembled only at disproportionate costs.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in her Department to *(a)* the Lord Chancellor and *(b)* her fellow Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36275]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, officials and advisers in the Lord Chancellor's Department have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35700]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27972]

Ms Hewitt: The estimated cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* the Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* NDPBs is as follows:

Theft

Year	£
1998	11,267
1999	10,985
2000	5,870
2001	18,782

These figures do not include returns from agencies or NDPBs. The information from agencies will be provided as soon as possible. The DTI does not hold information on thefts within NDPBs.

The annual fraud returns to the Treasury detailing losses relating to fraud are as follows:

Fraud

Year	£
1997–98	2,776
1998–99	56,150
1999–2000	2,589
2000–01	46,461

The Department's agencies and NDPBs are included in these figures.

Postal Deliveries

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many properties in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Scotland, and *(c)* Dumfries and Galloway were exempt from the normal six days a week postal deliveries during the past four years; if she will investigate the reasons for these exemptions; and what action she will take to reduce the number of exemptions. [28059]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The question of exceptions to the universal service is a matter for the postal regulator, the Postal Services Commission (Postcomm). Under the Postal Services Act 2000, Postcomm has the primary duty to ensure the provision of a universal postal service; that is at least one delivery of relevant postal packets is to be made every working day to the home or premises of every individual or other person in the United Kingdom or to such identifiable points for the delivery of relevant postal packets as Postcomm may approve.

However, the legislation does provide for the possibility that some addresses will receive less than this but only in exceptional circumstances. Such exceptions must be justified and agreed with Postcomm. Under the terms of the European Postal Directive these must also be notified to the European Commission. Since the establishment of the regulatory regime it has become clear that the incidence of exceptions is more widespread than was previously envisaged.

So, working closely with Postwatch (the postal consumer council), Postcomm is currently formulating a long-term policy on this matter and Postcomm intends to publish a public consultation paper, in the spring, setting out a long-term approach.

However, in the interim, and to avoid Consignia being in breach of its licence obligations, Postcomm issued a Direction on 23 March 2001 under section 4 of the Postal Services Act 2000 which designated exceptional conditions and circumstances under which Consignia plc was not obliged to comply with the every working day delivery requirement of the universal postal service. That Direction expired on 23 September 2001 and on that date Postcomm issued a second interim Direction (which is still in force). I am placing in the Library of the House a copy of that Direction.

The Annexe attached to the Direction outlines the geographical exceptions to the Direction. One of these relates only to parcel deliveries. One additional delivery point, was added to the Annexe to the Direction issued on 23 September 2001.

It is a matter for Postcomm to determine whether or not postal areas fall within any of the other exceptional designations outlined in the Direction.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will give a breakdown by parliamentary constituency of the number of homes in Scotland from whom Consignia plan to withdraw postal services; and from how many homes in the Angus local authority area Consignia proposes to withdraw postal services. [28307]

Mr. Alexander: Consignia would need Postcomm's authorisation to make changes to the way it carries out the universal postal service obligation in Scotland and Postcomm is not aware that Consignia plans to make such changes in Scotland. Subject to Consignia's universal service obligations, the number and timing of deliveries is an operational issue for Consignia.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with Consignia regarding their proposal to withdraw postal services from some rural homes in Scotland. [28306]

Mr. Alexander: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has had no discussions with Consignia on this issue. Consignia would need the postal regulator the Postal Services Commission's (Postcomm) authorisation to make changes to the way it carries out the universal postal service obligation in Scotland and Postcomm is not aware that Consignia plans to make such changes in Scotland. Subject to Consignia's universal service obligations, the number and timing of deliveries is an operational issue for Consignia.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures the Government are taking to protect the *(a)* price and *(b)* frequency of postal services in remote and rural areas from the pressures resulting from increased competition in delivery of mail, with particular reference to the Highlands of Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [34051]

Ms Hewitt: Under the Postal Services Act 2000 the Postal Services Commission (Postcomm) has the primary duty to ensure the provision of a universal postal service. The obligation consists of a service provided at an affordable price determined by a public tariff uniform throughout the UK and includes the delivery each working day to the home or premises of every individual in the UK and a collection each working day from access points.

Subject to this primary responsibility, Postcomm is also under a duty to exercise its functions in the manner which it considers is best calculated to further the interest of users of postal services, wherever appropriate, by promoting effective competition between postal operators. In performing this secondary duty Postcomm shall have regard to the interests of, among others, individuals residing in rural areas.

Currently Postcomm requires Consignia plc, in the licence, to provide a universal postal service. Subject to Consignia's universal service obligations, the number and timing of deliveries is an operational issue for Consignia. The prices that Consignia can charge for specific postal services, in particular prices for first and second class postage, are controlled by its licence granted by Postcomm on 23 March 2001. Postcomm is currently in the early stages of reviewing this price control and expects to publish initial proposals this summer.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many households do not receive a daily post delivery, broken down by postal area; and what measures she plans to take to overcome this. [28313]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I have given today to Question 28059 from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown).

Manufacturing Summit

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the responses received regarding the Manufacturing Summit of 5 December 2001; and if she will place the responses in the Library. [33979]

Mr. Wilson: A number of organisations provided written evidence to the Summit and a number of less formal comments were received. I have arranged for copies of the written evidence to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the publications issued by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34205]

Ms Hewitt: A list of those DTI publications produced since 1 December 2000 that have been notified to my Department's Publications Unit has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The listing includes the total cost incurred by the Department in production of each publication (where notified centrally), and excludes publications produced for internal use. For a list of publications published to December 2000, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 12 December 2000, *Official Report,* column 79W.

Circulation and purpose varies for each individual title. Information at the required level of detail is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, purposes include: guidance on legislation, informing people on a variety of issues such as consumer protection, and providing information to help small businesses.

Working Practices and Conditions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in her Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [35933]

Ms Hewitt: Data on work related stress are not collected separately in my Department. However we are committed to maintaining a safe working environment for staff and to reducing absences caused by any sickness or injury.

The Department offers an in-house counselling and advice service, with referrals to an outside specialist service where needed, which helps both managers and staff tackle work-related stress. Workshops are held for groups of staff and training is available.

Departmental Investment Measures

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's preferred measure of investment. [35297]

Alan Johnson: The DTI look at total investment and its components, including Government, business and manufacturing investment. The DTI competitiveness indicators publication compares both Government and business investment over time with the other G7 countries, using data sourced from the OECD.

Consignia

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the timescale for the appointment of the new chairman for Consignia. [35298]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 72W.

Manufacturing Industry

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the manufacturing industry on the effect of the level of the pound against the euro since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [35301]

Mr. Wilson: I and my ministerial colleagues understand the difficulties that the weakness of the euro and the slowdown in the world economy are causing for British industry, particularly manufacturing. We often receive representations from manufacturers on a wide range of issues, including those relating to the euro, and we value their insights.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of manufacturing industry. [35626]

Mr. Wilson: The stable macro-economic framework we have established—together with our policies to promote the spread of best practice, encourage innovation, raise skills levels and improve the transfer of ideas from the science base—are the best way to ensure the future competitiveness of the UK's manufacturing industry.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure that the Government's CHP target is reflected in her Department's aims and objectives on sustainable development; and when she intends to issue them to the non-ministerial Government Departments for which she is responsible. [35387]

Mr. Wilson: I believe the question is referring to guidelines on sustainable development and I should say that my Department has not issued any such guidelines. However, the DTI's Sustainable Development Strategy was published in October 2000 and is available on the DTI website. The Government remain committed to supporting CHP and my Department is working with colleagues in DEFRA and industry to improve the economic conditions for CHP and we are actively contributing to the development of the Government's CHP strategy.

New Electricity Trading Arrangements

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the extent to which the new electricity trading arrangements are encouraging for combined heat and power and renewables. [35385]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem's Report to DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators issued on 31 August 2001, indicated that prices for the export of power from smaller generators had reduced by around 17 per cent. since the introduction of NETA. Ofgem also found export volumes reduced by 44 per cent. compared to a year previously. Ofgem suggested the lower export prices for electricity were one factor, but that higher costs (especially gas prices) may also have contributed.

The Government believe that NETA should form part of its longer-term aim for encouraging a move towards a more cost-reflective and efficient system within which the benefits of embedded generation are recognised.

On 1 November 2001, I issued a consultation document in response to Ofgem's reports 'The New Electricity Trading Arrangements—Review of the First Three Months' and 'Report to the DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators' of 31 August 2001. This consultation closed on 1 December 2001.

The Government's key proposals are, broadly,

To ensure imbalance prices are genuinely cost reflective; and

To ensure that effective consolidation services emerge.

The Government are carefully considering responses on the proposals set out in their consultation document and will be issuing a response shortly.

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the functions, engagements and events which Ministers, her officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35698]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Arthur Andersen/Accenture

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which partners or senior employees of *(a)* Andersen, *(b)* Arthur Andersen, *(c)* Andersen Consulting and *(d)* Accenture have been appointed to (i) informal roles giving advice to the Department of Trade and Industry, (ii) task forces reporting to the Department of Trade and Industry, (iii) ad hoc advisory groups reporting to the Department of Trade and Industry and (iv) other formal roles reporting to Department of Trade and Industry Ministers since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [32916]

Ms Hewitt: Information on the number, remit and membership of taskforces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000, and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 13 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report: "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews", issued in October 2001, covers the period of the financial year 2000–2001. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The Department has numerous informal contacts with its stakeholders at different levels.

Sellafield

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which radioactive materials are held in B30 nuclear waste storage ponds at Sellafield. [35999]

Mr. Wilson: I understand from the company that the pond currently holds unreprocessed used nuclear fuel residues, and intermediate level waste in the form of sludges and various solid wastes.

European Fusion Development Scheme

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the UK has given to the European fusion development scheme in the past 10 years; and what the UK's financial commitment to EFDA is in the next 10 years. [36002]

Mr. Wilson: The European Fusion Development Agreement (EFDA) began in 1999. Over the four-year period 1999–2002 the UK's direct contribution to EFDA activities is projected to be £23 million. In this period 1999–2002, European income to the UK under EFDA for facility operation and research is likely to be £104 million.

The budget for EFDA in the next Framework Programme (2003–06) is still under discussion and hence no commitment has yet been made.

Pakistan (Imports)

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason the UK has chosen to give Pakistan a duty free assistance package rather than offering aid to Pakistan in the form of cash grants. [36249]

Mr. Wilson: The decision by the EU to give Pakistan duty free assistance was part of a package of measures that also included a renewed EC-Pakistan Co-operation Agreement and economic assistance in the form of euro 50 million in development aid in 2002. The whole package was given in response to the exceptional economic and political circumstances faced by Pakistan as a result of its support for the coalition against terrorism following the events of 11 September.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the duty free access for finished goods originating from Pakistan will be controlled to ensure that Pakistan improves *(a)* working conditions, *(b)* environmental controls and *(c)* human rights. [36248]

Mr. Wilson: Pakistan will have duty free access for many products as a drugs regime country under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). This regime has comprehensive monitoring and evaluation criteria covering social development and environmental policy. Annual reports will be considered by the GSP Committee, and the European Commission will undertake a general review at end of 2004. In addition, there are provisions to withdraw any GSP country's benefits in the event of serious problems in a variety of areas, such as fraud, inadequate drug controls, human rights abuses, and labour rights violations.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the number of jobs that will be lost in the UK following the decisions by the Government and the European Union to allow duty free access for finished goods originating from Pakistan. [36251]

Mr. Wilson: An assessment carried out by my officials last October suggests that the impact of the EU decision to offer duty-free access to Pakistan for made up textiles and clothing is likely to be modest but that it is not possible to say precisely how many jobs will be affected. One reason for this is because any resulting increase in exports from Pakistan will represent at most about a 1 per cent. increase in the value of overall supply of clothing and textiles to the EU market. A second reason is that increased exports from Pakistan are in many instances likely to displace exports from other third country suppliers

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the level of imports of cloth from Indonesia and China sent via Pakistan to be made into apparel goods in order to avoid the duty payable if the cloth had been imported direct to the UK. [36247]

Mr. Wilson: No assessment has been made of the level of imports of cloth from Indonesia and China sent via Pakistan to be made into apparel goods as such goods will remain liable to full duty on entry to the UK.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36218]

Ms Hewitt: The cost for my Department and its agencies for the last four years for which figures are available (financial years 1995–96 to 1998–99) was £77,000; £49,000; £44.500 and £59,000, respectively. Information about staff numbers and time allocated is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information for non-departmental public bodies is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Steel Industry

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the balance of trade was in steel in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what the main contribution of origin of steel imports were by volume. [36061]

Mr. Wilson: The information is given in the following tables:

UK balance of trade in steel 1996 to 2000

Year	*Tonnes 000*
1996	2,814
1997	2,662
1998	815
1999	835
2000	185

UK imports of steel 1996 to 2000—top five sources

Tonnes 000

Countries	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Germany	1,514	1,518	1,394	1,394	1,455
France	738	824	893	864	740
Belgium[1]	579	686	698	661	698
Sweden	526	454	577	524	588
Spain	397	348	384	385	435

[1] Data for Belgium include imports from Luxembourg in years 1996–98

Source:

Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her assessment is of the effects of stage 1 and stage 2 enlargement of the European Union on the British steel industry. [36062]

Mr. Wilson: Enlargement of the European Union will strengthen its position in the global market and provide excellent opportunities to increase trade.

It is important that applicant countries, particularly in the first wave of enlargement, move towards a market orientated economy as quickly as possible. It is vital that they bring their competition and state aid regimes into line with other member states to ensure a level playing field is created and we support the Commission's efforts to achieve this. In this context, there has undoubtedly been much progress in reducing subsidies and introducing privatisation and restructuring in the steel industry in the first and second wave applicant countries.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department was consulted as to the effect of LNM Holdings acquisition of the Sidex Plant in Romania on the British steel industry. [36732]

Ms Hewitt: My Department's position on the privatisation of Romanian steel plants is well established. We have for some time supported the interests of the British steel industry by encouraging the completion of privatisation in order to eliminate state subsidies and create a level playing field for British companies.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36194]

Ms Hewitt: None in my Department or its agencies. Information on non-departmental public bodies is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in her Department to *(a)* herself and *(b)* her Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36282]

Ms Hewitt: Ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail. In exceptional circumstances the departmental contracted courier service has been used to deliver urgent papers but this is not routine practice.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether a regulatory impact assessment, which adheres to the Cabinet Office model, has been published for the Work and Parents Framework documents and latest consultation document. [36979]

Alan Johnson: The regulatory impact assessment carried out for the current Employment Bill contains figures relating to maternity, paternity, adoption and the flexible working provisions. Copies of this are available from the Libraries of the House.

It is likely that a revised regulatory impact assessment will be available in the next few days. Copies of the updated version will also be available from the Libraries of the House.

Parental and Maternity Leave

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent legislation has been introduced on the provision of parental and maternity leave and pay with particular reference to returning to work part-time. [36980]

Alan Johnson: There are no provisions in parental and maternity leave and pay legislation which specifically cover return to work on a part-time basis. Existing legislation provides for the rights of an employee (whether full-time or part-time) to return either to the same job in which he/she was employed before taking leave or, in certain circumstances, to an alternative job which is suitable and appropriate.

A new duty on employers to seriously consider requests for flexible working, including part-time working, from parents with young children is being introduced as part of the Employment Bill which is currently going through Parliament.

Inward Investment Projects (North East)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the value of inward investment projects into the North East was in each year since 1996. [36777]

Ms Hewitt: The figures in the table are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the companies' best estimate, at that time, of the number of jobs associated with each investment.

There is no requirement on companies to notify inward investment decisions to Invest.UK and so the figures include only those projects where Invest.UK or its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice. They are therefore likely to be an under-estimate. Invest.UK is not always given financial information relating to inward investment decisions and therefore such information is not provided, as it is incomplete and would give a distorted impression against the number of projects for each year.

The UK is the No. 1 location in Europe for inward investment and the Government will continue to do all they can to maintain the UK's attractiveness as a location so our economy can continue to enjoy the substantial benefits from inward investment.

Successes in the North East

	Number of projects	*Number of associated jobs*
1996–97	46	7,618
1997–98	48	12,654
1998–99	35	9,257
1999–2000	49	11,910
2000–01	38	7,959

Free Eye Test

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employees in her Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36696]

Ms Hewitt: Five hundred and eight (508) staff have taken up the provision of a free eye test within the last two years. Staff who regularly use computers are entitled to a free eye test every two years, unless an optician recommends more frequent testing. The service has been brought to the attention of current staff through the distribution of a health and safety notice. A reference copy of the notice is also available on the Department's intranet. Guidance on the use of display screen equipment and the entitlement to a free eye test forms a part of the health and safety induction procedures for new staff.

Oil and Gas Directorate Posts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many oil and gas directorate posts there were in *(a)* Aberdeen, *(b)* London and *(c)* elsewhere in each of the last 15 years; and what the running costs for the oil and gas directorate were in total and by location in the most recent years for which figures are available. [36447]

Mr. Wilson: The number of oil and gas directorate posts located in Aberdeen, London and elsewhere since the establishment of the Aberdeen office in 1994, together with associated running costs was as follows:

£000

	Aberdeen	*London*	*Elsewhere*	*Running costs*
1994	4.1	118.5	0	6,560
1995	44.2	120.8	0	7,582
1996	45.5	118.9	0	7,425
1997	53.6	105	0	6,709
1998	56.3	102.3	0	7,060
1999	60.3	99.3	0	7,158
2000	72.3	103.8	0	8,409
2001	84.5	96.6	0	9,961

Notes:

1. Running costs expenditure is not recorded on the basis of the location of the office. A breakdown of the costs between Aberdeen and London is not therefore available.
2. There have been some changes in the functions of Oil and Gas Directorate over this period. For example, responsibility for the collection of oil and gas royalties was transferred to the Inland Revenue in 2000, leading to 14 posts transferring from Oil and Gas Directorate's Aberdeen office to the Inland Revenue's Aberdeen office.

Energy and Lobbying Companies

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 63W, on meetings with energy companies and lobbying companies, what criteria she uses to decide whether to place records of his meetings in the public domain; and if she will make a statement. [36997]

Ms Hewitt: The criteria are set out in the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I have no plans to make a statement.

Public Private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which public private partnerships with a capital value in excess of £1 million are under negotiation by her Department; and if she will make a statement. [36369]

Ms Hewitt: There are no PPP contracts currently under negotiation in my Department.

TRIPS Agreement

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans the Government have to propose revisions to the TRIPS agreement regarding the patenting of staple food crops under WTO rules; [36462]

(2) what representations she has made to the World Trade Organisation regarding the TRIPS agreement in relation to the patenting of staple food crops; and if she will make a statement. [36436]

Ms Hewitt: The TRIPS agreement confirms the established principle that it is not possible to be granted a valid patent for something which is already known. According to this principle, neither naturally occurring genetic resources as they exist in the natural environment, nor related traditional knowledge can constitute patentable matters in themselves. Genetic resources such as staple food crops can serve as a basis from which inventions may be developed. Those inventions may be subject to intellectual property rights, and in particular patents.

With the UK's agreement and that of our EU partner, the European Commission presented a communication to the TRIPS Council dated in April 2001 concerning the two most relevant international agreements in this field: the TRIPS agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The document bears World Trade Organisation reference IP/C/W/254 and a copy is available in the Libraries of the House.

This communication highlights the role of patents in encouraging and protecting technical inventions based on genetic resources, and invites all WTO Members to bring forward proposals to address their specific concerns.

In addition to the World Trade Organisation, issues concerning intellectual property rights and access to genetic resources, including staple food crops, are also under discussion in an Intergovernmental Committee set up by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The Government have also set up a Commission on Intellectual Property Rights to look at how intellectual property rights can work better for poor people and developing countries. It is due to report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development in June.

Any plans to propose revision of the TRIPS agreement will depend on the outcome of these activities.

Liabilities Management Authority

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what liaison her Department's Liabilities Management Unit has with the ALFA Group within BNFL. [36471]

Mr. Wilson: When established, I expect the Department's Liabilities Management Unit (LMU) and the ALFA Group within BNFL to have a close working relationship. One of the LMU's roles will be to monitor BNFL's performance and the ALFA Group will be the LMU's main contact point within BNFL. I expect the two bodies to work together to develop new measures and approaches aimed at improving BNFL's performance as a liabilities manager and delivering the sharper focus on clean up which the Government wish to achieve.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she plans to transfer the UK Atomic Energy Authority laboratories at Sellafield to the new Liabilities Management Authority. [36473]

Mr. Wilson: As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry indicated in her statement to the House on 28 November 2001, the Liabilities

Management Authority will be responsible for all public sector civil nuclear liabilities. This will include all of the UK Atomic Energy Authority's liabilities including those at Windscale (adjacent to Sellafield).

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether current contracts for Thorp and SMP at Sellafield will be made public as part of the transparency process in setting up the Liabilities Management Authority. [36470]

Mr. Wilson: The contracts between BNFL and its customers for Thorp and SMP are commercially confidential.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken to recruit a director for the Liabilities Management Authority. [36472]

Mr. Wilson: The Liabilities Management Authority will be established by legislation. No action will be taken to recruit a Director for the Authority until the founding legislation has been scrutinised by Parliament and has passed Second Reading in the House of Commons.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to establish an embryonic board for the Liabilities Management Authority. [36474]

Mr. Wilson: The Liabilities Management Authority will be established by legislation. No action will be taken to recruit board members for the Authority until the founding legislation has been scrutinised by Parliament and has passed Second Reading in the House of Commons.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what resources have been committed by her Department to the establishment and development of the New Liabilities Management Unit. [36469]

Mr. Wilson: My officials have had discussions with BNFL about working relationships between the Liabilities Management Unit (LMU) and the company and action is in hand to recruit senior staff and to appoint a partner contractor with top quality technical, operational and strategic management skills. As yet, however, no decision has been taken about the overall composition of the LMU or its budget.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the shadow Liabilities Management agency will be covered by the rules governing non-departmental public bodies. [36466]

Mr. Wilson: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the Liabilities Management Unit which is currently being set up.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry indicated in her statement to the House on 28 November 2001 that DTI would strengthen its existing capacity for overseeing work on the nuclear legacy prior to the creation of the Liabilities Management Authority. The Department is creating a Liabilities Management Unit to play this role.

The Unit will be part of the Department and, therefore, not covered by the rules governing non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's liabilities management unit with specific reference to *(a)* its role, *(b)* its level of staff, *(c)* its annual budget and *(d)* the expected length of its existence. [37083]

Mr. Wilson: The Department's Liabilities Management Unit (LMU) is in the process of being established. Action is in hand to recruit senior staff and to appoint a partner contractor with top quality technical, operational and strategic management skills. As yet, however, no decision has been taken about the overall composition of the LMU or its budget.

The LMU is intended to strengthen DTI's capacity for overseeing work on the nuclear legacy prior to the creation of the proposed Liabilities Management Authority (LMA). This includes, in particular, acquiring a more detailed knowledge of BNFL liabilities and working with BNFL to develop measures for monitoring BNFL's performance as a liabilities manager.

We envisage that the LMU will be wound up once the LMA is operational.

Imported Equipment

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures her Department takes to detect imported equipment which is sold as British-made. [36832]

Ms Hewitt: It is an offence under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 to describe goods in a false or misleading way as to their origin. The Act also prohibits the importation of goods falsely marked as to their origin. Local authority trading standards officers have the powers to investigate and where necessary prosecute offences under the Act. The prohibition on importation is enforced by HM Customs and Excise at ports of entry.

Regional Development

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many businesses the RDA helped to set up in *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* the South West region in 1999–2000. [36455]

Alan Johnson: The RDA has no direct delivery role in relation to business start-ups. It does, however, have a strategic role in creating an environment where businesses can start, survive and grow in the region. The Agency works with regional public and private sector partners, including the Small Business Service and Business Links, developing collaborative networks to integrate the work of all those agencies that provide support to business in the region.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the issue of the insolvency of BNFL was discussed at the meeting of the Energy Minister with Hugh Collum and Norman Askew on 15 November 2001. [37048]

Mr. Wilson: I meet Hugh Collum and Norman Askew regularly to discuss a range of issues, including financial issues, relating to BNFL.

Combined Cycle Gas Turbine Power Stations

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 389W, on CCGT power stations, how she intends to discharge her responsibilities on power stations under sections 34 and 35 of the Electricity Act 1989. [37049]

Mr. Wilson: Sections 34 and 35 of the Electricity Act allow my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to issue various directions to power station operators and transmission companies. This would generally be in preparation for, or for the possibility of an emergency in generation, distribution or supply. The directions may include demanding information on stocks or making contingency arrangements for certain fuels and materials and how they are used. The choices would depend on the circumstances at the time.

The Department will shortly be reviewing the emergency arrangements for electricity. All consultation papers etc. will be available on the DTI website throughout the period of the review—www.dti.gov.uk/energy.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff left the service of her Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many her Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37544]

Ms Hewitt: 912 staff left the Department and its Agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001. 804 staff left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years and the Department and its Agencies assumed responsibility for making payments until retirement age for 25 staff.

This answer covers DTI headquarters and the Insolvency Service Agency, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Employment Tribunal Service, Patents Office, Radiocommunications Agency, ACAS and Companies House Agency.

Departmental Overseas Visits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in her Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36818]

Ms Hewitt: Parliamentary private secretaries supporting Ministers in this Department have travelled overseas on Government business on one occasion at a total cost of £6,184. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Code.

UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in relation to the UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme, how much aid was paid to coal producers *(a)* for each mine and *(b)* on a £/per tonne basis in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; what determinations were made by the Import Parity Price Panel in (A) 2000 and (B) 2002; and whether any members of the Panel did not take part in an individual determination owing to a conflict of interest. [37122]

Brian Wilson: The table at annexe A details the total payments made under the UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme, by colliery and on a £/tce (tonnes of coal equivalent) basis.

Payments have been made in respect of two tranches: Tranche 1 (17 April 2000 to 31 December 2000) and Tranche 2 (1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001).

The Import Parity Price Panel has given advice on IPPs for contracts relating to Tranche 1 applications under the UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme. A summary of this advice is given in the table at annex B. No advice has yet been submitted in relation to Tranches 2 and 3.

David Brewer, having declared an interest, did not participate in the IPP determinations for Moorside Mining Co. Ltd. (Eckington Colliery).

Colliery	*Year 2000*		*Year 2001*	
	Total Aid (£)	*£/tce*[1,2]	*Total Aid (£)*	*£/tce*[1,2]
Anthracite Mining Ltd. (Aberpergwm Colliery)	0		1,031,000	15.4
Betws Anthracite Ltd. (Betws Colliery)	870,200	41.4	1,966,000	51.7
Blenkinsopp Colliery Ltd. (Blenkinsopp Colliery)	470,500	3.7	1,168,000	7.2
Celtic Energy Ltd. (East Pit Extension)	2,977,500	24.8	0	—
Coalpower Ltd. (Hatfield Colliery)	0	—	951,750	—
Ffynonau Duon Mines Ltd. (Blaentillery N#2)	112,800	10.6	217,000	19.2
Hatfield Coal Company Ltd. (Hatfield Colliery)	3,931,900	19.4	2,855,250	7.7
HJ Banks (Central Mines)	661,100	3.4	0	—
HJ Banks (North East Mines)	703,200	5	0	—
J Flack and Sons (Hay Royds Colliery)	78,900	4	264,000	8
Mining (Scotland) Ltd. (Longannet Mine)	19,652,800	50.9	21,525,000	23.4
Moorside Mining Ltd. (Eckington Colliery)	88,200	5.04	286,000	10.25
Tower Colliery Ltd. (Tower Colliery)	3,317,200	8.3	0	—
UK Coal (Rossington Colliery)	3,207,200	8.44	0	—
UK Coal Plc. (Harworth Colliery)	14,722,100	27.7	0	—
UK Coal Plc. (Maltby Colliery)	13,559,700	21.7	0	—
UK Coal Plc. (Selby Complex)	23,186,500	8.4	20,324,500	5.1

[1] For the purpose of this table, one tce (tonnes of coal equivalent)= 29.302GJ

[2] In 1999 prices

Summary of Panel's Advice on IPPs

Contract reference	*Purchaser Business*[1]	*Purchaser Region*[2]	*Date contract entered into (dd/mm/yy)*	*Calorific value (GJ/tonne)*	*Sulphur content (percentage)*	*Total volume of contract (000 tonnes)*	*Duration of contract (mm/yy to mm/yy)*	*IPP pence/GJ*
00–01	Industrial Heating	Yorkshire/ Humber	31 January 2000	25.38	1.24	2.6	February 2000 to January 2002	101
00–02	Public Authority	Yorkshire/Humber	31 February 2000	28.4	1.2	5.00	March 2000 to February 2001	144
00–03	Cement Producer	North West	16 February 2000	31.17	1.18	240 to 300	July 2000 to June 2002	97
00–04	Industrial Process	East Midlands	27 March 2000	28.39	1.27	0.9	April 2000 to March 2001	154
00–05	Coal Producer	Yorkshire/Humber	31 March 2000	26.1	2.0	5.6	April 2000 to September 2000	103
00–06	Transport	Wales	5 April 2000	28.80	1.10	0.1	March 2000 to February 2002	217
00–07	Industrial Heating	Yorkshire/ Humber	20 April 2000	28.39	1.27	4.3	May 2000 to April 2003	132
00–08	Industrial Heating	East Midlands	12 May 2000	28.39	1.27	0.3	April 2000 to March 2001	146
00–09	Transport	South West	15 May 2000	28.80	1.10	0.4	April 2000 to March 2001	198
00–10	Public Authority	East Midlands	2 June 2000	26.0	1.2	1.50	July 2000 to June 2001	115
00–11	Industrial Heating	Yorkshire/Humber	2 June 2000	28.4	1.2	0.05	July 2000 to June 2001	142
00–12	Industrial Heating	Yorkshire/Humber	2 June 2000	28.4	1.2	0.03	July 2000 to June 2001	142
00–13	Public Authority	Yorkshire/Humber	2 June 2000	28.39	1.27	1.5	July 2000 to June 2001	149
00–14	Public Authority	Yorkshire/Humber	2 June 2000	28.39	1.27	1.6	July 2000 to June 2001	152
00–15	Industrial Heating	Yorkshire/Humber	27 June 2000	28.39	1.27	0.7	July 2000 to June 2001	128
00–16	Public Authority	East Midlands	22 August 2000	28.39	1.27	5.0	September 2000 to August 2002	149
00–17	Industrial Heating	Yorkshire/Humber	1 September 2000	28.39	1.27	1.0	October 2000 to September 2001	140
00–18	Briqueting	Wales	5 September 2000	29.5	[4]1.0	20	September 2000 to August 2001	146
00–19	Energy Trader	Yorkshire/Humber	15 September 2000	24.10	[3]1.20	330	November 2000 to March 2001	113
00–20	Briquetting	Wales	26 September 2000	30	n/a	5	September 2000 to August 2001	143
00–21	Quarrying	East Midlands	9 October 2000	31.17	1.18	80 to 110	November 2000 to October 2002	125.5
00–22	Generator	East Midlands	19 October 2000	25.8	2.0	20	September 2000 to March 2001	96
00–23	Generator	Wales	10 November 2000	25	0.9	48.4	November 2000 to March 2001	95
00–24	Briquetting	North East	17 December 2000	30	[4]1.0	20 to 40	April 2000 to March 2001	104

Notes:

[1] Business of purchaser to be recorded in generic terms: e.g. generator, coke manufacturer, industrial heating, steel production.

[2] Region of purchaser should be one of the nine English regions as used by Government Offices/RDAs (North West, North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, East of England, West Midlands, South East, South West, London), Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland or Other.

[3] Maximum.

[4] Greater than.

Nuclear Clean-up

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what expenditure she incurred on the decommissioning, management and clean-up of nuclear materials, equipment and facilities in each year since 1997; and how much she expects to spend in this financial year. [37247]

Mr. Wilson: Expenditure on the Department's decommissioning and radioactive waste management programme is incurred by way of grant to the UK Atomic Energy Authority.

£ million

	UKAEA nuclear decommissioning
1997–98	162.2
1998–99	256.9
1999–2000	183.5
2000–01	219.9
2001–02[1]	262.5

[1] Planned

Note:

All figures in cash of year

Environmental Accounting Guidelines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to implement the EU recommendation on environmental accounting guidelines. [37290]

Mr. Wilson: The recommendation from the European Commission concerns specific environmental expenditure disclosures in company annual accounts. We have promoted it by asking the accountancy profession, business organisations (including the banking sector) and others to encourage their clients and member companies to take account of the recommendation in the preparation of their financial statements.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently challenged the top 350 companies to produce Environmental Reports and the DTI/DEFRA also launched Guidelines on Environmental Reporting with the CBI last year.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many home visits for medical assessment purposes to former miners have been conducted in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the north-west, *(d)* England, *(e)* Scotland and *(f)* Wales for (i) vibration white finger and (ii) respiratory diseases. [35586]

Mr. Wilson: The number of domiciliary visits undertaken in those regions is as follows:

	Number of vibration white finger domiciliary visits	*Number of respiratory disease domiciliary visits*
(a) St. Helens South	1	15
(b) Merseyside	5	33
(c) North-west	28	173
(d) England	201	1,815
(e) Scotland	48	389
(f) Wales	63	982

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former miners' compensation claims for *(a)* respiratory disease and *(b)* vibration white finger have been prioritised in (i) St. Helens, South, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the north-west, (iv) England, (v) Scotland and (vi) Wales. [35585]

Mr. Wilson: The number of high priority respiratory disease claimants who have been prioritised and medically assessed is as follows:

Region	*Number*
St. Helens, South	46
Merseyside	129
North-west	591
England	7,278
Scotland	871
Wales	3,400

The Department is unable, in the time given, to provide a breakdown of prioritised priority vibration white finger, VWF, claims. However, GB-wide, 346 claimants have been prioritised and received domiciliary visits.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate the Government have made of the number of claims for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* respiratory diseases for (i) former miners, (ii) widows of former miners and (iii) other eligible estate claims for former miners in (A) St. Helens South, (B) Merseyside, (C) the north-west, (D) England, (E) Scotland and (F) Wales. [35590]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has received nationally 177,000 claims in respect of respiratory disease and 135,000 in relation to vibration white finger, VWF. The Department continues to receive over 600 new respiratory disease claims and over 360 new VWF claims per week. As such, the Department is unable to provide an estimate of the number of claims to be received on either scheme.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average waiting time has been for former miners for an appointment for a medical assessment for *(a)* respiratory disease and *(b)* vibration white finger in (i) north-west England, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Wales in the last 12 months. [35589]

Mr. Wilson: Claims are being processed according to priority as set out in the handling agreement. The average waiting time between completion of medical records recovery and an appointment to undergo a medical assessment is as follows:

(a) Respiratory disease

	Average waiting time in days		
	(i) North-west	*(ii) Scotland*	*(iii) Wales*
Live cases	76	48	123
Deceased cases	39	56	52

(b) Vibration white finger

	(i) North-west	*(ii) Scotland*	*(iii) Wales*
Average waiting time in days	86	47	53

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new claims were lodged by former miners for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* respiratory diseases by month throughout 2001, in (i) St. Helens, South, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the north-west, (iv) England, (v) Scotland and (vi) Wales. [35591]

Mr. Wilson: New claims were registered as follows:

Regional breakdown of number of new claims for vibration white finger

2001	*St. Helens, South*	*Merseyside*	*North-west*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*
January	1	8	46	812	47	56
February	3	10	30	723	24	84
March	8	14	63	1,574	39	104
April	2	35	132	1,763	112	128
May	2	6	31	1,370	91	89
June	1	14	50	1,323	80	108
July	2	15	64	1,398	93	95
August	1	8	37	1,255	49	76
September	2	16	59	1,068	55	103
October	6	23	71	1,544	173	195
November	11	37	107	2,183	138	95
December	8	22	61	1,108	93	75

Regional breakdown of number of new claims for respiratory disease

2001	*St. Helens, South*	*Merseyside*	*North-west*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*
January	14	29	115	3,783	341	906
February	15	49	114	2,485	271	768
March	15	52	187	3,658	217	1,280
April	27	62	156	2,461	188	480
May	21	54	152	2,972	365	659
June	11	33	114	3,551	245	278
July	14	32	145	3,088	259	274
August	13	34	152	2,629	183	328
September	14	46	146	3,074	193	409
October	3[illegible]	103	339	3,544	184	503
November	50	136	343	2,379	227	279
December	19	63	161	1,637	151	169

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many expedited payments were made to former miners with respiratory diseases in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the north-west, *(d)* England, *(e)* Scotland and *(f)* Wales; and what the average expedited payment award was in each case. [35588]

Mr. Wilson: The number and average expedited payments were made in the above regions as follows:

Region	*Number of expedited payments*	*Average payment £*
(a) St. Helens, South	40	3,978
(b) Merseyside	146	4,464
(c) North-west	674	4,523
(d) England	8,661	4,117
(e) Scotland	943	4,424
(f) Wales	1,201	3,630

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former miners pursuing compensation claims have had a medical assessment for *(a)* respiratory diseases and *(b)* vibration white finger in (i) St. Helens, South (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the north-west, (iv) England, (v) Scotland and (vi) Wales. [35587]

Mr. Wilson: The number of miners who have attended an appointment to undergo the medical assessment is as follows:

	Number of miners[1]	*Number of miners*[2]
St. Helens, South	330	207
Merseyside	790	681
north-west	3,234	2,328
England	37,055	62,326
Scotland	7,326	4,069
Wales	17,945	8,814

[1] Who have attended a respiratory disease medical assessment

[2] Who have attended a Vibration White Finger medical assessment

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid to claimants through each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [37424]

Mr. Wilson: The amount paid to claimants through each of the top 10 claims handlers for respiratory disease and Vibration White Finger is as follows.

(£ million)

Solicitor	*Total damages paid*
Respiratory Disease	
Thompsons	62.2
Hugh James Ford Simey	47.6
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	16.1
Raleys	27.4
Mark Gilbert Morse	4.3
Browell Smith & Co	20.9
Graysons	10.1
Watson Burton	7.2
Irwin Mitchells	12.4
Randell Saunders	3.3
Total	211.3
Vibration White Finger	
Thompsons	70.1
Browell Smith & Co	40.5
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	43.8
Raleys	28.5
Hugh James Ford Simey	28.6
Graysons	22.0
Moss	14.2
Watson Burton	23.1
AMS Law	12.8
Towells	16.6
Total	300.4

Inward Investment

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs were *(a)* created and *(b)* safeguarded; and how many projects were completed as a result of inward investment in (i) the UK and (ii) the areas covered by the regional development agencies over the last five years. [37105]

Nigel Griffiths: The UK is the No. 1 location in the EU for inward investment and the Government will continue to do all they can to maintain the UK's attractiveness as a location so our economy can continue to enjoy the substantial benefits from inward investment.

There is no requirement on companies to notify inward investment decisions to Invest.UK and so the figures include only those projects where Invest.UK or its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice. They are therefore likely to be an underestimate.

Region	Number of: projects	new jobs	safeguarded jobs
1996–97			
UK	497	46,400	51,939
English RDAs	352	21,940	44,544
1997–98			
UK	631	46,562	82,771
English RDAs	477	30,541	73,007
1998–99			
UK	668	45,147	75,523
English RDAs	534	29,824	70,792
1999–2000			
UK	799	54,335	81,587
English RDAs	657	37,093	73,146
2000–01			
UK	884	71,585	52,358
English RDAs	751	52,885	45,385

Note:

1. All figures are revised from those published in Invest.UK Annual Reports.

2. The figures in the table above are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the company's best estimate, at that time, of the number of jobs associated with each investment.

Source:

Invest.UK Database.

Employment Rights Act

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether section 51 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 has been used; and if she will make a statement about its purpose. [37425]

Alan Johnson: Six applications to employment tribunals have been registered under section 51 since 1997. The purpose of the section is to allow employees to seek redress from the tribunals if their employers refuse them time off work for public duties under section 50.

Music Copyright

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of music copyright. [34232]

Ms Melanie Johnson: The protection of music copyright will be further improved by the EC Directive on copyright in the Information Society which is due to be implemented by 22 December this year. The Government are also supporting a Private Member's Bill that increases the criminal penalties for music piracy. The Government will continue to maintain close contact with the music industry on copyright issues.

Barking Power Station

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what dates in the past 12 months Barking power station came within 10 per cent. of its maximum generating output. [36789]

Mr. Wilson: This is a commercial matter for the company involved.

Nuclear Energy Technology

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to host a conference on the future of nuclear energy technology. [36790]

Mr. Wilson: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry nor I have any plans to host a conference on the future of nuclear energy technology. However, on 18–19 February, my Department's officials hosted the fifth in the series of Generation IV International Forum (GIF) meetings in London. Government officials and technical experts from the 10 member countries attended. GIF was started by the United States Department of Energy (USDOE) to promote the development of better longer-term nuclear reactor designs.

Objective 1 Regions

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of progress in delivering objective programmes in each of the four European Objective 1 regions in input of *(a)* numbers of projects offered support, *(b)* total amount of money offered, *(c)* proportion of total seven year European fund budget offered, *(d)* total amount of money actually drawn down by successful applicants and *(e)* proportion of total seven year European funding drawn down. [36633]

Alan Johnson: Officials continually monitor European Structural Funds and the four UK Objective 1 programmes are on target to achieve the required expenditure by 31 December 2002. The latest Objective 1 statistics requested by the hon. Member are contained in the table.

The management of the Objective 1 programme for West Wales and the Valleys is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. However, I understand from the National Assembly that the figures for the region are as set out in the table.

Objective area	*Number of projects*	*Committed grant (£ million)*	*Committed grant as percentage of total*	*Grant paid (£ million)*	*Grant paid as percentage of total*
South Yorkshire	192	198.2	27.96	48.5	6.84
Merseyside	674	152.0	18.00	78.9	9.34
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	180	75.6	24.57	10.6	3.45
West Wales and the Valleys	441	301.2	26.4	68.2	5.98

Biotechnology Companies

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many proposals for the creation and incubation of biotechnology companies have been received from Scottish bidders since the establishment of the Biotechnology Mentoring and Incubation Challenge; and how many have been successful. [36744]

Mr. Wilson: The four calls under the Biotechnology Mentoring and Incubator (BMI) Challenge resulted in four proposals being submitted from Scottish bidders. The BMI Challenge Independent Advisory Panel recommended that the DTI make an award to one applicant. However, due to complications between the 10 collaborating organisations the project did not proceed.

Motor Vehicle Registrations (Edinburgh)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many motor vehicles were registered to people living in the *(a)* Edinburgh, west, *(b)* Edinburgh, central, *(c)* Edinburgh, east and Musselburgh, *(d)* Edinburgh, Pentlands, *(e)* Edinburgh, north and Leith and *(f)* Edinburgh, south parliamentary constituencies or for the most appropriate geographical areas for which figures are available at the latest date for which figures are available. [35786]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The number of currently licensed motor vehicles registered to keepers with addresses in the Edinburgh constituencies is shown in the table. The totals include vehicles registered to companies and other entities as well as to individuals. The table shows the figures for each ward, as some wards (marked [1]) straddle two constituencies. The volume data is for December 2000, but the analysis to wards was available only by the pre-1996 definition of wards in Edinburgh. No split of volumes is available for the straddling wards and the total for the ward has been included in the constituency in which the greater part of the ward falls.

Constituency/electoral ward	*Number of motor vehicles*
Edinburgh, central	
Dalry	3,143
Dean	2,987
Fountainbridge	1,734
Holyrood	2,059
Moat	2,743
Murrayfield	3,959
Shandon	2,410
Southside	1,298
Stenhouse	2,376
Tollcross[1]	1,398
Total	24,107
Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh	
Musselburgh, central/Inveresk[1]	1,963
Musselburgh, east/Pinkie[1]	1,613
Musselburgh, north-west	1,849
Musselburgh, south	2,203
Craigmillar	1,812
Duddingston	3,088
Leith Links[1]	2,511
Meadowbank[1]	2,458
Milton	2,589
Mountcastle	2,259
Portobello	3,277
Restalrig	1,948
Total	27,570
Edinburgh, North and Leith	
Broughton	3,206
Calton	1,905
Granton	2,211
Harbour	2,228
Lorne	2,694
New Town	3,842
Newhaven	2,601
Pilton[1]	1,875
Stockbridge	2,576
Trinity	3,002
Total	26,140
Edinburgh, Pentlands	
Baberton	3,560
Balerno	3,911
Colinton	4,042
Craiglockhart[1]	3,206
Fairmilehead	3,870
Firrhill	2,126
Murray Burn	32,417
Parkhead	1,865
Sighthill[1]	3,149
South Morningside[1]	3,391
Total	61,537
Edinburgh, South	
Alnwickhill	3,066
Gilmerton	2,864
Kaimes	2,609
Marchmont	2,078
Merchiston	2,420
North Morningside	3,489
Prestonfield	1,500
Sciennes	2,420
Total	20,446
Edinburgh, West	
Cramond	3,901
Dalmeny/Kirkliston	4,252
Davidsons Mains	4,332
East Craigs	2,648
Gyle	4,702
Muirhouse	1,342
North-east Corstorphine	2,969
Queensferry	3,848
South-east Corstorphine	3,621
Total	33,717

Climate Change Levy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Government propose to exclude nuclear plants from paying the climate change levy. [36715]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 225W.

Tourism Exports

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the level of tourism exports in the last five years from each region of the country. [35304]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

Tourism exports are largely comprised of expenditure by overseas residents during visits to the United Kingdom. Data on this are available from the International Passenger Survey.

Expenditure by overseas' residents during visits to the UK is shown in the table. These data cover the years of 1996 to 2000 for Regional Tourist Board areas in England and for the countries of the United Kingdom. Regional data for 2001 will be available in May 2002.

Spending by overseas' residents during visits to the UK

£ million

Tourist board region/country	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
London	6,007	5,993	6,298	6,760	6,901
Northumbria	158	190	129	167	169
Cumbria	58	59	45	67	52
North West	381	455	395	441	448
Yorkshire	280	304	286	264	259
Heart of England	646	640	624	704	771
East of England	510	531	585	575	683
West Country	518	477	494	485	553
Southern	739	702	773	797	775
South East England	699	662	827	755	705
All England[1]	9,998	10,026	10,468	11,030	11,359
Wales	198	210	164	269	267
Scotland	839	799	882	817	789
Northern Ireland[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	107
UK[1]	11,244	11,275	11,723	12,370	12,672

[1] Figures may not sum due to spending not attributable to regions/countries, e.g. in 2000 £110 million was spent on day trips to the UK but was not allocated to region/countries of the UK for reasons of questionnaire simplicity.

[2] Comparable data not available.

Source:

International Passenger Survey, Office for National Statistics

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Re-offenders

Simon Hughes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the planned timetable is for the completion and publishing of the Social Exclusion Unit's project on re-offending by ex-prisoners; which organisations and individuals have been consulted in relation to the project; and if he will make a statement. [37673]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Social Exclusion Unit is finalising its recommendations, based on extensive research and analysis and expects to publish its report on reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners by spring 2002. The Unit is currently contributing to the Spending Review.

The Unit has consulted with an extremely wide range of organisations and individuals. There were 265 responses to the Unit's written consultation and the Unit has visited over 50 prisons and young offender institutions and had extensive discussions with staff and prisoners. There have been 11 regional seminars involving a very wide range of local practitioners, including health, housing, employment, education, voluntary sector, social services and police representatives. The Unit has also drawn on surveys of prisoners, both before leaving prison and after release.

HM Prison Service and the National Probation Service, as well as other government departments, are key partners. The Unit is working closely with the leading national organisations in the field and has drawn on their expertise throughout the project.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34166]

Mr. Leslie: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in fair trade fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33538]

Mr. Leslie: My Department will publicise the event to its staff.

The Department for International Development is providing £120,000 to the Fairtrade Foundation over three years (2001–2003) in support of its efforts to target new groups through its annual fair trade fortnight campaigns.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years, giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34187]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

'Creating Knowledge: Creating Wealth' Conference

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what advice the Cabinet Office gave to HM Treasury regarding the sponsorship of the 'Creating Knowledge: Creating Wealth' conference; and if he will make a statement. [32799]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office document *Guidance to Departments on Sponsorship of Government Activities*, sets out the principles that Departments should follow when seeking sponsorship for Government activities and events. I have placed copies of the guidance in the Libraries of the House.

Regional Bodies

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* quasi-autonomous boards, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* agencies and *(d)* committees and arms of national bodies which are accountable to Government and Parliament and operate on a geographical basis smaller than nation, but larger than district/unitary authorities for each of the Government's defined nations and regions and grouped by (i) economic development, (ii) arts, (iii) sports, (iv) health, (v) training and education, (vi) agriculture, (vii) environment and rural/urban affairs, (viii) transport, (ix) planning, (x) co-ordination of local government, (xi) European Structural funds and (xii) other sectors. [36631]

Mrs. Roche: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* total budget and *(b)* per capita funding has been provided for each of the last three years for which records are available to each (i) quasi-autonomous board, (ii) commission, (iii) agency and (iv) committee and arms of national bodies which are accountable to Government and which operate on a geographical basis smaller than nations, but larger than district/unitary authorities for each of the Government's defined nations and regions, grouped by sector. [36632]

Mrs. Roche: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Civil Defence Grant

Mr. Pound: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consultations he has had with local authority representatives on the formula to allocate civil defence grant in 2002–03. [38044]

Mr. Leslie: I have today written to the Local Government Association seeking their views on the formula that the Government are minded to use to allocate civil defence grant between eligible authorities in the next financial year. I am placing a copy of my letter (which makes clear that the use of such a formula is dependent upon the Civil Defence (Grant) Bill securing Royal Assent) in the Library of the House.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new entrants to the civil service were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 years and over. [36494]

Mr. Leslie: The figures are shown in the table and represent the data reported to mandate during the years from 1996–97 to 2000–01, based on headcount, for the number of permanent staff in each Department. The figures shown are the overall figures for Departments including any departmental agencies, and are based on the Departments as they were prior to the structural changes made as a result of the 2001 election.

Entrants 2 April 1996 to 1 April 2001 by Department and age

Permanent staff

	1996–97			*1997–98*		
	50+	*Others*	*Total*	*50+*	*Others*	*Total*
MAFF	51	639	690	76	747	823
Cabinet Office (including the Office of Public Services)	14	102	116	13	153	166
Inland Revenue	219	2,173	2,392	241	2,650	2,891
DCMS	2	56	58	10	93	103
MOD	1,683	9,472	11,155	1,458	7,435	8,893
DfEE	252	3,532	3,784	89	953	1,042
DETR	66	643	709	72	794	866
Home Office	46	512	558	46	496	542
LCD	85	399	484	149	567	716
Scotland	36	247	283	37	310	347
DSS	683	9,299	9,982	483	5,225	5,708
DTI	38	285	323	49	389	438
National Assembly for Wales	5	141	146	6	59	65
Treasury Solicitors	0	18	18	1	24	25
DfID	0	2	2	2	41	43
Charity Commission	1	37	38	5	29	34
GAD	0	10	10	0	11	11
Privy Council Office	0	1	1	0	0	0
Public Record Office	6	36	42	0	0	0
National Investment and Loans Office	0	0	0	0	1	1
HM Treas[illegible]y	0	29	29	2	51	53
Office of Fair Trading	2	18	20	2	23	25
Northern Ireland Office	2	10	12	1	11	12
Scottish Courts Administration	1	4	5	1	8	9
Legal Secretariat	0	1	1	1	1	2
Crown Office and PFS	1	66	67	3	45	48
Health and Safety Executive	11	117	128	8	134	142
Registry of Friendly Societies	1	16	17	0	5	5
ACAS	2	37	39	0	23	23
General Register Office (Scotland)	0	0	0	0	5	5
ECGD	0	16	16	3	21	24
Customs and Excise	65	1,145	1,210	74	1,153	1,227
Parliamentary Counsel Office	0	0	0	0	0	0
DNS	1	21	22	2	12	14
Crown Prosecution Service	12	133	145	15	312	327
OFGAS	0	6	6	0	12	12
OFWAT	1	16	17	0	0	0
OFER	2	10	12	2	17	19
OFSTED	4	55	59	3	28	31
OHMCI	0	0	0	1	5	6
Central Drugs Coordination Unit	0	0	0	0	0	0
Office SOS for Scotland	0	0	0	0	0	0
Office SOS for Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scottish Executive	0	0	0	0	0	0
OFGEM	0	0	0	0	0	0
HMSO	13	156	169	0	0	0
COI	4	22	26	8	65	73
Department for Registers of Scotland (SO)	7	34	41	2	21	23
Royal Mint	1	50	51	0	53	53
OS	1	18	19	7	110	117
Land Registry	0	47	47	14	344	358
Public Record Office	0	20	20	12	31	43
Scottish Prison Service (SO)	23	460	483	29	396	425
HM Prison Service	333	2,133	2,466	352	3,400	3,752
National Archives of Scotland (SO)	0	0	0	0	0	0
PGO (HMT)	2	11	13	0	0	0
Intelligence Services (GCHQ)	1	69	70	8	68	76
ONS	6	141	147	24	122	146
Def Geog Img Intel Agency (MOD)	0	0	0	0	0	0

	1998–99			1999–2000			2000–01		
	50+	*Others*	*Total*	*50+*	*Others*	*Total*	*50+*	*Others*	*Total*
MAFF	86	916	1,002	80	721	801	132	1,110	1,242
Cabinet Office (including the Office of Public Services)	22	260	282	25	274	299	22	278	300
Inland Revenue	341	3,663	4,004	597	6,253	6,850	418	4,222	4,640
DCMS	6	42	48	3	41	44	6	46	52
MOD	1,330	6,065	7,395	1,276	6,991	8,267	1,296	6,124	7,420
DfEE	226	2,653	2,879	262	3,626	3,888	314	3,070	3,384
DETR	70	890	960	90	1,313	1,403	116	845	961
Home Office	62	770	832	146	1,559	1,705	252	3,431	3,683
LCD	174	973	1,147	206	1,289	1,495	207	1,111	1,318
Scotland	51	530	581	16	137	153	4	130	134
DSS	840	9,629	10,469	1,063	10,918	11,981	700	6,117	6,817
DTI	56	502	558	47	585	632	110	665	775
National Assembly for Wales	21	110	131	30	267	297	43	353	396
Treasury Solicitors	4	31	35	3	55	58	2	48	50
DfID	5	78	83	7	72	79	7	94	101
Charity Commission	1	30	31	3	56	59	5	67	72
GAD	2	15	17	0	1	1	2	13	15
Privy Council Office	0	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2
Public Record Office	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
National Investment and Loans Office	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HM Treasury	1	48	49	0	37	37	0	0	0
Office of Fair Trading	3	22	25	0	1	1	0	0	0
Northern Ireland Office	0	19	19	2	19	21	4	55	59
Scottish Courts Administration	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal Secretariat	0	5	5	1	1	2	0	0	0
Crown Office and PFS	3	51	54	12	117	129	7	108	115
Health and Safety Executive	11	189	200	17	253	270	16	279	295
Registry of Friendly Societies	0	5	5	0	8	8	0	0	0
ACAS	0	0	0	5	43	48	11	34	45
General Register Office (Scotland)	0	13	13	1	10	11	5	14	19
ECGD	0	7	7	1	30	31	1	45	46
Customs and Excise	38	586	624	31	573	604	49	1,067	1,116
Parliamentary Counsel Office	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	2	2
DNS	0	10	10	1	21	22	1	34	35
Crown Prosecution Service	16	355	371	16	345	361	18	259	277
OFGAS	2	32	34	3	102	105	0	0	0
OFWAT	0	0	0	2	26	28	6	45	51
OFER	0	21	21	0	16	16	0	0	0
OFSTED	6	32	38	6	67	73	15	80	95
OHMCI	2	7	9	3	15	18	1	1	2
Central Drugs Coordination Unit	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Office SOS for Scotland	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	13	14
Office SOS for Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Scottish Executive	0	0	0	31	413	444	32	448	480
OFGEM	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	49	53
HMSO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
COI	4	44	48	1	54	55	12	87	99
Department. for Registers of Scotland (SO)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Royal Mint	3	61	64	1	101	102	2	74	76
OS	1	107	108	3	87	90	13	125	138
Land Registry	16	330	346	21	342	363	23	360	383
Public Record Office	7	31	38	6	53	59	11	83	94
Scottish Prison Service (SO)	28	458	486	14	224	238	15	107	122
HM Prison Service	301	2,838	3,139	294	2,845	3,139	296	2,178	2,474
National Archives of Scotland (SO)	4	8	12	3	14	17	5	15	20
PGO (HMT)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intelligence Services (GCHQ)	15	239	254	15	272	287	18	262	280
ONS	20	165	185	21	169	190	40	410	450
Def Geog Img Intel Agency (MOD)	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	22	25

SCOTLAND

Friends of Scotland

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the advisory board of Friends of Scotland accompanied her on her visit to the Far East. [36743]

Mrs. Liddell: None.

A77

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has received on the level of speed limit imposed on heavy goods vehicles on the A77 between Ayr and Stranraer. [36742]

Mrs. Liddell: Neither I nor my right hon. Friend of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have received any representations on this matter.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Angola

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development for what reason humanitarian assistance to Angola has fallen by one third over the last year. [37084]

Clare Short: The levels of DFID humanitarian assistance provided to Angola in recent years have depended on the nature of requests put to us, and also on competing claims for our resources elsewhere in the continent.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37498]

Clare Short: Details of rail travel booked by DFID's in-house travel agent are given for the period from September 1998. Detailed figures before that date, or for travel by grade throughout the period, or for travel booked by other means are not available without disproportionate costs.

	September 1998 to March 1999	*April 1999 to March 2000*	*April 2000 to March 2001*	*April 2001 to January 2002*	*Totals*
Number of first class journeys by rail	737	2,037	1,712	1,448	5,934
As percentage of all rail journeys	61.72	66.87	52.59	51.75	57.65
Average cost of first class journey (£)	133.18	103.88	121.28	160.71	126.41
Total cost of all rail travel (£)	111,995.18	245,661.61	244,868.22	275,987.55	878,512.56

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many new entrants to the Civil Service were employed in her Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 and over. [36496]

Clare Short: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff left the service of her Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many her Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37548]

Clare Short: The information requested is as follows:

59 staff left the service during 2000–01. Of these, 50 left before the retirement age of 60 years and two are early retirement cases in respect of whom DFID is making payments until retirement age.

Projects (Palestinian Authority)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects her Department has funded from 1997 to 2002 in the territory controlled by the Palestinian Authority; what the annual amount of funding was for each of these projects; how many of these projects included construction work; what the status of the building funded by her Department is; and if she will make a statement. [37257]

Clare Short: The following table sets out the information requested. The funding column shows the total project allocation. Annual disbursement figures could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Project	*Funding (£)*	*Construction work*
Birzeit Food Quality Control Unit (1997)	425,872	No
Group Guaranteed Lending (1997)	1,820,000	No
Assistance to the Education Sector (1997)	3,225,700	No
Population Census (1997)	80,000	No
Newcastle University—Hydrology (1997)	715,000	No
Primary Health Care (1997)	950,000	No
Gender and Law (1997)	1,628,128	No
Economic Protocol (1997)	5,000	No
VAT Audit Training (1997)	102,000	No
Economic Protocol (1998)	730,281	No
Southern Area Water Appraisal	45,000	No
Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy (1998)	775,000	No
Assistance to the Legal Sector (1998)	12,500	No
Rural Water Schemes Appraisal (1998)	110,000	No
Legal Sector Assistance—Phase 2 (1998)	70,252	No
Health Management Strengthening (1998)	3,600,000	No
Bethlehem 2000 Doha Sewerage (1999)	1,400,000	Yes—the construction of sewerage pipes was completed in July 2000
Save the Children Fund Water and Sanitation Project—Dura (1999)	1,678,092	Yes—work on piped water supplies, sewerage pipes and drains, is now in its third year

Project	*Funding (£)*	*Construction work*
Save the Children Fund Water and Sanitation Project—Jabalia (1999)	908,905	Yes—work on piped water supplies, sewerage pipes and drains, is now in its third year
Save the Children Fund Water and Sanitation Project—Anabta (1999)	1,610,859	Yes—work on piped water supplies, sewerage pipes and drains, is now in its third year
Unification and Development of Legislation (1999)	775,000	No
Assistance to the Negotiations Affairs Department (1999)	4,200,000	No
Tele-Cardiology (Peres Centre) (1999)	850,000	No
Sustainable Management of West Bank and Gaza Aquifers (1999)	1,971,308	No
Gaza Midwifery (1999)	545,000	No
Hebron Water Access and Storage (1999)	513,572	Yes—the construction of cisterns and latrines has now been completed
Economy and Trade Policy Development (1999)	495,057	No
Save the Children Fund Water and Sanitation Project—Rafah (1999)	2,013,836	Yes—work on piped water supplies, sewerage pipes and drains, is now in its third year
Census Reports (1999)	92,500	No
Legislative Council Library (1999)	353,700	No
Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees Women's Health (2000)	987,000	No
Public Administration Institutional Development (2000)	1,900,000	No
Primary Health Care—Phase 2 (2000)	1,550,000	Yes—small scale remodelling work for lecture rooms and library now completed
Participatory Poverty Assessment (2001)	500,000	No
Utilisation of Census Data (2001)	700,000	No
Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees Emergency Response (2001)	520,000	No
World Bank Employment Generation Programme (2001)	1,500,000	No
OXFAM Humanitarian Grant (2001)	34,000	No
Mental Health and Trauma Counselling (2001)	450,000	No
World Food Programme Appeal (2001)	500,000	No
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Grant (2001)	300,000	No
Supporting Literacy (2001)	290,000	No
Child Health Development (2001)	1,215,000	No
World Bank NGO Project—Phase 2 (2001)	4,500,000	No
Reducing the Impact of Violence on Palestinian Children (2001)	517,000	No
Palestinian Hydrology Group—Water Sector Grant (2001)	250,000	Yes—work on a number of cisterns is nearing completion
Economic Policy Programme—Phase 3 (2001)	1,015,000	No
Hebron Water Access and Storage—Phase 2 (2001)	5,000,000	Yes—the construction of numerous cisterns and latrines have recently begun

Reproductive Health Programmes

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what population reproductive health programmes are directly run by her Department in *(a)* Africa, *(b)* south and central America, *(c)* the middle east, *(d)* central and eastern Europe, *(e)* Asia and *(f)* Oceania; and if she will make a statement. [37234]

Clare Short: Reproductive health is a priority for my Department. The target of achieving access to reproductive health for all by 2015 is at the core of our reproductive health policy. We are working with partners to ensure that the international community and developing countries continue to give the issue the priority it demands.

The following is a list of current reproductive health programmes (over £1 million) funded by DFID:

Country	*Programme*
a) Africa	
Nigeria	Sexual and Reproductive Health programme; life planning education programme; HIV/AIDS programme
Kenya	Family health programme; HIV/AIDS programme; safe motherhood demonstration project
South Africa	Reproductive health programme; social marketing of condoms; Soul City multi media initiative
Mozambique	Social marketing of condoms
Zambia	HIV/AIDS and reproductive health programme
Uganda	Support for TASO—AIDS Support Organisation
Malawi	Sexual and maternal health programme
Tanzania	Safe motherhood programme; family planning programme; support for health sector reform including sexual and reproductive health
Zimbabwe	Sexual and reproductive health programme
Ghana	Ghana HIV/AIDS programme

Country	*Programme*
Mozambique	HIV/AIDS and maternal health programme
Sierra Leone	Strengthening reproductive health provision
Ethiopia	Social marketing of condoms
Africa Regional (Ethiopia, Rwanda and Burundi)	Support to International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa
Southern Africa Development Co-ordinating Committee	Regional HIV/AIDS Programme
b) South and Central America	
Central America: regional	Improving sexual and reproductive health services
Bolivia	Health and Sexual Education programme
Peru	Reproductive Health programme
c) Middle East	None
d) Central and Eastern Europe	
Russian Federation	STD programme; HIV/AIDS programme; support for Russian Family Planning Association
e) Asia	
China	HIV/AIDS programme
Bangladesh	Reproductive health and disease control project; contraceptive social marketing; HIV/AIDS programme; CARE-RASTTA Bondor STD/HIV project
India	Support for National AIDS Control Programme, Orissa reproductive health project
Nepal	Reproductive health programme and rights-based response to HIV/AIDS
Pakistan	Reproductive health programme; social marketing of condoms; private sector population project; community based family planning project
Asia Regional	HIV/AIDS prevention in Asia
f) Oceania	None

Contraceptive Commodity Support Programme

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contribution the UK has made to the United Nations Family Planning Agency's Contraceptive Commodity Support programme in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002; and if she will make a statement. [37236]

Clare Short: No contribution was made in 2000 to the United Nations Population Fund's Contraceptive Commodity Support programme. My Department contributed £25 million in 2001. A decision has not yet been made about a contribution in 2002.

Afghanistan

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects her Department is supporting in respect of maternity clinics in Afghanistan; what steps her Department is taking to improve the conditions in *(a)* Malalai Maternity, *(b)* Rabia Balkhi Women's Hospital and *(c)* Kheikhana Hospital in Kabul; and if she will make a statement. [37235]

Clare Short: Maternal mortality in Afghanistan is the second highest in the world, and one in four children dies before reaching the age of five. Recent surveys have highlighted the weaknesses in Kabul's MCH services, which are mirrored elsewhere in the country.

Our support of £8 million to UNICEF includes assistance to MCH clinics including those in Kabul, by providing training on pregnancy and childbirth. We have also contributed £3 million to the World Health Organisation for public health surveillance and disease control. In addition, we are providing £1 million to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, to support the Afghan Red Crescent Society's nationwide network of 48 clinics offering MCH services; and supporting a number of quick impact recovery projects to rehabilitate MCH clinics.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on humanitarian aid to Afghanistan disbursed through the Central Asian Republics. [36122]

Clare Short: Significant quantities of food and other assistance have been delivered to Afghanistan through the Central Asian republics by the United Nations, the Red Cross movement and non-governmental organisations. The main routes are the Friendship Bridge from Uzbekistan, the Nizhny Pianj barge crossing from Tajikistan, the land route through Krgyztan and Tajikistan into Badakhshan via Ishkashim (used by the Russian Ministry of Emergencies with DFID funding), and the land route from Turkmenistan to Herat. In addition, the World Food Programme has flown food supplies into Faizabad from Kulyab Tajikistan.

The Central Asian routes were of particular importance while southern routes from pakistan and Iran could not be used for security reasons. With the improvement in the general security situation, the southern routes are now the main supply routes into Afghanistan.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to help internally displaced people surrounding Herat in western Afghanistan return to their homes. [36125]

Clare Short: The area surrounding Herat in western Afghanistan is home to the largest gathering of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the country. The largest organised camp is at Maslakh in Herat with an estimated population of 200,000. Assisted by the United Nations

High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the International Organisation for Migration is currently re-registering the IDPs in Maslakh as the first step in returning them to their homes.

We have committed over £3.5 million to the IOM and £3 million pounds to UNHCR to include provision for displaced people in the region; including for facilitating their safe return home.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of levels of malnourishment amongst internally displaced people in Afghanistan. [36124]

Clare Short: There have been a number of nutritional surveys conducted by humanitarian agencies. These indicate that some remote areas are facing difficulty in receiving sufficient food aid.

The World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other humanitarian agencies are continuing to do their best to deliver life-saving assistance to those in need. WFP have recently launched rapid assessment helicopter missions to investigate reports of food shortages and other urgent needs in difficult-to-access areas of Afghanistan, especially western Afghanistan. We have contributed £6 million towards WFP's operations inside Afghanistan, for both direct procurement and transportation of food and for logistical support to help speed up the movement of food aid into the country. We have also supported a number of agencies—the United Nations, Red Cross and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)—for supplementary feeding and secondary distribution of food inside Afghanistan.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the levels of humanitarian aid disbursed via the friendship bridge between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. [36123]

Clare Short: The Friendship Bridge crossing from Termez, Uzbekistan to Hairaton, northern Afghanistan, has been operational since it was reopened by the Uzbek authorities on 9 December 2001. Useful quantities of food and other relief assistance have been transported by United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations across the bridge, which is an important route into the north for both humanitarian and commercial traffic; for example, earlier this month over 3,700 tonnes of assistance were transported in one week across the bridge.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns her Department undertook in the past five Parliamentary sessions including the current Parliamentary session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two Parliamentary sessions and the current session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and (D) Northern Ireland. [37397]

Clare Short: DFID does not run a programme of media advertising campaigns.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary sessions including the current session, for her Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two Parliamentary sessions and the current Parliamentary session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37409]

Clare Short: DFID does not undertake media advertising campaigns. The bulk of our media advertising expenditure is in relation to recruitment advertising, on which we spend around £1 million per year. It would involve disproportionate cost to break this figure down to the level of detail requested.

In addition, DFID commissioned a 12-page supplement in *The Independent* on the subject of globalisation to accompany the Government's second White Paper on International Development. The report was published on 12 December 2000 at a cost of £40,276.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36215]

Clare Short: There are 18 members of staff who are entitled to paid leave to undertake union duties in addition to two full time representatives of the Public and Commercial Services Union; in practice, one of two may take up that entitlement in any one year. There is no formally agreed number of days, each case being handled on its merits. The estimated cost to public funds in each of the last four years has been as follows:

Year	*£*
1998	356
1999	96
2000	155
2001	175

Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total cost of her Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36146]

Clare Short: The total costs for the DFID website for the financial years 1998–99 to 2001–02 (to date) were as follows:

1998–99: £40,305

1999–2000: £42,731

2000–01: £61,612

2001–02: £131,381.

These figures include salary costs for the website manager, but exclude the costs of centrally provided departmental services (e.g. telephone charges). The figures for the current year include one-off costs for a complete redevelopment of the website to allow for a significant expansion in departmental material made available in electronic form, and in response to an increasing interest in the work of the Department.

The average weekly assessed hits for the same periods were:

1998–99: 37,000

1999–2000: 38,000

2000–01: 40,257

2001–02[1]: 77,841

[1] To date

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the total real terms expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36160]

Clare Short: Expenditure in relation to paid publicity in the years in question was as follows:

	£000
1997–98	410
1998–99	697
1999–2000	880
2000–01	1,487
2001–02[1]	1,194
2001–02[2]	1,410

[1] To date

[2] Estimated

The annual totals given include expenditure on departmental publications, exhibitions, visits and displays, photography, video production and internet services. The increase over the period reflects our commitment to greater openness, as well as to promoting greater public awareness and understanding of international development issues.

We hold a separate budget for Press Office running costs (other than salary costs), for which expenditure in the years in questions was:

	£000
1998–99	70
1999–2000	151
2000–01	119
2001–02[1]	126
2001–02[2]	175

[1] To date

[2] Estimated

Figures for 1997–98 are not obtainable without involving disproportionate cost.

DFID does not hold a specific advertising budget. However the bulk of our paid advertising relates to recruitment advertising in newspapers and journals, costing around £1 million a year.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36191]

Clare Short: There have been no days lost owing to industrial action.

Russia

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development who conducted the recent study in Russia on the provision of reproductive health services funded by the Department for International Development; if there were independent assessors; what the results of the survey were; if she will place a full report in the Library; and what contraceptive and abortion facilities were made available to women who took part in the survey. [36246]

Clare Short: My Department engaged John Snow International (UK)'s Centre for Sexual and Reproductive Health to undertake a review of literature on maternal health in Russia and the former Soviet Union from April 2000 to June 2001. The purpose of the project was to identify, review and summarise information that would form a basis for a future plan of action on maternal and reproductive health in the region. The reviewers made a number of recommendations on the development of Russian evidence-based guidelines on reproductive health. A copy of the project's final report will be placed in the Library of the House. The project did not assess reproductive health facilities in Russia or survey users of such facilities.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in her Department to *(a)* herself and *(b)* her fellow Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36278]

Clare Short: The ministerial boxes for the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State are conveyed using the Government Car Service, Royal Mail and trains as required. Private courier firms are not used.

Iran

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's work in Iran. [36129]

Clare Short: We do not have a development assistance programme with the Government of Iran. However, we are providing humanitarian assistance for Iraqi refugees in Southern Iran, which to date has amounted to £1.45 million. This is being channelled through an international NGO, The AMAR International Charitable Foundation.

We are also providing support through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to education and health services for Afghan refugees in urban areas of Iran, and to the World Food Programme for feeding programmes in Afghan refugee camps. Our assistance to date has totalled almost £1.5 million.

Refugee Camps

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the conditions in *(a)* Jalozai and *(b)* Shalman refugee camps; and what action her Department is taking to improve conditions in these camps. [36127]

Clare Short: UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan recently completed the voluntary relocation of all 45,000 residents of Jalozai refugee camp to five new sites in Pakistan, which had been purpose built to offer better conditions. Officials from my Department visited one of these camps, Shalman, last week and reported it to be well run, with good security and a considerable improvement on conditions at Jalozai.

We have provided £3 million to UNHCR for its programme in response to the Afghan crisis, this has included a site planning specialist and other practical as well as financial support.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the number of rape incidents in refugee camps in *(a)* Afghanistan and *(b)* Pakistan. [36126]

Clare Short: We are not aware of any quantitative assessment by humanitarian agencies of the number of rape incidents in IDP camps in Afghanistan nor refugee camps in Pakistan.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has established guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women (details of which can found at www.unhcr.ch) of which we are fully supportive. We have provided £3 million to UNHCR for its regional programme for humanitarian assistance for Afghans. We are also supporting other agencies including the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and international non-governmental organisations who manage IDP camps in Afghanistan using similar guidelines for minimum standards in humanitarian protection and care.

Development Assistance

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she had made of the Government's progress towards the target of 0.7 per cent. of GNP for development assistance; and if she will make a statement. [36089]

Clare Short: The UK has increased official development assistance (ODA) by a third in real terms since 1997. In 2000 net official development assistance from the UK to developing countries was £2.974 million which represented 0.32 per cent. of gross national income (GNI)—up from 0.26 per cent. in 1997. This made us the fourth largest bilateral donor in volume terms. We have pledged to raise ODA as a percentage of gross national income (GNI) to 0.33 per cent. by 2003–04.

Our position after 2003–04 is under discussion with the Chancellor as part of the current public spending round and will not be determined before June. We are committed to making substantial further progress towards the UN 0.7 per cent. target.

Sudan

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the Government supports the resumption of EU aid to Sudan; and whether it supports attaching to this aid clear benchmarks in the EU-Sudan dialogue. [36419]

Clare Short: We support the EC making preparations for the resumption of aid to Sudan so that aid can be disbursed when the time is right. But it would be premature for the EC to begin disbursing assistance, other than that which is intended to meet urgent humanitarian need, before there are substantial moves towards peace.

Uganda and Rwanda (Extradition)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on a bilateral extradition treaty between Uganda and Rwanda. [36567]

Clare Short: We have been working hard to reduce tension between Rwanda and Uganda. I met Presidents Museveni and Kagame again last week to review the progress on the Memorandum of Understanding signed between them in November. The MoU covered the need for an extradition treaty on which they are now working. The UK stands ready to offer advice on this if it is needed.

Rwanda

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she has taken to encourage Rwanda to withdraw its troops from the Democratic Republic of Congo. [36568]

Clare Short: Rwanda has legitimate security concerns in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since those responsible for the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 are fighting to invade Rwanda. The UK supports the full implementation of the Lusaka Peace Agreement from which links the need for progress on the formation of a transitional Government and a target date for elections in the DRC, the disarmament and demobilisation of the rebel forces seeking to destabilise Rwanda and Burundi and the withdrawal of foreign forces.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the next stage of the inter-Congolese dialogue in Sun City, South Africa. [36569]

Clare Short: The next stage of the inter-Congolese dialogue, due to start next week in Sun City, is a crucial step in the implementation of the Lusaka Peace Agreement which is the only viable solution to the long-running conflict in the DRC. It is important that the dialogue should lead to agreement on a transitional Government and a date for democratic elections in the DRC.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the UN talks in Geneva on the peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [36570]

Clare Short: The talks in Geneva, in advance of the Sun City meeting, failed to achieve agreement between the parties to the conflict. It is important that all parties should be encouraged to attend the talks in Sun City and to agree on the formation of a transitional Government and a date for democratic elections in the DRC.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what further help her Department will provide for aid agencies dealing with the provision of water sanitation in Renseraki, Republic of Congo. [31666]

Clare Short: We are not currently funding any projects with NGOs or other aid agencies in the Republic of Congo, and have no plans to do so. I understand that the ICRC plans to continue working on the rehabilitation of water and sanitation supplies to certain towns in the Republic, but that Renseraki does not currently feature in their plans at present.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to work with other Government departments to raise awareness *(a)* before and *(b)* during the World Summit on Sustainable Development. [36435]

Clare Short: My Department is represented at Cabinet Committee (MISC 18), chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, which has been set up to develop, co-ordinate and deliver the Government's strategy for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). We are also represented on the WSSD inter-departmental group and a high level steering group, both chaired by DEFRA. All Government Departments have agreed through MISC 18 a communications strategy for WSSD to raise awareness of the summit. We are working with other Departments to take it forward.

Development Awareness Fund

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of her Department's Development Awareness Fund is given in grants; and what percentage is spent on her Department's internal work. [36434]

Clare Short: Our budget for public information and awareness raising activities in 2001–02 is £7.25 million. Within this, the Development Awareness Fund has a budget in 2001–02 of £5.69 million (78.5 per cent. of the total) and is all grant based. Our wider public services work (which includes our publications, Development policy Forums, the DFID website, DFID Public Inquiry Point and DFID exhibitions and display activities) has a budget in 2001–02 of £1.56 million (21.5 per cent.).

Working Conditions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people are employed in her Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35363]

Clare Short: The Department currently employs 18 staff on official job share contracts. Two such posts out of a total of 348 (0.57 per cent.) have been advertised through our internal procedures in the last 12 months.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment has been made of the effect of the working time directive on her Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps she is taking to reduce this number; and if she will make a statement. [35896]

Clare Short: DFID has no recorded incidence of employees working in excess of 48 hours per week and none who have been required to sign a waiver under the terms of the working time directive. The Department is conscious of its responsibilities under this legislation and is committed to ensuring that staff do not exceed the 48 hour limit.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in her Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [35928]

Clare Short: The information requested is not held and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

DFID is conscious of its legal obligation to provide a safe working environment for employees and is committed to meeting targets for reducing the number of working days lost generally due to work related injuries and illness.

Fair Trade Goods

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 931W, on fair trade goods, if she will review and increase the amount of fairly traded goods purchased by her Department during Fair Trade Fortnight. [35919]

Clare Short: As mentioned in my answer of 16 November 2001, my Department has supported FT initiatives for a number of years, both in developing countries and in the UK. This support forms part of a wider dialogue with the private sector to encourage them to adopt more socially responsible and ethical business practices. As companies and consumers become more aware of the connection between the way business is done and its impact on the livelihoods of people in developing countries, so the pressure for positive change grows.

Primarily for this reason, DFID is providing £120,000 to the Fair Trade Foundation over three years (2001–03) in support of its efforts to target new consumers through its annual Fair Trade Fortnight campaigns. In addition, Hilary Benn will be attending the launch of this year's campaign on 4 March 2002.

We also continue to serve FT coffee at all our official meetings and our in-house caterers will be actively promoting FT goods during the fortnight.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total cost to her Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35025]

Clare Short: DFID expenditure on consultancies from the development programme over the past four financial years is given in the table:

	£ million
1997–98	204
1998–99	199
1999–2000	198
2000–01	209

Expenditure on consultancy funded from DFID running costs has been around £2 million in each year.

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many contracts were let by her Department and agencies for which she is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33852]

Clare Short: Details are given in the following table:

	Financial Year 1997–98			*Financial Year 1998–99*		
Consultant	*New contracts*	*Value £*	*Cost billed to DFID for all current contracts*	*New contracts*	*Value £*	*Cost billed to DFID for all current contracts*
PricewaterhouseCoopers	28	5,575,135	14,910,760	38	11,193,643	12,158,276
Ernst & Young	9	445,792	444,823	15	838,429	734,951
Deloitte & Touche	1	4,185	54,815	5	269,070	36,852
KPMG	19	7,104,728	3,317,440	17	2,548,237	4,087,979
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	3	24,558,244	2,745,702

	Financial Year 1999–2000			*Financial Year 2000–01*			*Financial Year 2001–02*[1]		
Consultant	*New contracts*	*Value £*	*Cost billed to DFID for all current contracts*	*New contracts*	*Value £*	*Cost billed to DFID for all current contracts*	*New contracts*	*Value £*	*Cost billed to DFID for all current contracts*
PricewaterhouseCoopers	42	13,405,142	1,012,668	31	19,018,515	16,252,770	21	3,075,210	11,014,066
Ernst & Young	6	286,800	531,170	1	11,610	57,636	5	43,023	47,614
Deloitte & Touche	6	749,262	184,577	9	8,478,352	1,481,185	6	633,884	1,733,079
KPMG	23	12,773,757	3,097,485	17	4,700,110	5,626,769	15	2,185,931	3,977,785
Arthur Andersen	1	27,724	6,655,157	1	83,721	6,616,784	2	114,162	5,528,055

HOME DEPARTMENT

English Language

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the population is fluent in the English language. [34673]

Mr. Healey *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

We have no reliable data regarding the proportion of the population who are fluent in the English language. Research undertaken by the Institute of Education and MORI in 1995 for the Basic Skills Agency suggested that around 450,000 people living in the UK, whose first language is not English, have little command of the English language. However, more recent research indicates that the figure could easily be twice this amount. Later this year, we will be conducting a survey of literacy, language and numeracy needs in England as part of our "Skills for Life" strategy to improve adult basic skills. This will provide a more accurate and current assessment of the extent of English language need.

Teacher Vacancies

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which 10 education authorities have *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest number of teacher vacancies; what the numbers of teachers involved are; and whether she is taking steps to remove the inequality. [36910]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

The 10 local education authorities in England that reported the highest number of teacher vacancies[1] for maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in January 2001, and their number of vacancies, were as follows:

Education authorities	
Essex	220
Kent	196
Hampshire	175
Tower Hamlets	157
Surrey	104
Newham	103

Education authorities	
Hackney	101
Southwark	100
Barnet	100
Suffolk	89

Ten local education authorities reported no teacher vacancies. They were as follows:

City of London
Cornwall
Isles of Scilly
Liverpool
Manchester
Northumberland
Nottinghamshire
Rutland
South Tyneside
Trafford.

In 2001–02, the Government made £33 million available to fund local teacher recruitment and retention initiatives. Almost 80 per cent. of those funds went to schools in London and the South East. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced a further £44 million for 2002–03. More than 3,500 teachers will also receive assistance to purchase homes in areas of high price or demand as part of the Government's £250 million Starter Homes Initiative. 2,890 of these teachers will be in London and the South East. My right hon. Friend has also proposed to accept the School Teacher's Review Body's recommendation to award a fourth successive above-inflation pay increase for all teachers from 1 April 2002.

[1] Vacancies are recorded for posts which have been advertised for full-time appointments of at least one term's duration, that exist on the survey date of the third Thursday in January. A post would not be recorded as a vacancy if someone appointed to that post on a full-time contract of one term or more has filled the post.

Refugee Accommodation

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his oral statement of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1027–29, on nationality, immigration and asylum, if he will make a statement on the future of other providers of accommodation for refugees. [35559]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The trial of accommodation centres is expected to provide for 3,000 places. Asylum seekers requiring accommodation who are not offered a place in one of the accommodation centres will be dispersed in line with current policies. National Asylum Support Service (NASS) will continue to work with its existing contractors to provide accommodation in these circumstances.

National Asylum Support Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much it cost to run the National Asylum Support Service in 2001. [35995]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. For the financial year 2001–02 National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has been allocated £17.8 million[1] to cover pay and related administration costs and £22.1 million[1] for grants to voluntary organisations working with asylum seeker.

[1] All figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were electronically tagged in England and Wales as at 1 February. [35998]

Beverley Hughes: 59,509 people have been electronically tagged in England and Wales between the start of the current electronic monitoring contracts on 28 January 1999 and 1 February 2002. Of these 53,764 were male and 5,745 were female. On 1 February 2002, a total of 3,391 persons were still being monitored. Of these 3,073 were male and 318 were female.

Prison Officers (Suspension)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officer in England and Wales are suspended from duty because of allegations of cruelty to prison inmates; and what is the average period of time these officers have been suspended for. [35997]

Beverley Hughes: There are currently 29 prison officers suspended for this reason. The average length of time they have been suspended is 7.25 months.

Suspects (Mental Illness)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision exists in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Devon, for police and social services to liaise on matters concerning suspects suffering from mental illness. [16685]

Mr. Denham: Under the Codes of Practice issued under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, when a suspect who is suffering from a mental illness is in police custody the custody officer must, as soon as practicable, inform the appropriate adult of the grounds for detention and his whereabouts and ask the adult to come to the police station to see the person. An appropriate adult includes someone who has experience of dealing with mentally disordered or mentally handicapped people, such as an approved social worker as defined by the Mental Health Act 1983 or a specialised social worker.

Where a person has been detained at a police station under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 an approved social worker and a registered medical practitioner shall be called to the police station as soon as possible in order to interview and examine the person. The person should not be released until he has been seen by both the approved social worker and the registered medical practitioner.

I am informed by the chief constable that in Devon and Cornwall there is formal multi-agency policy, containing practice and procedural guidelines, which addresses issues relating to arrest, detention, assessment and care plan arrangements under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Local mental health issues, ranging from resources to specific care management reviews are addressed through four locally based multi-agency "Mentally Disordered

Offender (MDO)" groups. A county level Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel (MAPPP) provides for a multi-agency problem solving approach to the management of high risk and potentially dangerous mentally disordered persons. These are linked to a Peninsula (Devon and Cornwall) Criminal Justice Strategies Group.

Informal case review meetings may be called at short notice by any of the representative bodies on the MDO groups when an actual or potential case management problem is identified. Such meetings allow for joint agency agreement on appropriate early intervention and, if necessary, referral to an MDO group or MAPPP.

Formal multi-agency information exchange protocols are still being developed for lower risk patients, but the Devon Approved Social Worker (out of hours) Service ensures that Devon and Cornwall police officers have 24 hour access to professional, informed advice on any known individual if required.

European Arrest Warrant

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes in the text of the European arrest warrant have been made since it was debated in the House; and if he will place the new text in the Library. [36042]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: On 10 December 2001 European Standing Committee B held a debate on the basis of document 13425–01, COPEN 65, which at the time was the latest available full English text of the Framework Decision on the European Arrest Warrant. The current text, which reflects discussions at the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council on 6–7 December, is numbered 14867/1/01, COPEN 79 REV 1. This version contains a number of changes. In addition to the revised wording of Article 5(1) concerning guarantees to be given for requests based on convictions in absentia, the most significant changes concern scope (Article 2) and time limits (Article 17).

The current text and Explanatory Memorandum were deposited in Parliament by the Home Office on 11 December 2001. As a matter of procedure copies of all deposited texts are sent to the House of Commons Library as well as to the Commons European Scrutiny Committee. Version 14867/1/01, COPEN 79 REV 1 was considered by the Committee and cleared from scrutiny on 12 December.

Sentencing

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prison sentences of 28 days or less were imposed by courts in England and Wales in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000; [R] [34850]

(2) how many prison sentences of local custody were imposed by magistrates courts in England and Wales in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1989 and *(c)* 1999. [R] [34849]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office Court Proceedings database show that 7,586 persons were sentenced to custody for 28 days or less in 1998 in England and Wales. Figures for 1999 and 2000 were 8,553 and 8,525 respectively.

The expression "prison sentences of local custody" is not recognised.

Death Sentence (Reburial Applications)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications by relatives of people, upon whom judgment of death was executed, for reburial outside the prison in which they were last confined have been refused since 1979. [34523]

Beverley Hughes: It has been the practice since 1965 for successive Home Secretaries to consider such applications sympathetically; none appears to have been refused over the period in question.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if *(a)* education, *(b)* health care and *(c)* legal services will be provided on site at asylum seeker accommodation centres; and who will be responsible for the costs of providing such services. [34582]

Angela Eagle: Health care and education facilities will be provided on site in the trial accommodation centres and will be funded by the Home Office.

Legal advice will be available to asylum seekers housed in accommodation centres and may be provided on site, depending on the particular circumstances at each centre. Arrangements at each centre will be decided and funded by the Legal Services Commission.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to consult local authorities on the proposed siting of asylum seeker accommodation centres; [34579]

(2) what plans he has to involve residents in the vicinity of proposed asylum seeker accommodation centres in consultation about such plans. [34580]

Angela Eagle: Home Office officials are in the process of meeting with planning officials from the local authorities where the potential sites are sited.

They will, in the near future and in agreement with each planning authority, embark on a consultation exercise with all relevant parties including local authorities, providers of local services and members of the local community.

Immigration Service (Lincolnshire)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Immigration Service staff are employed in *(a)* north Lincolnshire and *(b)* north-east Lincolnshire; and what proportion of those employees speak (i) Arabic, (ii) Hindi, (iii) Urdu, (iv) Farsi/Dari and (v) Pashtu. [34585]

Angela Eagle: As at 1 February 2002 there were 12 Immigration Service staff based in north and north-east Lincolnshire.

The details of the languages spoken by immigration staff of all grades is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. We recognise this shortfall and are in the process of addressing it by creating a database of training received and qualifications held by Immigration Service staff. However, interpreting and translation services for those in the care of the Immigration Service are largely provided by external translators, who are called upon to travel if required.

As my hon. Friend is aware, we have identified a potential site for an asylum seeker accommodation centre in her constituency. We intend that staff for accommodation centres will be provided by the contractor running the site.

Migrants

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a quota for all categories of migrant. [34151]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* Our immigration system is not generally based on applying quotas but on requiring conditions set out in the Immigration Rules and associated concessions, to be met for permission to enter or remain in the United Kingdom to be given. Two exceptions are our bilateral youth exchange scheme with Japan and the longstanding Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme (SAWS) for which there is an annual quota. We plan to introduce new quota-based routes of entry to the United Kingdom. As we said in our White Paper, "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain", published on 7 February:

> "We will build on the principles of [SAWS] to meet the demand for short-term casual labour in other sectors of the United Kingdom economy. As with the SAWS, we envisage quotas will be a key feature of any similar schemes that would be carefully targeted at specific sectors and closely managed. Entry would be for a short period of up to six months and applicants would not have the right to bring dependants with them".

We also plan to reform the existing SAW scheme.

Illegal Immigrants and Overstayers

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to remove illegal immigrants and overstayers over the last 12 months. [34147]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* We have taken a range of measures to apprehend and remove illegal entrants and overstayers. These include a substantial increase in the number of immigration officers engaged on removals work, an expansion of the detention estate, creation of additional immigration arrest teams, the development of a network of reporting centres and the use of chartered flights.

In line with the police service, the immigration service is embracing the National Intelligence Model as a disciplined tool for using intelligence to drive effective strategy in the delivery of our business objectives, including the removal of overstayers and illegal immigrants. Intelligence lies at the heart of business planning. It provides an accurate picture of the business, the nature and extent of the problems, trends and where the main threats lie.

The most recent published figures show that in the calendar year 2000 there were 8,370 persons removed from the United Kingdom after enforcement action had been initiated. This includes those persons who departed voluntarily after enforcement action had been initiated against them, or who left under an Assisted Voluntary Return Programme.

Additionally, 38,275 persons were refused leave to enter at port and subsequently removed in 2000.

Life Sentences

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the offences for which *(a)* men and *(b)* women are serving life sentences in England and Wales; and how many are serving such sentences for each offence. [34592]

Beverley Hughes: The number of men and women serving life sentences in England and Wales at 31 December 2001 and the offences for which they were sentenced are shown in the table.

Offence	*Males*	*Females*
Murder	3,399	125
Other homicide and attempted homicide	122	7
Manslaughter	159	6
Rape	468	0
Wounding	265	6
Arson	94	16
Buggery and indecent behaviour between males	36	0
Other sexual offences	12	0
Gross indecency with children	2	0
Kidnapping	22	0
Robbery	124	0
Other offences of violence against the person	68	0
Drug offences	4	0
Burglary	12	0
Affray	2	0
Other thefts	2	0
Threatening/disorderly behaviour	1	0
Cruelty to children	1	0
Other criminal offences	25	0
Offence not recorded	5	0
Total number of inmates	4,823	160

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women are serving *(a)* mandatory and *(b)* discretionary life sentences in England and Wales for non-homicide offences. [34594]

Beverley Hughes: There were *(a)* 125 women serving mandatory life sentences and *(b)* 35 women serving discretionary life sentences on 31 December 2001.

Under section 2 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 offenders convicted of a second serious sexual or violent offence must be sentenced to life imprisonment. These sentences are known as automatic life sentences. There is currently no centrally held data to differentiate between automatic and discretionary life sentence inmates. Mandatory life sentences are passed for murder only.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many men are serving *(a)* mandatory and *(b)* discretionary life sentences in England and Wales for non-homicide. [34595]

Beverley Hughes: There were *(a)* 3,399 men serving mandatory life sentences and *(b)* 1,424 men serving discretionary life sentences on 31 December 2001.

Under section 2 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 offenders convicted of a second serious sexual or violent offence must be sentenced to life imprisonment. These sentences are known as automatic life sentences. There is currently no centrally held data to differentiate between automatic and discretionary life sentence inmates. Mandatory life sentences are passed for murder only.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate (Lost Passports)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports were lost by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [34618]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not held centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost. However, the Integrated Casework Directorate's (ICD's) Return of Passport Unit, which was set up in October 1999, issued 97 lost passport letters in the year 2000 and 103 in 2001.

Leicestershire Police

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members there are in the Leicestershire Constabulary, broken down by rank; and how many are *(a)* women, *(b)* black and *(c)* Asian. [34619]

Mr. Denham: The information in the tables has been provided by the Chief Constable and reflects the position in the Leicestershire Constabulary on 8 February 2002.

Male (full-time equivalents)

Rank	*White*	*Black Caribbean*	*Black African*	*Black other*	*Chinese*	*Pakistani*	*Indian*	*Other*	*Total*
Chief Constable	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Deputy Chief Constable	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Assistant Chief Constable	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chief Superintendent	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Superintendent	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	7
Chief Inspector	17	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Inspector	80	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	83
Sergeant	239	1	0	0	0	0	8	1	249
Constable	1,294.3	11	3	7	1	8	22	13	1,359.3
Total	1,647.3	14	3	8	1	8	31	15	1,727.3

Female (full-time equivalents)

Rank	*White*	*Black Caribbean*	*Black African*	*Black other*	*Chinese*	*Pakistani*	*Indian*	*Other*	*Total*
Chief Constable	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Deputy Chief Constable	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assistant Chief Constable	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chief Superintendent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Superintendent	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Chief Inspector	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Inspector	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Sergeant	20.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20.8
Constable	299.6	1	0	3	0	2	5	3	313.6
Total	329.5	1	0	3	0	2	5	3	343.5

Total (full-time equivalents)

Rank	*White*	*Black Caribbean*	*Black African*	*Black other*	*Chinese*	*Pakistani*	*Indian*	*Other*	*Total*
Chief Constable	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Deputy Chief Constable	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Assistant Chief Constable	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Chief Superintendent	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Superintendent	8	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	9
Chief Inspector	19	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Inspector	84	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	87
Sergeant	259.8	1	0	0	0	0	8	1	269.8
Constable	1,593.9	12	3	10	1	10	27	16	1,672.9
Total	1,976.8	15	3	11	1	10	36	18	2,070.8

Asylum Seekers

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will *(a)* list the sites which are being considered by his Department to build accommodation centres for asylum seekers and *(b)* list sites which have already been considered and have been deemed unsuitable. [32515]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 57W.

So far, none has been deemed unsuitable.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria the Government have set for selecting sites for accommodation centres to house asylum seekers within the UK; and which of these criteria have been met by RAF Turnhouse in Edinburgh. [32519]

Angela Eagle: The criteria are set out in the answer I gave the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1134W. The Royal Air Force (RAF) Turnhouse site appears to meet these initial criteria.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people seeking asylum have been located in the Portsmouth, South constituency since the introduction of the Government's dispersal policy; and if he will make a statement. [35444]

Angela Eagle: Figures are not available by constituency for those asylum seekers accommodated by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

Statistics from NASS for the end of September 2001, show that 150[1,2] asylum seekers (including dependants) were being supported in NASS accommodation in Portsmouth.

[1] Figure rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Cases where support has been ceased are excluded from this figure.

Essex Police Authority

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the complement is for Essex Police Authority; and how many officers were in post at 31 December 2001. [29757]

Mr. Denham: The chief constable of Essex Police informs me that the full time equivalent strength at 31 December 2001 was 2,978.

Essex police continue to recruit strongly. Force strength rose by 119 officers (4.2 per cent.) to 2,937 in the year to 30 September 2001 and the information provided by the chief constable shows a further strength increase.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with Arthur Andersen about terminating contracts. [33092]

Angela Eagle: The Home Department does not currently hold any contracts with Arthur Andersen and therefore no discussions on termination have taken place.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 963–64W, on police resignations; if he will make a statement reconciling the figures for resignations in 1996–97 with the figures given in a previous answer to my Friend the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) of 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 64W (UIN: 41401). [17257]

Mr. Denham: The figures for total police wastage and police resignations given in the answer to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) of 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 64W, were those collected by the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) and published as Police Personnel Statistics. For the purpose of these statistics, wastage is collected on a headcount basis (ie the number of persons) in the following categories: retirements, resignations and other. Other wastage includes officers transferring to forces outside England and Wales, but not those transferring to forces within England and Wales.

In addition to the information collected by RDS, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) collects information annually about wastage from the police service broken down into the following categories:

Dismissals from force (including requirements to resign)

Voluntary resignations

Medical retirements

Ordinary retirements

Transfers from force

Deaths.

Forces are asked to provide these figures on a full-time equivalent basis, not on a headcount basis. The HMIC category "Transfers from force" includes transfers to any other force.

There is no specific category of resignation for medical reasons. If an officer is permanently disabled for police duties there is provision for retirement on ill-health grounds. The number of such medical retirements is recorded in the HMIC statistics. In the circumstances the answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 963W showed the number of medical retirements and the number of officers who left the police service for other reasons—ordinary retirements, dismissals including requirements to resign, and voluntary resignations.

As the two sets of statistics collected by RDS and HMIC are gathered on a different basis, they cannot be reconciled directly with one another. We are aware of the inconsistent basis between the two sets of figures and established a task force to consider these issues. The task force report was issued for consultation on 18 December 2001. The report of the task force proposes a comprehensive revision to the current requirements on police personnel statistics. Following consultation with the police service we will implement the necessary changes from September 2002.

West Mercia Police

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to increase funding for West Mercia police to the average level for English shire forces. [33732]

Mr. Denham: I announced the police funding settlement for 2002–03 on 30 January. Through the settlement West Mercia will receive grant of £101.3 million, an increase of 2.3 per cent. over this year. The average increase for English shire authorities is 2.5 per cent.

In addition, the West Mercia Police Authority will receive £3.5 million through the Crime Fighting Fund, £2.3 million through the rural policing fund and £2.8 million capital allocation.

Grant for police authorities is mainly determined by the police funding formula. The formula aims to allocate resources fairly between authorities, taking account of the circumstances of each. The formula has many strengths and is generally acceptable to much of the policing community. It does however have well recognised limitations and we have decided to undertake a wide ranging review of the formula to ensure that it satisfactorily allocates funding in future. I intend that, where possible, changes to the formula should be introduced in time for the 2003–04 police funding settlement.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which members of the Zimbabwe Government and their family members *(a)* hold and *(b)* are entitled to hold British passports. [36104]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* We have no record of having issued a British passport to any current members of the Zimbabwe cabinet. Eligibility for British passport facilities depends on the application of the terms of the British Nationality Act 1981 to the facts of a person's birth and descent. This information in respect of members of the Zimbabwe Government and their families is not held by the Passport Service. I understand that Zimbabwean nationality law now prohibits dual nationality and that in order to retain Zimbabwean nationality, Zimbabweans were required by January this year to renounce formally any other nationality they held.

Cheshire Police Authority

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the level of the Cheshire Police Authority's grant within the 2002–03 provisional settlement; and what *(a)* representations he has received and *(b)* assessment he has made of the implications of the level of grant increase for (i) the effective policing of Cheshire and (ii) the future level of council tax to be levied in Cheshire; [31870]

(2) what representations he has received about the 2002–03 provisional grant settlement for the Cheshire Police Authority. [31869]

Mr. Denham: The provisional police funding settlement was announced on 4 December 2001. Representations were subsequently received from Cheshire Police Authority and from Cheshire MPs.

I announced the final police funding settlement for 2002–03 on 30 January. Through the settlement Cheshire will receive grant (Home Office and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) grant) of £99 million. This is an increase of £2.4 million or 2.5 per cent. over 2001–02. In addition Cheshire will receive £3.3 million through the Crime Fighting Fund, £0.2 million through the Rural Policing Fund and £2.7 million capital allocation.

It is a matter for the police authority to set a budget and council tax.

Police Pay and Pensions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the level of increase in grant settlement necessary for police authorities to cover police service personnel pay and pensions; and if he will make a statement. [31872]

Mr. Denham: Police pay and pensions costs are taken into account when the level of funding for the police service is taken into consideration during each spending review.

Police

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time police officers there were in Wales in each year since 1997. [36421]

Mr. Denham: Police numbers for Wales since 1997 are set out in the table. On 30 September 2001 Wales had record numbers of officers.

Year	*Number of officers*[1]	*Number of civilian support staff*[1]
31 March 1997	6,592	2,455
31 March 1998	6,617	2,429
31 March 1999	6,646	2,559
31 March 2000	6,632	2,457
31 March 2001	6,873	2,706
30 September 2001	7,134	2,829

[1] Strength is full-time equivalents.

Drug Traffickers

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much is expected to be recovered by the confiscation of assets of drug traffickers in each of the next five years; and if he will estimate the percentage that this will represent of the total value of illegal drug sales. [36560]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The national Asset Recovery Strategy, which I announced on 28 November, sets out the Government's objectives for meeting the challenging financial investigation target of recovering £60 million in receipts from asset recovery orders of all kinds by the 2004–05 financial year, compared with £29.5 million during 1999–2000. This would achieve the Government's objective of doubling the amounts recovered from drug traffickers and other major criminals. We estimate that between a half and two thirds of these receipts will come from drug trafficking cases.

It is not possible to provide a meaningful estimate of the percentage these receipts will represent of the total value of illegal drug sales. What I can say is that the value of such sales is very much greater even than the increased receipts set out in the current target, but that effective application of the new powers in the Proceeds of Crime Bill, including those that will be exercised by the proposed new Assets Recovery Agency, should enable a major increase in the recovery of drug trafficking proceeds. Targets in this field will be reviewed when the strategy has operated for a year, in the light of the outcome of the Bill's passage.

A copy of the strategy is available in the Library.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of setting up the unit for confiscation of the proceeds of drug trafficking; and what the anticipated annual cost is of running it. [36561]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Proceeds of Crime Bill, which is shortly to have its Report and Third Reading Stages in the House of Commons, provides inter alia for the setting up of an Assets Recovery Agency. The agency will be empowered to apply for confiscation orders in relation to any category of crime, including drug trafficking.

As I explained in my answer to the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) on 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 837W. It is currently estimated that the agency will cost £3 million to set up, with running costs of some £13 million per annum. These estimates are subject to revision as planning for the agency progresses.

Based on current assumptions about caseloads and amounts available for recovery, the Government expect that the agency's receipts will exceed its running costs.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many secure unit places for juvenile offenders in *(a)* young offender institutions, *(b)* local authority secure units and *(c)* secure training centres there are in (i) England and Wales and (ii) Greater London; what the occupancy rates are for each; and if he will make a statement. [36097]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 14 February 2002]*: The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales commissions and purchases secure accommodation for remanded and sentenced young people. They have provided the following information. The table details the number of secure juvenile places within England and Wales and Greater London and the occupancy rates on Thursday 31 January 2002.

Type of secure accommodation	*Number of places*	*Percentage occupied*
England and Wales		
Young offender institution	3,072	84
Local authority secure unit	256	95
Secure training centre	130	85
Greater London		
Young offender institution	240	93
Local authority secure unit	16	100
Secure training centre	0	—

TETRA

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a copy of the full TETRA standard specification documents in the Library. [36591]

Mr. Denham: The suite of documents which comprise the Terrestrial Trunked Radio System (TETRA) standard specification is published by the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI), based in Sophia Antipolis, France. The suite currently contains over 200 separate items and the documents may be downloaded from the ETSI internet website www.etsi.org. These documents are updated as the standard evolves and this method of access ensures that the latest version is always available for consultation. Alternatively, the documents may also be accessed via the library of the British Standards Institute, 389 Chiswick High Road, London W4 4AL Tel: +44 (0) 20 8996 7004, Fax: +44 (0) 20 8996 7005.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to commission further investigations into possible health risks associated with the use of the TETRA communications system by the emergency services. [36593]

Mr. Denham: In early 2001, the Home Office commissioned a report from the National Radiological Protection Board on the potential health risks from Terrestrial Trunked Radio System (TETRA) technology.

The report concluded it was unlikely that the special features of TETRA posed a hazard to health and made recommendations for further research in the remaining areas of uncertainty. The Home Office has accepted the report and is taking forward all its recommendations in a comprehensive programme of work which is already well under way. This includes a large study commissioned by the Home Office from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory on the possible effects of TETRA signals on cell biology. The initial results of this work are expected by April, 2002.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has given to police officers to reduce the possible health risks of using TETRA handsets. [36592]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office has issued guidance to police forces recommending a maximum output power of 1 watt for Airwave Terrestrial Trunked Radio System (TETRA) handsets.

This power limit ensures that transmissions from the handsets comply with exposure guidelines.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many TETRA masts *(a)* have been and *(b)* are due to be set up in constabularies using the Airwave Communications system. [36590]

Mr. Denham: The number of Terrestrial Trunked Radio System (TETRA) masts commissioned by mm02, the operator responsible for the development of Airwave, totalled 369 at 15 February 2002.

As the Airwave service is still under development, is not yet possible to give a precise figure for the overall number of masts required for England, Wales and

Scotland. However, outline planning studies estimate that 3,500 masts will be needed to meet the police requirement for Airwave.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from scientific *(a)* organisations, *(b)* journals and *(c)* institutions expressing concerns over the possible health risks of the TETRA communications system; and if he will make a statement. [36595]

Mr. Denham: No representations have been received to date from the scientific community, or the scientific press, concerning the possible health risks of Terrestrial Trunked Radio System communications systems (TETRA).

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the correspondence from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed dated 30 August and 28 November 2001, regarding delegates to the World Methodist Conference. [34157]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I wrote to the right hon. Member on 19 February 2002 on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I am very sorry for the delay in replying.

Prison Population

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the prison population was in England and Wales on 31 January. [35323]

Beverley Hughes: On 31 January 2002 there were 67,870 people in prisons in England and Wales.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the United Kingdom prison population was in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1994, *(d)* 1996, *(e)* 1998 and *(f)* 2000; and if he will make a statement. [35324]

Beverley Hughes: The average population in prisons in England and Wales for every other year between 1990 and 2000 is shown in the table.

	Average population
1990	45,636
1992	45,817
1994	48,794
1996	55,281
1998	65,298
2000	64,602

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Prison Officers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies there are for prison officers in prisons in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [35327]

Beverley Hughes: On 31 January 2002 there were 866 vacancies for prison officer grades in England and Wales. Recruitment is currently running in the areas of greatest need, with a programme of recruitment throughout 2002–03.

Victims and Witnesses

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Home Office reports since 1972 which refer to the treatment of victims and witnesses. [35956]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information is not collected centrally on the subject and sub-topics of Home Office reports since 1972. It is likely that a large number will refer to the treatment of victims and witnesses.

HMIC Reports

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list Her Majesty's Inspectorate and Constabulary thematic reports undertaken since 1978. [35955]

Mr. Denham: The practice of undertaking thematic inspections is a relatively recent one. The 31 reports published to date on thematic inspections conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) (either alone or in partnership with other inspectorates) are:

1993

Equal Opportunities in the Police Service

The Administration of Firearms Licensing

1995

Developing Diversity in the Police Service

Facing Violence—The Response of Provincial Police Forces

Obtaining Value for Money in the Police Service

1996

An Examination of the Police Force Drugs Strategies: Tackling Drugs Together

A Review of Crime recording Procedures

1997

Lost Time—The Management of Sickness Absence and Medical Retirement in the Police Service

Masefield's Progress—How Heavy is the Administrative Burden on the Police now?

Officer Safety—Minimising the Risk of Violence

Policing With Intelligence—Criminal Intelligence

A Special Relationship—Police Forces, the Special Constabulary and Neighbourhood Watch

Winning the Race—Policing Plural Communities

1998

Beating Crime

'How Long Youth Cases Take'

Road Policing and Traffic

What Price Policing

1999

Casework Information Needs Within the Criminal Justice System Vols. 1&2'

Child Protection

Keeping The Peace—Policing Disorder

Managing Learning—A study of Police Training

Police Integrity

Winning the Race—Revisited

2000

Calling Time on Crime

The Implementation of Section 1 of the Magistrates' Courts (Procedure) Act 1998[1]

On the Record

Under the Microscope

2001

Open All Hours

A Report on the Joint Inspection of the Progress made in Reducing Delay in the Youth Justice System[1]

Winning the Race—Embracing Diversity

2002

Training Matters

[1] Report produced in conjunction with other inspectorate(s).

Drugs (Portsmouth, South)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the percentage of recorded crime in the Portsmouth, South constituency that was drug-related in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [35442]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information is not available in the form requested. However, the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse monitoring (NEW-ADAM), a national research programme, confirms the link between drugs misuse and crime. Summary data published in September 2001 based on eight sites in 1999–2000 found that up to 65 per cent. of arrestees tested positive for an illegal drug with up to 29 per cent. testing positive for opiates (including heroin) and/or cocaine (including crack).

We are determined to break the link between drug misuse and crime and have introduced a number of initiatives to get offenders out of crime and into treatment. These include, for example, arrest referral schemes and Drug Treatment Testing Orders in the Portsmouth courts of which 47 have been made since they became available in December 2000.

The allocation of funding to Hampshire constabulary in 2001–02 for arrest referral schemes in their force area, including Portsmouth, was £188,323 for arrest referral workers and £108,240 towards treatment. In addition, we have allocated £166,939 to the Portsmouth Crime and Disorder Partnership in 2001–02 from the Communities Against Drugs fund, to put in place targeted, locally determined measures to strengthen the community, disrupt the local drugs market and generally tackle drugs and drug related crime.

Learning Disabilities

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional steps are being taken to protect children and adults with learning disabilities from sexual abuse; and if he will make a statement. [35545]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Tackling sexual offending is a top priority for this Government and we intend to ensure that the legislative framework enables firm action to be taken against those who abuse others.

One of the key themes of the Sex Offences Review is the protection of children and vulnerable people. The independent review body recommended new offences to protect the more vulnerable members of our society, including those with learning disabilities, and a new scale of penalties. We are actively considering all of the recommendations in the consultation document on reforming the law on sex offences, 'Setting the Boundaries', in the light of over 700 responses received during the consultation period. We intend to legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Pornography (Sex Offences)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the link between the viewing of pornography and the committing of sex offences. [35725]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In 1990 the Home Office commissioned a review of available research evidence on the effects of pornography. The report by Howitt and Cumberbatch entitled "Pornography: impacts and influences: A review of available research evidence on the effects of pornography" was published in 1990.

The review evaluated existing literature and concluded that there was no convincing evidence for a link between pornography and sex offending. It found that trends in sex offending were not clearly linked to the availability of pornography. Also, use of pornography often appeared to post-date the emergence of deviance. However, one of the difficulties of research in this area is that sex offenders are not a homogenous group, and it is therefore difficult to try and establish consistent relationships with external factors (ie in this case availability of pornography) and offending behaviour.

Obscene Publications Act

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government will review the Obscene Publications Act 1959, with specific reference to its definition of obscene. [35727]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We have no plans to review the Act.

Under the Obscene Publications Act 1959, an article is obscene if its effect is, if taken as a whole, such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all the relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it.

The existing test is flexible enough to be used in respect of all broadcast and published works, including material published via the internet. It also avoids potential conflict with wider principles of freedom of expression by requiring that the effects of the material on those who are exposed to it should be taken into account. Attempts to reach consensus on changes have been unsuccessful. The most recent of these was by the late Lord Halsbury in 1999 in another place, when he tried to replace the general test by a comprehensive list of proscribed material.

Illegal Activities (Websites)

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action he has taken to investigate whether special websites are used by hooligans to orchestrate football violence; and if he will make a statement; [35437]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* police and *(b)* internet service providers to ensure that football hooligan websites cannot be set up; [35436]

(3) what investigations he has made into the number of football websites with links to paramilitary groups; and if he will make a statement. [35448]

Mr. Denham: The National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) monitors websites associated with football hooliganism and shares information with local police forces. There is no evidence that the sites are used to orchestrate football disorder, or that individuals who set up or visit the sites are directly involved in the phenomenon. Some sites do have information technology (IT) links with paramilitary websites and some hooligans do have links with racist and other extremist groups. However, football hooligans come from all social and cultural backgrounds and there seems to be no necessary connection between football disorder generally and political extremism.

Government and the police liaise closely on all matters connected with football disorder, including on internet and other communication issues. There are no plans to discuss hooligan websites with internet service providers. Material appearing on the internet is subject to the same laws as material distributed by other means, providing it falls within United Kingdom jurisdiction. The sites are monitored and, at present, the material posted on net servers based in the United Kingdom appears to reproduce information and opinions which, however unpalatable, are already published legally in the United Kingdom. Material posted on websites hosted abroad, which includes a number associated with football hooliganism, falls outside United Kingdom jurisdiction. NCIS liaises closely with overseas law enforcement agencies on this matter and mutual assistance arrangements are being developed as a requirement of the G8 Action Plan on 'high tech' crime.

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation to define criminal material on websites. [35447]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Legislation already exists to combat the publication and distribution of illegal material and those laws apply equally online and offline. There are no plans to introduce legislation specific to websites.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policies his Department has for dealing with domestic violence; and if he will publish them. [35466]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office and the Women's Unit jointly published the policy document "Living without Fear: an integrated approach to tackling violence against women" in June 1999. The document set out the Government's goals for tackling violence against women which include:

> to reduce crimes of violence against women and fear of violence as measured by the British Crime Survey;
>
> to help today's children grow up in a society where violence is not part of family life and relationships are built on greater mutual respect; and
>
> within five years to see effective multi-agency partnerships operating throughout England and Wales, drawing on good practice demonstrated in the mentioned publication.

Within the last two years we have also issued new multi-agency guidance on dealing with domestic violence, specific guidance to health service professionals and a new Home Office circular to the police which has been widely welcomed.

We have provided £120 million additional capital funding for a new Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund and increased funding for Victim Support. Over £10 million has been provided for a violence against women initiative within the Crime Reduction Programme to help us identify what interventions in what circumstances are the most effective and cost-effective.

In addition, an informal ministerial group on domestic violence involving representatives from seven key Departments is working closely together to consider the development and implementation of preventative strategies to address domestic violence. The group has highlighted five areas for priority action, which include piloting early interventions by health professionals and ensuring that the civil and criminal jurisdictions co-operate to best effect in domestic violence cases.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

MOX Plant, Sellafield

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions she had with the Governments of *(a)* the Irish Republic, *(b)* Norway and *(c)* Iceland prior to the approval of the MOX plant at Sellafield; [21821]

(2) what discussions she had with the *(a)* Executive of the National Assembly for Wales, *(b)* Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly and *(c)* Scottish Executive prior to the approval of the MOX plant at Sellafield. [21820]

Margaret Beckett: My officials have had discussions with Irish Government officials about the publication of 1997 data on MOX, and hold six-monthly meetings at which they and the devolved Administrations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland brief one another on a range of radioactivity issues; but otherwise no such discussion has taken place.

I also refer the hon. Member to my answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 752W.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will provide a breakdown of his latest estimate of the total cost to public funds of the foot and mouth outbreak; and if she will make a statement. [31593]

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated final cost is of the foot and mouth epidemic. [28745]

Margaret Beckett: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Lord Whitty, in another place, 4 February 2002, *Official Report, (House of Lords)*, column WA65.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements are in place for the extension of rate relief to businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. [36485]

Dr. Whitehead: Local authorities can give discretionary rate relief to any business suffering hardship. Many authorities have used this power to give rate relief to businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. Normally, the Government meets 75 per cent. of the cost of such relief. However, special arrangements have been in place during 2001–02 whereby the Government have met 95 per cent. or 98 per cent. of the cost of hardship rate relief granted by 151 rural local authorities to small businesses affected by food and mouth disease. As part of the Government's response to the rural task force report on 13 December 2001, we announced that these arrangements would be extended to 31 March 2002. A special grant report giving effect to that extension will be laid before the House shortly. The Government have no plans to extend these arrangements beyond 2001–02, but local authorities will retain their powers to grant hardship relief, with 75 per cent. of the cost met centrally.

Refrigerators

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of refrigerators per day being added to storage by local authorities; and when she expects appropriate recycling plants to be operating in this country. [30320]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* It has been estimated that around 2.5 million domestic refrigeration units are disposed of in the UK each year. Not all these arisings will require storage—any fridges in working order may be refurbished for re-sale and re-use on the domestic market. Fridges can also be incinerated in the UK or exported to other Member States for treatment. We anticipate that a specialist fridge recycling plant will be operating in the UK by spring.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if it is her policy to require major distributors of refrigerators who collect used refrigerators to return each one to the local authority in the area from which it originated. [36253]

Mr. Meacher: Most retailers and other distributors no longer collect used refrigerators. We are looking at the options available to reinstate retailer take back. However, it is not my Department's policy to require the return of fridges to the local authority for the area from which they originated.

Airport Runway Capacity

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions she has had with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions concerning proposals to expand airport runway capacity in the South East; and if she will make a statement; [31970]

(2) what arrangements are in place between her Department and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions concerning the timing of the public release of information on the study into airport runway capacity in the South East; and if she will make a statement. [31969]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* The Government have been considering how to respond to the demand for air travel over the next 30 years and intends to publish a series of regional consultation documents, including one for the south-east and east of England, for public consultation in the spring. These consultation documents will set out possible options for developing airport capacity at airports across the UK. At the same time, to support these consultation documents, the Government intends to make the regional studies and supporting technical documents publicly available. The consultation will be followed by the publication of the Air Transport White Paper at the end of this year.

I am working closely with my colleague, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, on all the regional studies, including the south-east and east of England Regional Air Services study, and on the development of the Air Transport White Paper. Our two Departments have developed a framework for working together, to formalise our working and liaison arrangements. This is set out in an exchange of letters between our respective Permanent Secretaries, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. DEFRA will be fully consulted on the content and timing of publication of the consultation documents, the supporting technical material and the White Paper.

Ministerial Meetings (Energy Industry)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what meetings *(a)* she and *(b)* her senior departmental officials have had with Enron and its subsidiaries in the last two years. [32434]

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what occasions she and her Department have held meetings since May 1997 with representatives from *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Exxon-Mobil, *(d)* Enron, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf; if she will state the purpose of each meeting; and if she will provide details of the outcomes and agreements reached as a result of each meeting. [33219]

Margaret Beckett: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

EAGA

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the complaints procedures EAGA have in force. [33130]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* EAGA Partnership is one of the two scheme managers for the Government's Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

(HEES) in England. HEES is marketed as the Warm Front Team and is the Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector.

EAGA Partnership's complaint procedure is accredited to British Standard ISO 9002. A copy of the procedure is attached and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House. EAGA is currently reviewing its complaint system and an updated version will be sent to the hon. Member for Stroud and placed in the Library of the House.

Over 250,000 householders have been assisted since the launch of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) on 1 June 2000. The number of complaints received by the Department since that date concerning EAGA Partnership's three regions is 330 or 0.1 per cent. of work completed.

EU Noise Directive

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the EU Noise Directive; and what restrictions this will place on sources of excessive noise apart from aircraft. [34633]

Mr. Meacher: The proposed directive relating to the Assessment and Management of Environmental Noise would establish common methods for measuring and assessing environmental noise. As presently drafted it would also require member states to designate authorities to map noise levels in local areas and develop noise action plans. Maps would be publicised locally and local people consulted in drawing up the action plans. The requirement for mapping and action plans would apply to major roads, railways and airports and urban agglomerations. Summary information would be collected by the European Commission and used to inform future Community noise policy. It would not be the purpose of this directive to place restrictions on sources of noise.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the adequacy of treatment and disposal facilities in place to handle hazardous water and waste banned from landfill under the forthcoming Landfill Regulations. [34488]

Mr. Meacher: The Department in conjunction with the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly has undertaken an assessment of the implications of the landfill directive for the future management of wastes banned from landfill.

The aims and objectives of the study were:

to identify and evaluate the potential impact of the landfill directive on the management of hazardous wastes and liquid wastes in the UK, and

to identify and assess the alternative waste management options that may be available to ensure the continued safe management of wastes for which landfilling will be restricted under the landfill directive.

The study found that there was sufficient alternative disposal systems (in use or planned) to cope with the large volume of organic process waste streams requiring diversion from landfill. It also suggested that additional facilities might be required for oily wastes, contaminated soils, and inorganic chemical wastes.

Copies of the study have been disseminated widely.

Chemicals (Controls)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the proposals being prepared by the European Commission covering control of chemicals in household products. [34542]

Mr. Meacher: The European Commission presented a White Paper on a Strategy for a Future Chemicals Policy in February last year. This proposes a new regulatory regime for chemicals used in household and other products. We have published the following assessments of it:

an Explanatory Memorandum on the proposals (23 March 2001);

a partial Regulatory Impact Assessment (May 2001);

a report by the Institute for Environment and Health on the Testing Requirements for Proposals under the EC White Paper "Strategy for Future Chemicals Policy" (April 2001).

These documents have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

In June last year the UK and other member states agreed Council Conclusions endorsing the White Paper proposals. The conclusions called for the proposals to be strengthened in a number of respects. They emphasised the need for a more streamlined process to obtain the essential information required to speed up action on the chemicals of most concern and to phase out those that pose unacceptable risks with the minimum delay. Ministers also agreed that chemicals that are persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic and those that are very persistent and very bioaccumulative should be added to the list of chemicals of very high concern that will be subject to the most stringent controls.

Following the agreement of the Council Conclusions a number of working groups made up of stakeholders and representatives from member states were convened to consider in detail how the proposed regulatory system should operate. The Commission is now drawing up proposals for legislation and expects to publish draft proposals later this year.

GM Crops

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost of farm-scale trials of GM herbicide tolerant crops is; and what the contribution to the cost from public funds is. [34478]

Mr. Meacher: The costs of the Farm Scale Evaluations (FSEs) of Genetically Modified Herbicide Tolerant crops are shared between Government and the industry body SCIMAC.

SCIMAC are responsible for providing, managing and disposing of the crops grown on the test sites. I do not have information on these costs.

Government collectively meets the costs of the ecological studies carried out by the Research Consortium, which are expected to total about £5.38 million over the five years of the programme.

Mercury Vapour

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the amount of mercury vapour emitted in each of the last five years by the burning of mercury (II) thiocyanate in pyrotechnic products. [34522]

Mr. Meacher: There is a wide range in estimates of the tonnage of fireworks used annually in the UK. However on current information our best estimate is that emissions of mercury from this source may be in the order of 150kg per annum.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the amount of mercury vapour emitted in each of the last five years by the detonation of caps in toy cap guns. [34524]

Mr. Meacher: Currently there is only limited data available on emissions of mercury from toy caps, but it is an area in which we are looking at ways to improve our estimates. Our current best estimate is that emissions from this source may be in the order of 150kg per annum.

Manufacture of 2,4,5-Trichlorophenol

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what quantity of 2,4,5-trichlorophenol was manufactured in the United Kingdom in the latest year for which figures are available. [34519]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has no records of the quantity of 2,4,5-trichlorophenol manufactured, but we believe it is no longer used (or manufactured) in the UK.

Ozone-Depleting Substances

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she has collected on the *(a)* UK standards and *(b)* collected standards of the other EU countries on the recovery of ozone-depleting substances; and if she will make a statement. [34603]

Mr. Meacher: The Department published draft UK standards for the recovery of ozone depleting substances from fridges in December last year. These have been widely endorsed and are currently being worked into technical guidance by the Environment Agency. The draft UK standards drew heavily on work already under way with the United Nations (UN) TEAP Task Force and considered those standards and technology used elsewhere, including the German DIN and RAL standards.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how recovered ozone-depleting substances removed from the insulation foam from redundant refrigerators and freezers is to be disposed of; and if she will make a statement. [34604]

Mr. Meacher: Under Regulation 2037/2000 controlled ozone-depleting substances must be disposed of by technologies approved by the Parties (to the Montreal Protocol), or by any other environmentally acceptable destruction technology. These technologies include destruction by liquid injection incineration, reactor cracking, gaseous/fume oxidation, rotary kiln incinerators, cement kilns, municipal solid waste incinerators (for foams containing ODS) and radio frequency plasma destruction technology.

Refrigerator Insulation Foam

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer given by the Minister of State for the Environment on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 414, if she will place in the Library the correspondence between the Government and the European Commission regarding the removal of chlorofluorocarbons from the insulation foam of refrigerators. [34531]

Mr. Meacher: There have only been two pieces of correspondence related to this specific issue exchanged between UK officials and the European Commission. All the other instances referred to in my reply given to the hon. Member on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 414, were either in the form of minuted discussions at Management Committee on EC Regulations 3093/94 and 2037/2000 or in the margins of another meeting. Since the minutes of Management Committee are produced by the European Commission, we understand that we are not in a position to be able to place them in the Library.

I have today placed in the Libraries of the House, a faxed letter of 11 September 2000 and a letter of 30 January 2001 from a UK official dealing with the EC Regulation on substances that deplete the ozone layer to officials at the European Commission.

Badgers

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her latest estimate is of the badger population. [34504]

Margaret Beckett: There are likely to be in the region of 300,000 to 400,000 badgers in Great Britain. This figure is derived from the National Badger Survey which took place in the mid-1990's.

Angling Licences

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what angling licences are granted for waters where there is a statutory right of navigation. [34953]

Mr. Meacher: Anyone aged 12 years or over who fishes for salmon, trout, freshwater fish or eels in England and Wales must have an Environment Agency rod fishing licence. Rod licences are required for fishing in both navigable and non-navigable waters. Agency rod licences do not confer a right to fish; a permit from the owner of the fishing rights is required before angling can take place.

River Thames

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether there is a statutory right of navigation along the full length of the River Thames. [34954]

Mr. Meacher: There is a public right of navigation on the River Thames from Cricklade to the sea, but the river above Lechlade is not fully navigable.

Peat

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps her Department is taking to meet the Biodiversity Action Plan target for the replacement of peat in the horticultural industry by 2010; [34487]

(2) what steps her Department is taking to meet the Biodiversity Action Plan target for replacement of peat in the horticulture industry by 2010. [35380]

Mr. Meacher: The Biodiversity Action Plan commits the Government to undertake and promote research and development into sustainable alternatives to peat and provide advice on the development and marketing of peat alternatives. The aim of the plan is for 40 per cent. of the total market requirements to be peat free by 2005 and 90 per cent. by 2010.

Peat is a major constituent of growing media used in gardening and commercial horticulture. It is well suited to a wide range of uses and comes from a variety of sources in the UK, the Republic of Ireland and the Baltic States.

There has already been some substitution of peat by other materials, such as coir and bark, but there are still considerable difficulties to be overcome in producing alternative growing media of sufficiently reliable and consistent quality to replace peat in the full range of its present uses.

We are funding seminars to increase awareness of and to examine the potential for using reduced-peat and peat free alternatives and to encourage growers and others to take them up where they are already available.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what progress is being made in safeguarding the proposed special areas for conservation of lowland raised peat bogs which are awaiting ratification; [34489]

(2) what progress has been made in safeguarding the environmental interests of the proposed special areas for conservation lowland raised peat bogs that are still awaiting ratification. [35379]

Mr. Meacher: Further to my answers of 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 116–17W, concerning the Hatfield Moor site, I anticipate that English Nature's report on their consultations on the designation of that site and three other sites, together with recommendations to Government, will be presented within the next two months. If justified as Special Areas of Conservation, the sites will be notified to the European Commission and afforded immediate legal protection under national legislation.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what costs were incurred in setting up her Department's quality assessment programme for combined heat and power to 31 March 2001; [35390]

(2) what the anticipated operational costs are of the Department's quality assessment programme for combined heat and power for the financial year 2001–02; [35391]

Mr. Meacher: The costs incurred in setting up and running the Combined Heat and Power Quality Assurance programme (CHPQA) to 31 March 2001 was around £765,000. The anticipated operational costs of the CHPQA for 2001–02 is around £625,000.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimates her Department has made of the operational costs for the running of the CHP Club in 2001–02; [35394]

(2) what costs were incurred in setting up the Department's CHP Club; and what its operational costs were in the financial year 2000–01. [35393]

Mr. Meacher: The CHP Club provides a one-stop shop for independent information and guidance for potential and new users on the design, implementation, and operation of CHP schemes. Responsibility for the management of the Government's Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme including the CHP Club will soon be passed to the Carbon Trust. The total cost of setting up and operating the CHP Club in 2000–01 was around £200,000. The cost of running the club in 2001–02 is expected to be a similar amount.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that the Government's CHP target is reflected in her Department's aims and objectives. [35388]

Mr. Meacher: The Government target of 10,000 MWe of installed CHP by 2010 will make a significant contribution to DEFRA's objectives to promote sustainable management and prudent use of natural resources domestically and internationally. The CHP target will also contribute to DEFRA's future public service agreement targets.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the procedure is by which applicants qualify for inclusion in the Government's quality assessment procedure for combined heat and power; and whether this procedure requires periodic re-assessment. [35392]

Mr. Meacher: The Combined Heat and Power Quality Assurance programme (CHPQA) provides a practical, determinate method for assessing CHP schemes. Operators are required to self-assess their scheme, based on actual performance data, which is subject to validation and verification. A CHPQA certificate is then issued detailing the parameters qualifying as "good quality" CHP. All CHPQA certificates are valid to 31 December of the year of issue, whereupon applicants must submit a fresh self-assessment based on the previous year's data.

Waste Management

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the *(a)* levels and *(b)* mix of waste required to make a modern high-temperature incinerator commercially viable. [35396]

Mr. Meacher: The levels of waste that make a modern high-temperature incinerator commercially viable will depend on the gate fees charged. Its viability is likely to be enhanced by the availability of sufficient quantities of high calorific value wastes to ensure full combustion of material with lower calorific value.

Landfill

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reduce the amount of hazardous and industrial waste sent to landfill sites for disposal. [35631]

Mr. Meacher: The forthcoming landfill regulations which will implement the EC Landfill Directive in England and Wales reduce the amount of hazardous waste going to landfill by banning, from July 2002, the landfilling of hazardous liquid wastes and any hazardous wastes which in the conditions of landfill are explosive, corrosive, oxidising, highly flammable or flammable.

More widely, in Waste Strategy 2000, we have set a target to reduce the amount of industrial and commercial waste sent to landfill by 2005 to 85 per cent. of that landfilled in 1998.

Annual Environmental Reports

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many of the top 350 companies have responded to the Prime Minister's challenge in October 2000 to publish an annual environmental report by the end of 2001. [35663]

Mr. Meacher: Not all companies have yet published their reports for 2001, but we currently estimate 71 of the top 350 companies have produced a stand alone environmental report, including quantified environmental performance data, or otherwise published this information.

A further 84 have also taken at least one step towards meeting the Prime Minister's challenge such as publishing an environmental policy or environmental performance targets. We will be writing to all companies shortly to check our estimates and will make the final tally public as soon as possible.

European Commissioners Communications (EU 2037/2000)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library copies of European Commissioners Communications received by her Department from June 2001 about matters that were covered under EU 2037/2000. [34841]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* In June 2001, the European Commission sent the Department minutes of the meeting of the Management Committee on EC Regulation 2037/2000 of 11–12 June 2001. Since the minutes were produced by the Commission, we understand that we are not in a position to make them available to the Library of the House. We have received no other Communications from the Commission regarding matters covered under 2037/2000 since June 2001.

Parishes

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the relevant district and borough councils regarding sleeping and barely active parishes under their jurisdiction. [35817]

Alun Michael: We have had a great deal of discussion with both the Local Government Association and the Natural Association of Local Councils about how best to promote the level of activity and effectiveness of parish and town councils. We have not had direct discussions with district or borough councils, but our initiatives have received a warm welcome from many local authorities. Our strategy to help parish and town councils develop a new role and give communities the opportunity to shape their future is set out in the Rural White Paper, published in November 2000. We have made considerable progress in putting in place measures to help local councils develop their potential to lead and invigorate their communities. Over the three years this includes: £15 million for Community Service Grants to help projects to maintain or introduce services which are local priorities; £15 million for Parish Transport Grants scheme for small scale projects to meet local needs; a further £5 million to help up to 1,000 parishes draw up their own town or village plans to set out local needs and aspirations. The Countryside Agency and the National Association of Local Councils have published a national training and support strategy for parish and town councils, towards which we have allocated £2 million. In November we published a consultation paper on putting the Quality Parish and Town Council concept into practice. This sets out our detailed proposals for enhancing the role of local councils, giving their communities a better deal on local services and a stronger voice in the decisions that affect peoples lives.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she recommends that those parishes deemed *(a)* sleeping and *(b)* barely active should take. [35816]

Alun Michael: This Government are giving unprecedented encouragement to all parish councils to aspire to the standard of the best, that is why we have put in place a range of measures to encourage all rural communities, parish and town councils to take action to shape their own future. I refer the hon. Member to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 471W, for further information.

Radioactive Waste

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 566W, what records the Department has of *(a)* the total number of containers, *(b)* the weight of waste contained within the containers and *(c)* the proportion of (i) high level, (ii) intermediate level and (iii) low level radioactive waste in each of the 10 North Atlantic disposal sites used by the UK between 1949 and 1982. [35266]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The Inventory of Radioactive Waste Disposals at Sea published in 1999 by the International Atomic Energy Authority includes details, provided by the UK, of the weight and activity of the radioactive material disposed of by the UK in each of the sites in the North Atlantic. The total weight and amount of activity dumped at each disposal site are set out in the table. It should be noted that the great majority of this weight (usually around 90 per cent.) was accounted for by packaging.

Disposal site centred on co-ordinates		*Total weight*	*Total activity*
Latitude	*Longitude*	*(tonnes)*	*(GBq)*
48 30'N	13 00'W	9	37.0
55 20'N	11 20'W	33	222.0
55 08'N	12 10'W	57	148.0
32 37'N	14 05'W	1,453	1,665.0
32 42'N	19 30'W	7,098	131,191.0
32 38'N	20 05'W	4,360	81,141.0
46 27'N	6 10'W	253	6,660.0
45 27'N	6 16'W	5,809	275,243.0
45 27'N	6 36'W	4,392	574,758.0
48 20'N	13 16'W	7,641	4,170,381.0
42 50'N	14 30'W	722	65,601.0
49 05'N	17 05'W	1,878	665,260.0
46 15'N	17 25'W	9,647	8,855,475.0
46 00'N	16 45'W	14,141	20,191,963.0

Around 150,000 packages of radioactive waste were disposed of by the UK in the North East Atlantic between 1949 and 1982. A breakdown of the number of containers dumped at each disposal site is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am not aware that any high level radioactive waste was disposed of by the UK in the North Atlantic. The inventory includes details of the actual amount of activity disposed of at each site (as set out in the table), rather than the proportion of the waste which was categorised as low level or intermediate level. This information is not readily available and an estimate could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 566W, which of the 10 radioactive waste disposal sites in the North Atlantic contains high level radioactive waste by *(a)* number of containers and *(b)* weight. [35267]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I am not aware that any high level radioactive waste was disposed of by the UK in the North Atlantic. The "Report of the Independent Review of Disposal of Radioactive Waste in the Northeast Atlantic" (HMSO 1984) includes details of the activity of the waste disposed of by the UK, and explains that the disposals carried out between 1949 and 1982 involved low and intermediate level waste. Copies of the report are available in the Library of the House.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 748W, what efforts *(a)* have been, *(b)* are being and *(c)* will be made to monitor the state and safety of the 10 radioactive waste disposal sites in the North Atlantic used by the UK (i) through the UK's own efforts, (ii) through the OECD, (iii) through OSPAR and (iv) by other authority or means. [35265]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The radiological impact of the North Atlantic disposal sites was assessed under the OECD's Co-ordinated Research and Environmental Surveillance Programme (CRESP). The UK played an active part in this programme which ran from 1980 to 1995 and included direct monitoring of the main North Atlantic disposal site, which was used up until 1982. The UK has not been involved in any direct monitoring of the Atlantic disposal sites since that time and we have no plans to do so. With regard to the results obtained under CRESP and the coastal monitoring carried out by the UK, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 974W. No direct monitoring of the disposal sites has been carried out through OSPAR.

It should be noted that the drums used in the North Atlantic disposal operations were designed to reach the floor of the deep ocean intact but in the knowledge that the radioactivity would leak out over a period of years and be dispersed into the sea, by which time the radioactivity would have been somewhat reduced by natural decay. Assessments of the radiological impact of the disposals undertaken by CRESP and others have taken full account of this.

Carbon Dioxide

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average amount is of carbon dioxide produced per *(a)* car, *(b)* motor vehicle and *(c)* household in each of the last five years in the United Kingdom. [35785]

Mr. Meacher: The following table shows the average amount of CO_2 produced per car, per vehicle and per household for each year during the period 1996–2000. (The last complete set of annual data is for the year 2000).

Average CO_2 produced each year, per car/vehicle/household

Tonnes

	Car	*Vehicle*	*Household*
1996	3.28	4.42	3.77
1997	3.22	4.36	3.43
1998	3.12	4.24	3.48
1999	3.07	4.15	3.43
2000	2.99	4.04	3.42

Renewable Energy

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what forms of renewable energy generation take place on the Government estate. [36005]

Mr. Meacher: Renewable energy generation technologies used on the Government estate in England include: wind power, active and passive solar thermal systems, "ambient energy" heat pumps and waste heat from incinerators.

A number of Departments are investigating the possibility of installing renewable energy generation technologies on their estates, such as the Defence Logistics Organisation scheme to install a 12 MW wind energy project in the west of Scotland.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of electricity used within the Government Estate is supplied from renewable generators. [36006]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are keen to encourage the use of renewable energy on their estate and a significant step forward was made with the agreement, in May 2001, of the following renewable energy target across Government:

> "All Departments will ensure that, by 31 March 2003, at least 5 per cent. of their electricity comes from renewable sources that are exempt from the climate change levy, or from self generation, provided this does not entail excessive cost. This will rise to at least 10 per cent. supply from such sources by 31 March 2008, but will be reviewed after 31 March 2003 to take account of market conditions following the introduction of the renewables obligation.
>
> The review of 2003 will include consideration of increasing or bringing forward the target".

In 2000–01 nine Departments purchased energy from renewable sources. We estimate that the Government estate purchased about 3 per cent. of its electricity from renewable sources that are exempt from the climate change levy. In addition, there were also small purchases of electricity from other "green" sources not exempt from the climate change levy.

Progress by individual Departments is partly dependent upon the expiry date for their current energy contracts. However, all central Government Departments in England report that they are in the process of considering how they will go about purchasing renewable energy or are considering self-generation options.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what funding has been made available for the development of renewable energy initiatives within urban areas; [35666]

(2) if she will make a statement on the production of wind turbine renewable energy sources in urban areas. [35662]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply

The Government are taking vigorous action to promote renewable energy, including the introduction of the Renewables Obligation, the exemption of renewable energy from the climate change levy and over £260 million in direct support over the period 2001–04. This action will encourage new proposals for renewable energy generation in urban as well as rural areas.

Initiatives that may prove particularly relevant for urban areas include the £10 million fund to support renewable energy projects with a strong local community or household interest and the £20 million fund for the first stage of the new scheme to promote solar photovoltaics (PV). These were among the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in November for the deployment of an additional £100 million for renewable energy. Scheme details are being prepared for publication later in the year. The DTI is already putting over £5 million funding into 30 PV housing projects totalling over 500 homes across the country in its Domestic PV Field Trial.

Earlier examples of wind energy development in industrial settings include a windfarm in the Mersey docklands and an onshore windfarm at Blyth harbour in Northumberland. As an example of a new, large-scale urban initiative, three national companies, Corus, Northern Electric Generation and AMEC Border Wind have submitted detailed proposals for a 47.5MW windfarm on an industrial brownfield site on the south bank of the River Tees, within the Redcar and Cleveland borough. The proposals have been developed by the companies in close liaison with Regional Development Agency One NorthEast and Redcar and Cleveland borough council. I trust that Government action to encourage the establishment of renewable energy targets for each region will stimulate more brownfield site proposals.

On a smaller scale, the supermarket chain Sainsbury's, for example, has installed a 600 KW wind turbine to power its distribution depot at East Kilbride, and is promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency at its other sites.

Private Sewers

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has commissioned into the scale of the problems caused by private sewers; when that research was commissioned; what body is undertaking it; and when the research will be published. [34690]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* We have appointed outside consultants to undertake research into existing private sewers, the main objective of which is to establish their extent, identify and examine the problems associated with them, and to produce workable solutions. The research began in December and is due to last 18 months. Further details will be provided in an announcement that I will be making at the end of this month.

Lead

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the extent to which lead in the atmosphere has been reduced following the introduction of unleaded petrol. [36255]

Mr. Meacher: Ambient lead concentrations are currently measured at 23 national monitoring network sites. Sales of unleaded petrol have increased since 1987, particularly as a result of the increased use of cars fitted with catalytic converters. The sale of leaded petrol was banned in 2000. Since the mid 1980s annual average levels of airborne lead in urban areas have reduced by about 95 per cent. from a broad range of 0.18 to 0.81 micrograms per cubic metre to maximum values less than 0.1 (0.008 to 0.032) micrograms per cubic metre in 2000 (latest published data). Annual average level at roadside sites have also declined by about 92 per cent. from the mid 1980s from a broad range of 0.18 to 0.81 micrograms per cubic metre to between 0.022 and 0.032 micrograms per cubic metre in 2000. Annual average rural levels, as expected, are smaller and ranged in 2000 from 0.003 to 0.009 micrograms per cubic metre.

Results from the Government's monitoring network are published at http://www.aeat.co.uk/netcen/airqual/data/nonauto/pbdata.html

Regional Events (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which of the regional events to promote "Your Countryside—You're Welcome", will take place on the Isle of Wight. [36486]

Alun Michael: It is open to all organisations which have an interest in encouraging visitors to the countryside, including businesses, local authorities and voluntary organisations in any part of England, to be a part of the "Your Countryside—You're Welcome" campaign which is being led by some 50 national organisations. Over 120 organisations are already involved and some imaginative events have been arranged at a regional and local level in many parts of England. I recently wrote to all MPs asking them to engage with local aspects of this initiative, which arises from a recommendations of the Rural Task Force. I have also written to all local authorities. This is not a top-down initiative, nor is it just another publicity campaign. The theme "Your Countryside—You're Welcome" creates an opportunity to publicise local initiatives.

For instance, the Countryside Agency and the National Trust will hold a joint event at Dimbola Lodge, Tennyson Down on the Isle of Wight on 1 March to celebrate the purchase by the trust, with help from the agency, of land at Farringford Farm: the event will also be used to promote "Your Countryside—You're Welcome". Dimbola Lodge is the former home of Julia Margaret Cameron, the first prominent woman photographer, and the surrounding area was popular with nineteenth-century writers and artists. The land acquired will improve access to the coast and will be managed to enhance its landscape quality and biodiversity. I hope that further events may be arranged later in the year to promote the message that visitors are welcome to the Isle of Wight.

Warm Front Scheme

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on the grant levels available under the Warm Front scheme; and what proposals she has to increase the maximum grants payable. [36400]

Mr. Meacher: The new Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES), marketed as the Warm Front Team, was launched on 1 June 2000. It provides two levels of financial assistance for the installation of insulation and heating measures dependent upon the needs of the householder and property type:

HEES—£1,500 for low income households with children under 16, disabled persons or suffering long-term sickness on a qualifying benefit; and

HEES Plus—£2,500 for over-60s on an income-related benefit.

In addition, HEES Plus recipients who live in Home Office designated high crime areas may be able to have security measures—door and window locks—provided from a separate Home Office grant.

The Department recently reviewed the individual grant maximum, taking advice from the scheme managers on expected rates of labour and materials for the coming year and representations from trade associations. As a result of this, from 15 February the grant maximums have been increased from £1,000 to £1,500 and from £2,000 to £2,500 respectively. Eligibility has also been extended to include pregnant women on low-incomes in receipt of a maternity certificate.

Radon Gas

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her statement of 30 January 2000, *Official Report*, columns 123–26WH, on radon gas, what the location is of the area that has over 5,300 Bq/m^3 of radon gas emissions. [36432]

Mr. Meacher: The radon level of 5,300 Bq/m^3 was found in the electoral ward of Cornwood and Sparkwell in South Hams district council's area. I quoted this level to illustrate the highest concentration of radon that has been measured in an area of South Devon. Although radon levels have been found to be significantly above the Action Level (200 Bq/m^3) in other parts of South Hams district council and other local authority areas in Devon, the radon concentration measured in Cornwood and Sparkwell is exceptional.

Waste Disposal Incinerators

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take further measures to ensure that emissions from waste disposal incinerators are effectively monitored; and if she will make a statement. [36706]

Mr. Meacher: Emission standards apply throughout the EU to all incineration facilities, applicable to both old and new facilities. Monitoring is carried out to ensure these emission standards are met and to identify breaches of these standards, which may lead to enforcement action.

We are currently transposing the new waste incineration directive, which will further tighten the emissions standards. The older generation of incinerators has now been replaced with newer, cleaner technology, and most municipal waste incinerators in this country already meet the tough standards that will be introduced with the new directive. Incinerator emissions of all air pollutants are now less than 1.5 per cent. of total UK emissions.

Additionally the Environment Agency has recently varied the authorisations for existing Municipal Solid Waste Incinerators to reduce the dioxin emission limit to 0.1 ng/m^3 (ie no more than one part in 10 billion). This is ahead of the timetable required by the recently adopted waste incineration directive. At this stage we do not consider that further measures are required.

Grazing

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government intend to change the rules on common grazing rights after the Bettison *v.* Langton ruling in 1998. [36437]

Alun Michael: Following a judgment delivered in another place in the case of Bettison and Others *v.* Langton and Others on 17 May 2001, it is conclusive in law that rights of common for grazing, registered for a fixed number as required by the Commons Registration Act 1965, are severable from the land to which they were originally attached. In the consultation paper "Greater Protection and Better Management of Common Land in England and Wales" launched in February 2000, the Government included an outline proposal to prevent severance of rights of common grazing. We hope to announce our conclusions on this, and all the other issues raised in the consultation paper, in the spring.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to prevent people using common grazing as a transit stop for sheep and cattle. [36453]

Alun Michael: Powers already exist to control the unlawful turning out of animals on common land. The landowner or the holders of common rights could take action in the courts to prevent this activity. Where the owner of registered common land is not known, any local authority in whose area the common lies has a discretionary power under section 9 of the Commons Registration Act 1965 to act in the capacity of the owner to prevent unlawful interference, and may bring proceedings in respect of any offence concerning the land. Where the common is subject to a scheme of management under the Commons Act 1899, the local authority may make byelaws to prevent any person from turning out animals on to the common without lawful authority.

Rights of Way

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when section 4 of the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 will be implemented. [36417]

Alun Michael: Section 4 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 came into force on 30 January 2001. It requires the Countryside Agency (in England) and the Countryside Council for Wales to prepare maps of open country and registered common land for the purposes of the statutory right of access under that Act. The Countryside Agency has recently concluded consultation on draft maps for part of the south-east and lower north-west regions. A draft map for southern England is due to be issued in June this year. Further information about the Agency's mapping programme is contained on its website, at: www.countryside.gov.uk/access/mapping/.

HEALTH

Nutrition

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number, *(b)* percentage and *(c)* age of people (i) admitted to and (ii) discharged from hospital who were malnourished, in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [12918]

Yvette Cooper: The tables show figures on the number of admissions and discharges of people whose main diagnosis was malnutrition from 1995–96 to 1999–2000.

The discharges figures are slightly higher than the admissions figures. This may be that the main diagnosis prior to discharge may be different from the admission diagnosis. For example, a patient could be admitted for treatment of a condition resulting from malnutrition, and moved to another consultant afterwards to be treated for the malnutrition. It is also possible that a patient is admitted for an unrelated condition, but also have malnutrition diagnosed while in hospital and be treated for this before discharge.

Discharges from NHS hospitals in England where the patient's main diagnosis was malnutrition, 1995–96 to 1999–2000

	Malnutrition discharges				
Age	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
0–4	11	13	15	6	11
10–14	7	14	13	15	6
15–44	60	71	59	74	54
45–64	57	45	59	61	67
65–74	43	34	36	47	30
75–84	54	47	45	39	45
85 and over	37	25	27	30	27
Not known	0	0	0	0	0
Total	270	249	253	272	240

Note:

The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital. Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid data, except for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 which are not yet adjusted for.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Discharges from NHS hospitals in England where the patient's main diagnosis was malnutrition, 1995–96 to 1999–2000

	All discharges				
Age	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
0–4	1,131,637	1,111,261	1,131,555	1,126,564	1,107,961
10–14	520,258	504,506	515,462	511,176	506,246
15–44	3,611,179	3,542,691	3,607,351	3,670,575	3,659,975
45–64	2,093,679	2,111,733	2,228,626	2,366,588	2,434,419
65–74	1,377,965	1,368,162	1,432,555	1,489,842	1,527,800
75–84	1,151,994	1,178,939	1,247,991	1,309,570	1,353,941
85 and over	473,121	556,468	603,873	563,039	576,802
Not known	4,445	9,080	16,209	23,156	25,285
Total	10,364,278	10,382,840	10,783,622	11,060,510	11,192,429

Note:

The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital. Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid data, except for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 which are not yet adjusted for.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Discharges from NHS hospitals in England where the patient's main diagnosis was malnutrition, 1995–96 to 1999–2000

	Malnutrition discharges per 100,000				
Age	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
0–4	1.0	1.2	1.3	0.5	1.0
10–14	1.3	2.8	2.5	2.9	1.2
15–44	1.7	2.0	1.6	2.0	1.5
45–64	2.7	2.1	2.6	2.6	2.8
65–74	3.1	2.5	2.5	3.2	2.0
75–84	4.7	4.0	3.6	3.0	3.3
85 and over	7.8	4.5	4.5	5.3	4.7
Not known	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.1

Note:

The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital. Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid data, except for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 which are not yet adjusted for.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Admissions to NHS hospitals in England where the patient's main diagnosis was malnutrition, 1995–96 to 1999–2000

	Malnutrition admissions				
Age	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
0–4	11	11	12	5	10
10–14	7	14	12	15	6
15–44	53	65	57	72	54
45–64	56	45	65	63	63
65–74	38	28	30	43	28
75–84	45	43	42	38	41
85 and over	35	27	31	22	24
Not known	0	0	0	0	0
Total	245	234	249	258	226

Note:

The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital. Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid data, except for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 which are not yet adjusted for.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Admissions to NHS hospitals in England where the patient's main diagnosis was malnutrition, 1995–96 to 1999–2000

	All admissions				
Age	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
0–4	1,132,151	1,097,885	1,123,059	1,124,564	1,098,320
10–14	523,318	493,916	509,949	507,001	501,534
15–44	3,585,082	3,496,224	3,547,914	3,636,100	3,619,428
45–64	2,070,659	2,050,262	2,180,458	2,333,056	2,400,880
65–74	1,353,144	1,322,310	1,390,765	1,459,225	1,500,357
75–84	1,122,025	1,129,724	1,196,840	1,271,028	1,319,641
85 and over	456,147	530,710	574,593	539,601	556,687
Not known	4,476	7,929	13,958	18,397	29,097
Total	10,247,002	10,128,960	10,537,536	10,888,972	11,025,944

Note:

The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital. Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid data, except for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 which are not yet adjusted for.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Admissions to NHS hospitals in England where the patient's main diagnosis was malnutrition, 1995–96 to 1999–2000

	Malnutrition admissions per 100,000				
Age	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
0–4	1.0	1.0	1.1	0.4	0.9
10–14	1.3	2.8	2.4	3.0	1.2
15–44	1.5	1.9	1.6	2.0	1.5
45–64	2.7	2.2	3.0	2.7	2.6
65–74	2.8	2.1	2.2	2.9	1.9
75–84	4.0	3.8	3.5	3.0	3.1
85 and over	7.7	5.1	5.4	4.1	4.3
Not known	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.0

Note:

The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital. Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid data, except for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 which are not yet adjusted for.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Strategic Health Authorities

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will be responsible for the appointment of the chief executives of the new strategic health authorities. [15051]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The appointment of the chief executives designate of strategic health authorities was through a process of open competition. The chief executives posts were advertised nationally. The appointment process included the NHS chief executive, regional commissioners from the national health service Appointments Commission, the directors of health and social care in the Department, patients' representatives and the health authority chairs designate. The NHS chief executive had overall responsibility for the process. Chief executives will be formally appointed to health authorities on the basis of their franchise plans, following the establishment of the new health authorities in April. Franchise plans will specify how chief executives propose to deliver the functions for which the health authorities are responsible.

Health Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the outcome was of the Health Council held in Brussels on 15 November; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [16530]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Health represented the United Kingdom.

The Council reached political agreement to adopt a common position on the directive setting standards of quality and safety for blood and blood components. Although a few member states were disappointed that there were no strict requirements for donations to be voluntary and unpaid agreement was reached on an acceptable compromise form of words.

In the orientation debate on the directive on tobacco advertising and sponsorship all the delegations, which spoke, stressed the need to ensure that its basis be legally sound so that it is not struck down by the European Court Judgment as the previous directive had been. The UK, along with other member states expressed support for the directive. The UK raised concerns that global sponsorship should benefit from derogation until 1 October 2006. The UK also mentioned the need to ensure that the directive was compatible with other legislation pertaining to e-commerce. There was some discussion of the scope of the directive and Commissioner Byrne explained that it did not cover indirect advertising. Some states felt the advertising ban should not apply to local press and publications. There was no opposition to the inclusion of advertising for cigarette papers within the scope of the ban.

Member states discussed the health aspects of bio-terrorism agreed presidency conclusions on the need for a comprehensive programme of co-operation in this area; strengthening existing networks and exploring other opportunities to ensure a coherent approach in support of national plans.

Commissioner Byrne made a statement on recent developments in cross-border healthcare. Member states expressed concern over recent ECJ rulings that treaty provisions on freedom to provide services applied to health services, which had previously been thought to lie outside treaty competence. The Commission called for further discussions on the detail and will produce a discussion document for the Spanish presidency conference in February. The UK explained that the rulings had implications for domestic legislation, to which we were responding, and that there was a need to look further at competence boundaries. Other member states were of the same opinion.

Commissioner Byrne gave an update on preparations for the next round of negotiations on the World Health Organisation framework convention on tobacco control. He indicated that the Community position on agriculture subsidies would need to be updated to take account of references to phasing out of tobacco subsidies in the communication to Gothenburg on sustainable development. The planned Commission communication on 'Health and Poverty policy' will help pave the way for financial support for implementation of the convention in developing countries.

Council adopted unanimously a Recommendation on the prudent use of anti-microbial agents; and Conclusions on stress and depression related problems.

The Council noted the Commission's updates on the revision of the medical devices Directive 93/42/EEC and the current state of play in the process of setting up the European Food Authority.

Commissioner Byrne explained that the Scientific Committee investigating the impact of electro-magnetic fields thought there may be a link with DNA damage and multiple exposure, but there was insufficient evidence as yet. The Commission will recommend further studies to fill the knowledge gaps.

Patient Consultations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average patient consultation times were in each health authority area for *(a)* general practitioner and *(b)* hospital consultant appointments in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [19293]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The data are not collected either routinely or by health authority. The latest figure available, for general practitioners only, was in the GP Workload Survey of 1992–93. This showed the average GP consultation time with a patient was 8.4 minutes.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in meeting the Public Service Agreement target of efficiency and other value for money gains in personal social services expenditure of two per cent. in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 and three per cent. in 2001–02. [14947]

Jacqui Smith: Information provided by councils during in-year monitoring suggests that for social services in England the estimated efficiency gain was 2.1 per cent. for 1999–2000, 2.3 per cent. for 2000–01 and 2.5 per cent. for 2001–02. The total estimated efficiency gain over the three years was therefore 7.1 per cent, all but meeting the total of the efficiency targets over three years of 7.2 per cent.

"Removing Barriers"

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1042W, concerning the report, "Removing Barriers", which of the report's recommendations were acted upon and with what result. [11957]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* The two recommendations included in the report which related to the Department of Health were that there should be additional funds provided to local authorities and there should be a dialogue between the Department of Work and Pensions, the Local Government Association and the Department.

Pensioner Mobility and Safety

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what initiatives there are to improve pensioner mobility and safety. [19355]

Jacqui Smith: We recognise the importance of improving and maintaining the mobility and safety of older people. A number of initiatives within both health and social care will contribute to these aims. Of prime importance are the National Service Frameworks for Older People and Coronary Heart Disease, which stress the importance of physical exercise. Other initiatives of particular importance to older people include intermediate care and the integration of community equipment services. Also, to reduce the incidence of serious injuries caused by falls in older people, the Department is funding several pilot schemes that help frail older people in nursing homes and sheltered accommodation improve their ability to walk without falling.

EU Health Expenditure

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his latest assessment is of the average *(a)* private, *(b)* public and *(c)* total spending on health in EU member states expressed as a percentage of GDP; and what he expects those figures to be in 2004–05. [21058]

Mr. Hutton: The latest figures for the European Union member states are as follows:

Average health care expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product

Expenditure	*1998*
Private	2.0
Public	5.9
Total	7.9

Source:
OECD data 2001

There are no projections for changes in the balance between public and private health care spending. There is no evidence to suggest that in 2004–05 the average total health spending as a percentage of gross domestic product will be any different to current levels.

Ambulances

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the average time ambulance crews have waited over the last 12 months with the patients they have brought to the accident and emergency unit at Oldchurch hospital in Romford. [22882]

Mr. Hutton: Ambulance crews wait longer at Oldchurch hospital before they are ready to go to their next call than at other London hospitals. While it is not acceptable that patients are kept waiting before being booked in at accident and emergency, they are receiving medical care during this time.

The London Ambulance Service (LAS) is working together with the local NHS organisations to further improve turnaround times. The LAS records turnaround times as the time taken from the crew arriving at the hospital to telling central ambulance control that they are ready to receive another call. This includes any time taken to complete paperwork on the patient, clean the vehicle, do a clinical handover to A&E staff or have a bathroom break.

Action being taken to improve turnaround times at Oldchurch hospital include:

A London Ambulance Service liaison officer based at Oldchurch to work closely with A&E staff to identify where the hold-ups are for patients in the handover system.

A process mapping exercise being undertaken by Barking and Havering health authority to look at patient access to A&E to see where are the hold-ups in the system.

Recent additional funding will help address pressures in A&E and emergency services.

On 25 October 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a £118 million investment for reducing long waits in A&E. This includes £50 million to implement the reforming emergency care strategy and £40 million to fund an additional 600 A&E nursing posts. Out of this money, Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals national health service trust will receive £154,206 this year to provide additional nurses for its two A&E departments and a further £632,243 next year.

Child Benefit

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to give child benefit to foster carers who look after children under the age of 16. [34629]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

Financial support for looked after children, including those placed with foster carers, is proved by local authorities under section 23 of the Children Act 1989. Foster carers receive an allowance under section 23 and are therefore not eligible for Child Benefit.

24-hour Community Services

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on 24-hour community services care. [23700]

Jacqui Smith: People's needs can arise at any time and we expect councils with social services responsibilities to have arrangements in place to enable them to respond appropriately and promptly.

A recent report "Out Of Hours" from the social services inspectorate recommends councils should review their out of hours services. The report gives a range of good practice examples.

In addition, the Care Direct helpline, which is currently being piloted, will provide information and practical help for older people around the clock, and the NHS Plan announced our commitment to establish crisis resolution teams which can be accessed 24 hours a day by those with specialist mental health needs. The provision of intermediate care should include a rapid response service, available out of hours, to ensure people may remain independent at home.

Public-Private Partnerships (Trusts)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 889W, on capital assets, if he will place in the Library information on the accounting treatment of the public-private partnership projects relating to *(a)* Leicestershire and Rutland Headquarters NHST, *(b)* York Health Services NHST Provision of MRI Service, *(c)* Leeds Community and Mental Health NHST Information System, *(d)* Rotherham General Hospitals NHST Entrance Redevelopment, and *(e)* Royal National Orthopaedic NHST; and if he will make a statement. [24177]

Mr. Hutton: We have today placed in the Library information on the accounting treatment of the public-private partnership (PPP) projects for Royal National Orthopaedic National Health Service Trust; York Health

Services NHS Trust (provision of Magnetic Resonance Imaging service); Leeds Community and Mental Health NHS Trust (Information System) and Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust Concourse.

There is no formal written audit opinion for Leicestershire and Rutland Headquarters NHS Trust although the accounting treatment of this building has regularly been discussed with the trust's auditors. The trust have confirmed that it is accounted for as an operating lease.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital admissions there were in the most recent year for which figures are available in respect of *(a)* a disabling anxiety disorder, *(b)* clinical depression, *(c)* manic depression and *(d)* schizophrenia. [24539]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information is not available in the format requested.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met Ministers from the Department for Works and Pensions to discuss ways of helping those with mental health problems to find paid employment. [36879]

Jacqui Smith: The Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions officials continue to work very closely together to ensure that policies are implemented across Government to empower all disabled people, including those with mental health problems, to make the most of their abilities at work and in the wider society.

Drug Awareness Programmes

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on drug awareness programmes in England in each of the last 20 years. [25124]

Ms Blears: The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has made the following amounts available to directly support drug, alcohol and tobacco education in schools through the Standards Fund, Grants for Education and Support Training, and Education Support Grants. The figures in the table are from 1986–87 to 2002–03. DfES may have made moneys available prior to 1986–87 and will have also made other moneys available to support drug, alcohol and tobacco education in schools indirectly, but these figures could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	£ million
1986–87	2.0
1987–88	2.0
1988–95	0
1995–96	5.9
1996–97	5.8
1997–98	5.8
1998–99	7.0
1999–2000	7.5
2000–01	7.5
2001–02	13.1
2002–03	13.2

The following table details the DfES moneys allocated to the Health Education Authority (HEA) through the Standards Fund for Drug Education. These figures taken from the HEA's annual reports indicate how much was spent in the year beginning 1995 to 2000 on drug awareness programmes. These figures are taken from funding for drug education programmes as a whole.

	£ million
1995–96	3.8
1996–97	4.7
1997–98	4.8
1998–99	2.0
1999–2000	1.3

The Department also funded the HEA's National Drugs Campaign. Before 1998–99, the figure for the HEA National Drugs Campaign was £5 million per year. For 1998–99 the Department paid £2.0 million. For 1999–2000 and in 2000–01 the HEA had finished its work.

Ambulance Waiting Times (Havering)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is for an ambulance in the London Borough of Havering, in response to an emergency 999 call. [26458]

Ms Blears: Information about the response times to emergency calls and other requests for transport is collected by the Department by ambulance service and not by borough. Information for London Ambulance National Health Service Trust, which covers the London Borough of Havering, and all other ambulance trusts are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy is in the Library and available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Foster Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on which date legislation making unregistered foster care a criminal offence came into force. [27356]

Jacqui Smith: Foster carers are not registered with the local authority. Instead they are approved by a panel set up for the purpose of approving foster carers. Once approval is confirmed the local authority is required to enter in a register the particulars for each foster parent in their area who is approved, and each person not being an approved foster parent with whom a child is placed under regulation 11 in their area. This is not intended to mean that foster carers are 'registered' with the local authority.

In the case of private fostering arrangements, there is no requirement for private foster carers to register with the local authority. Both the private foster carer and the person with parental responsibility have a duty to notify the local authority that a private fostering arrangement is in existence, or about to take place, in order for that local authority to fulfil its obligations under Part 9 of the Children Act 1989.

The role of the local authority is to satisfy themselves that the welfare of the child is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by supervising, regulating and advising in respect of the private placement. The local authority is required to visit at specified intervals and to report on these visits. They have the power to impose requirements, or if there are serious concerns, to prohibit the fostering arrangement.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on which date the code of practice on recruiting, selecting, training and supporting foster carers came into force. [27355]

Jacqui Smith: Joint work on a code of practice for the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers was carried out by the United Kingdom Joint Working Party on Foster Care. The document setting that code out was published in June 1999, and was intended to be implemented from that date.

EU Treatment (English Patients)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the treatment of English patients in other EU countries. [28019]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* In the light of rulings of the European Court of Justice, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in August 2001 that national health service health authorities and trusts could commission treatment for their patients overseas. Since October 2001 three test-bed sites in the south east of England have been working through the legal and practical issues involved in sending patients abroad. The first patients to go abroad for routine NHS-funded surgery travelled to Lille on 18 January. By the end of the test bed scheme in March this year around 200 patients are likely to have travelled to France and Germany for treatment. Guidance for the NHS will be published, based on the experience of the test bed sites.

The Department plans to launch a tender exercise later this year for surgical procedures overseas, as part of its wider strategy to reduce waiting times and enhance patient choice.

It is also possible for patients to be referred to Europe under the long-standing E112 arrangements described on pages 36–37 of the Department of Health leaflet "Health Advice for Travellers", copies of which are available in the Library and to the public from post offices.

Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31776]

Ms Blears: Interchange is a key component of the reform agenda. The Modernising Government White Paper committed us to increasing interchange, in particular by bringing in more people on secondment and sending more of our people out. Secondments and attachments are part of the interchange initiative, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: voluntary, education, health, public and private.

Central Records are held on the following secondments commenced in the years shown:

	Public sector	*Private sector*	*Total*
1998–99	19	1	20
1999–2000	53	2	55
2000–01	85	1	86
2001–02[1]	31	2	33
Total	188	6	194

[1] To date

Health and Social Care Act

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what announcement he made on the powers in Section 4 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 to establish and support private firms to undertake tasks within the National Health Service, prior to the conclusion of the Second Reading of the Bill in the House of Commons. [28678]

Mr. Hutton: On 6 December 2000, in a press notice which accompanied the announcement of the Health and Social Care Bill in the Queen's Speech, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said:

> "Primary care is the first port of call for patients. The biggest hospital building programme in the NHS is already well under way, thanks to the success of the Private Finance Initiative. This Bill will provide for a complementary programme of public private partnership to be invested in primary care services—improving access in the most needy areas of the country".

HEALTH

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31796]

Ms Blears: The Department takes theft and fraud prevention very seriously. Our existing arrangements for deterring and detecting theft and fraud include internal control systems, auditor scrutiny, asset holder accountability, and investigation of losses. Some examples of our existing security controls are:

- security awareness training for new entrants
- a range of guides and advice for staff on the electronic notice board
- tight physical security measures on the Department's estate, with 24 hour guarding
- specialists who are responsible for preventing, detecting and investigating fraud
- appropriate action taken against perpetrators.

Following a recent departmental security review, we have strengthened our arrangements, including:

- the setting-up of a cross-Department senior security management forum to strengthen policy and compliance
- the involvement of a professional specialist unit for the national health service in departmental fraud casework
- an increased input by building managers in countering theft of the Department's assets
- more direct involvement of senior management in security measures
- an annual security awareness week targeted at the entire department and its agencies.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities since 1 October 2001 have revised their contracts with nursing homes to ensure that the payment for free nursing care is passed on to the self-funding resident in the form of a reduced fee. [31300]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The guidance on implementation of free nursing care makes it clear that nursing home residents should not be charged for services funded by the national health service and that the NHS locally will develop contracting procedures with homes that the financial benefit of the NHS payment should be discounted in any fee payable by the resident to the home. Information is not available centrally on how each health authority or primary care trust has handled this.

Health Clinic (South Woodham Ferrers)

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to establish an X-ray facility in the health clinic at South Woodham Ferrers. [31640]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* Maldon and South Chelmsford Primary Care Group put forward a bid towards the end of the 2000–01 financial year to the then National Patients' Access Team (now part of the National Health Service Modernisation Agency) for digital imaging facilities to be made available at South Woodham Ferrers clinic. The National Patients' Access Team considered the bid and although there was some capital funding available at that time unfortunately there were insufficient funds available to fund the purchase of this equipment.

The overall concept of providing an X-ray facility in the local general practitioner clinic is a good one that would appear to enhance local patient services. However the overall cost of setting up a service with a digital X-ray machine is a lot greater than that of the equipment alone. There would be significant recurring staff and maintenance costs involved in the provision of such a service. The primary care trust would have to be able to meet these recurring costs from within their existing resources. Further more the type of X-rays that could be done out of a main X-ray department is limited to chest and extremity radiography only.

While the modernisation agency does not have funds available to support this, the PCT may wish to prioritise its own funds to purchase such equipment. The Medical Devices Agency would be able to advise on suitable equipment that could provide a simple service at a lower cost than a full digital system.

Cancer

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of years of life lost following the potential blocking of the use of irinotecan in first line use for advanced colo-rectal cancer; and if this criteria is a feature of NICE assessments; [32772]

(2) what assessment he has made of the NICE guidance on the colo-rectal cancer drugs *(a)* irinotecan, *(b)* oxaliplatin and *(c)* ralitrexel in relation to cancer survival rates; and what figures on European survival rates he has collated. [32771]

Yvette Cooper: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has not yet issued guidance on the appraisal for colo-rectal cancer drugs and the draft guidance is currently subject to appeal.

Figures on European survival rates from colon and rectal cancers are given in the tables.

Colon cancer—age standardised relative survival (percentage) Europe 1985–89[1]

	Males		Females	
Country	*1 year*	*2 year*	*1 year*	*2 year*
Austria	75.0	54.7	60.5	44.0
Denmark	63.7	39.2	64.0	42.7
England	61.6	41.0	60.5	41.3
Estonia	51.5	36.5	52.7	38.0
Finland	68.6	47.6	68.8	50.0
France	73.7	51.8	72.5	54.0
Germany	66.4	49.6	70.0	49.9
Iceland	61.6	48.7	67.4	51.8
Italy	67.3	46.9	68.5	47.0
Netherlands	75.7	58.7	72.4	55.7
Poland	43.4	24.8	43.1	22.6
Scotland	61.5	41.1	61.3	41.1
Slovakia	58.7	38.9	54.1	38.3
Slovenia	50.1	33.2	53.9	38.1
Spain	66.6	49.5	66.5	49.4
Sweden	71.4	51.8	73.4	55.2
Switzerland	74.6	52.3	73.7	49.4
Europe 1985–89	66.3	46.8	66.4	46.7

Rectal cancer—age standardised relative survival (percentage) Europe 1985–89[1]

	Males		Females	
Country	*1 year*	*2 year*	*1 year*	*2 year*
Austria	71.7	46.7	75.6	54.2
Denmark	69.7	38.2	69.7	41.5
England	67.4	40.1	68.2	41.0
Estonia	56.8	34.1	61.4	35.5
Finland	80.4	49.3	75.5	46.1
France	78.6	48.4	79.6	48.4
Germany	74.5	43.5	72.4	43.6
Iceland	—	—	80.8	52.5
Italy	72.4	43.0	74.0	44.2
Netherlands	79.0	52.4	80.4	53.8
Poland	52.9	21.2	53.1	21.9
Scotland	65.5	36.3	65.2	38.2
Slovakia	60.0	35.1	62.4	37.1
Slovenia	60.4	28.6	60.3	31.3
Spain	71.9	43.3	70.3	43.1
Sweden	76.1	49.2	79.5	51.9
Switzerland	75.9	52.6	82.9	51.6
Europe 1985–89	71.9	42.6	71.8	42.9

[1] Survival of Cancer Patients in Europe: the Eurocare-2 Study 1999

MMR

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people contracted *(a)* measles, *(b)* mumps and *(c)* rubella in each of the last five years. [32981]

Yvette Cooper: The number of confirmed cases of measles, mumps and rubella between 1996 and 2000 are shown in the table. The data for 2001 are provisional and are therefore subject to change.

	Measles	*Mumps*	*Rubella*
1996	112	94	2,759
1997	177	180	99
1998	56	118	122
1999	94	366	161
2000	100	697	60
2001[1]	69	753	39

[1] Provisional data

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the single measles vaccine ceased to be available on the national health service; and for what reason it was withdrawn. [34357]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* Measles vaccine was replaced with MMR from October 1988. Since then each of the manufacturers have advised the Department that they no longer intended to supply single measles vaccine to the United Kingdom.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures he has collected for MMR vaccination rates in the October to December 2001 quarter in the UK, broken down by health authority area. [34877]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The information requested is not yet available.

When published the information about coverage rates by region for children who have received a primary MMR vaccination by their second birthday and a booster vaccination by age five is contained in the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2000/01". A copy of the bulletin will be placed in the Library and can also be found on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0121.htm.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has collated on the countries in the EU which license single vaccinations for measles, mumps and rubella. [35423]

Yvette Cooper: We do not keep a database of single component MMR vaccines licensed in European Union member states. However, all EU member states recommend a two dose vaccination schedule with MMR vaccine. None routinely recommend single vaccines instead of MMR.

There is no comprehensive list available of measles, mumps and rubella combination vaccines, two-component vaccines or single component vaccines that are currently licensed in Europe . The Medicines Control Agency has obtained the following information from "The European Drug Index" (1997 edition), from national compendia of licensed medicinal products in France, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden (1998 to 2000 editions), and from two companies. While these references indicate that such products are currently licensed as listed in the named countries, it is not known whether or not they are on the market at the present time.

In the EU and Switzerland

There are combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccines currently licensed in all countries in the EU, including the United Kingdom.

Measles plus rubella vaccines are licensed in at least Italy, Switzerland and the UK.

Measles plus mumps vaccines are licensed in at least Germany, Portugal and Switzerland.

At least one measles single component vaccine is licensed in Italy, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland, Portugal, Spain, Greece and the UK.

At least one single component mumps vaccine is licensed in Italy, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland, Portugal and the UK.

There are numerous single component rubella vaccines licensed across the EU, including the UK.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collects on the number of children who have received single measles, mumps and rubella inoculations since the introduction of the triple MMR vaccine *(a)* privately and *(b)* on the national health service. [34496]

Yvette Cooper: From the information collected it is not possible to distinguish whether vaccinations were done privately or on the national health service.

Patient Malnutrition

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics his Department collects concerning *(a)* (i) primary and (ii) contributory diagnosis relating to malnutrition and *(b)* the weight of patients on (1) admission and (2) discharge from hospital by age. [32624]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Department collects information on in-patients as part of the hospital episodes statistics (HES) system, which contains details of patients admitted to and treated in

National Health Service hospitals in England. HES records contain up to seven diagnoses (coded to ICD10 where malnutrition is E40 to E46). The first of these is the main reason that the patient was in hospital; any subsidiary or secondary diagnoses are recorded in the last six fields. Admissions to hospital with a main diagnosis of malnutrition, by age, are given in the table.

No data are held on the weight of the patient.

Admissions to NHS hospitals in England where the patient's main diagnosis was malnutrition

Age	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
0–4	11	11	12	5	10	17
10–14	7	14	12	15	6	5
15–44	53	65	57	72	54	33
45–64	56	45	65	63	63	47
65–74	38	28	30	43	28	35
75–84	45	43	42	38	41	33
85 and over	35	27	31	22	24	27
Not Known	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	245	234	249	258	226	197

Note:

Admissions are defined as the first period of patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that admissions do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year. Figures have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data is ungrossed).

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Disabled Parking

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued on the level of minimum provision of disabled parking spaces at NHS hospitals. [33497]

Mr. Hutton: National Health Service Estates, an executive agency of the Department of Health, provides advice and guidance to the NHS, principally through a series of documents. These represent best practice guidance, and through their adoption, NHS trusts and health authorities should comply with current legislation affecting disabled people.

NHS Estates guidance document "Car Parking" (1996—Health Facilities Note 21) suggests overall proportion of car park spaces for disabled people for healthcare premises, whilst accepting that the number and different types of car park spaces would be dependent on the range of healthcare services and facilities provided.

The Department also issued "Doubly Disabled—Equality for Disabled People in the new NHS—Access to Services" (1999). This guidance gives advice on accessibility for disabled people including 'Transport, cars and parking'. To help underpin this process, an access audit tool was developed and made available to all NHS bodies in 1999.

Angiogram Assessment

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the waiting lists for angiogram assessment in *(a)* England and *(b)* Gloucestershire. [33056]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Data are not collected on the number of patients waiting for angiograms. On the 21 November 2001, we announced details of the first wave of £65 million of New Opportunities Fund money which will provide new angiography equipment at 37 hospitals. This was matched by £15 million from the Treasury Capital Modernisation Fund to be used on building laboratory facilities for angiography at 22 hospitals. Further Treasury Capital Modernisation Fund money for buildings will follow to match second and third wave New Opportunities Fund funding. This first wave of funding will enable the National Health Service to carry out an extra 14,000 angiograms each year, and so reduce waiting times.

Walsgrave Hospital

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why the announcement of the CHI Progress report into the investigation of the Walsgrave Hospital has been postponed. [32657]

Yvette Cooper: *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* A Commission for Health Improvement team revisited University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, which includes Walsgrave General Hospital, to assess progress in implementing the trust's action plan, following a clinical governance review last year. The visit took place on 22–23 January 2002, and a report is due to be published in March 2002.

Maternity Units

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many maternity units there are in England and Wales; how many have fewer than *(a)* 2,500 and *(b)* 2,000 births a year; how many with approximately 2,000 births a year are midwife only; and what his policy is on the size of midwife only units. [33716]

Yvette Cooper: *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The Department estimates that there are about 250 maternity units in England.

Information for England about the number of births in each unit and which of these are midwife only is not collected centrally by the relevant Departments.

Statistics on all births in England and Wales is available on the Office of National Statistics webpage at: *www.statistics.gov.uk*

The National Health Service provides care for women in various sizes of midwife only units. It is for local health authorities, trusts and communities to decide on the local pattern of service provision.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years, giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34184]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportional cost.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent inspector posts there are in the establishment scheme for the National Care Standards Commission for each type of establishment and agency covered by regulations laid down under the Care Standards Act 2000; how many will be in post as at 1 April; and when all posts will be filled.* [32671]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The National Care Standards Commission is funded to employ 1,475 inspectors. The NCSC will allocate case loads following the completion of the staff transfer from local authorities and health authorities.

It is currently anticipated that the Commission will need to recruit around 300 additional inspectors to supplement those who transfer. This recruitment is under way and the profile of the take on will match the phased introduction of services new to regulation after 1 April 2002.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent direct observation of service delivery will form part of the routine inspection of establishments by the National Care Standards Commission. [32669]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The National Care Standards Commission is still finalising its regulatory procedures which will include inspection methodologies. It is anticipated that the Commission will use a range of techniques as part of their routine inspections and these will include direct observation of service delivery.

Palliative Care

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the underprovision of palliative care; what plans he has to expand the provision, increase expertise and move toward 24 hour care; and if he will make a statement. [34468]

Yvette Cooper: The National Palliative Care Survey (2000) commissioned by the Department, identified inequality of palliative care provision. The NHS Cancer Plan acknowledged this and that the national health service contribution to the costs of specialist palliative care needed to increase. The Plan announced that by 2004 the NHS will invest an additional £50 million in specialist palliative care in order to address these inequalities. This will match, on a national basis, the investment by the voluntary sector and will enable the NHS to increase their contribution to the costs hospices incur for agreed levels of service. A supportive and palliative care strategy is being developed under the plan to ensure best treatment and care from when cancer is first suspected through to death and bereavement. Part of this strategy includes a review of out-of-hours palliative care services working with other key organisations such as Macmillan Cancer Relief.

NHS Dentists

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial arrangements are in place to help dentists set up NHS practices by way of *(a)* a grant and *(b)* a preferential loan. [34042]

Ms Blears: Over the last two financial years we have allocated £10 million from the Dental Care Development Fund and the Dentistry Action Plan Fund to support local plans to improve access. This money enables health authorities to assist dentists seeking to set up new practices and to expand and modernise existing ones.

Probiotics

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has conducted into the beneficial effects of probiotics; and if he will make a statement. [33965]

Yvette Cooper: The Department and the Food Standards Agency have not funded any research to date into the beneficial effects of probiotics.

Trolley Waits (Hillingdon Hospital)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had a trolley wait of four hours or more in Hillingdon hospital in each of the last eight years. [34099]

Ms Blears: The number of patients waiting on a trolley is not collected centrally.

Primary Care (Running Costs)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the running costs are of the primary care groups and the primary care trusts in 2001–02. [33992]

Mr. Hutton: Information for 2001–02 is not available.

In 2000–01 management costs for primary care groups and primary care trusts were £158 million and £24 million respectively.

Residential Care (Elderly)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost is to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* the private sector in Lancashire of bringing residential homes for the elderly up to the standards set by Government. [34567]

Jacqui Smith: The cost of complying with the National Minimum Standards for care homes for older people will vary from home to home, depending on the extent to which these homes already meet the standards. The standards are based on existing good practice, and many homes already meet or exceed the standards.

Laser Eye Surgery

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's assessment is of the *(a)* effectiveness of laser eye surgery as an alternative to glasses and *(b)* risks involved; whether he has plans to introduce such treatment on the national health service; and if he will make a statement. [34899]

Ms Blears: Laser surgery is not available under the national health service. Refractive errors can be successfully corrected by spectacles and contact lenses and optical vouchers are available to children and people on low incomes to help with the cost of these appliances. I understand that research shows that surgery is effective in treating selected patients with refractive errors and that research continues into the long-term effects.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy towards nutritional supplements in food, with particular reference to EU directives under discussion. [34636]

Yvette Cooper: A common position on a draft European Union directive on food supplements was agreed by the Council of Ministers on 3 December and is currently at second reading stage in the European Parliament.

The Government's view is that in the interests of consumer choice, the law should allow food supplements which are safe and properly labelled to be freely marketed. The proposed directive would establish a framework for harmonised controls on vitamin and mineral content of food supplements and introduce a number of useful labelling measures.

Suicide Rates

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether targets exist regarding the national rate of suicide; what these targets are; whether they are being met; and if he will make a statement. [35859]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 147W.

Adoption (Unmarried Couples)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to propose changes in the law to allow adoption by unmarried couples. [35865]

Jacqui Smith: We are looking thoroughly at the many and complex issues of partnership registration, rights and responsibilities. Adoption will, alongside all other relevant issues, be considered as part of that work.

Beta Interferon and Glatiramer Acetate

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) who will make the initial decision on which MS patients are included in the new cohort to receive beta interferon and glatiramer acetate drugs; [35346]

(2) if he will estimate how many new people in *(a)* England and *(b)* Essex will receive beta interferon and glatiramer acetate drugs in the next five years; [35350]

(3) what system for appeals will be established to review cases where MS sufferers have been refused access to beta interferon and glatiramer acetate; who will constitute the appeal body; and what its terms of reference, operating procedures and decision criteria will be; [35348]

(4) what limits will be put on the access of clinically qualifying patients to beta interferon and glatiramer acetate drugs; [35344]

(5) when the new cohort of MS sufferers who will now receive beta interferon and glatiramer acetate drugs will start to receive these drugs; [35347]

(6) what restriction based on post code there will be to access the beta interferon and glatiramer acetate drugs for clinically qualifying patients; [35343]

(7) how the new cohort of MS patients to receive beta interferon and glatiramer acetate drugs will be selected; [35349]

(8) whether patients who are diagnosed as having MS and who qualify under the clinical criteria for the cohort to receive beta interferon and glatiramer acetate drugs will be given access to those drugs. [35345]

Ms Blears: The scheme allows disease-modifying drugs for multiple sclerosis to be prescribed on the national health service to patients who meet the criteria set out by the Association of British Neurologists (ABN). Subject to assessment by a specialist neurologist to confirm that they meet these criteria, all eligible patients will be given access to beta interferon and glatiramer acetate. It has been estimated that the total number of patients in England and Wales who fall within the ABN criteria might range between 7,500 to 9,000. We have no figures for potential patient numbers in Essex.

NHS bodies are required to fund any treatment within the scheme prescribed by clinicians for eligible patients, in accordance with a statutory direction.

The responsibility for making an effective clinical judgment rests with the specialist neurologist concerned. If there is any doubt about an individual case, it is likely that another specialist neurologist will be requested to give a second opinion.

The scheme starts to operate on 6 May 2002. It is anticipated that it might take 18 months to initiate all eligible patients on the scheme. Details of the scheme are explained in Health Service Circular 2002/004 which has been widely distributed across the NHS.

Young Minds

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to secure state funding for Young Minds following the letter to the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey from the Minister of State, the Cabinet Office. [36933]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has given financial aid to Young Minds for a number of years via the Section 64 grant scheme. In the current financial year we shall be giving Young Minds a mixture of project and core funding that totals £74,000. We are currently considering an application for the renewal of their core funding for the years 2002–03 to 2004–05.

We have a close working relationship with Young Minds and welcome their collaboration in the development of the child and adolescent mental health module of the children's National Service Framework.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the likely *(a)* number of and *(b)* requirement for speech and language therapists in the NHS in each of the next five years; [36770]

(2) what plans he has to increase the number of university training places in speech and language therapy. [36774]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan commits us to 4,450 more therapists and other professional staff being trained each year by 2004 than there were in 1999.

Between 1999–2000 and 2000–01 the number of speech and language therapy training commissions increased by 101. We are working with workforce development confederations to determine the split in the remainder of commissions that make up the NHS Plan target. Recommendations on the final allocation will be made by the Workforce Numbers Advisory Board (WNAB) later in the year and will take into account supply and demand information for speech and language therapy. WNAB will also look at the need for further training commissions beyond 2004.

Epilepsy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence of epilepsy and the death rate for epilepsy was *(a)* in total, *(b)* for men and *(c)* for women in each health authority in England in (i) 1996 and (ii) [illegible] most recent available year; and how these rates deviate from the national average. [3703[illegible]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect information specifically on the incidence of epilepsy. However, it does collect information on the number of admissions to national health service hospitals for epilepsy by health authority. The available information has been placed in the Library.

The number of epilepsy deaths at health authority level is very small and subject to considerable random fluctuation. In both 1996 and 2000 the mean number of epilepsy deaths for health authorities was eight. These figures, therefore, cannot in themselves be taken as evidence of either trends over time, or real differences between areas.

The rates are presented as standardised mortality ratios (SMRs). The ratios are the numbers of "observed" deaths in each health authority to the numbers of "expected" deaths. These "expected" deaths are the number, which would have occurred if the sex and age-specific mortality rates for England were applied in each health authority. While SMRs allow for comparison between areas because the ratios presented here are based on very small numbers, even slight differences in numbers will have a marked effect on the resulting SMRs.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list every ward in Tyne and Wear by local authority, setting out the latest standard mortality ratio on the basis of the European Standardised rate *(a)* in total, *(b)* for men and *(c)* for women and the year in which the death rate for England and Wales as a whole was at this level. [37039]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not available in the format requested. The table compares the trends in mortality from all causes for men and women in England and Wales with each local authority in Tyne and Wear from 1989 to 1999.

Trends in mortality from all causes (ICD9 001–999): Indirectly Standardised Ratios (SMR), 1989 to 1999 annually, all ages[1]

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Males											
England and Wales											
SMR	106	103	102	98	100	95	95	93	90	89	87
OBS	280,097	276,104	276,399	270,580	278,245	265,843	271,761	268,888	265,190	263,314	262,248
Gateshead											
SMR	136	121	126	119	123	113	113	108	102	111	99
OBS	1387	1244	1318	1243	1306	1209	1222	1187	1130	1234	1114
Newcastle upon Tyne											
SMR	121	121	121	117	117	111	107	105	103	104	102
OBS	1,738	1,732	1,735	1,691	1,697	1,616	1,556	1,531	1,502	1,519	1,487
North Tyneside											
SMR	118	121	117	112	111	105	102	108	98	103	94
OBS	1,199	1,256	1,224	1,184	1,192	1,133	1,121	1,202	1,104	1,172	1,070
South Tyneside											
SMR	136	118	120	126	117	110	105	107	111	107	106
OBS	1091	960	984	1,043	974	925	906	936	981	952	949
Sunderland											
SMR	131	122	127	122	119	114	112	110	106	110	102
OBS	1,732	1,641	1,737	1,685	1,653	1,614	1,596	1,593	1,551	1,641	1,527
Females											
England and Wales											
SMR	104	100	100	97	100	95	96	96	95	93	94
OBS	294,841	286,775	291,709	285,868	298,487	284,278	292,582	292,564	291,294	288,680	289,800
Gateshead											
SMR	122	112	119	107	121	114	112	112	115	118	110
OBS	1,380	1,274	1,368	1,237	1,402	1,313	1,302	1,299	1,316	1,331	1,234

Trends in mortality from all causes (ICD9 001–999): Indirectly Standardised Ratios (SMR), 1989 to 1999 annually, all ages[1]

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Newcastle upon Tyne											
SMR	118	112	108	110	107	106	107	109	106	112	103
OBS	1,997	1,878	1,824	1,858	1,805	1,775	1,783	1,812	1,728	1,789	1,627
North Tyneside											
SMR	117	113	115	109	113	99	99	99	100	98	92
OBS	1,335	1,316	1,355	1,303	1,368	1,217	1,231	1,250	1,289	1,277	1,200
South Tyneside											
SMR	125	116	114	112	111	104	104	100	109	105	101
OBS	1,102	1,028	1,028	1,012	1,019	967	975	947	1043	10,04	960
Sunderland											
SMR	122	118	118	115	121	113	110	111	103	112	114
OBS	1,743	1,714	1,738	1,708	1,809	1,701	1,678	1,702	1,580	1,727	1,755
Persons											
England and Wales											
SMR	105	101	101	98	100	95	96	94	93	91	91
OBS	574,938	562,879	568,108	556,448	576,732	550,121	564,343	561,452	556,484	551,994	552,048
Gateshead											
SMR	129	116	123	113	122	114	113	110	108	114	104
OBS	2,767	2,518	2,686	2,480	2,708	2,522	2,524	2,486	2,446	2,565	2,348
Newcastle upon Tyne											
SMR	120	116	114	113	112	109	107	107	104	108	102
OBS	3,735	3,610	3,559	3,549	3,502	3,391	3,339	3,343	3,230	3,308	3,114
North Tyneside											
SMR	117	117	116	110	112	102	100	103	99	100	93
OBS	2,534	2,572	2,579	2,487	2,560	2,350	2,352	2,452	2,393	2,449	2,270
South Tyneside											
SMR	130	117	117	118	114	107	104	103	110	106	103
OBS	2,193	1,988	2,012	2,055	1,993	1,892	1,881	1,883	2,024	1,956	1,909
Sunderland											
SMR	126	120	122	118	120	114	111	110	104	111	108
OBS	3475	3355	3475	3393	3462	3315	3274	3295	3131	3368	3282

[1] Standard rates are age-specific mortality rates in 1993

Notes:

SMT—Standardised Mortality Rates

OBS—Observed Deaths

Mental Health Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of children's mental health services in England. [36886]

Jacqui Smith: The main objective of our strategy for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), which is supported by £85 million of targeted funding 1999 to 2002, is to reduce waiting lists and geographical inequalities of access and to bring fragmented and variable local services up to an appropriate level. Considerable progress has been made including robust strategies for the development of local CAMHS, based on needs assessment, agreed between all health and local authorities; and significant increases in service provision (some 375 extra wte posts in 2000 and 46 new in-patient beds by 31 March 2002). Other developments are much improved co-operation and joint working between the main providing agencies and better links between CAMHS and related initiatives such as Sure Start, Quality Protects, Children's Services planning and Youth Offending Teams. However local services generally are not yet up to the required standard to meet current pressures. The inclusion of a CAMHS module in the forthcoming Children's National Service Framework will provide an opportunity to establish new standards and service models. It will also give guidance on good practice, drawing in part on a range of innovative projects in community settings which we are currently funding.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met ministers in the Cabinet Office to discuss the work of the Social Exclusion Unit and the relationship between poor mental health and social exclusion; and if he will make a statement. [36880]

Jacqui Smith: The relationship between poor mental health and social exclusion has been considered within a number of contexts, most recently in relation to the Social Exclusion Unit's project on reducing re-offending among ex-prisoners. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health last met ministerial colleagues, including a Cabinet Office Minister, with regard to this work on 16 January 2002.

Ministerial consideration of the overarching social exclusion agenda is facilitated through the Domestic Affairs (Social Exclusion and Regeneration) cabinet sub-committee at which I represent my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. DA (SER) last met on 18 December 2001.

We have a full programme for tackling the social exclusion of those with mental health problems. The National Service Framework for Mental Health (NSF) is a 10-year programme spelling out national standards for mental health, what they aim to achieve, how they should be developed and delivered and how to measure performance.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the achievements of the Children's Czar have been in the field of children's mental health. [36887]

Jacqui Smith: Since his appointment on 18 July 2001, the National Clinical Director for Children, Professor Al Aynsley-Green, has been leading the work of the

Children's Taskforce and development of the Children's National Service Framework (NSF). The NSF will include standards relating to the mental health and psychological well-being of children and young people, and Professor Aynsley-Green has established an external working group to provide advice on this area.

Engagement with, and listening to, stakeholders is a key part of the National Director's role. In the area of child and adolescent mental health, the National Director has held a number of wide-ranging discussions on the current issues, including discussions with the President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, informal meetings with voluntary organisations, including Young Minds, visiting several young people's psychiatric units around the country and addressing several major conferences including FOCUS—a national meeting of child psychiatrists.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role the National Institute for Mental Health for England will have in the field of children's mental health. [36885]

Jacqui Smith: The National Institute for Mental Health in England will cover the full range of mental health services from childhood to old age. It will be concerned with mental health care in primary, specialist and tertiary care organisations, in both health and social care. It will address the issues surrounding children and other groups with special needs.

It will also ensure that the implementation of the mental health component of the Children's National Service Framework is integrated with the mental health agenda.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for the National Institute for Mental Health to *(a)* be developed and *(b)* start work. [36884]

Jacqui Smith: The National Institute for Mental Health in England was launched in July 2001 and the first wave of work was announced on 10 October, World Mental Health Day. A small project team has been working to develop the role and function of the institute and a full consultation has recently concluded. The team are now looking to put formal structures in place and key appointments will be made over the coming months.

Care Group Workforce Teams

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the work is of the care group workforce teams; [36900]

(2) what the budget is of each care group workforce team; [36897]

(3) when the Care Group Workforce Team on Mental Health was established; and what is its remit; [36899]

(4) what powers the Care Group Workforce Team on Mental Health has; [36898]

Jacqui Smith: The care group workforce teams are multi-disciplinary bodies set up to support the National Workforce Development Board (NWDB) and the relevant service taskforce. They lead on national strategies for producing the right workforce to deliver NHS Plan commitments for service improvements, across health, social care and the independent and voluntary sectors, within their remit.

Seven CGWTs were established on 19 November 2001. They cover services for children (including maternity and gynaecology), older people, cancer, coronary heart disease, mental health, long-term conditions (including diabetes and renal), and emergency care (including accident and emergency, ambulance services, and critical care).

The CGWTs do not hold dedicated budgets but influence the way mainstream national health service budgets are spent.

The terms of reference and first year priorities for each care group are currently being finalised and will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the success of the care group work force teams on mental health will be evaluated. [36896]

Jacqui Smith: The overall success of the care group work force teams will be measured by the provision of a work force that better matches service needs. The mental health care group work force team will develop specific mechanisms as part of its first year work programme.

GP Consultations

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average time which a general practitioner spends with a patient has been in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [36893]

Mr. Hutton: The most recent statistics on general practitioner consultation times are drawn from the GP work load survey of 1992–93 which records that the average GP consultation time with a patient was 8.4 minutes.

Children and Young People

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* will take to implement Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People; and what progress has been made in drawing up an action plan. [36883]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is playing a leading role in engaging children and young people in the development of policy. Development of the Department's action plan is well advanced. Participation of children and young people underpins both the Quality Protects programme and implementation of the NHS Plan.

The Department was one of the first Government Departments to create a young people's reference group. This group is serving as a model of good practice for other Government Departments and local councils.

GP Targets

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all general practitioners are expected to meet his 48 hours' access target by 2004. [3689[illegible]]

Mr. Hutton: All patients on every general practitioners' list will have access to a GP within 48 hours by 2004. This does not need to be a named GP. Health authorities and primary care trusts have been working with GPs and others to secure delivery of these targets. In doing so they are supported by the work of the National Primary Care Development Team and by resources from the PCT primary care access fund.

Prison Nurses

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met Ministers in the Home Office to discuss the training of prison nurses to carry out mental health assessments; and if he will make a statement. [36882]

Jacqui Smith: I am in regular contact with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Community and Custodial Sentences at the Home Office (Beverley Hughes) over a wide range of prison matters, among them issues related to the training of nurses and other health care staff working in prisons.

Lister Hospital, Stevenage

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the facilities and development funding available for the Lister hospital, Stevenage. [36892]

Jacqui Smith: The assessment of facilities and future development of the Lister hospital is linked to the Hertfordshire and south Bedfordshire acute services review. Work continues on service models and this will be published as an interim discussion document later this year.

Statins

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what he is doing to increase the uptake of statins. [36405]

Yvette Cooper: The National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease sets out advice on the prescribing of statins, by primary care, to prevent heart disease. Primary care practices are developing registers of patients with coronary heart disease to help them provide these patients with systematic care. Part of this systematic care is the effective prescribing of statins to lower cholesterol levels. The prescribing of statins has increased by over 30 per cent. in the first year since the publication of the National Service Framework in June 2000 and is continuing to rise.

Surgical Instruments

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals have been found to have fallen below acceptable standards for the decontamination of surgical instruments since October 2000. [36404]

Yvette Cooper: Over the last year the Department has completed the first ever national survey of decontamination services for surgical instruments in the national health service in England. The survey, implemented between March 2001 and November 2001, involved a series of prioritised visits to all NHS facilities undertaking reprocessing. Initial assessments found that standards in 109 hospitals fell below acceptable levels. Further assessments and work with hospitals to implement action plans for improvement has resulted in all NHS acute hospitals in England having access to satisfactory decontamination services. The results of the assessments are published in the report "A Review of the Decontamination of Surgical Instruments in the NHS in England". Copies of this report, and further comprehensive guidance are available in the Library and can also be found on the website www.decontamination.nhsestates.gov.uk. The modernisation of NHS decontamination services is a long-term process, not a one off event, and we are committed to ensuring that standards are maintained and raised to ensure patient safety.

Rubella Vaccination

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the rubella vaccination is administered to boys. [36475]

Yvette Cooper: Prior to the introduction of MMR in 1988, a large number of babies were born disabled as a result of congenital rubella. In many cases this was due to older unimmunised children passing rubella to their pregnant mother or her pregnant friends. With MMR a child and its family can benefit from protection against three diseases at the earliest possible time.

Organ Donation

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that NHS staff who may be in charge of a hospital ward are fully aware of procedures for arranging for donation of organs for transplantation. [36445]

Jacqui Smith: The consultation document "Organ and Tissue Donation" published in February 2001 announced planned improvements in transplants services with the overall aim to increase organ donation levels in the United Kingdom by meeting challenging targets by 2005. UK Transplant is supporting a number of initiatives across the United Kingdom to increase the numbers of organs available for transplantation with dedicated funding supporting staffing costs in hospitals, the co-ordination of this transplant expansion programme, training, education and communications. Ten additional co-ordinators across the UK are being appointed. Donor transplant co-ordinators have a particular responsibility to raise the importance and profile of organ/tissue donation in all hospitals and will carry out various education initiatives. Specific funding is also being made available to employ donor liaison sisters/staff nurses in 35 hospitals with intensive care units. They will be responsible for identifying potential donors and ensuring that all staff in that hospital understand the importance of organ and tissue donation and how it can be arranged.

Organ Donors

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the UK are registered as organ donors; what plans he has to introduce legislation to recognise presumed consent; what measures he has introduced to encourage people to sign up as organ donors; and if he will make a statement. [35724]

Jacqui Smith: There are currently 9.1 million people registered on the national health service organ donor register.

We have no plans to introduce an opt-out scheme for organ donation. We are in the process of undertaking a comprehensive review of the law governing the taking, removal and use of human tissue, and will be issuing a consultation paper shortly.

There have been numerous wide-ranging initiatives in England to raise the public's awareness of the shortage of organs for transplantation. The Department runs a public information campaign with a current annual budget of £900,000. A public information leaflet, incorporating the organ donor card, is widely distributed, and is also available through the organ donor literature line. The Department also runs a special campaign to raise awareness among the Asian community and a similar campaign targeting the African and African Caribbean communities is planned for launch in spring 2002.

Asbestos

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received regarding the EU prohibition on white asbestos. [35381]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

There have been no formal representations received about the European Commission Directive 1999/77/EC, which requires the marketing, supply and use of white asbestos to be banned by 1 January 2005. However 153 representations were made on the consultation on the Asbestos Prohibitions (Amendment) Regulations 1999, which implemented the EC ban on white asbestos in the UK. Eight specific derogations were made in the regulations. Twenty-two requests for exemptions from the regulations have been received since they were made, of which thirteen were granted. All derogations and exemptions were granted because no suitable substitute to white asbestos existed.

Medical Students

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of trends in recruitment of medical students by socio-economic group since 1997. [36441]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The numbers and proportions of students accepted for entry to Pre-clinical medical courses by social class are shown in the following table. The data on social class are based on self-reporting by applicants, so small year-on-year changes should not be regarded as significant.

The Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent family backgrounds, and has introduced Excellence Challenge, including the AimHigher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

Accepted applicants through UCAS to full-time and sandwich undergraduate Pre-clinical medical courses in the UK, by social class.

Accepted applicants through UCAS to full-time and sandwich undergraduate Pre-clinical medical courses in the UK, by social class

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Numbers					
I Professional	1,818	1,876	1,875	1,970	2,053
II Intermediate	1,698	1,743	1,756	1,843	2,037
IIIN Skilled non-manual	348	353	399	423	439
IIIM Skilled manual	294	325	336	363	406
IV Partly skilled	187	170	182	200	204
V Unskilled	36	25	19	44	36
Not known	196	191	304	386	500
Grand total	4,577	4,683	4,871	5,229	5,675
Percentages					
I Professional	41	42	41	41	40
II Intermediate	39	39	38	38	39
IIIN Skilled non-manual	8	8	9	9	8
IIIM Skilled manual	7	7	7	7	8
IV Partly skilled	4	4	4	4	4
V Unskilled	1	1	0	1	1
Grand total	100	100	100	100	100

Source:
Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

Health and Social Care Bill

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons consultation on the Health and Social Care Bill was restricted to six weeks. [16692]

Mr. Hutton: As is standard practice with most legislation not subject to pre-legislative scrutiny, there was no formal consultation on the Health and Social Care Bill. However a discussion document on the patient and public involvement proposals within the National Health Service Reform and Healthcare Professions Bill currently before Parliament was published with an invitation to comment which was open for six weeks. It was not a formal consultation exercise and six weeks was considered an adequate period during which to receive comments in keeping with the timetable for the Bill as a whole.

Haemophilia

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the number of persons who have contracted viral infections in the last 12 months which could have been avoided if they had been prescribed recombinant factor VIII; [16625]

(2) what assessment he has made of the number of persons who have avoided viral infections as a result of the prescription of recombinant factor VIII; [16626]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* We are not aware of any viral transmissions from the use of plasma-derived clotting factors for haemophiliacs in the United Kingdom in the last 12 months.

Heat treatment was introduced for UK-plasma products in the mid 1980s, and they have since had an excellent safety record. In addition, throughout this period, there have been increasingly sophisticated screening tests on the plasma, to improve the safety margin.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the *(a)* availability and *(b)* level of supply from manufacturers of recombinant factor VIII; [16628]

(2) what plans he has to permit the provision of recombinant factor VIII to persons over the age of 16 years in England free of charge. [16627]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 22 November 2002]:* Patients with haemophilia up to age 20 (approximately 43 per cent. of all haemophilia patients) are eligible to receive recombinant clotting factors. There are no plans to allow haemophiliacs over age 16 to be exempt from prescription charges

These patients may not currently be receiving recombinant clotting factors due to the recent worldwide shortage. However, supplies are returning to normal and patients up to age 20 will receive recombinant clotting factors as soon as possible. We are giving active consideration to the case for providing recombinant clotting factors for all haemophilia patients in England.

Hyperbaric Disorders

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on treatment of hyperbaric disorders. [24606]

Yvette Cooper: Hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBO) is a medical treatment by which oxygen is administered at greater than normal pressure to a patient in order to treat specific medical indications. Arrangements for the provision of HBO are made by NHS trusts locally.

Trolley Waits

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes have been made to the *(a)* designations of trolleys and *(b)* methods of counting trolley waits since May 1997. [15321]

Ms Blears: The Department collects information on all waits for emergency admission to a bed via accident and emergency department (A&E) following a decision to admit. This information is collected as part of "Your Guide to the NHS" (formerly "Patients Charter"). It has been collected since 1997 and is published quarterly.

The Department does not collect information on whether patients, recorded as waiting for admission, are on trolleys.

Since August 2001, data on total time in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge have been collected by the Department. This is in line with the NHS Plan which states that by 2004, the maximum wait in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge will be four hours.

Medical Costs (European Economic Area)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the detailed expenditure costs of EEA medical costs *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by country of origin of the patient. [12778]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is as follows

Estimated costs of EEA medical benefits for 2000–01

£000

EEA country	*UK payments to EEA states*	*EEA states payments to the UK*
Austria	1,711	618
Belgium	1,084	1,021
Denmark	[1]—	[1]—
Finland	0	0
France	25,914	2,282
Germany	474	111
Greece	863	658
Iceland	15	14
Ireland	141,475	14,258
Italy	5,837	5,535
Liechtenstein	0	0
Luxembourg	[1]—	[1]—
Netherlands	2,757	1,285
Norway	0	0
Portugal	541	110
Spain	31,012	750
Sweden	511	819
Total	212,194	27,461

[1] Waiver. The UK has cost waiver agreements with Finland and Norway, except for referred patients. No claims were made in this financial year.

Notes:

1. Figures are based on latest available information and used for resource accounting and budgeting (RAB) purposes in 2000–01.
2. Claims against the UK are made in national currency and converted into sterling by using the quarterly mean exchange rates published by the EU commission.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Beta Interferon

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates his Department held *(a)* negotiations and *(b)* discussions with pharmaceutical companies in relation to the trial prescribing of beta interferon; and which pharmaceutical companies were involved. [15320]

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his discussions with the pharmaceutical industry over the provision of beta interferon. [22177]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 8 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1241W.

Accident and Emergency Services

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency cases were dealt with by *(a)* the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and *(b)* the Princess Royal Hospital Telford in 2000–01. [34805]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is shown in the table.

Total Accident and Emergency Attendances at Selected NHS Trusts 2000–01

NHS trust	*Total attendance*
Princess Royal hospital	43,037
Royal Shrewsbury hospital	41,735

Source: KH09—Outpatient and ward attenders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expected cost to public funds is of ending long waits in accident and emergency departments. [16251]

Ms Blears: We have made no estimate of the cost of long waiting times in accident and emergency departments. Currently 77 per cent. of visitors to accident and emergency are admitted, transferred or discharged within four hours.

Cloned Embryos

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to appeal against the judgment in the case of R *v*. Quintavalle and the Secretary of State for Health. [16267]

Yvette Cooper: We did appeal and on 18 January 2002, the Court of Appeal unanimously overturned the original judgment. This means that the creation and use of embryos created by cell nuclear replacement (so called "cloned embryos") is governed by the 1990 Act and regulated by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

Latex Allergy

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent studies he has undertaken into the *(a)* cause, *(b)* prevalence and *(c)* treatment and management of latex allergy (i) among national health service workers and (ii) in the wider population. [23774]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The Medical Devices Agency regularly investigates the risks posed to patients and healthcare workers and along with the Department of Health, issues relevant guidance. Latex is recognised as a sensitiser or substance hazardous to health as defined by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH 1994) and Health Service Circular 1999/186 instructed that individuals who are sensitised to latex should stop using latex medical gloves and be provided with gloves made from an alternative material.

Cataracts

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the waiting times for cataract operations in each of the last 10 years for each NHS trust from *(a)* referral from GP to first consultation and *(b)* referral from GP to surgery; and if he will make a statement; [20853]

(2) how many patients diagnosed as suffering from cataracts in each of the last 10 years in each NHS trust *(a)* have undergone and *(b)* are awaiting surgery. [20854]

Ms Blears: Data are not collected on waiting times from GP referral to a first outpatient appointment specifically for cataract patients, and data are not collected on the total wait from GP referral to a first outpatient appointment through to completion of surgery.

Instead, data have been provided from 1991–92 to 2000–01 on the length of time patients waited on the inpatient waiting list before being treated for cataract removal.

This Government are aware that some patients wait long periods of time for cataract removal. Cataract removal is one of the most commonly performed operations, particularly among the elderly. That is why we have set up the Action On Cataracts programme, led by the NHS Modernisation Agency. The programme aims to improve access to care and to reduce variations in waiting times for cataract removal patients. As part of the programme, local services are helped to identify their constraints and to find effective solutions.

Good practice guidance on treating cataract patients was issued to NHS Trusts, Health Authorities and Primary Care Groups in February 2000. In 2000–01 the sum of £22 million was allocated for "Action on" Cataracts to provide dedicated facilities to improve the patient pathway and to reduce waiting times.

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which members of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition have participated in previous investigations into dietary salt and health conducted by *(a)* the Cardiovascular Review Group of the Committee on Medical Aspects and *(b)* other Government bodies since 1990. [23885]

Yvette Cooper: The table shows which SACN members were also members of the Committee of Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA, 1994), the COMA Cardiovascular Review Group (1994), the COMA panel on Dietary Reference Values (1991), and associated Working Group on minerals.

No SACN members were on the MAFF Consumer Panel (January 1999) which considered salt and health. The table also shows that no SACN members were participants of the 1997 workshop on salt organised at the request of the Department of Health by the Faculty of Public Health Medicine and the British Heart Foundation.

Biographies of SACN members can be obtained from: www.sacn.gov.uk.

SACN Member	*Member of SACN sub-group on salt*	*Member of COMA (1994)*	*Member of COMA Cardiovascular Review Group (1994)*	*Member of COMA Panel on DRVs (1991)*	*Member of COMA Panel on DRV Working Group on Minerals (1991)*	*Participant at FPHM/BHF Workshop (1997)*	*Member MAFF Consumer Panel (1999)*
Professor Alan Jackson (Chair)	Yes	Yes	—	—	—	—	—
Professor Peter Aggett	Yes	Yes	—	Yes	Yes (Chair)	—	—
Professor Annie Anderson	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Professor Sheila Bingham	Yes	Yes	—	—	—	—	—
Professor John Cummings	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Miss Gill Fine	Yes	—	—	—	—	—	—

SACN Member	*Member of SACN sub-group on salt*	*Member of COMA (1994)*	*Member of COMA Cardiovascular Review Group (1994)*	*Member of COMA Panel on DRVs (1991)*	*Member of COMA Panel on DRV Working Group on Minerals (1991)*	*Participant at FPHM/BHF Workshop (1997)*	*Member MAFF Consumer Panel (1999)*
Ms Paulette Jones	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dr. Timothy Key	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Professor Peter Kopelman	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dr. Ann Prentice	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Professor Andrew Rugg-Gunn		—	—	—	—	—	—
Dr. Anita Thomas	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mrs. Stella Walsh	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dr. Anthony Williams	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Professor Christine Williams	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Patient Advocacy and Liaison Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Patient Advocacy and Liaison Services are in operation; and where they are. [20857]

Ms Blears: Current patient advice and liaison services, as at November 2001, are as follows:

Addenbrooke's NHS Trust

Ashford and St. Peter's NHS Trust

Ashford PCG

Barts and the London NHS Trust

Bassetlaw Hospital

Bath and NE Somerset PCT

Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust

Bexhill and Rother PCT

Birmingham Specialist Community Trust

Birmingham Women's Healthcare Trust

Bishop Auckland General Hospital

Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley NHS Trust

Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust

Bootle and Litherland PCT

Bournemouth PCT, Poole Bay PCT, Poole Central and North PCT and Dorset Ambulance Trust

Brighton and Hove PCG

Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust

Buckinghamshire Mental Health Trust

City Hospital Trust

City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust

Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHS Trust

County Durham and Darlington Priority Services NHS Trust

Craven PCG

Crawley PCG

Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley PCT

Dartford, Gravesham NHS Trust

Dewsbury Healthcare NHS Trust

Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Trust

Easington PCG

East Cheshire NHS Trust

East Devon PCT

East Gloucestershire Trust

East Kent Hospitals Trust

Eastbourne and County Healthcare NHS Trust

Eastbourne Hospital NHS Trust

Eastern Wakefield PCT

Epping Forest PCT

Exeter PCT

Fenland PCT

Frimley Park NHS Trust

Gateshead Health NHS Trust Education Centre

George Eliot Hospital and Warwickshire Ambulance Trust

Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust

Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust

Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital NHS Trust

Hambleton and Richmondshire PCG

Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust

Hartlepool NHS PCT

Hastings and Rother NHS Trust

Heatherwood and Wrexham Park NHS Trust

Herefordshire PCT

High Weald PCG

Hillingdon PCT

Homerton Hospital NHS Trust

Hull and East Yorkshire Community Health NHS Trust

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust

Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust

Kettering General Hospital NHS Trust

King's Healthcare NHS Trust

Kingston Hospital NHS Trust

Langbaurgh PCT

Luton and Dunstable Hospital

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells

Manchester Mental Health Partnership

Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust

Medway and Swale PCG

Medway Maritime Hospital

Mid Surrey; East Elmbridge and East Surrey PCGs

Mid Sussex NHS Trust

Middlesbrough and Eston NHS PCG

Milton Keynes Central Hospital

Newham PCT

North Bristol Trust

North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust

North Durham Healthcare NHS Trust
North East Lincolnshire PCT
North East London Mental Health NHS Trust
North Hampshire Hospital NHS Trust
North Hants PCT
North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust
North Tees NHS PCT
Northallerton Trust
Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust
Northern and Yorks Region Learning Alliance
Northern General Hospital
Northumberland Mental Health Trust
Nottinghamshire Health Authority
Nuffield Orthopaedic NHS Trust
Ouse Valley PCG
Oxford Learning Disabilities Trust
Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust
Oxleas NHS Trust
Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust
Pinderfields and Pontefract Hospitals NHS Trust
Plymouth PCT
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust
Preston Acute Hospital NHS Trust
Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust
Priority Healthcare Wearside NHS Trust
Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust
Royal Devon and Exeter Trust
Royal Hallamshire Hospital
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Surrey County NHS trust
Royal United Hospital Bath
Rushmoor and Hart PCG
Salisbury Healthcare Trust
Scarborough and NE Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale PCG
Selby and District A.V.S
Sheffield Health Authority
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals
Shropshire Hospitals
Slough PCT
Somerset Health Community PALS
South Buckinghamshire Trust
South Derbyshire Acute NHS Trust
South Devon Healthcare trust
South Downs Health NHS Trust
South Humber Health Authority
South London and Maudsley Mental Health NHS Trust
South Manchester University Hospital Trust
South Stoke PCT
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
South Tyneside Health Care Trust
South Wiltshire PCT
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust
Southern Derbyshire Community and Mental Health Trust
St. Catherine's Hospital
St George's Healthcare NHS Trust
St. Helens and Knowsley NHS Trust
St. Mary's House
St. Richards Hospital, Chichester
Stepping Hill Hospital
Stockport NHS Trust
Sunderland West NHS PCT
Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
Surrey Hants Borders Mental Health
Surrey Oaklands NHS Trust
Sussex Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Swindon and Marlborough Trust
Tees and NE Yorks NHS Trust
Tees, East and North Yorkshire Ambulance Service
Teeside and North Yorkshire Ambulance Service
Thames Gateway NHS Trust
The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust
The Walton Centre
Tower Hamlets PCT
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust
United Bristol Hospitals Trust
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
Vale of Aylesbury PCT
Wakefield and Pontefract Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Wakefield West PCT
Walsall Hospitals Trust
West Hertfordshire NHS Trust
West Kent Mental Health Trust
West Norfolk PCT
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust
West Sussex Partnership Trust
West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Whittington Hospitals NHS Trust
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS
Wythenshawe Health Centre
York Health Services NHS Trust.

Hospital-acquired Infections

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital-acquired infections there were in each of the past five years. [24576]

Jacqui Smith: The data requested are not held centrally. Healthcare associated infections in general, and Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) specifically, are a recognised problem in most parts of the world. It is generally accepted that, at any one time in England, as many as 9 per cent. of in-patients have an infection acquired since their admission to hospital. Information about bacteraemias (blood borne infections) due to MRSA has been collected from all acute trusts as the first stage of a new comprehensive and compulsory surveillance system since 1 April 2001. Early data from this surveillance were published in the Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Disease Report on 8 February. (www.phls.co.uk/publications/CDR per cent.20Weekly/pages/news.html#MRSA)

Patients (Nutritional Status)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals do not screen as routine the nutritional status of patients being admitted to hospital. [24310]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 3 January 2002]:* The Department does not collect these data. The standard on general hospital care in the National Service Framework for Older People, published in March 2001, sets the need for nutritional screening to identify those at nutritional risk within the wider context of the good care management of older people in hospital. Food and nutrition is also one of the best practice standards in "The Essence of Care: patient-focused benchmarking for health care practitioners" which was published in February 2001 and will be used to support health professionals. In addition, the single assessment process for older people will require health professionals to collect information on nutritional status at the initial stage. Detailed guidance on the single assessment process was published on 28 January 2002.

Children Act 1989

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to review the Regulations and Guidance associated with the Children Act 1989 following the Utting report. [27367]

Jacqui Smith: In our response to the Children's Safeguards Review (the Utting report), we acknowledged that in the longer term it may be necessary to completely revise and reissue the regulations and guidance to the Children Act 1989. The intention is to undertake this on a step by step basis that will focus at first on the volumes most affected by recent legislative and regulatory changes.

We announced a major review of adoption in February 2000. Part of the extensive programme of reform includes the introduction of the Adoption and Children Bill in October 2001. The Bill will comprehensively overhaul adoption legislation, regulation and related guidance, which once commenced, would necessitate the revision of volume 8 (Private Fostering and Miscellaneous) of the Children Act Guidance. Further, in the light of the changes arising from the Care Standards Act 2000, we plan to revise volumes 3 (Family Placements), 4 (Residential Care), and 5 (Independent Schools) of the guidance in the near future.

CJD

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent investigations have been made into the increased theoretical risk of contracting CJD through blood transfusions; and if he plans to produce guidelines on the issue; [28750]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the need for a test to screen donated blood for CJD with special reference to hepatitis sufferers. [28749]

Yvette Cooper: We have already taken action to reduce the theoretical risk of transferring CJD through blood and blood products. The Department and the National Blood Service are currently undertaking a programme of risk assessments on further reducing any theoretical risk from CJD to the blood supply. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) has reviewed the precautions on a number of occasions and has advised that no further regulatory action was required.

We are supporting a number of avenues of research into a diagnostic test for CJD to enable a screening test to be developed for blood donations.

The CJD Incidents Panel is the expert committee set up by the Department to advise health authorities and trusts how to manage incidents involving possible exposure to CJD in healthcare settings, including blood transfusions. The panel issued a public consultation paper in October 2001 on "Management of possible exposure to CJD through medical procedures", for which the closing date for comments was 15 January. The panel is currently considering the responses to the consultation but continues to provide provisional advice on a precautionary basis as set out in the document.

At the request of the panel, the Department has commissioned independent consultants to provide an updated review of the potential CJD infectivity of blood and blood products.

Contraception

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received regarding the side effects of the contraceptive injection Depo-provera; and if he will make a statement. [31068]

Yvette Cooper: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA), which is responsible for medicines regulation in the UK, and the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) receive reports of suspected adverse drug reactions to medicinal products via the Yellow Card Scheme. Since marketing authorisation was granted in 1981, the MCA and CSM have received 232 such reports for Depo-provera. However, the reporting of a suspected adverse reaction does not necessarily mean that it has been caused by the drug. Many factors have to be taken into account including the possible contribution of other medications or illnesses. Since 1981, the MCA has also recorded receiving 40 requests for information about Depo-provera. In most cases, the nature of these inquiries was to seek information on suspected adverse drug reactions to Depo-provera, which are reflected in the Marketing Authorisation Summary of Product Characteristics and Patient Information Leaflet. The MCA routinely provides this information to health professionals and members of the public on request.

Malnutrition

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 674W, on nutrition, how much the single assessment process for malnutrition will cost *(a)* each health authority and *(b)* in England. [31301]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* There is no single assessment process for malnutrition.

The single assessment process for older people, published on 28 January, requires health and care professionals to assess the nutritional status of older people when it is necessary to assess their needs. Specific estimates of the cost implications of this part of the assessment have not been undertaken.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many assessments in respect of the free nursing care scheme were *(a)* completed by and *(b)* outstanding on 31 December 2001; what proportion of residents are in each category, for how many residents payments have been made to nursing homes; and what is the (i) total value of the payments and (ii) average value. [31299]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 30 January 2002]*: Preliminary information available from regions of the position at the end of December, indicates that around 80 per cent. of the nursing homes with residents eligible for national health service funded nursing care had had their residents' needs for care determined by a registered nurse. The majority of the remainder will be completed by the end of this month.

Around 99 per cent. of people in nursing homes whose needs have been determined have been found to be eligible. Of those whose needs have been determined, around 19 per cent. have been allocated to the low band; 58 per cent. to the middle band; and 22 per cent. to the high band.

Anticoagulation Therapy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to make the strips used to test the blood during oral anticoagulation therapy treatment available on prescription. [32537]

Ms Blears: We are currently considering whether to list such strips in Part IX of the Drug Tariff, so enabling them to be prescribed by general practitioners on the national health service in England. Issues for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Assemblies.

Scrutiny

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what redress will be available to local authority health overview and scrutiny committees if their recommendations are not acted upon. [31857]

Ms Blears: Overview and scrutiny of health including scrutiny of the national health service should not be considered in terms of redress, rather as a lever to improve the health of local people. Scrutiny committees, working in partnership with the NHS and other stakeholders, will seek to secure continuous improvements both of health services and services that impact upon health. This will be a significant step forward in making public services, including the NHS, more locally relevant and locally accountable.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the letter to him dated 11 December 2001, from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Lorna McIntyre. [31676]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent on 5 February.

Pregnancy Advice

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* approved independent sector places for abortions and *(b)* registered pregnancy advice bureaux in the Buckinghamshire health authority area. [32189]

Ms Blears: The Buckinghamshire health authority has three registered pregnancy advice bureaux: BPAS High Wycombe branch; BPAS Milton Keynes branch and Marie Stopes Milton Keynes centre but no independent sector places are approved for abortions.

Walk-in Centres

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS walk-in centres there are *(a)* in England and Wales and *(b)* in the Buckinghamshire health authority area; and what plans he has for further centres. [32191]

Ms Blears: National health service walk-in centres are being piloted as a new initiative to offer convenient access to primary care services. As pilots, they are being independently evaluated. 42 centres are now open. All of these are in England and none is in the area of Buckinghamshire health authority.

Our decisions on the future development of NHS walk-in centres will be informed by the independent evaluation report.

Cleanliness

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will made a statement on NHS policy in respect of a cleanliness standard for patients; whether the Chief Medical Officer has made recommendations on this; whether guidelines to hospital and health trusts have been issued by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [32522]

Ms Blears: The National Standards of Cleanliness for the national health service were announced in April 2001.

The standards provide a comprehensive basis which hospitals can adapt for local requirements. They measure what is, or is not, clean.

All hospitals will be required to report a score against the National Standards of Cleanliness for the NHS on an annual basis. This score will form part of the Performance Assessment Framework by which trusts performance against key targets is assessed.

For the first time, members of the public will know how their local hospital compares against other hospitals in terms of actual cleanliness.

All trusts in England have received guidelines on how to implement the National Standards of Cleanliness for the NHS, and a series of regional workshops were held in November 2001 to support this initiative.

Macular Degeneration

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make Verteporfin available on the NHS for the treatment of age related macular degeneration. [32583]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently undertaking an appraisal of this treatment and will advise if it should be made generally available under the national health service. NICE expects to publish its advice in July 2002.

Patient Confidentiality

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what powers, and in what circumstances, an NHS trust or other health body is permitted to pass information from patients' medical records to *(a)* his office and *(b)* the Prime Minister's office. [32705]

Ms Blears: The powers and circumstances under or in which national health service trusts and other health bodies may pass information from patients' medical records to my office and that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, are limited by the common law and the legislation on data protection and human rights which we have put on the statute book. For example, information may be disclosed where the patient to whom it relates has consented or has deliberately taken steps to make it public.

Teenage Pregnancy (South Tyneside)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the sexual health strategy aims to reduce teenage pregnancy rates in South Tyneside. [26042]

Yvette Cooper: The sexual health and HIV strategy is distinct from the teenage pregnancy strategy and considers the sexual health needs of all age groups. However, its main aims of improving the information provided for the public and modernising sexual health services will support implementation of the South Tyneside local teenage pregnancy strategy, which aims to halve the local under 18 conception rate by 2010.

Organ Retention

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to change arrangements for the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue; and if he will make a statement. [32544]

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government intend to introduce legislation to cover the removal and storage of human organs by hospitals and universities. [32291]

Mr. Hutton: In his advice to the Government, published last year, the chief medical officer made 17 specific recommendations regarding the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue. These recommendations were accepted by us. We have an extensive programme of implementation, led by the Department, which is working closely with other Government Departments and other agencies. This includes the following:

> We have established the Retained Organs Commission as a special health authority to oversee, among other things, the return of organs and tissue to families who want that to happen.
>
> The Home Office is leading a review of the coroners' system which was set up in July 2001.
>
> In January 2002 we published a number of documents for consultation, including a code of practice on communications with families about post mortems; draft forms for consent to the post mortem removal, retention and use of organs and tissue (where such actions are not required by a coroner); and an interim statement on the use of organs and tissue, based on the current law. The consent forms are linked to the Department's wider "Good Practice in Consent" initiative, and will shortly be piloted in a number of national health service trusts across the country. Taken together, these initiatives provide an interim framework of good practice pending changes in the law.
>
> We shall shortly be publishing for consultation a draft code of practice on the import and export of human body parts.
>
> The Department is leading a comprehensive review of the law in England and Wales which will examine, among other things, the taking, storage and use of organs and tissue from the living and the dead and options for future regulatory control. We shall be issuing a consultative paper on possible changes to the law in the near future.
>
> We are committed to amending the Human Tissue Act 1961 to clarify that consent must be sought from those with parental responsibility for the retention of organs or tissue from post mortems on children beyond the time necessary to establish the cause of death, and to introducing a penalty for non-compliance. This will be addressed as part of the comprehensive review.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of private hospitals provide *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* part-time accident and emergency cover; [31126]

(2) what percentage of private hospitals undertaking elective surgery have *(a)* intensive care and *(b)* recovery units. [31123]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally, but when the National Care Standards Commission takes over from health authorities the regulation of private health care services on 1 April this year, it will compile a comprehensive national database about service providers and the facilities they offer.

Private hospitals will be required to have staff available at all times trained in resuscitation, and have procedures in place for transferring patients to intensive care facilities, when necessary, if they do not have them on site. However, private hospitals will not be required to have accident and emergency departments as they treat only elective cases—they do not take casualties.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of private hospitals have 24 hour medical cover in the form of qualified doctors. [31124]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 January 2001]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. However, the national minimum standards that will come into force on 1 April when the National Care Standards Commission takes over the regulation of private hospitals, require that where an establishment provides in-patient care, there is a resident medical officer, trained in resuscitation to advanced life support level, available immediately at all times.

Tonsillectomy

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what cost-benefit analysis was performed prior to the introduction of single-use instruments for tonsillectomy. [32776]

Yvette Cooper: The decision to introduce single use instruments for tonsillectomy was taken after receiving advice from Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory

Committee (SEAC), the expert body that advises the Government on BSE and CJD, that rigorous implementation of washing, decontamination and general hygiene procedures are key measures in minimising the risk of infection. The Committee also considered that, where practicable, the use of single-use instruments for surgery was to be encouraged. The Committee identified tonsillectomies as an operation where practical steps might be readily taken.

General Practitioners Recruitment

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the NHS GP Golden Hello scheme. [34137]

Mr. Hutton: We announced the national health service general practitioner Golden Hello Scheme in March 2001 and, after consultation with stakeholders, introduced the scheme on 2 November 2001. We are committed to keeping the scheme under review and are monitoring take-up. It is, however, still too early to draw any conclusions beyond the fact that the scheme has been generally welcomed by GPs and by their representative groups, including the General Practitioners Committee of the British Medical Association.

MMR Vaccine

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children received a mumps vaccine in *(a)* each county or health authority and *(b)* England in each of the five years before the introduction of the MMR vaccine; and what proportion those who has received the vaccine represented of the total number of children under five years of age. [34359]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* Single mumps vaccine has never been recommended in the United Kingdom and there was no data collected centrally.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have received the MMR vaccine in *(a)* each county or health authority and *(b)* England in each year since its introduction; and what proportions of those who had received (i) the MMR vaccine and (ii) the single measles vaccine represented of the total number of children under five years of age. [34355]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* Information on the number of children who have received MMR vaccine by health authority has been placed in the Library. There were a number of changes in HAs over the period since MMR was introduced to date so a separate sheet is shown for each year. Routine requests for information about the uptake of single measles vaccine were discontinued in 1994 but there were no returns shown for the single vaccine after 1991–92.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children received, either by means of single or combined MMR vaccine, inoculation against *(a)* measles, *(b)* mumps and *(c)* rubella, in each year since the introduction of the MMR vaccine, in (i) each county or health authority and (ii) England; and what proportion they represented of the total number of children under five years of age. [34498]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The available information about children under five years of age who have received the single measles, single rubella or MMR vaccine for each year since the introduction of MMR has been placed in the Library.

Routine requests for information about the uptake of single measles vaccine were discontinued in 1994 and there were no returns for the single measles vaccine after 1991–92.

Single rubella vaccine was not available for children under five years of age.

Single mumps vaccine has never been recommended in the United Kingdom and there were no data collected centrally.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children received a single *(a)* mumps, *(b)* measles and *(c)* rubella vaccine in each year since the introduction of the MMR vaccine in (i) each county or health authority and (ii) England. [34497]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The available information about children under five years of age who have received the single measles and single rubella vaccine for each year since the introduction of MMR has been placed in the Library. Routine requests for information about the uptake of single measles vaccine were discontinued in 1994 and there were no returns for the single measles vaccine after 1991–92. Single rubella vaccine was not available for children under five years of age.

Single mumps vaccine has never been recommended in the United Kingdom and there were no data collected centrally.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has evaluated on the financial costs of the administration of the *(a)* MMR vaccination and *(b)* three separate vaccinations for measles, mumps and rubella. [34543]

Yvette Cooper: None. Cost is not a consideration in recommendations about MMR vaccine.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children received the rubella vaccine in *(a)* each county or health authority and *(b)* England in each of the five years before the introduction of the MMR vaccine; and what proportion those who had received the vaccine represented of the total number of children under five years of age. [34358]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The rubella vaccine was not recommended for children under five years of age prior to the introduction of the combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine in 1988.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of eligible children have been vaccinated with single measles/mumps/rubella injections in the last *(a)* three months, *(b)* 12 months and *(c)* three years. [34879]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children aged four or five years old have taken the first MMR vaccine but not the booster; and what proportion they represent of the cohorts. [35216]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* For the quarter July to September 2001, coverage of one dose of MMR at five years of age is 91.3 per cent. for England, Wales and Northern Ireland while coverage of two doses of MMR at five years of age is 73.4 per cent. By five years of age, 17.9 per cent. of children immunised with one dose of MMR have not received the second dose at school entry.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the anticipated cost is of the planned MMR advertising campaign; and when it was first commissioned. [35215]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Work to provide information on MMR to health professionals and the public is ongoing and has continued over several years, as part of a programme of work on immunisation information. The full details of any new MMR information campaign have yet to be confirmed.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is per patient of a course of *(a)* MMR vaccine, *(b)* single measles vaccine, *(c)* single rubella vaccine and *(d)* single mumps vaccine. [35213]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I refer to the reply given to the hon. Member for the Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on 20 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 133W.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when and upon what advice the Government withdrew the licence for single vaccinations of measles, mumps and rubella in the United Kingdom. [35411]

Yvette Cooper: We have never received advice to withdraw the licences for single vaccinations of measles, mumps or rubella.

One mumps vaccine, four rubella and four measles vaccines have a current licence.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which countries in the EU allow children to be given single inoculations for measles, mumps and rubella. [24263]

Yvette Cooper: My answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 321W, contained an inadvertent error in that it stated "prevent" instead of "permit". The correct position is: As far as we are aware, all European Union countries recommend MMR as the safest way to protect children.

We are not aware of any EU country where the health service routinely offers parents a choice of MMR or single vaccines against measles, mumps and rubella.

Like the United Kingdom, EU countries permit the use of licensed vaccines, including single vaccines.

NHS Expenditure

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the planned expenditure in England on the national health service as a percentage of England's GDP in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [34505]

Mr. Hutton: We cannot provide the information as requested, because gross domestic product figures for England, over the period asked for are not available. The figures for the United Kingdom are shown in the table.

National health service expenditure (UK) as a percentage of gross domestic product

	Percentage
2001–02	6.3
2002–03	6.5
2003–04	6.6

Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the performance of the Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service in 2001. [35273]

Yvette Cooper: Our objective is to save more lives by providing faster, more responsive and effective emergency ambulance services.

I am advised that Worcestershire health authority invested £893,000 last year to put extra ambulance staff at Kidderminster to ensure that the Accident and Emergency service in the Wyre Forest area continued to be as effective as before the changes to Kidderminster hospital Accident and Emergency department.

This investment, along with changes to working practices which are in line with changes made nationally in all ambulance services, have ensured that the level of emergency service provided by the Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service NHS Trust is among the best in the United Kingdom. Indeed, in December 2001 the trust was the second fastest service in England in responding to life-threatening calls.

Podiatry/Chiropody

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* podiatrists and *(b)* chiropodists work in each of the primary care trust areas in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [36305]

Mr. Hutton: Work force statistics collected on scientific, therapeutic and technical staff which includes chiropody/podiatry staff annually for all national health service organisations in England. The table shows the figures for primary care trusts only.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Chiropody/podiatry staff working in primary care trusts, in England by regional office area as at 30 September 2001

	All chiropody/podiatry staff
Whole-time equivalents	
All Primary Care Trusts	940
Northern and Yorkshire	90
Trent	140
West midlands	20
North-west	160
Eastern	140
London	170
South-east	170
South-west	70

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Chiropody/podiatry staff working in primary care trusts, in England by regional office area as at 30 September 2001

	All chiropody/podiatry staff
Headcount	
All Primary Care Trusts	1,170
Northern and Yorkshire	110
Trent	170
West midlands	20
North-west	200
Eastern	170
London	200
South-east	200
South-west	100

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Due to rounding figures may not equal the sum of component parts

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for assistance to those people refused treatment by the Podiatry Service due to failing to meet the medical criteria yet incapable of looking after their feet; and if he will make a statement. [36297]

Mr. Hutton: Responsibility for the provision of national health service chiropody/podiatry services rests with individual NHS organisations. It is for them to decide what criteria to apply to clinically prioritise access to chiropody/podiatry services but vulnerable groups of people such as older people, children and people with diabetes and those with learning disabilities should normally receive priority.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people used the Podiatry Service within the NHS in the last 12 months for which figures are available; what estimate he has made of how many people will be refused treatment by the Podiatry Service within the NHS as a result of the new guidelines; and if he will make a statement. [36298]

Mr. Hutton: In 2000–01, the latest year for which figures are available, 2.25 million people received national health service chiropody services. Information about patient contracts with the chiropody service in England is collected on Department's return KT23 and published each year. The latest publication "Chiropody services: summary information for 2000–01, England" is in the Library and is available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/kt230001.

The Department has not issued any guidelines to the national health service on the provision of chiropody/podiatry services. It is the responsibility of local commissioners to determine the needs of their local population and provide services within available resources.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines the NHS has given to community care trusts with regard to the podiatry treatment to be offered to patients under the NHS; who set the criteria; whether the patient may challenge the criteria; and if he will make a statement. [36299]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not issued any guidelines to the national health service on the provision of chiropody/podiatry services. It is the responsibility of local commissioners to determine the needs of their local population and provide services within available resources. Therefore criteria, if set, will be determined locally. Patients can use complaints procedures about any treatment issue and in the first instance they should contact the complaints manager at the hospital concerned or their health authority.

Antibiotics

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost to the national health service of over-prescribing of antibiotics in each of the last five years. [36078]

Ms Blears: We have no direct evidence of over-prescribing of antibiotics. However, in the light of concerns over antimicrobial resistance we have taken action to ensure the appropriate use of antibiotics with the result that prescriptions issued over the period 1997 to 2000 have fallen by around 20 per cent.

Workforce Numbers Advisory Board

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget is of the Workforce Numbers Advisory Board. [36901]

Mr. Hutton: The Workforce Numbers Advisory Board does not have a budget.

Its role is to consider detailed workforce analysis to support optimum use of the Department's £2,940 million multi professional education and training budget.

Road Traffic Acts

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he plans to reintroduce regulations on the NHS charges under the Road Traffic Acts; [37559]

(2) what recent representations he has received on the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment Regulations; [37560]

(3) for what reason the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment Regulations were revoked. [37558]

Ms Blears: The Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment Regulations 2001 came into force on 28 January 2002. Following representations made by, and on behalf of, the insurance industry that the introduction of the regulations had taken place without adequate consultation the regulations were revoked and the previous rates reinstated with effect from 8 February 2002.

Consultation will take place, in due course, on the content and timing of further amendments to the regulations.

NHS Dentistry (Wirral)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on access to NHS dentistry on the Wirral. [33487]

Ms Blears: In the quarter October to December 2001 65 per cent. of children were registered with an NHS dentist compared with 61 per cent. in England and 57 per cent. of adults in Wirral were registered compared to 45 per cent. in England.

Wirral dentists have received £350,788 from the £35 million dentistry modernisation fund announced in May 2001, which has been used locally to increase the provision and scope of surgery and modernise premises and upgrade equipment.

Two Personal Dental Service Pilots have been established in Wirral with central funding. One is bringing dentistry for the first time to the Leasowe Housing estate, a very socially disadvantaged area in North Wirral.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the existing UK stocks of smallpox vaccine have undergone tests for efficacy and safety, with particular reference to TSE, in line with recommendations by the Medicines Control Agency and EMEA. [32972]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 5 January 2002]:* Existing United Kingdom stocks of smallpox vaccine are held on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health, but do not have a current marketing authorisation (licence) issued by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA). There were originally three licences for smallpox vaccine held by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State. At the request of the licence holder, these licences were cancelled in the early 1990s.

The UK stocks of vaccine have been tested on a regular basis for potency. Last year the Department asked the holder of the stocks to recheck the viability of the virus in the vaccine and to repeat the safety and quality control tests originally performed on vaccine stocks as described in the World Health Organisation recommendations on smallpox vaccine manufacture.

Because of the particular nature of the disease for which this vaccine was developed it has never been possible to conduct formal clinical trials in humans to demonstrate efficacy in the prevention of smallpox that would normally support an application for a licence for a medicinal product.

The vaccines held in stock are no longer licensed medicinal products and were not therefore included in the exercise undertaken in all member states of the European Union, by way of implementing Commission Directive 1999/82/EC, to require all marketing authorisation (licence) holders to demonstrate that their products comply with the current guideline. Compliance with these guidelines has been a legal requirement for new licence applications since 1 July 2000 and for products already on the market since 1 March 2001.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately-provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if he will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if he will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34376]

Jacqui Smith: Since 1999 we have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year.

We have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 April 1999. Copies of the lists are available in the Library.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Library.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34288]

Ms Blears: The figures represent what the Department has spent in the last four complete years on legal advice, legal representation and on costs awarded against it in court.

Year	*£ million*
1997–1998	2.8
1998–1999	3.6
1999–2000	4.3
2000–01	5.3

Macmillan Nurses

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from Macmillan Cancer Relief about training district nurses; and if he will make a statement. [34476]

Yvette Cooper: We have received no representations from Macmillan Cancer Relief about the training of district nurses. Macmillan, amongst other voluntary bodies, has been involved in the planning and implementation of a training and support programme for district and community nurses initiated under the NHS Cancer Plan. We have made £6 million available over the next three years to support over 10,000 nurses in primary care to take part in new training and support in the general principles and practice of palliative care. The training programme will help district and community nurses to support people with cancer, in remaining at home for as long as possible during their illness.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the proposed establishment numbers are for the National Care Standards Commission for each category of staff. [32673]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The National Care Standards Commission is funded to employ 1,475 inspectors. Managerial, advisory and administrative staff will bring the total funded establishment to 2,440.

Cytology

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if guidance based on the report on liquid-based cytology will be available by May; and if he will make a statement; [34091]

(2) what *(a)* plans he has made and *(b)* budgets he has put in place in advance of the NICE decision on liquid-based cytology. [34090]

Ms Blears: The evaluation report of the liquid based cytology arm of the pilot will now be available in the autumn, once the full clinical record of each woman in the pilot has been received for the purposes of the evaluation. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) will begin the reappraisal of liquid-based cytology techniques once the evaluation report has been received. The pilot will inform the planning and resource requirements needed for liquid-based cytology if NICE recommends its introduction.

Aircraft Noise (Children)

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has commissioned into the effect of aircraft noise on young children. [34275]

Yvette Cooper: As part of a joint programme with the Department for the Environment and Food and Rural Affairs, we have commissioned a research programme designed to study the non-auditory health effects of noise.

Five research projects were funded under this programme, one of which was "West London Schools study aircraft noise at school and children's cognitive performance and stress responses". This study was led by Professor S. Stansfeld at Queen Mary and Westfield College.

Full details of the study are available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hef/airpol/aipolh.htm.

Food Labelling

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has made to other EU countries on labelling the origin of meat and meat products. [33932]

Yvette Cooper: *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Food Standards Agency is responsible for representing the United Kingdom at working level on these matters and has taken the lead in pressing for changes to European labelling rules to require country of origin labelling on a wider range of foods, particularly meat products. It is also pressing for changes that would prevent misleading labelling by restricting the use of terms like "produce of" to those foods where the main ingredients come from, and production processes occur in, the named place or country. Other EU member states support the UK's initiative on this issue.

Terminally Ill Patients

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve out-of-hours home care for patients who are terminally ill. [34073]

Yvette Cooper: *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* A supportive and palliative care strategy is being developed under the NHS Cancer Plan to ensure best treatment and care from when cancer is first suspected through to death and bereavement. Part of this strategy includes a review of out-of-hours palliative care services working with other key organisations such as Macmillan Cancer Relief.

Zyban

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is planned into the effectiveness of Zyban in assisting people to stop smoking; and what plans he has to review the funding of Zyban on the NHS. [33613]

Yvette Cooper: *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* At the time of licensing, the Committee on Safety of Medicines considered that Zyban (bupropion hydrochloride) met appropriate standards of quality, safety and efficacy to justify its licence for use as an aid to smoking cessation in combination with motivational support in nicotine-dependent patients. Subsequent studies (conducted by Glaxosmithkline, the Marketing Authorisation holder) have confirmed that Zyban is an effective aid to smoking cessation. There are no plans to commission further research into the efficacy of Zyban.

We expect health authorities and primary care trusts to fund the provision of Zyban and other smoking cessation services from their general allocations which are increasing in real terms by an average 7.2 per cent. next year. We have no plans to alter these arrangements.

Respiratory Disease

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much has been spent on *(a)* research, *(b)* treatment and *(c)* prevention of asthma since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [34591]

(2) how much has been spent on *(a)* research, *(b)* treatment and *(c)* prevention of lung diseases since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [34587]

Yvette Cooper: Information on expenditure on lung diseases and asthma is not collected centrally. The British Thoracic Society estimated in November 2001, in a report entitled "The Burden of Lung Disease" that the total cost of respiratory disease to the national health service is around £2.5 billion.

The main Government agency for research into the cause and treatments of disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC spent a total of £12.2 million in 1999–2000 on research into asthma and respiratory disorders. The MRC additionally supports research on lung cancer that is not included in this figure.

The Department has spent an estimated £7.24 million on directly commissioned asthma research projects since 1997. The Department has also spent an estimated £3.45 million on directly commissioned research relating to lung disease since 1997. The forward commitment for ongoing projects is currently an estimated £1.41 million.

Smoking is one of the major causes of lung disease. In 1998 the Government published the first White Paper on Tobacco "Smoking Kills". To date it has invested around £130 million to implement the strategy set out in that document.

Anti-Smoking Strategies

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been introduced since 1997 to dissuade young people from smoking. [34588]

Yvette Cooper: In December 1998 we launched the first ever cross-Government strategy to reduce smoking levels. In 'Smoking Kills' we set targets to reduce smoking among children aged 11–15 from 13 per cent. to 11 per cent. by 2005, and nine per cent. by 2010. We have already delivered on the 2005 target for children aged 11–15. The latest available survey results show that in 2000 the percentage of regular smokers in this age group was 10 per cent.

Any programme to reduce smoking among children and young people must involve cross-Government and cross-agency working. The Department has worked closely with other Departments to introduce measures to control the supply of tobacco and educate young people about the dangers of smoking.

The Department has agreed an enforcement protocol with local authorities to strengthen the enforcement of the existing legislation on under-age sales of cigarettes. The Department supports proof of age card schemes, which protect shopkeepers and children alike, as well as measures to restrict the siting of cigarette vending machines.

In December 1999 the Department launched a national tobacco education campaign to help smokers to give up and to persuade non-smokers, particularly children not to start. In 2001 a peer-to-peer communication project encouraged groups of young people to produce a series of films expressing their views on smoking. The films have been shown on cable television and plans are being developed for wider distribution including a teaching pack for schools.

Foster Care

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures he is proposing to make foster care easier; and if he will make a statement; [34627]

(2) what financial provision is given to foster carers who are unable to work owing to their commitment to the children in their care. [34628]

Jacqui Smith: Caring for another person's child is not an easy task and those that take on the role of foster carer perform a very important role for society. The assessment and approval processes ensure that the potential carer has a proper understanding of the task ahead. Additionally, training and support from the fostering service provides carers with the opportunities to further their knowledge, understanding and ability to manage the role they have taken on. The Government is constantly looking for ways in which to better support foster carers. New regulations and national minimum standards will come into force in April and these will form a more comprehensive legislative framework for all concerned with the delivery of fostering.

Foster carers are paid an allowance by the local authority to care for a child. The allowance covers the usual costs of looking after a child, and many local authorities operate a reward payment scheme for their foster carers in addition to the basic allowance. These payments are linked to the carer's skills and abilities to meet the needs of children who are fostered, and with their commitment to training and skills development.

Matters relating to Scotland are for the devolved Administration.

Strategic Health Authority (Shropshire and Staffordshire)

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent posts are planned for the staffing of the new strategic health authority covering Shropshire and Staffordshire. [34803]

Yvette Cooper: In accordance with the Shifting the Balance of Power Document "The Next Steps" paragraph 2.5.5, the staffing levels will be capped at 75 with costs of £4 million. The chief executives are in the process of putting together their franchise plans, in which actual staffing levels will be finalised.

Radiotherapy

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what target he has set for waiting time for cancer patients requiring radiotherapy from the NHS. [34821]

Yvette Cooper: *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The NHS Cancer Plan set out waiting time targets for cancer treatment, including radiotherapy, which will be implemented over the next four years. From December 2001, there is a one month maximum wait from diagnosis to treatment for breast cancer and a one month wait from urgent general practitioner referral to treatment for children's, testicular and acute leukaemia. By 2005, there will be a maximum one month wait from diagnosis to treatment for all cancers.

Emergency Contraception

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the consumer is of emergency contraception at a pharmacy; what plans he has to lower the charge; and if he will make a statement. [35245]

Yvette Cooper: Emergency contraception is available through direct sale in pharmacies to women aged 16 and over usually at a cost of £19.99. We do not control the prices at which medicines are sold to the public. Emergency contraception remains free of charge from the National Health Service.

Donor Scheme

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to replace the opt-in donor scheme with an opt-out scheme. [35461]

Jacqui Smith: We have no plans to introduce an opt-out scheme for organ donation. We are in the process of undertaking a comprehensive review of the law governing the taking, removal and use of human tissue, and will be issuing a consultation paper shortly.

Tobacco Products

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what standards the Government sets to protect consumers from toxins in *(a)* smoking and *(b)* chewing tobacco products; and whether she has taken advice from the

(i) Chief Medical Officer and (ii) Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health on appropriate standards for the protection of public health. [34905]

Yvette Cooper: *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Upper limits on tar yields from cigarettes were established by Directive 90/239/EEC and are regulated under the Tobacco Products Labelling (Safety) regulations 1991. The limits will reduce under the provisions of EC Directive 2001/37/EC and limits will also apply to nicotine and carbon monoxide yields.

Additives to tobacco products are assessed using the guidelines detailed in the report to the Chief Medical Officer from the Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health (SCOTH) (Annex K, appendix 1) as part of the voluntary agreement. It is under this agreement that the Department maintains a list of approved additives with details of individual and aggregate usage limits. The list of approved additives is published on the department of health website at "www.doh.gov.uk/scoth". Tobacco companies are required to submit annual certificates of compliance with these limits.

Copies of Tobacco Products Labelling (Safety) regulations 1991 and the report from the Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health (SCOTH) including the guidelines are available in the Library.

NHS Funded Activity (Private Sector)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he has completed his review of information needs as regards NHS funded activity in the private sector; and if he will make a statement on his conclusion; [35087]

(2) when he expects to publish the key results of his survey of the amount of activity purchased by the NHS within the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [35078]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The Department is working to improve the collection of routine information about National Health Service activity undertaken by the independent sector and is making arrangements to collect data on such activity through NHS management information returns to the Department. It will be some time before information gathered in this way is available for publication.

Validation and analysis of the survey returns from the NHS for the Department's survey of NHS organisations' use of the independent sector, is being finalised. We expect to be able to share key findings shortly.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures he has introduced to gauge the physical and mental fitness of managers working within NHS Professionals; [35092]

(2) what measures are in place to ensure the financial viability of NHS Professionals; [35096]

(3) what training is being provided to NHS Professionals' call centre staff; [35094]

(4) what measures he has put in place to ensure that the management structure of NHS Professionals adequately reflects the size of the agency and the volume and complexity of the services it provides; [35098]

(5) whether managers working within NHS Professionals will be required to hold nationally recognised management qualifications; [35093]

(6) what measures are in place to ensure the management structure of NHS Professionals allows sufficient flexibility for the organisation to *(a)* respond to the changing needs and circumstances of service users and *(b)* maintain an effective quality control system; [35097]

(7) what measures he has put in place to ensure that managers working within NHS Professionals have the necessary qualifications, skills and experience to provide trusts with temporary health care staff; [35091]

(8) what measures are in place to ensure that *(a)* the size and layout of NHS Professionals' premises are appropriate for the effective management of the services which the agency provides and *(b)* the premises are kept clean and suitably equipped and furnished; [35095]

(9) which body has responsibility for *(a)* regulating the performance of NHS Professionals and *(b)* investigating complaints made against the service provider. [35099]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The National Health Service Professionals initiative is being implemented nationally in three phased approach, highlighted in detail in "HSC 2001–02 NHS Professionals—Flexible Organisations, Flexible Staff". To date the service has been extended to 38 sites. An evaluation is being undertaken at the moment of the existing sites.

A national project board has been established that includes representatives from the NHS and Department of Health, that is responsible for the development of NHS Professionals. Regional project boards will closely manage the development across regions. Each site has its own project structure to manage and monitor implementation.

This structure will ensure that measures are in place to address:

1. The physical and mental fitness of managers working within NHS Professionals is gauged.

2. Managers working within NHS Professionals having the necessary and appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to provide trusts with temporary health care staff.

3. Need for appropriate training and development to be provided to NHS Professionals' call-centre staff.

4. The size and layout of NHS Professionals' premises are appropriate for the effective management of the services that NHS Professionals provides, and that they are kept clean and suitably equipped and furnished.

5. The financial viability of NHS Professionals.

6. The management structure of NHS Professionals adequately reflects the size of NHS Professionals, and the volume and complexity of the services it provides; and allows for sufficient flexibility for the organisation to

respond to the changing needs and circumstances of service users and maintain effective quality control systems.

7. The investigation of complaints and monitoring of performance.

Care Home Beds (Bromsgrove)

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of care home beds lost in the Bromsgrove constituency in *(a)* the last year and *(b)* the last two years. [35275]

Yvette Cooper: Information for the Bromsgrove constituency is not available centrally. The number of residential and nursing care homes and beds in Worcestershire is shown in the table.

Number of residential and nursing care homes and beds in Worcestershire, 1999 to 2001. At 31 March

	Residential care homes		*Nursing care homes, hospitals and clinics*	
	Homes	*Places*	*Homes*	*Places*
1999	317	3,781	104	3,226
2000	314	3,719	100	2,831
2001	303	3,530	98	2,670

Source: Department of Health annual returns

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level in 2002–03 was of *(a)* personal services SSA per resident, *(b)* personal social services SSA per resident over 65, and *(c)* personal social services SSA per resident under 18 years of age for (i) Buckinghamshire, (ii) Milton Keynes, (iii) Oxfordshire, (iv) Bedfordshire, (v) Hertfordshire, (vi) Northamptonshire, (vii) Windsor and Maidenhead, (viii) Hillingdon, (ix) Harrow, (x) Kingston-upon-Thames, (xi) Ealing and (xii) England. [35819]

Jacqui Smith: The personal social services spending assessment figures requested are shown in the table.

£

Local authority	*Total PSS SSA per resident*	*Elderly[1] SSA per resident 65+*	*Children's SSA per resident 0–17*
Buckinghamshire	130.32	579.80	85.90
Milton Keynes	146.03	759.67	143.23
Oxfordshire	135.29	603.92	97.66
Bedfordshire	141.53	630.70	104.66
Hertfordshire	162.91	708.21	109.22
Northamptonshire	144.77	627.09	114.75
Windsor and Maidenhead	134.57	540.98	100.16
Hillingdon	177.96	738.64	173.77
Harrow	189.09	833.28	158.73
Kingston-upon-Thames	159.03	663.26	156.73
Ealing	221.66	902.34	293.90
England	184.63	703.61	169.29

[1] Includes elderly residential and elderly domiciliary SSAs

Landfill Sites (Health Effects)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent evidence he has received concerning the damaging effects caused to the health of people living near landfill sites. [35632]

Yvette Cooper: The Department is aware of a number of research studies published in the scientific literature, which investigate health outcomes in people living near landfill sites. These have been considered by the Department, which has sought advice from the independent expert advisory committee, the committee on the toxicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment (COT). They felt that it was not possible to draw any definite conclusions regarding possible health effects from these studies and further research was warranted. The most recent statement by the COT is available on the Department's website (www.doh.gov.uk/landh.htm). The Government have commissioned a programme of work on the impacts on health of landfill sites, details of which are also available on the website, and the Department continues to monitor relevant publications.

Child Care Workers

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1041W, ref 19094, on child care workers, what measures he has taken to ensure that employers of child care workers notify the Secretary of State when they have dismissed a person from a child care position on the grounds of misconduct which harmed a child or placed a child at risk of harm. [35868]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance on the operation of the Protection of Children Act 1999 was published in September 2000 and distributed to a large range of child care organisations. This guidance explains the statutory responsibilities placed on child care organisations to refer names to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in certain circumstances. The guidance continues to be made available and is published at the Department's website for easy access.

Additionally, local authority children's services are regularly inspected by the social services inspectorate. These inspections include scrutiny of the provisions for children's safeguards to ensure the requirements of the Children Act and subsequent legislation and regulations are being implemented.

Care Beds

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many care beds were *(a)* closed in the public sector and *(b)* created in the private sector in each year from 1990 to 1997; [35369]

(2) how many care beds have been closed in *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the public sector since 1997; and how many have been created in each sector since 1997. [35370]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of home care beds closures or new home care beds is not centrally available. The number of care home beds in independent homes and local authority staffed homes is presented in the table.

Number of residential and nursing care home beds in independent homes and local authority staffed homes, England, 1997 to 2001

Rounded numbers

At 31 March	*(a) Total number of care beds in independent[1] care homes*	*(b) Total number of care beds in local authority staffed homes*
1990	310,700	120,300
1991	345,000	112,600
1992	367,900	100,900
1993	385,000	90,200
1994	402,900	81,200
1995	416,900	75,500
1996	429,500	72,700
1997[2]	468,600	65,800
1998	489,500	64,000
1999	487,200	59,000
2000	483,800	55,500
2001	477,100	50,900

[1] The figures relate to residential care beds in independent residential homes and nursing beds in private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics.

[2] The number of nursing beds in 1997 refers to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns.

Drug Administration (School Staff)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what conditions *(a)* school nurses and *(b)* other school staff may administer (i) aspirin, (ii) MMR vaccine, (iii) other vaccines and (iv) the morning after pill without parental consent. [35223]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The guidance "Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs" issued by the Department for Education and Skills covers circumstances in which medication may be administered, and underlines the need for a clear policy to be set out, drawn up in partnership with parents. School staff should generally not give aspirin to pupils and never to a child under 12 years of age, unless prescribed. Parents must give consent to their child's participation in any immunisation programme, for which school nurses are responsible. Other school staff do not conduct immunisation programmes.

School nurses may provide prescription only medicines, like the morning after pill, to pupils within the legal framework and arrangements set out in Patient Group Directions. There are no circumstances in which other school staff may supply emergency contraception. The necessity for parental consent to these measures depends on whether or not a child is considered to be competent to give consent. Children and young people are often able to provide their own consent for medication—where they are considered to be competent under the Frazer Guidelines set out in 1985. Involving parents is recognised to be good practice but the primary duty is to the child's best interests.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and Civil Service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35836]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Secondments and attachments are part of the Interchange Initiative which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. Before an interchange can occur all parties must be satisfied that no conflict of interest arises.

Details of secondments from the private sector commencing in the years shown are in the table.

Dates	*Companies seconded from:*	*Civil service grade*	*Job title*	*Section seconded to:*	*Summary of work undertaken*
November 1995 to November 1997	Nabarro Nathanson	The secondees to the Private Finance Unit of the NHS Executive are equivalent to civil service grade IP4 and titled 'Consultant' except the secondee from Tarmac who was equivalent to civil service grade SCS and was Head of the Private Finance Unit			Secondees to the Private Finance Unit of the NHS Executive advise NHS Trusts on legal and financial aspects of PFI contracts
July 1996 to July 1997	Walker Morris				
June 1996 to March 1997	Secta Group Ltd.				
December 1996 to January 1998	Tarmac plc				
January 1997 to September 1997	Private Finance Panel Executive (3)				
February 1997 to January 1998	Private Finance Panel Executive (3)				
April 1997 to July 1998	Private Finance Panel Executive (3)				
July 1997 to July 1998	Pinsent Curtis				
September 1997 to August 1998	Deloitte & Touche				
September 1997 to September 1998	Beachcroft Stanley				
January 1998 to July 1998	Dickinson Dees				
May 1998 to May 1999	PricewaterhouseCooper				
June 1998 to June 1999	Ward Hadaway				
July 1998 to June 1999	Lloyds Bank plc				
February 1999 to November 1999	Hempson				
March 1999 to January 2000	Berwin Leighton				

Dates	*Companies seconded from:*	*Civil service grade*	*Job title*	*Section seconded to:*	*Summary of work undertaken*
September 1999 to December 2001	British Airways	SCS	Branch Head	Organisational Development	Developing the Department's capacity to change in order to deliver Minister's priorities and to be recognised as a leader in civil service reform
July 1999 to April 2000	Addleshaw Booth & Co.	The secondees to the Private Finance Unit of the NHS Executive are equivalent to civil service grade IP4 and titled 'Consultant'.			Secondees to the Private Finance Unit of the NHS Executive advise NHS trusts on legal and financial aspects of PFI contracts.
October 1999 to October 2000	Deloitte & Touche				
November 1999 to January 2001	Taylor Woodrow				
December 1999 to August 2000	Herbert Smith				
March 2000 to July 2000	MacFarlanes				
July 2000 to April 2001	Capsticks				
August 2000 to September 2001	Walker Morris				
August 2000 to July 2001	Beachcroft Wansborough				
October 2000 to October 2001	Ernst & Young				
January 2001 to December 2001	KPMG				
May 2001 to July 2001	Berwin Leighton				
September 2001 to September 2002	Hornergold & Hills				
November 2001 to November 2002	Grant Thornton				
December 2001 to November 2002	Deloitte & Touche				
January 2002 to July 2002	AMEC				
February 2002 to August 2002	Eversheds				

Note:

For the secondees to the Private Finance Unit the Department of Health negotiates a reimbursement fee with the individual company to cover the period of the secondment.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33867]

Ms Blears: Interchange is a key component of the reform agenda. The Modernising Government White Paper committed us to increasing Interchange, in particular by bringing in more people on secondment and sending more of our people out. Secondments and attachments are part of the Interchange Initiative, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: voluntary, education, health, public and private.

Centrally held records indicate that the following secondments have taken place:

1999–2000

A Secondment from Deloitte & Touche to the Department of Health, providing advice to NHS Trusts on legal and financial aspects of PFI contracts.

2000–01

Three secondments from, respectively, Deloitte & Touche, Ernst and Young, and KPMG. In addition there was a reciprocal secondment ("Job swap") from Deloitte & Touche to the Department of Health, with the Deloitte & Touche secondee to the Department being involved in developing PFI policy and approving schemes. The Department of Health secondee to Deloitte & Touche is involved with various NHS Health related projects and research work.

Learning Disability

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many local learning disability partnership boards have met to consider updated joint investment plans; and how many such agreed plans were submitted to regional offices of his Department before 1 February; [35582]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress in the implementation of his strategy for learning disability, and on future arrangements for monitoring its implementation; [35581]

(3) how many local learning disability partnership boards have been established; and how many remain to be constituted. [35583]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* The Government's strategy for improving services for people with learning disabilities and their families is set out in the white paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" (Cm 5086), published in March 2001.

For progress made on implementation and arrangements for monitoring the difference the policies set out in "Valuing People" will make, I refer the hon. Member to the report I gave during the debate on this subject on 1 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 535–78, progress includes:

Nine regional conferences held in June and July 2001 to publicise "Valuing People".

Implementation guidance issued on 31 August 2001.

A national conference on the theme of partnership working held on 9 January 2002.

A Director of Implementation and members of the Implementation Support Team appointed.

The chair, co-chair, and members of the Learning Disability Task Force appointed. The Task Force met for the first time on 19 December. Its second meeting was on 14 February.

Work has started on commissioning a national survey of people with learning disabilities.

A funding programme for advocacy schemes is under way.

Guidance has been issued on involving service users in decision making and on person centred planning. Guidance is being prepared, and will be issued within the next few months, on health action plans, partnership working, and housing options.

Work is well advanced on establishing a National Forum for People with Learning Disabilities.

A telephone information and helpline, with matched funding from the Department of Health and MENCAP, was launched on 3 December 2001. It received nearly 700 inquiries in its first five weeks.

Decisions have been taken on projects to be funded under a £2 million learning disability research initiative.

Both "Valuing People" and the implementation guidance (Health Service Circular/Local Authority Circular HSC 2001/016: LAC (2001)23) published in August 2001 set out arrangements for monitoring implementation (copies of both documents are available in the Library).

We will continue to monitor progress through a range of performance assessment mechanisms, a survey of learning disabled people, and measurement against specific performance indicators that are currently being developed. We will report progress annually to Parliament.

The implementation guidance issued in August 2001 reminded local authorities that Learning Disability Partnership Boards should be set up in each local authority area by 31 October 2001 to take forward implementation of the "Valuing People" proposals at local level.

Partnership Boards were asked to complete and return updated joint investment plans (JIPs) to the Department's Social Services inspectorate social care regional offices by 31 January 2002. The JIPs should include local action plans for implementing the "Valuing People" programme.

By 8 February all but two JIPs had been returned, most being received on or before 31 January. The outstanding JIPs are being followed up. All Partnership Boards have been constituted as required by the implementation circular, but information is not held centrally on how many have met or met specifically to consider their JIPs. The guidance made it clear, however, that updated JIPs should be agreed by all agencies represented on the Partnership Boards.

The first priority of the learning disability Implementation Team will be to establish links and contacts with learning disability partnership boards. The team will work with any boards whose JIPs are found, following the evaluation now under way, to be below an acceptable standard to help them take remedial action and ensure that improvements in local services are achieved.

Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future management of Barnet Chase Farm NHS Trust. [36036]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* On 11 February, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State announced that the best National Health Service managers would be appointed to replace the chief executive at four zero rated NHS trusts. One of those trusts was Barnet and Chase Farm. The decision to move to franchising Barnet and Chase Farm NHS Trust follows serious concerns raised by the Commission for Health Improvement about radiology services at the trust.

The franchises for the trust chief executive posts will be open to NHS managers with a proven track record of delivery. Each franchise will run for three years and be annually reviewed to ensure improvements are being made. Franchises for these hospitals are expected to be made in April.

New chief executives will be appointed to the four trusts on the basis of a three-year franchise plan setting out how services will be improved. Franchise bids will address the specific weaknesses of the trusts that resulted in them being given a zero star rating and will also show how improvements in performance can be sustained throughout the trust.

Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust supports any initiative which drives up standards in hospitals and as such welcomes the franchise announcement and looks forward to more details about how this will directly affect the trust.

Following the resignation of the chief executive of the trust, as an interim measure Paul O'Connor, formerly Director of Operations at King's College Hospital NHS Trust, has been appointed as acting chief executive.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients *(a)* overall, *(b)* from the London Borough of Barnet and *(c)* from Hendon constituency (i) were affected by the backlog in ultrasound tests at Barnet Chase Farm NHS Trust and (ii) remain to be seen; when they are expected to be seen; and if he will make a statement. [36038]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 13 February, 2002]:* There were 2,700 ultrasound test requests delayed inappropriately at Chase Farm Hospital. I understand that none of these requests related to Barnet or Hendon residents. The 400 requests currently outstanding will be undertaken by the end of February.

Cancer Research

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money he allocated for cancer research in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [36048]

Yvette Cooper: In 2000–01, our investment in cancer research was about £190 million. The Department spent £83.8 million, and the health departments of the devolved administrations spent £12.4 million. The Medical Research Council (MRC) has estimated that it spent £58 million on cancer research, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has estimated that the universities spent £26 million of their allocations from HEFCE on cancer research. The other research councils spent a total of £9.9 million.

Comparable figures for previous years are not available, because, for example, the MRC has improved its methods of capturing data and identifying relevant expenditure. But the Department spent £77.4 million on cancer research in 1999–2000, £75.6 million in 1998–99 and £53 million in 1997–98.

Waiting Times

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients are waiting over one year for inpatient treatment *(a)* in West Surrey and *(b)* in Durham; and what percentage were waiting over one year in June 1997. [36907]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Inpatient 12 month waiters—June 1997 and December 2001

	West Surrey[1]	*County Durham*[1]
June 1997		
Number of patient waiting over 12 months for inpatient treatment	1,452	66
Percentage of patients waiting over 12 months for inpatient treatment	8.9	0.5
December 2001		
Number of patient waiting over 12 months for inpatient treatment	849	7
Percentage of patients waiting over 12 months for inpatient treatment	7	0.1

[1] Health Authority

Source:

QF01 quarterly return, Department of Health

Mental Health Services

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve mental health services for young people. [36932]

Jacqui Smith: Our strategy for the development of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), initiated in 1999–2000, is ongoing with the aim of improving the overall quality and accessibility of local services for children and young people with mental health problems. In the three years ending 31 March 2002 we will have invested some £85 million across the national health service and local authorities, with each agency receiving funding to help support the implementation of jointly agreed local CAMHS developments in accordance with national objectives. We intend to build on these gains through implementation of the CAMHS strand of the planned Children's National Service Framework, on which work has recently started. This is expected to produce new standards and service models and will be one of the main drivers of future developments.

Work is also proceeding on relevant aspects of the NHS plan including improved early intervention services for young people with psychosis and better mental health services for young people in prison.

Nursing Vacancies

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which 10 health authorities have *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest percentage of nurse vacancies; and what the number of nurses is in each case. [36908]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Department of health vacancies survey, March 2001 vacancies in NHS trusts by health authority areas, qualified nurses

Highest three month vacancies	*Three month vacancy rates (Percentage)*	*Three month vacancy (Number)*	*Staff in post*
Bromley HA	10.9	100	800
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	8.8	630	6,590
Bexley and Greenwich HA	8.2	180	2,040
Barking and Havering HA	8.1	130	1,470
Buckinghamshire HA	7.8	230	2,680
North Cheshire HA	7.8	140	2,680
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	7.6	220	1,690
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	7.5	330	2,660
East London and The City HA	7.4	360	4,110
Hillingdon HA	6.8	360	3,960
Lowest 3 month vacancies		60	840
Wolverhampton HA	0.3	10	1,450
Sunderland HA	0.4	10	1,700
Southern Derbyshire HA	0.5	10	2,380
Kingston and Richmond HA	0.5	10	1,400
County Durham and Darlington HA	0.5	10	2,620
Suffolk HA	0.6	10	2,450
South Humber HA	0.6	10	1,340
Cornwall and Isle of Scilly HA	0.6	10	2,250
Morcambe Bay HA	0.7	10	1,840
North Yorkshire HA	0.7	20	3,300

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 workforce censuses (whole time equivalent).
3. HA Figures are based on Trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of healthcare.
4. Staff in post figures quoted cannot be used to calculate the vacancy rates.
5. Percentages rounded to one decimal place.
6. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Source: Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001

East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish *(a)* the action plan for East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust and *(b)* revisions to it; and if he will make a statement; [36888]

(2) what plans he has for the East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust. [36889]

Jacqui Smith: Additional work on the performance improvement plan submitted by East and North Hertfordshire National Health Service to the Eastern Regional Office is in progress. A further assessment of the trust's performance will be made in April and will include feedback from the forthcoming Commission for Health Improvement visit to the trust.

Liver Disease

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the incidence of chronic liver disease *(a)* in total, *(b)* for men and *(c)* for women, in residents of each health authority in England and Wales in (i) 1996 and (ii) for the most recent available year; and how far local health authority rates deviate from the national average. [37037]

Ms Blears: The incidence of chronic liver disease in England in 1996–97 and in 2000–01 (the last year for which figures are available) was as follows:

Number of cases per 100,000 population

	1996–97	*2000–01*
Men	3	3
Women	6	6
Total	5	5

The tables show detailed information about the incidence of chronic liver disease among men and women in each English health authority for these two years. Information about the incidence of the disease and the deviation from the national average is expressed in terms of the number of cases per 100,000 population in each health authority.

Admissions, rate per 100,000 population and deviation from national average for chronic liver disease by health authority of residence and gender—NHS Hospitals, England 2000–01

	Admissions				*Population*		
Health Authority	*Male*	*Female*	*Not known/ not specified*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
QA2 Hillingdon	1	4	0	5	127,271	128,429	255,700
QA3 Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	8	6	0	14	221,268	213,662	434,930
QA4 Enfield and Haringey	6	13	0	19	248,121	246,435	494,556
QA5 Redbridge and Waltham Forest	10	15	0	25	224,519	227,873	452,392
QA6 Bedfordshire	9	9	0	18	282,220	283,528	565,748
QA7 Berkshire	9	17	0	26	403,506	399,272	802,778
QA8 Buckinghamshire	9	13	0	22	345,303	347,588	692,891
QAA Bexley and Greenwich	4	16	0	20	215,507	223,035	438,542
QAC Bromley	2	7	0	9	147,820	154,616	302,436
QAD Croydon	4	4	0	8	168,681	171,194	339,875
QAE East Kent	6	18	0	24	298,494	316,082	614,576
QAF West Kent	13	27	0	40	485,598	497,858	983,456
QAG Kingston and Richmond	4	6	0	10	172,580	174,490	347,070
QAH Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	10	21	0	31	376,727	383,778	760,505
QAJ Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	6	8	0	14	316,416	323,290	639,706
QAK East Surrey	0	8	0	8	210,221	219,401	429,622
QAL West Surrey	9	14	0	23	321,648	329,377	651,025
QAM East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	18	34	0	52	363,545	395,166	758,711
QAN West Sussex	3	20	0	23	367,796	395,894	763,690
QAP Barking and Havering	1	7	0	8	190,201	196,645	386,846
QAQ Barnet	2	7	0	9	173,142	172,350	345,492
QAR Brent and Harrow	2	7	0	9	238,184	231,614	469,798
QAT Camden and Islington	10	9	0	19	190,438	190,607	381,045
QAV Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	21	24	0	45	349,712	340,942	690,654
QAW East London and The City	11	17	0	28	321,535	313,983	635,518
QAX North Essex	7	23	0	30	448,914	464,419	913,333
QAY South Essex	6	23	0	29	351,582	364,047	715,629
QC1 South Lancashire	10	16	0	26	154,731	159,631	314,362
QC2 Liverpool	10	8	0	18	224,379	232,959	457,338
QC3 Manchester	11	10	0	21	218,398	221,151	439,549
QC4 Morecambe Bay	1	15	0	16	152,766	159,503	312,269
QC5 St. Helens and Knowsley	7	20	0	27	163,037	169,039	332,076
QC6 Salford and Trafford	10	16	0	26	220,746	223,589	444,335
QC7 Sefton	9	12	0	21	137,702	148,797	286,499
QC8 Stockport	2	4	0	6	140,950	150,152	291,102
QC9 West Pennine	16	11	0	27	232,091	238,445	470,536
QCC Northamptonshire	7	11	2	20	310,462	315,433	625,895
QCE Oxfordshire	9	7	0	16	315,662	316,451	632,113
QCF Suffolk	12	34	0	46	335,113	344,802	679,915
QCG Barnsley	8	9	0	17	112,321	115,757	228,078

Admissions, rate per 100,000 population and deviation from national average for chronic liver disease by health authority of residence and gender—NHS Hospitals, England 2000–01

	Admissions				Population		
Health Authority	*Male*	*Female*	*Not known/ not specified*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
QCH North Derbyshire	13	12	0	25	183,974	187,857	371,831
QCJ South Derbyshire	21	60	0	81	285,522	287,327	572,849
QCK Doncaster	7	6	0	13	143,407	146,737	290,144
QCL Leicestershire	8	18	1	27	467,726	470,967	938,693
QCM Lincolnshire	11	12	0	23	310,014	324,334	634,348
QCN North Nottinghamshire	7	22	0	29	194,776	197,287	392,063
QCP Nottingham	20	28	0	48	315,416	323,731	639,147
QCQ Rotherham	5	19	0	24	125,661	127,546	253,207
QCR Sheffield	10	14	0	24	264,894	265,209	530,103
QCT Bury and Rochdale	7	12	0	19	194,980	198,786	393,766
QCV North Cheshire	5	12	0	17	154,344	157,305	311,649
QCW South Cheshire	13	12	1	26	331,426	341,236	672,662
QCX East Lancashire	9	16	0	25	251,682	256,394	508,076
QCY North West Lancashire	8	14	0	22	230,328	238,606	468,934
QD1 North and Mid Hampshire	2	10	0	12	278,627	283,667	562,294
QD2 Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	3	10	0	13	269,283	276,748	546,031
QD3 Southampton and South West Hampshire	4	12	0	16	272,940	275,273	548,213
QD4 Isle of Wight	5	6	0	11	63,004	66,444	129,448
QD5 Somerset	8	17	0	25	241,728	254,566	496,294
QD6 South and West Devon	11	23	0	34	289,186	308,338	597,524
QD7 Wiltshire	13	22	0	35	303,514	309,973	613,487
QD8 Avon	32	28	0	60	504,509	510,975	1,015,484
QD9 Birmingham	15	21	1	37	500,013	510,414	1,010,427
QDA Wigan and Bolton	17	27	0	44	287,498	292,063	579,561
QDC Wirral	8	18	0	26	157,543	169,925	327,468
QDD Bradford	2	19	0	21	240,071	246,002	486,073
QDE County Durham	9	24	0	33	298,232	308,451	606,683
QDF East Riding	13	40	0	53	283,271	290,005	573,276
QDG Gateshead and South Tyneside	12	15	0	27	171,082	178,485	349,567
QDH Leeds	7	11	0	18	360,292	365,842	726,134
QDJ Newcastle and North Tyneside	9	23	0	32	226,886	237,665	464,551
QDK North Cumbria	4	14	0	18	156,631	160,218	316,849
QDL South Humber	6	10	0	16	151,391	156,318	307,709
QDM Northumberland	6	15	0	21	152,433	157,934	310,367
QDN Sunderland	8	21	0	29	141,459	148,026	289,485
QDP Tees	3	15	0	18	273,255	283,438	556,693
QDQ Wakefield	0	5	0	5	158,896	161,486	320,382
QDR North Yorkshire	18	36	0	54	370,009	383,937	753,946
QDT Calderdale and Kirklees	4	13	0	17	290,182	298,681	588,863
QDV Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	10	19	0	29	243,126	256,257	499,383
QDW Dorset	8	16	0	24	338,697	359,633	698,330
QDX North and East Devon	7	13	0	20	238,631	251,117	489,748
QDY Gloucestershire	6	18	0	24	278,986	285,855	564,841
QEA Coventry	3	11	0	14	149,539	152,330	301,869
QEC Dudley	6	17	0	23	155,363	156,687	312,050
QED Herefordshire	1	9	0	10	83,098	86,215	169,313
QEE Sandwell	5	10	0	15	141,936	146,500	288,436
QEF Shropshire	3	13	0	16	216,949	218,963	435,912
QEG Solihull	1	5	0	6	100,322	104,507	204,829
QEH North Staffordshire	7	16	0	23	232,411	235,638	468,049
QEJ South Staffordshire	5	17	1	23	295,600	296,062	591,662
QEK Walsall	2	15	0	17	129,553	131,346	260,899
QEL Warwickshire	2	23	0	25	252,585	257,374	509,959
QEM Wolverhampton	4	3	0	7	118,707	121,804	240,511
QEN Worcestershire	9	13	0	22	267,120	274,325	541,445
QEP East and North Hertfordshire	5	21	0	26	251,538	255,550	507,088
QEQ West Hertfordshire	1	8	0	9	269,189	274,551	543,740
QER Cambridge	12	25	0	37	363,340	366,843	730,183
QET Norfolk	12	30	0	42	394,940	409,030	803,970
Total	775	1,564	6	2,345	24,697,022	25,300,067	49,997,089

Admissions, rate per 100,000 population and deviation from national average for chronic liver disease by health authority of residence and gender—NHS Hospitals, England 2000–01

	Rate per 100,000 population			*Deviation from national average*		
Health Authority	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
QA2 Hillingdon	1	3	2	−2	−3	−3
QA3 Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	4	3	3	0	−3	−1
QA4 Enfield and Haringey	2	5	4	−1	−1	−1
QA5 Redbridge and Waltham Forest	4	7	6	1	0	1
QA6 Bedfordshire	3	3	3	0	−3	−2
QA7 Berkshire	2	4	3	−1	−2	−1
QA8 Buckinghamshire	3	4	3	−1	−2	−2
QAA Bexley and Greenwich	2	7	5	−1	1	0
QAC Bromley	1	5	3	−2	−2	−2
QAD Croydon	2	2	2	−1	−4	−2
QAE East Kent	2	6	4	−1	0	−1
QAF West Kent	3	5	4	0	−1	−1
QAG Kingston and Richmond	2	3	3	−1	−3	−2
QAH Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	3	5	4	0	−1	−1
QAJ Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	2	2	2	−1	−4	−3
QAK East Surrey	0	4	2	−3	−3	−3
QAL West Surrey	3	4	4	0	−2	−1
QAM East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	5	9	7	2	2	2
QAN West Sussex	1	5	3	−2	−1	−2
QAP Barking and Havering	1	4	2	−3	−3	−3
QAQ Barnet	1	4	3	−2	−2	−2
QAR Brent and Harrow	1	3	2	−2	−3	−3
QAT Camden and Islington	5	5	5	2	−1	0
QAV Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	6	7	7	3	1	2
QAW East London and The City	3	5	4	0	−1	0
QAX North Essex	2	5	3	−2	−1	−1
QAY South Essex	2	6	4	−1	0	−1
QC1 South Lancashire	6	10	8	3	4	4
QC2 Liverpool	4	3	4	1	−3	−1
QC3 Manchester	5	5	5	2	−2	0
QC4 Morecambe Bay	1	9	5	−2	3	0
QC5 St. Helens and Knowsley	4	12	8	1	6	3
QC6 Salford and Trafford	5	7	6	1	1	1
QC7 Sefton	7	8	7	3	2	3
QC8 Stockport	1	3	2	−2	−4	−3
QC9 West Pennine	7	5	6	4	−2	1
QCC Northamptonshire	2	3	3	−1	−3	−1
QCE Oxfordshire	3	2	3	0	−4	−2
QCF Suffolk	4	10	7	0	4	2
QCG Barnsley	7	8	7	4	2	3
QCH North Derbyshire	7	6	7	4	0	2
QCJ South Derbyshire	7	21	14	4	15	9
QCK Doncaster	5	4	4	2	−2	0
QCL Leicestershire	2	4	3	−1	−2	−2
QCM Lincolnshire	4	4	4	0	−2	−1
QCN North Nottinghamshire	4	11	7	0	5	3
QCP Nottingham	6	9	8	3	2	3
QCQ Rotherham	4	15	9	1	9	5
QCR Sheffield	4	5	5	1	−1	0
QCT Bury and Rochdale	4	6	5	0	0	0
QCV North Cheshire	3	8	5	0	1	1
QCW South Cheshire	4	4	4	1	−3	−1
QCX East Lancashire	4	6	5	0	0	0
QCY North West Lancashire	3	6	5	0	0	0
QD1 North and Mid Hampshire	1	4	2	−2	−3	−3
QD2 Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	1	4	2	−2	−3	−2
QD3 Southampton and South West Hampshire	1	4	3	−2	−2	−2
QD4 Isle of Wight	8	9	8	5	3	4
QD5 Somerset	3	7	5	0	0	0
QD6 South and West Devon	4	7	6	1	1	1
QD7 Wiltshire	4	7	6	1	1	1
QD8 Avon	6	5	6	3	−1	1
QD9 Birmingham	3	4	4	0	−2	−1
QDA Wigan and Bolton	6	9	8	3	3	3
QDC Wirral	5	11	8	2	4	3
QDD Bradford	1	8	4	−2	2	0
QDE County Durham	3	8	5	0	2	1
QDF East Riding	5	14	9	1	8	5
QDG Gateshead and South Tyneside	7	8	8	4	2	3
QDH Leeds	2	3	2	−1	−3	−2

Admissions, rate per 100,000 population and deviation from national average for chronic liver disease by health authority of residence and gender—NHS Hospitals, England 2000–01

	Rate per 100,000 population			*Deviation from national average*		
Health Authority	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
QDJ Newcastle and North Tyneside	4	10	7	1	3	2
QDK North Cumbria	3	9	6	–1	3	1
QDL South Humber	4	6	5	1	0	1
QDM Northumberland	4	9	7	1	3	2
QDN Sunderland	6	14	10	3	8	5
QDP Tees	1	5	3	–2	–1	–1
QDQ Wakefield	0	3	2	–3	–3	–3
QDR North Yorkshire	5	9	7	2	3	2
QDT Calderdale and Kirklees	1	4	3	–2	–2	–2
QDV Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	4	7	6	1	1	1
QDW Dorset	2	4	3	–1	–2	–1
QDX North and East Devon	3	5	4	0	–1	–1
QDY Gloucestershire	2	6	4	–1	0	0
QEA Coventry	2	7	5	–1	1	0
QEC Dudley	4	11	7	1	5	3
QED Herefordshire	1	10	6	–2	4	1
QEE Sandwell	4	7	5	0	1	1
QEF Shropshire	1	6	4	–2	0	–1
QEG Solihull	1	5	3	–2	–1	–2
QEH North Staffordshire	3	7	5	0	1	0
QEJ South Staffordshire	2	6	4	–1	0	–1
QEK Walsall	2	11	7	–2	5	2
QEL Warwickshire	1	9	5	–2	3	0
QEM Wolverhampton	3	2	3	0	–4	–2
QEN Worcestershire	3	5	4	0	–1	–1
QEP East and North Hertfordshire	2	8	5	–1	2	0
QEQ West Hertfordshire	0	3	2	–3	–3	–3
QER Cambridge	3	7	5	0	1	0
QET Norfolk	3	7	5	0	1	1
Total	3	6	5	0	0	0

Notes:

ICD-10 (diagnosis) codes used were: K70.4, K71.1, K71.3, K71.5, K72.1, K73, K74.3, K76.1

Please note that these figures are for admissions to hospital, and not incidence rates.

Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Out-Patient Waiting Facilities

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department gives to hospitals about suitable out-patient waiting facilities. [36890]

Mr. Hutton: Current information on out-patient waiting facilities is contained within the following guidance for those involved in the briefing and design of new or refurbished healthcare facilities. Information sources comprise:

Health Building Note 12 Out-patients Departments ISBN 0113212666, Department of Health and Welsh Office;

Design Briefing System notebook DBS 12 (for project teams to record their decisions) Out-patients Departments (issued with the above Health Building Note);

Supplement 1: Genito-urinary medicine clinic ISBN 0113213085, Department of Health, Welsh Office and Department of Health and Social Security (Northern Ireland);

Supplement 2: Oral surgery, orthodontics, restorative dentistry ISBN 0113214057, NHS Estates;

Supplement 3: ENT and audiology clinics; hearing aid centre ISBN 0113217455, NHS Estates;

Supplement 4: Ophthalmology ISBN 0113222459, NHS Estates.

All are available through The Stationery Office Ltd. and agents. Electronic copies are distributed free to the national health service.

Medical Students

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relationship between student debt and recruitment of medical students. [36442]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not commissioned any research into the relationship between student debt and recruitment of medical students. It has however funded a study of trends in applications to medical school. The study report will review educational and population statistics from 1996 to 2000, and current literature examining the issue of medical student debt.

The Department is currently discussing with the Higher Education Funding Council for England the possibility of jointly commissioning research evaluating the expansion of medical schools, which may also include examination of the issue of student debt. The Department is aware of the British Medical Association Medical Students Committee's surveys of medical students' finances.

During the first four years of their training, undergraduate medical students are supported under the Department for Education and Skills' student support regulations. The Department of Health has introduced special support arrangements for medical and dental students in recognition of the longer length of medical and dental training programmes, and the limited opportunities that such students have to supplement their income due to their heavier study commitments. At the same time the issue of medical student debt needs to be considered against the background that doctors, on qualification, have a higher earning potential than most other professions.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to amend the arrangements for financial support for medical students. [36443]

Mr. Hutton: The Department currently has no plans to amend the support arrangements for medical students. However, we take a close interest in the effective operation of student support arrangements to ensure that they continue to support our plans to deliver the increased number of staff the service needs.

On 3 October 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Department for Education and Skills announced plans for a review of student support arrangements. The Department of Health will be working with DfES to ensure that the needs of health professional students are taken fully into account in the design of any new arrangements. They will consider carefully what implications the changes have for the support which the national health service provides directly through the NHS bursary scheme.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public funding is available to medical students who are training to become doctors. [36440]

Mr. Hutton: In recognition of the longer length of medical and dental degree courses and the need to guarantee the future supply of staff, special arrangements have been introduced for undergraduate medical and dental students. English domiciled pre-registration medical and dental students who joined their courses from 1 September 1998 onwards will qualify for NHS bursaries in their fifth and any subsequent years of study.

NHS bursaries are also available to English domiciled students undertaking the new four-year graduate entry medical courses introduced following the recommendations of the Third Report of the Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee in December 1997. These students qualify for NHS-funded support in years 2–4 of the course.

NHS funded students (including medical and dental students) on degree level courses receive their support in the form of a means tested bursary supplemented by reduced rate, repayable, student loans. All NHS-funded students have their liability for a tuition fee contribution (currently £1,075) met in full on their behalf and without means testing. Additional allowances are available to take account of the additional weeks that health professional students are required to attend their course, and also for older students, single parents and others with dependants. During the first four years of undergraduate medical and dental courses, and the first year of the four-year graduate entry programme, students are supported under the Department for Education and Skills' student support regulations.

Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the instances in which his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32027]

Ms Blears: The number of invoices not paid within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the 2000–01 financial year is shown in the table.

	Paid within 30 days/credit period		*Paid late*		
	Number	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Total*
Department of Health	324,566	96.08	13,233	3.92	337,799
Agencies	19,512	94.2	1,212	5.8	20,724
NDPB's	74,023	74.96	24,722	25.04	98,745

Smallpox

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 715W, on smallpox, what contracts he has entered into in the last six months for the supply of anti-smallpox drugs. [34817]

Mr. Hutton: Anti-viral drugs have been shown in laboratory studies to be effective in treating infections caused by viruses similar to smallpox. However, in practice, patients on anti-virus therapy require intensive monitoring and additional treatment to minimise potentially severe side-effects and need to be in hospital. Anti- viral drugs would therefore, be difficult to administer on a large scale. Because of this, no contracts have been entered into in the last six months for the supply of these anti-smallpox drugs.

Vaccination is effective in preventing the disease. The Department has a strategic stock of vaccine for use in an outbreak. Information about the size and location of these stocks is not being put in the public domain, as this is information that might be of use to terrorists.

Counter Fraud Service

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been convicted for fraudulent claims for free prescriptions since the Counter Fraud Service was introduced 18 months ago. [34616]

Ms Blears: Following the creation of the national health service Counter Fraud Service, the value of fraudulent patient evasion of NHS prescription charges has been reduced from 1998 levels by 41 per cent., equivalent to £48 million.

Following the implementation of the penalty charges regime in August 2001, over 23,000 charge notices have been issued to patients in respect of non-payment of prescription charges and as a result £236,000 has been returned to NHS funds. The use of penalty charges is a proportionate response in the majority of these cases.

Criminal sanctions are considered where offences are of a serious or repetitive nature and one patient has been prosecuted.

Emergency Care

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what cash allocations have been made under the reforming emergency care accident and emergency nurse allocation for 2001–02 to each acute NHS trust in the northern Region; upon what basis the allocations have been made; and which trusts are involved in PFI programmes. [35055]

Ms Blears: Cash allocations to national health service acute trusts in the Department's northern and Yorkshire region under the reforming emergency care accident and emergency nurse allocation for 2001–02 are detailed in the table. All trusts received funding for a minimum of two additional nurse posts for each accident and emergency department. The table also indicates those trusts that are involved in PFI programmes.

NHS trust	*Allocation (£)*	*Additional nurse posts*	*PFI*
Airedale NHS Trust	17,942	2	Yes
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	17,942	2	Yes
Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Trust	35,883	4	Yes
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust	17,942	2	No
Dewsbury Health Care NHS Trust	17,942	2	No
Gateshead Health NHS Trust	17,942	2	No
Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust	17,942	2	No
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	17,942	2	Yes
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	143,534	8	Yes
Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust	17,942	2	Yes
North Cumbria Acute NHS Trust	35,883	4	Yes
North Durham Health Care NHS Trust	143,534	8	Yes
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust	35,883	4	No
Northallerton Health Services NHS Trust	17,942	2	Yes
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust	35,883	4	Yes
Pinderfields and Pontefract NHS Trust	17,942	2	Yes
Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Health Care NHS Trust	17,942	2	No
South Durham Health Care NHS Trust	35,883	4	Yes
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	17,942	2	Yes
South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust	17,942	2	No
York Health Services NHS Trust	17,942	2	No

Operation Cancellations

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations, broken down into category of operation, have been cancelled in NHS hospitals in the last 12 months. [35194]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of cancelled operations are not collected by the type of operation.

The latest released figures are for Quarter 2 2001–02. Copies of quarterly statistics on cancelled operations by health authority are available in the Library. The publication gives the number of operations cancelled (for non-medical reasons) on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of the operation.

Care Homes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage providers of residential care for the elderly to connect up their homes to the internet. [35071]

Jacqui Smith: The national standards for care homes for older people require care homes to give residents the opportunity to exercise choice in relation to leisure and social activities and cultural interests. They also require care homes to record residents' interests and give them the opportunity for stimulation through leisure and recreational activities, in and outside the care home, which suit their needs, preferences and capacities, with particular consideration for people with cognitive or sensory impairments and those with physical or learning disabilities. This could include access to the internet. However, it is for individual care home owners to decide whether they wish their care home to be linked to the internet taking into account the individual circumstances of their business and the needs and capacities of the residents.

Financial Allocation

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial allocation has been made to the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority in each of the last 10 years. [35321]

Mr. Hutton: Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority was established in its current form on 1 April 1996.

The table shows the financial allocation that the health authority has received since its establishment.

Revenue allocations to Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority since 1996–97

£000

Period	*Total allocation*
1996–97	293,778
1997–98	309,318
1998–99	322,343
1999–2000	422,995
2000–01	455,914
2001–02	498,646
2002–03	563,125

Note:

Allocations for 1999–2000 onwards are not comparable with those for 1996–97 to 1998–99 which cover hospital and community health services (HCHS) only. 1999–2000 was the first year of unified allocations which cover HCHS, prescribing and discretionary general medical services.

Bed Occupancy

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the highest level of occupancy of beds on a single day was in 2000–01 in each NHS trust in respect of acute mental health wards in London. [35081]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 11 February, 2002]:* Occupancy levels are not collected on a daily basis for acute mental health wards.

Eating Disorders

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has adjusted the 1999–2000 figures on hospital admissions in respect of eating disorders. [35089]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 11 February, 2002]:* There were 2,030 finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of eating disorder in 1999–2000. These figures have now been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission research into the incidence of eating disorders among *(a)* children and young persons, *(b)* men and *(c)* women. [35085]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 11 February, 2002]:* There are no plans to commission further research into the incidence of eating disorders. However, details of ongoing and recently completed research projects are available on the national research register at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm. The Department has also commissioned a guideline on the management of eating disorders from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Antipsychotic Depot Injections

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for antipsychotic depot injections in 2001. [35080]

Ms Blears: *[holding ans[illegible] 11 February, 2002]:* We expect to publish the data [illegible]May 2002.

Cance[illegible]aiting Times)

Norman Lamb: T[illegible]sk the Secretary of State for Health if he will list[illegible] those NHS trusts and *(b)* those health authorities which have met the Government's two-week target in respect of out-patient waiting times for suspected cancer patients. [34[illegible]93]

Yvette Cooper: *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The following tables show the percentage of patients seen within two weeks of urgent referral by their general practitioner by national health service trusts and health authorities for the period July to September 2001.

Cancer two week out-patient waiting time standard. Percentage of patients seen within two weeks of urgent referral by their general practitioner where the referral was received within 24 hours of the decision to refer

NHS trust	*Percentage seen Qtr 2, 2001–02*
Addenbrooke's	90.4
Aintree Hospitals	98.1
Airedale	100.0
Ashford and St. Peters' Hospitals	77.6
Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals	78.9
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals	97.6
Barnsley District General Hospital	94.2
Barts and the London	94.5
Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals	100.0
Bedford Hospital	55.5
Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull Hospitals	61.0
Birmingham Women's Healthcare	95.5
Blackburn Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care	99.5
Blackpool Wyre and Fylde Community Health Services	100.0
Blackpool Victoria Hospital	99.7
Bolton Hospitals	97.8
Bradford Hospitals	96.1
Brighton Healthcare	80.6
Bromley Hospitals	100.0
Burnley Healthcare	100.0
Burton Hospitals	92.0
Bury Healthcare	99.0
Calderdale and Huddersfield	97.1
Cardiothoracic Centre Liverpool	100.0
Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals	85.0
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare	97.1
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital	74.0
Chorley and South Ribble	100.0
Christie Hospital	100.0
City Hospitals	99.7
City Hospitals Sunderland	67.0
Countess of Chester Hospital	95.0
Dartford and Gravesham	86.1
Dewsbury Healthcare	97.8
Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals	99.1
Dudley Group of Hospitals	94.4
Ealing Hospital	98.7
East and North Hertfordshire	77.4
East Cheshire	98.9
East Gloucestershire	99.8
East Kent Hospitals	86.1
East Somerset	72.3
Eastbourne Hospitals	79.7
Epsom and St. Helier	95.9
Essex Rivers Healthcare	97.9
Frimley Park Hospital	99.2
Gateshead Health	98.5
George Eliot Hospital	99.2
Gloucestershire Royal	99.8
Good Hope Hospital	97.8
Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital	89.1
Hammersmith Hospitals	89.7
Harrogate Health Care	100.0
Hastings and Rother	58.6
Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals	98.7
Hereford Hospitals	95.5
Hillingdon Hospital	93.3
Hinchingbrooke Health Care	99.5
Homerton Hospital	90.8
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals	98.8
Ipswich Hospital	76.5
Isle of Wight Healthcare	95.1
James Paget Healthcare	95.7
Kettering General Hospital	78.6
King's College Hospital	98.2
King's Lynn and Wisbech Hospitals	90.0
Kingston Hospital	96.4
Leeds Teaching Hospitals	95.3
Leicestershire and Rutland Healthcare	95.8
Lewisham Hospital	99.2
Liverpool Women's Hospital	92.7
Luton and Dunstable Hospital	94.9
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells	98.2
Mayday Healthcare	97.2
Medway	80.4

Cancer two week out-patient waiting time standard. Percentage of patients seen within two weeks of urgent referral by their general practitioner where the referral was received within 24 hours of the decision to refer

NHS trust	*Percentage seen Qtr 2, 2001–02*
Mid-Cheshire Hospitals	96.7
Mid-Essex Hospital Services	98.8
Mid-Staffordshire General Hospitals	95.0
Mid-Sussex	93.2
Milton Keynes General	98.4
Morecambe Bay Hospitals	87.4
Newham Healthcare	100.0
Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare	94.8
North Bristol	85.0
North Cheshire Hospital	90.0
North Cumbria Acute	85.3
North Durham Health Care	89.8
North Hampshire Hospitals	86.3
North Manchester Healthcare	90.6
North Middlesex Hospital	100.0
North Staffordshire Hospital	85.9
North Tees and Hartlepool	88.2
North West London Hospitals	95.5
Northallerton Health Services	96.1
Northampton General Hospital	78.3
Northern Devon Healthcare	100.0
Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals	98.6
Northumbria Healthcare	76.8
Nottingham City Hospital	99.7
Oldham	96.4
Papworth Hospital	100.0
Peterborough Hospitals	100.0
Pinderfields and Pontefract Hospitals	65.5
Plymouth Hospitals	97.0
Poole Hospital	99.6
Portsmouth Hospitals	87.4
Preston Acute Hospitals	100.0
Princess Alexandra Hospital	97.3
Princess Royal Hospital	94.6
Queen Elizabeth Hospital	99.0
Queen Mary's Sidcup	96.8
Queen Victoria Hospital	97.1
Queens Medical Centre Nottingham University Hospital	93.0
Rochdale Healthcare	93.0
Rotherham General Hospitals	99.0
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital	76.0
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals	99.5
Royal Brompton and Harefield	83.3
Royal Cornwall Hospital	85.9
Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare	100.0
Royal Free Hampstead	40.0
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals	91.3
Royal Liverpool Children's	100.0
Royal Marsden Hospital	100.0
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals	79.1
Royal Surrey County and St. Luke's Hospitals	100.0
Royal United Hospital Bath	93.7
Royal West Sussex	99.6
Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals	99.8
Salford Royal Hospitals	91.1
Salisbury Health Care	85.6
Sandwell Healthcare	100.0
Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare	100.0
Severn	100.0
Sheffield Children's Hospital	100.0
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals	98.6
Sherwood Forest Hospitals	93.2
South Buckinghamshire	77.9
South Devon Healthcare	97.0
South Durham Health Care	99.2
South Manchester University Hospitals	93.9
South Tees Acute Hospitals	88.8
South Tyneside Healthcare	90.3

Cancer two week out-patient waiting time standard. Percentage of patients seen within two weeks of urgent referral by their general practitioner where the referral was received within 24 hours of the decision to refer

NHS trust	*Percentage seen Qtr 2, 2001–02*
South Warwickshire General Hospitals	86.1
South West London Community	100.0
Southampton University Hospitals	95.9
Southend Hospital	85.5
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals	95.1
Southport and Ormskirk	99.8
St. George's Healthcare	99.5
St. Helens and Knowsley Hospitals	79.5
St. Mary's	100.0
Stockport Health Services	100.0
Stoke Mandeville Hospital	94.8
Surrey and Sussex Healthcare	98.8
Surrey Hampshire Borders	99.0
Swindon and Marlborough	98.4
Tameside and Glossop Acute Services	90.6
Taunton and Somerset	92.5
The Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals	98.9
The Oxford Radcliffe Hospital	97.7
Trafford Healthcare	96.8
United Bristol Healthcare	65.2
United Lincolnshire Hospitals	97.9
University College London Hospitals	92.5
University Hospital Birmingham	98.5
University Hospital of Coventry and Warwickshire	74.8
University Hospitals of Leicester	89.1
Walsall Hospitals	99.7
West Dorset General Hospitals	95.3
West Hertfordshire Hospitals	90.5
West Middlesex University Hospital	90.6
West Suffolk Hospitals	75.7
Weston Area Health	95.6
Whipps Cross University Hospital	70.5
Whittington Hospital	80.7
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare	93.2
Wirral Hospital	98.6
Worcestershire Acute Hospital	90.9
Worcestershire Community and Mental Health	95.2
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals	73.6
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh	86.2
York Health Services	95.3

Source:

DOH form QMCW

Cancer two week out-patient waiting time standard. Percentage of patients seen within two weeks of urgent referral by their general practitioner where the referral was received within 24 hours of the decision to refer

Health authority	*Percentage seen Qtr 2, 2001–02*
Avon	83.4
Barking and Havering	78.9
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	98.0
Barnsley	94.2
Bedfordshire	79.4
Berkshire	87.6
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	98.0
Birmingham	81.6
Bradford	97.4
Brent and Harrow	95.5
Buckinghamshire	88.7
Bury and Rochdale	96.7
Calderdale and Kirklees	97.4
Cambridgeshire	94.5
Camden and Islington	76.4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	85.9
County Durham and Darlington	95.4

Cancer two week out-patient waiting time standard. Percentage of patients seen within two weeks of urgent referral by their general practitioner where the referral was received within 24 hours of the decision to refer

Health authority	*Percentage seen Qtr 2, 2001–02*
Coventry	74.8
Croydon	97.2
Doncaster	99.1
Dorset	98.0
Dudley	94.4
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	93.8
East Kent	86.1
East Lancashire	99.8
East London and City	96.0
East Riding and Hull	98.8
East Surrey	98.8
East Sussex Brighton and Hove	78.2
Gateshead and South Tyneside	96.2
Gloucestershire	99.8
Herefordshire	95.5
Hertfordshire	86.9
Hillingdon	93.3
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	87.9
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	99.0
Kingston & Richmond	96.6
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	96.0
Leeds	95.3
Leicestershire	89.4
Lincolnshire	97.9
Liverpool	92.8
Manchester	91.4
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	98.9
Morecambe Bay	87.4
Newcastle and North Tyneside	98.9
Norfolk	93.8
North and East Devon	100.0
North and Mid Hampshire	90.7
North Cheshire	90.0
North Cumbria	85.3
North Derbyshire	74.0
North Essex	98.1
North Nottinghamshire	93.2
North Staffordshire	85.9
North West Lancashire	99.8
North Yorkshire	97.8
Northamptonshire	78.4
Northumberland	76.8
Nottingham	95.9
Oxfordshire	97.7
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	70.5
Rotherham	99.0
Salford and Trafford	93.1
Sandwell	100.0
Sefton	98.8
Sheffield	98.6
Shropshire	87.2
Somerset	85.0
South and West Devon	97.0
South Cheshire	96.9
South Essex	91.5
South Humber	98.6
South Lancashire	100.0
South Staffordshire	93.1
Southampton and SW Hampshire	95.9
Southern Derbyshire	95.1
St. Helens and Knowsley	79.5
Stockport	100.0
Suffolk	76.1
Sunderland	67.0
Tees	88.4
Wakefield	65.5
Walsall	99.7
Warwickshire	91.5
West Kent	87.9
West Pennine	93.0
West Surrey	92.0
West Sussex	90.8
Wigan and Bolton	93.3
Wiltshire	91.1
Wirral	98.6
Wolverhampton	99.8
Worcestershire	91.1

Note:

Health authority performance is based on data from NHS trust providers within their boundaries.

Source:

DOH form QMCW

NHS Plan

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards providing the additional intermediate care beds announced in the NHS Plan. [35410]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan set a target of 5,000 extra national health service intermediate-care beds by March 2004, over the baseline of 1999–2000.

A survey undertaken last summer indicates that by the end of this year (2001–02) we shall have 2,400 extra beds.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the *(a)* proportion of those with a diagnosis of severe mental illness who are in employment and *(b)* trend in the prevalence of psychiatric disorder by employment status. [35510]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February, 2002]:* Information on the proportion of individuals with a diagnosis of severe mental illness who are in employment, and trends in the prevalence of psychiatric disorder by employment is not collected centrally by the Department.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in implementation of the National Service Framework for Mental Health. [35490]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February, 2002]:* The targets set in the mental health National Service Framework (NSF) for April 2001 were all achieved on time. These included 170 assertive outreach teams; almost 500 additional secure beds; over 320 additional 24 hour staffed care beds; access to services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year for all those with complex mental health problems; investment to improve the physical environments in psychiatric wards; and guidance has been issued to ensure the safety, privacy and dignity of mental health patients.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for speech and language therapists in the National Health Service. [36771]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested in shown in the table.

Department of health, 2001 three month vacancies speech and language therapists

	England
Three month vacancy number	200
Three month vacancy rate (percentage)	4.7
Staff in post	4,210

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents)

2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental and non-medical workforce censuses (whole time equivalent)

3. Staff in post is from the September 2001 non-medical workforce census

4. Numbers are rounded to the nearest ten

5. England totals include staff from Special Health Authorities

Source: Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2001 and HCHS Non-Medical Workforce Census September 2001

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make speech and language therapy a statutory service. [36775]

Mr. Hutton: Speech and language therapists are a recognised profession, which have been state regulated since 1999. We have no plans for the service to be based in statute.

Treatment Abroad

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance is given to parents with the cost of visiting and telephoning their children in hospitals abroad for NHS treatment; if the Government will set up such a new scheme to help parents; and if he will make a statement. [33022]

Mr. Hutton: No children are being sent abroad for national health service treatment under the test bed scheme currently under way in the south east of England. If the NHS chooses to commission care for children overseas at some point in the future we would expect commissioners to ensure that children were accompanied by a parent or carer at the NHS' expense.

It is rare for children to travel abroad under the E112 scheme which requires prior authorisation from the NHS and the Department. The Department has not in the past paid for travel and non-hospital accommodation costs for the child and accompanying adult, although in practice the NHS has found ways, e.g. through charitable funds, to help in deserving cases. The Department is reviewing this policy as part of its wider review of the working of the E112 system.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by his Department and how much reclaimed. [34450]

Ms Blears: The Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies classify management and accounting data about spending on food and alcohol in widely different ways. To provide the information requested would involve a disproportionate expense.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34392]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Failing Hospitals

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on allowing private sector managers to run failing hospitals. [34490]

Mr. Hutton: Poorly performing national health service organisations that fail to respond to special measures and meet their recovery plan will be put under the control of a new senior management. Franchise bids to run poorly performing NHS trusts will be invited from experienced NHS managers with a good track record for delivery. In future expressions of interest could be invited from elsewhere, and subject to a tender from an approved list.

The types of non-NHS organisation that might be interested in franchises to run zero rated NHS trusts are likely to include:

organisations with specific experience and expertise in the health field;

non-health organisations with relevant management capability, but which would need to bring in staff with health expertise.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 11 February that four of the 12 zero-start rated trusts will be subject to franchise arrangements. Invitations for franchise will be invited from existing NHS senior managers with a proven track record of delivery.

Social Services

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of social services SSA was in *(a)* Stoke-on-Trent, *(b)* all unitary authorities and *(c)* on average in England, in each year from 1997–98. [34902]

Jacqui Smith: The social services standard spending assessment figures are set out in the table.

£ million

	Stoke-on-Trent	*Total unitaries*[1]	*Total England*
1997–98	38.102	753.385	7,392.117
1998–99	41.200	1253.952	7,814.651
1999–2000	46.787	1331.024	8,268.000
2000–01	49.080	1399.805	8,693.400
2001–02	50.460	1435.596	8,955.400
2002–03	51.660	1475.623	9,230.994

[1] A number of new unitary authorities was created in 1998–99. Figures for unitaries are not, therefore, on a consistent and comparable basis.

The equivalent SSA figures per head of population are as follows:

£ per head

	Stoke-on-Trent	*Total unitaries*[1]	*Total England*
1997–98	150	146	151
1998–99	162	152	159
1999–2000	184	161	168
2000–01	195	169	176
2001–02	201	173	18[illegible]
2002–03	207	177	184

[1] A number of new unitary authorities was created in 1998–99. Figures for unitaries are not, therefore, on a consistent and comparable basis.

Haemophilia

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy to provide recombinant (synthetic) clothing factors for new haemophilia patients and children under 16; and if it applies to the provision of Factor VIIa to patients with inhibitors, who are resistant to Factor VIII and IX. [35282]

Yvette Cooper: In 1998 we notified health authorities that from 1998–99 all children under the age of 16 and new patients with haemophilia A should receive recombinant factor VIII. From April 1999 this policy was extended to recombinant factor IX for patients with haemophilia B. We have not issued any advice to health authorities on the treatment of patients with inhibitors, of which recombinant factor VIIa is one of a range of possible treatments. Guidance on overall management of these patients, including the use of recombinant factor VIIa, has however been issued by the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctors Organisation. A copy of these guidelines is available in the Library.

NHS Dentistry

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on NHS dental provision in each region of the UK. [35627]

Ms Blears: The total number of dentists working in the national health service in England as at 30 September was 22,437, of whom 18,821 work in the general dental service (GDS) and the personal dental service (PDS). The remainder work in the hospital dental service, the community dental service or are salaried dentists. The total gross expenditure on the GDS and the PDS is about £1,720 million a year.

NHS dental provision in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a matter for the devolved Administrations.

Hip and Knee Replacements

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost per operation is for *(a)* hip and *(b)* knee replacements in each hospital trust. [35988]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library. The table contains the average unit costs (per operation) for each NHS Trust in England for *(a)* primary hip replacements, and *(b)* Primary Knee Replacements where the operation is undertaken as an elective (ie planned) admission.

The data source is the Reference Costs 2001 Collection, relating to the financial year 2000–01. These are the most current data available in the public domain.

Calculation of the costs provided are based on all activity and costs associated with each procedure, regardless of the specialty in which the activity is recorded.

Prescriptions

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the benefits of the movement of products from prescription control to pharmacy sale; and what impact the change would have on access to treatments. [36295]

Ms Blears: We are committed to empowering patients to make informed health care choices. Widening access to medicines, including moving medicines from prescription only status to availability from a pharmacist where is it safe to do so, can play an important part in this process.

The benefits of making more medicines available from the pharmacy include the opportunity for people to access treatments speedily, at a time and a place of their choosing that would otherwise only be available having consulted a prescriber.

The NHS Plan set out a range of proposals for improving access to medicines including developing the role of pharmacists set out in "Pharmacy in the Future"—a copy of which is in the Library. It outlines a range of changes designed to enable the greater availability of medicines, including independent nurse prescribing, supplementary prescribing and patient group directions. Taken together, these initiatives will have an important impact on improving access to treatments and ensuring our commitment to patient centred care is taken forward.

Reclassification of medicines can also play an important role in supporting our clinical priority areas, for example in disease prevention and health promotion. It also provides support on more specific health initiatives such as smoking cessation where, a number of nicotine replacement products were made more widely available in May 2001.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36274]

Ms Blears: Ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by Royal Mail.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees in his Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36688]

Ms Blears: The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, effective from January 1993, require employers to provide and pay for, upon request from an employee, an eye and eyesight test.

The number of eyesight tests carried out under the Display Screen Equipment Regulation (1992) for staff working for the Department and its agencies is shown in the table.

Year	*Number of tests*
1998	249
1999	410
2000	462
2001	495

The Department promotes the eyesight test scheme to all staff through its internal electronic information system and in house publications. New staff are also provided with information about the eye test scheme through health and safety awareness as part of induction training.

Independent Reconfiguration Panel

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how the posts of Chairman of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel was *(a)* advertised and *(b)* filled; [36780]

(2) if he will make a statement on the extent to which the Independent Reconfiguration Panel is independent of Government; [36779]

(3) on what basis the members of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel other than the Chairman were *(a)* recruited and *(b)* appointed; [36781]

(4) what the role of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel is. [36778]

Ms Blears: The Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP) will offer authoritative advice to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on referred proposals for NHS service change. The Panel's draft terms of reference were outlined in the press release announcing the appointment of the Chair, Dr Peter Barrett. These will need to be agreed with the Panel membership before being confirmed. The advice offered will be independent of Government and will be published.

As a Public Sector Working Group, the Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments has confirmed that the IRP does not fall within its remit. However, as far as possible, the appointment procedures followed have been in line with "Nolan" principles. The panel chairman, Dr Barrett, was appointed by the Secretary of State from a shortlist of candidates. The selection of the Panel membership is being undertaken through an open recruitment competition, overseen by an independent assessor. No appointments have yet been made.

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37506]

Ms Blears: In 2001, 43,474 rail tickets were purchased from the Department's travel contractor, of which 27,087 (62 per cent.) were for first class travel.

Information about the average price of a first class ticket is not kept but the average price paid in 2001 for all classes of rail ticket purchased from the Department's travel contractor was £150.

There is no information about tickets purchased by grade of civil servant but the total cost of rail travel in each of the past three years is as follows:

	£
1999	3,697,682
2000	4,331,446
2001	4,983,797

Promotional Sick Bags

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many promotional sick bags have been sent out by the Food Standards Agency; and at what cost. [36801]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that they have sent out a total of 287,378 promotional sick bags to named catering outlets at a cost of £125,322. The approach was extensively piloted as a successful means of promoting the food hygiene campaign.

A and E Patients

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency patients have been received each month over the past five years at the *(a)* Whittington, *(b)* North Middlesex and *(c)* Royal Free hospital. [36616]

Mr. Hutton: Data on accident and emergency attendances are not collected on a monthly basis. From 2001–02, the information is available on a quarterly basis and previous to this on an annual basis.

Information for the selected national health service trusts is given in the table.

Total accident and emergency attendances, 1997–98 to 2001–02 Qtr 3

	National health service trust		
	Whittington hospital	*North Middlesex hospital*	*Royal Free Hampstead*
2001–02[1]	16,003	21,646	14,245
2001–02[2]	16,550	21,553	14,907
2001–02[3]	17,136	22,653	15,003

Total accident and emergency attendances, 1997–98 to 2001–02 Qtr 3

	National health service trust		
	Whittington hospital	*North Middlesex hospital*	*Royal Free Hampstead*
2000–01	67,883	88,096	58,830
1999–2000	68,047	84,441	60,445
1998–99	64,429	81,589	62,239
1997–98	66,143	80,929	62,717

[1] Quarter 3

[2] Quarter 2

[3] Quarter 1

Source:

KH09—Outpatient and A&E attendances

The information is available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Housing

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each English health authority how many housing units have been *(a)* disposed of, *(b)* bought and *(c)* financed for purchase by specialist staff. [36622]

Mr. Hutton: Health authorities do not acquire or dispose of residential housing units for staff. Where staff accommodation is owned, this is through either National Health Service trusts or primary care trusts. The information requested has not been required to be collected in the past, so no records exist.

Artificial Limbs

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been *(a)* made available to and *(b)* spent by the NHS on the provision of silicone cosmesis for artificial limb users since April 2001. [36792]

Jacqui Smith: In January 2001, we announced that funding totalling £4 million over three years to provide silicone cosmesis covers to artificial limb users would be made available to the national health service. From April 2001 £0.5 million was added to health authorities' baseline allocation, with £1.5 million from 2002–03 and £2 million from 2003–04.

The contract for providing silicone cosmesis covers was awarded in October 2001. The contractor is required to provide the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency with quarterly contract sales which will include:

Total sales figures in £s

£s spent by each Disablement Service Centre

what span of product are purchased.

This information is currently being collated by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding will be made available to the NHS by his Department for the provision of silicone cosmesis for artificial limb users in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [36793]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has made available £1.5 million in 2002–03 and £2 million in 2003–04 to the national health service to provide silicone cosmesis covers for artificial limb users.

Apolipoproteins

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a uniform, standardised test for apolipoproteins. [24649]

Yvette Cooper: *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The measurement of apolipoproteins in the blood may be useful in predicting coronary heart disease. However total cholesterol and high and low density lipoprotein cholesterol levels remain the standard tests in clinical practice. NHS pathology services carrying out routine apolipoprotein testing (rather than or as an additional indicator of coronary heart disease) will need to be assured of its value in patient care, to use a standard technique and to be part of an accredited external quality assurance scheme. Our Pathology Modernisation Programme strongly encourages this approach.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the policy of the Department is for ensuring responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 are completed within 40 days; and what their procedure is to achieve this; [33473]

(2) what his estimate is of the average cost of processing each information request under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33442]

(3) what the longest period of time elapsed is between receiving *(a)* the administration fee and providing the information requested and *(b)* a request for information and providing the information requested, under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33452]

(4) how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 have been completed *(a)* within 40 days, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the original letter; and how many are still outstanding; [33568]

(5) what the Department's procedure is for responding to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998; if he will place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement; [33480]

(6) how many requests the Department has received under the Data Protection Act 1988 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation; [33580]

(7) what percentage of responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of the £10 fee, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the administration fee; [33466]

(8) what administration fees are charged by the Department for information requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998; [33459]

(9) what the period of time elapsed is for the oldest outstanding request for information under the Data Protection Act 1998, since receipt of the *(a)* original request and *(b)* administration fee; [33445]

(10) how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the £10 administration fee; [33561]

(11) how many responses the Department has completed to requests for information made under the Data Protection Act 1998 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation. [33573]

Ms Blears: The Department's policy is to respond to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 as quickly and accurately as possible, and in accordance with the data protection principles.

The Department follows a strict procedure in handling requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998. Requests are coordinated centrally and monitored. These arrangements are designed to ensure that requests are handled sensitively, and wherever possible responses provided on time.

The Act provides for anyone seeking information to be given a response within 40 calendar days of receiving adequate proof of identity and an indication of what kind of personal data the Department is likely to hold. The time taken to reply is measured against the date when this information was received, not the date of the original letter. The Department does not currently charge an administration fee.

The table sets out the numbers of requests received since 1 March 2000, when the Act came into force, with an analysis of performance against the target. Those requesting information do not usually specify the format of information when submitting requests. The analysis shows where responses were based on paper or electronic records, or a mixture of the two.

Requests for access to personal information under the Data Protection Act 1998

		Format			*Time to complete/ time outstanding*		
		Electronic and paper	*Electronic*	*Paper*	*Under 40 days*	*40–60 days*	*Over 60 days*
Total requests received	56	30	10	16	—	—	—
Total requests completed	47	22	9	16	45 (96%)	2 (4%)	0
Total outstanding	9	8	1	0	8	—	1

The longest period of time elapsed between receiving a request for information and providing the information requested was 60 days. The period of time elapsed for the oldest outstanding request for information is 68 days (on 12 February 2002).

The Department does not currently measure the time and effort needed to respond to each information request on an individual basis. These vary considerably in relation to the nature and complexity of requests. No estimate of the average cost is available.

A copy of the Department's procedure for handling responses to information requests will be deposited in the Library.

Muchal Fold Scans

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health have many NHS trusts charge for a muchal fold scan for mothers over the age of 35 years. [33756]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not held centrally.

NHS Board Appointments

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will give the number of people from the Warrington, North constituency who in each of the past five years have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been appointed to positions on the board of the (i) North Cheshire health authority, (ii) Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery NHS trust, (iii) North Cheshire hospitals and Warrington hospital NHS trust, (iv) Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS trust, (v) Clatterbridge Centre Oncology NHS trust, (vi) Cardiothoracic Centre, Liverpool NHS trust and (vii) Warrington Community NHS trust; [34975]

(2) how many people from the Warrington, North constituency have, in each of the past five years, *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been appointed to positions on the board of the (i) Ashworth hospital authority SHA, (ii) Christie hospital NHS trust, (iii) Family Health Services Appeal Authority SHA and (iv) National Blood Authority SHA. [35525]

Ms Blears: Information is not available on applications made in the last five years. Details of applications made by people living in Warrington, North since 1 April 2001 and appointments made in the last five years are provided in the table.

Applications for and appointments to national health service bodies by people living in the Warrington, North constituency

	Applications since 1 April 2001	*Applications in the last five years*
Ashworth Hospital Authority Special Health Authority	0	2
Cardiothoracic Centre, Liverpool NHS trust	0	0
Clatterbridge Centre Oncology NHS trust	0	0
Christie Hospital NHS trust	0	0
Family Health Services Appeal Authority	0	0
Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS trust	0	0
National Blood Authority	0	0
North Cheshire health authority	0	2
North Cheshire hospitals NHS trust	0	1
Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery NHS trust	0	0
Warrington community NHS trust	0	3
Warrington hospital NHS trust	0	1

MMR

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the percentage of eligible infants in the South Cheshire health authority receiving the MMR vaccine was in each of the last four years. [33085]

Yvette Cooper: The percentage of children in South Cheshire health authority immunised against MMR by their second birthday and fifth birthday is shown in the table.

Percentage of children in South Cheshire health authority immunised against MMR

At 31 March	By their second birthday	By their fifth birthday[1] First dose	By their fifth birthday[1] First and second dose
1998	92	—	—
1999	89	—	—
2000	88	90	65
2001	89	90	72

[1] Information about uptake of MMR immunisation at age five was collected for the first time in 1999–2000

Source:

Department of Health, Statistics Division SD2B

TREASURY

Fuel Duties (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what volume of *(a)* petrol and *(b)* diesel he estimates is imported annually from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland without UK excise duty being paid. [36803]

Mr. Boateng: Customs estimates of revenue loss in the Northern Ireland oils sector were included in the "Tackling Indirect Fraud" paper which the Government published as part of the pre-Budget report in November 2001.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what volume of heating oil he estimates is sold annually in Northern Ireland for use in the Republic of Ireland. [36804]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise do not have estimates of the volume of heating oil sold annually in Northern Ireland for use in the Republic of Ireland.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons he decided not to implement a carbon tax. [36791]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy (CCL) was introduced in April 2001 following extensive consultation, and in accordance with the recommendations of Lord Marshall's report on Economic Instruments and the Business use of Energy.

As recommended by Lord Marshall, the Government believe that a downstream tax on energy such as the CCL is the best approach to take to the taxation of energy products, as it allows the Government to balance the need to encourage improvements in energy efficiency with other policy considerations. The extent of fuel poverty in the UK is well established, and the Government do not propose taxing energy use in the domestic sector.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what activities are carried out by the Inland Revenue with regard to the Child Support Agency; what the costs of these activities are; and if he will make a statement. [37519]

Dawn Primarolo: The Child Support Act 1991 permits the Inland Revenue to disclose information to assist the Child Support Agency in tracing non-resident parents. Amendments under the Social Security Administration Act 1992 enabled earnings information to be passed to the Child Support Agency.

Amendments under the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 enabled the Inland Revenue to provide the Child Support Agency with information about the earnings or other income of the self employed.

Under the terms of this legislation the Inland Revenue provides the Child Support Agency with the relevant information on request. The approximate estimated amount involved is £165,000 per annum, for which the Inland Revenue is reimbursed by the Child Support Agency.

10-year Transport Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total level of public expenditure allocated for the 10-year transport plan was as of *(a)* the launch of the plan in July 2000, *(b)* 2 April 2001, *(c)* 14 January 2002 and *(d)* 12 February 2002. [37093]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The totals are as follows:

(a) At the launch of the plan the total funding envelope over the plan period was £179.7 billion, of which £129.1 billion was assumed to be public money.

(b) As a result of the 2 April 2001 agreement with Railtrack, the total rose to £181.2 billion, which includes £1.5 billion of advanced grants to Railtrack. The total public element of this is therefore £130.6 billion.

(c) On 14 January 2002, the total stood at £181.9 billion, which includes the grants to Railtrack as shown, a freight adjustment of £462 million agreed in principle in April 2001, but only quantified in October 2001 following completion of the regulator's freight charges review, and £285 million of 2000–01 EYF, allocated in the summer and winter supplementaries. Public sector funding accounts for £131.4 billion of this total.

(d) As of 12 February 2002, the total figure remained £181.9 billion. A detailed breakdown of the total is provided in an updated version of Table A3 from the 10-year plan, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 243W, on the 10-year transport plan, if the unused rail provision in 2000–01 was available for use in 2001–02 under the rules on end of year flexibility. [37052]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Yes, the unused rail provision from 2000–01 is available for use this year.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 243W, on the 10-year transport plan, if the Treasury gave permission for the allocation of additional funding to the 10-year transport plan from the unused rail provision in 2000–01. [37053]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Yes, Treasury did give permission. The transfer was made through the normal supplementary arrangements.

Gross Domestic Product

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will *(a)* set out for each of the last five years and *(b)* provide forecasts where available for the next two years of GDP per head for each nation and region of the UK, and as a proportion of UK GDP per head; and what the GDP per head was for each nation of the UK assuming (i) 70 per cent., (ii) 80 per cent. and (iii) 90 per cent. allocation of continental shelf GDP to Scotland. [37569]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Gross domestic product (GDP) per head data for each English region, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are reported annually in "Economic Trends" and "Regional Trends", copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library. The 2001 edition of "Regional Trends" (ISSN 0261–1783) shows the latest available data in "Chapter 12: Regional Accounts". The latest data are also available in electronic form on the ONS database, which can be accessed via the House of Commons Library.

Extra-region GDP—which includes 'continental shelf' activity relating to offshore oil and gas extraction, UK embassies overseas and armed forces stationed abroad—comprises compensation of employees and gross operating surplus that cannot be assigned to regions. It is reported in "Regional Trends" alongside regional GDP.

The Treasury does not produce forecasts of GDP for the English regions, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37453]

Mr. Boateng: Information for 2000 and 2001 and average response times for 1999 in relation to ministerial correspondence only are as follows:

HM Treasury	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Average response (working days)	27	24	19
Percentage over 1 month	n/a	[1]25.0	[1]18.0
Percentage over 3 months	n/a	[1]2.0	[1]1.3

[1] Sample based

Information for earlier years and on other types of correspondence are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Tax Credits Bill

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the provisions of Part 2 of the Tax Credits Bill to be commenced. [35167]

Dawn Primarolo: As I said in the debate at Report Stage of the Tax Credits Bill on 7 February 2002, *Official Report* column 1060, the Government plan to introduce the new tax credits from April 2003. The date will be confirmed in the Budget.

ECOFIN

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 12 February. [36862]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended ECOFIN on 12 February.

The European Commission presented reports on the functioning of EU product and capital markets and set out its priorities for the 2002 Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.

The Council examined and after debate agreed opinions on the updated stability and convergence programmes for Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom, produced in line with the Stability and Growth Pact. The Council also agreed additional statements on Germany and Portugal, in which both countries set out the disciplines they should follow in future years.

The Commission and the ECB summarised latest developments on the transition to the euro.

The presidency noted that all member states had now ratified the Council decision of September 2000 on own resources. This will now take effect from March 2002, with any differences resulting from the late entry into force being corrected with retrospective effect from 1 January.

The Commission presented its proposals for a budgetary framework for enlargement, for use in the accession negotiations. Following a brief discussion, the presidency concluded that the Commission should now draw up draft common positions for the financial aspects of enlargement that were in conformity with the Berlin European Council budgetary settlement. These should not be linked with parallel discussions later in the year on reform of the common agricultural policy. Equally, it was important that enlargement should not impede reform.

ECOFIN reached political agreement on VAT on e-commerce without discussion. The amended directive and regulation make welcome changes to the rules governing the taxation of digitised products, so as to correct certain distortions of competition. During the negotiations the UK successfully secured an explicit commitment, which now features in the directive, to move, by 2006, to a comprehensive electronic solution for the taxation of such items which will treat EU and non-EU businesses on an identical basis.

Population Income (Increases)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for each income decile what the annual increase in total income has been for *(a)* pensioners since 1992 and *(b)* the population as a whole. [36408]

Mr. McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

Such information as is available can be found in the publication "Households Below Average Income 1994–95 to 2000–01", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Films

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what definition of a film he uses in extending tax allowances to film production; and how many *(a)* films and *(b)* television programmes have benefited from such allowances in the last five years; [31716]

(2) what estimate he has made of the extent to which tax allowances have been taken up by *(a)* independent film makers and *(b)* television shows. [36110]

Dawn Primarolo: There are three main measures providing enhanced tax relief for the production or acquisition of films. A "film" is defined in Schedule 1 of the Films Act 1985 as including:

> "any record, however made, of a sequence of visual images, which is a record capable of being used as a means of showing that sequence as a moving picture".

We estimate that between 1 July 1997 and 30 June 2001 1,433 productions have benefited from the films tax reliefs.

Partnerships UK

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 706W, on Geoffrey Spence, which Department has responsibility for Partnerships UK. [35715]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Partnerships UK (PUK) is a public limited company in which the HM Government and Scottish Ministers together hold a minority (49 per cent.) shareholding.

PUK provides services to a wide range of Government Departments and other public bodies. It also assists public bodies with joint venture and investment activities. HM Treasury is responsible for the Government's shareholding and nominates two non-executive directors to the PUK Board. HM Treasury has also established an advisory council chaired by Sir Andrew Turnball, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury. The membership consists of representatives from Government Departments, the devolved Administrations, local authorities and other public bodies drawn from PUK's client base. The council's remit is to review the effectiveness of Partnerships UK in fulfilling its public sector mission.

Research and Development Investment

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make a statement on the additional support he intends offering small and medium-sized enterprises to increase research and development investment. [36414]

Mr. Boateng: Budget 2000 introduced an R&D tax credit for small and medium-sized companies. It provides a tax deduction of 150 per cent. of the cost of all qualifying R&D expenditure. Under this enhanced relief the cash cost of R&D will be reduced by 30 per cent. for a company paying tax at the small companies' rate. Companies that are not yet in profit can take the relief up front and reduce the cash cost of their R&D by 24 per cent.

To encourage high risk investment by small enterprises PBR 2001 announced:

> an increase in the gross asset limit for Enterprise Management Incentives (EMIs) from £15 million to £30 million.
>
> publication of a prospectus for a £50 million early growth fund to help at least 1,000 businesses access the risk capital they need to develop and grow.

Government Expenditure (NHS)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state, for each year since 1990, Government spending on the NHS in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* England and *(c)* Scotland, (i) in real terms and (ii) as a percentage of GDP. [36415]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Figures for identifiable total managed spending on health and personal social services in the UK, England and Scotland are published annually in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses. The latest publication shows figures for 1995–96 to 1999–2000. Figures for earlier years are published in earlier publications which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Information on NHS expenditure as a proportion of GDP in the UK for the period 1999–2000 to 2003–04 is also published in the Department of Health departmental report (Cm 5103) for England and the United Kingdom. Health spending in Scotland is a devolved matter described in the Scottish Executive's budget documents for Scotland.

Departmental Overseas Visits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in his Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36813]

Ruth Kelly: No such visits have been undertaken at departmental expense in the period specified.

National Savings

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if a cost benefit analysis of changing the name of the Office of National Savings was carried out; and if he will make a statement. [36800]

Ruth Kelly: The name change is just one part of the transformation process undertaken by National Savings and Investments to modernise its operation, improve efficiency and upgrade services to customers.

It followed a strategic marketing review which showed that the agency's main role of raising funds for the Government cost effectively could only be sustained if it:

designed a new brand positioning and relaunched

introduced new products

introduced new channels of distribution

improved direct mail capability

developed the relationship with the Post Office.

The most important key success factor was demonstrated to be the relaunch of the brand.

Unitary Authorities

Andrew George: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the mean average population is of unitary authorities in England; [36639]

(2) if he will list all unitary authorities by the latest known resident population number. [36637]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. Andrew George, dated 25 February 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions concerning the population and average size of unitary authorities. (36634 and 36639)

The attached table shows the unitary authorities, their populations and the average number of persons per unitary authority in both England and Wales.

Table 1 Population at mid-2000: unitary authorities in England and Wales

thousand

Area	*Persons*
England	
North-east	
Darlington UA	100.6
Hartlepool UA	92.3
Middlesbrough UA	143.9
Redcar and Cleveland UA	136.4
Stockton-on-Tees UA	184.1
North-west	
Blackburn with Darwen UA	138.1
Blackpool UA	150.7
Halton UA	120.8
Warrington UA	190.8
Yorkshire and The Humber	
East Riding of Yorkshire UA	318.9
Kingston upon Hull, City of UA	254.3
North East Lincolnshire UA	155.2
North Lincolnshire UA	152.5
York UA	179.3
East Midlands	
Derby UA	236.3
Leicester UA	289.7
Nottingham UA	282.9
Rutland UA	37.8
West Midlands	
Herefordshire, County of UA	169.3
Stoke-on-Trent UA	249.0
Telford and Wrekin UA	151.3
East	
Luton UA	183.1
Peterborough UA	156.5
Southend-on-Sea UA	176.9
Thurrock UA	135.8
South-east	
Bracknell Forest UA	111.1
Brighton and Hove UA	259.9
Isle of Wight UA	129.4
Medway UA	244.8
Milton Keynes UA	209.8
Portsmouth UA	189.1
Reading UA	147.7
Slough UA	111.1
Southampton UA	214.9
West Berkshire UA	144.3
Windsor and Maidenhead UA	142.6
Workingham UA	146.0
South-west	
Bath and North East Somerset UA	170.2
Bournemouth UA	163.4
Bristol, City of UA	406.2
North Somerset UA	191.1
Plymouth UA	254.2
Poole UA	140.9
South Gloucestershire UA	247.9
Swindon UA	181.5
Torbay UA	126.1
Total population in unitary authorities in England	8,318.8
Average persons per unitary authority in England	180.8
Wales	
Blaenau Gwent	71.2
Bridgend	131.5
Caerphilly	170.5
Cardiff	327.5
Carmarthenshire	169.1
Ceredigion	72.2
Conwy	112.7
Denbighshire	91.8
Flintshire	148.3
Gwynedd	116.8
Isle of Anglesey	64.8
Merthyr Tydfil	55.8
Monmouthshire	87.4
Neath Port Talbot	138.0
Newport	138.5
Pembrokeshire	114.7
Powys	126.8
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	239.8
Swansea	230.3
Torfaen	89.8
The Vale of Glamorgan	122.9
Wrexham	125.7
Total population in unitary authorities in Wales	2,946.2
Average persons per unitary authority in Wales	133.9

Note:

Figures may not add exactly because of rounding

Source:

Office for National Statistics

IT Contacts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from

May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category *(a)*. [33689]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

HM Treasury

	£ million
	IT expenditure
1997–98	3.1
1998–99	3.9
1999–2000	3.8
2000–01	3.5
2001–02	3.1

The Treasury has let the following IT contracts over this period:

Star Computers: for the supply of IT desktop and portable equipment. Contract awarded in December 1997.

Mitech Europe Ltd.: network support. Contract awarded in December 1999.

Computacenter Ltd.: for the supply of servers, software and networking equipment. Contract awarded via the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) using a GCAT agreement in January 2000.

Rebus HR Ltd.: provide personnel software. Contract awarded in January 2000.

Diagonal Solutions Ltd.: software maintenance. Contract awarded in June 2000.

Anite Public sector Ltd.: moving IT equipment into new Treasury building. Contract awarded in November 2001.

Lynx Technology Ltd.: software support services. Contract awarded in January 2002.

Centerprise International: for the supply of IT desktop and portable equipment. Contract awarded in January 2002.

All companies mentioned are registered in England.

Microsoft Ltd.: software maintenance. Contract awarded in December 2000. The company is registered in the United States of America.

Decision Support Systems Ltd.: accounting software. Contract awarded in October 2001. The company are registered in New Zealand.

Customs and Excise

	£ million *IT expenditure*
1997–98	8.2
1998–99	31.8
1999–2000	11.7
2000–01	3.3
2001–02	4.8

The decline in spend on computer equipment and maintenance over the last four years can be explained by the implementation of a PFI contract in HM Customs and Excise, which means that we no longer purchase our IS infrastructure equipment but pay a service charge for its provision by our PFI provider.The Department has one main IS provider through a PFI, this being ICL. This is a 10 year contract awarded on 25 August 1999 with a TOU issued on 31 March 2000. We are currently novating nearly all our IT contracts (including software licences obtained through various local offices) into this contract. The number is around 182 although it is expected to grow. ICL is an English registered company.

Debt Management Office (DMO)

	£ million *IT expenditure*
1998–99	0.7
1999–2000	1.4
2000–01	2.0
2001–02	1.6

The DMO has an on going contract with Computacenter Ltd. who have provided the Department with IT equipment since 1999. Computacenter is registered in England.

Inland Revenue

The Department currently has three major contracts in place to provide its IT systems and support. We have two strategic technology partners, EDS and Accenture, who provide support, development and maintenance of our IT systems and one framework contract (with Computacenter) for the supply of IT equipment.

The IT Services contract was let to EDS in 1994 for 10 years.

The NIRS 2 contract for operational services was awarded to Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) in May 1995 and runs to 2004.

In November 1994 the Department let the IROS contract for the supply of desktop equipment to CSC/Computacenter. This was replaced in June 2000 by the e-IROS contract with Computacenter. Total annual expenditure under these contracts from April 1997 to January 2002 is as follows:

	£ million *IT expenditure*
1997–98	25.1
1998–99	31.9
1999–2000	32.3
2000–01	29.8
2001–02	38.5

All of the companies mentioned have registered offices in England.

The parent companies of CSC and EDS are US based.

Tax Polarisation

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he expects to be the impact on the revenue arising from abolishing polarisation in respect of *(a)* VAT, *(b)* capital gains tax and *(c)* other taxes. [33953]

Ruth Kelly: All taxes are kept under review, as are the revenue implications of other policy changes.

Temporary Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what positions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of (i) 51 weeks' and (ii) less than 51 weeks' duration. [25513]

Ruth Kelly: The information is given as follows:

	Number
HM Treasury	
(i) 51 weeks	
Range E	3
Range D	6
Range C	2
Range B	3
(ii) Less than 51 weeks	
Range E	7
Range D	15
Range C	3
Range B	1
HM Customs and Excise	
(i) 51 weeks	0
(ii) Less than 51 weeks	
Information and Library Resource Manager	2
Information Specialist	2
Photographic Officer	1
Advice, Support and Process Contact Officer	1
Business Support Administrator	12
Corporate Services Admin Officer	1
Advice Centre Support	1
Business Support Administrator	27
Business Support Assistant	319
Corporate Services Assistant	9
Customs Assistant	21
Fast Keyer	11
IS Operational Support Officer	3
Kennel Assistant	2
Revenue constable	9
Typist	1
UK Revenue Assistant	18
Inland Revenue	
(i) 51 weeks	0
(ii) Less than 51 weeks	
Officer	92
Assistant	981
Other	5
Government Actuary's Department	
(i) 51 weeks	0
(ii) Less than 51 weeks	
Trainee Actuaries	4
National Savings	
(i) 51 weeks	0
(ii) Less than 51 weeks	
Accounts Manager	1
Personnel Assistant	1
Administrative Assistant	1
Supplier Relationship Manager	1
Contracts Assistant	1
Performance Analyst	1
Office of National Statistics	
(i) 51 weeks	0
(ii) Less than 51 weeks	
Staff	208
Royal Mint	
(i) 51 weeks	0
(ii) Less than 51 weeks	
Medallists	7
Collector Coin Packers	9
Store Person	1
Non-Industrial Staff	
Clerks	5
Valuation Office	
(i) 51 weeks	0
(ii) Less than 51 weeks	
Clerical staff	57
Higher Executive Officers	4
Senior Executive Officer	1
Total numbers for all Departments	
(i) 51 weeks	12
(ii) Less than 51 weeks	1,866

EC Budgets

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the main items of income and expenditure of the general budgets of the European Community for each year from 1995 to the latest available year in the manner of the answer of 11 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns 119–22W. [35875]

Ruth Kelly: The information from 1995 to 2000, based on currently available EU documents and at 2000 prices, is set out in the following tables.

Table 1: European Community Budget—Expenditure

Million euro[1]

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
EAGGF Guarantee	37,855	42,108	42,478	40,249	40,061	40,506
Percentage of total general budget	51.8	51.0	50.6	48.3	47.3	48.6
Structural Funds	—	—	—	—	—	25,906
Percentage of total general budget	—	—	—	—	—	31.1
EAGGF Guidance	2,777	3,598	3,762	3,628	3,831	—
Percentage of total general budget	3.8	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.5	—
ERDF	9,191	11,361	12,107	12,135	14,217	—
Percentage of total general budget	12.6	13.8	14.4	14.6	16.8	—
ESF	4,991	6,459	6,456	7,833	7,354	—
Percentage of total general budget	6.8	7.8	7.7	9.4	8.7	—

Table 1: European Community Budget—Expenditure

Million euro[1]

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
FIFG	272	451	512	420	580	—
Percentage of total general budget	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.7	—
Cohesion Fund	1,865	2,005	2,441	2,407	2,773	1,685
Percentage of total general budget	2.6	2.4	2.9	2.9	2.6	2.0
Research	2,720	3,082	3,133	3,058	2,669	3,404
Percentage of total general budget	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.1	4.1
Administration	4,248	4,295	4,409	4,297	4,173	4,643
Percentage of total general budget	5.8	5.2	5.3	5.2	4.9	5.6
Other	9,121	9,126	8,579	9,296	9,087	7,187
Percentage of total general budget	12.5	11.1	10.2	11.2	10.7	8.6
Total	73,040	82,486	83,876	83,323	84,744	83,331

Table 2: European Community Budget—Revenue

Million euro[1]

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Agricultural levies	2,134	1,950	2,023	2,014	2,184	—
Percentage of total revenue	2.6	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.5	—
Customs duties	13,729	12,595	12,870	12,523	11,881	—
Percentage of total revenue	16.7	14.5	15.2	14.4	13.5	—
VAT	43,006	36,367	35,962	34,119	31,631	35,122
Percentage of total revenue	52.2	41.8	42.5	39.2	35.9	37.9
GNP	15,576	25,216	28,265	36,079	38,072	37,580
Percentage of total revenue	18.9	29.0	33.4	41.4	43.2	40.5
Misc.	7,957	10,900	5,522	2,349	4,438	4,755
Percentage of total revenue	9.7	12.5	6.5	2.7	5.0	5.1
Traditional Own Resources	—	—	—	—	—	15,267
Percentage of total revenue	—	—	—	—	—	16.5
Total	82,402	87,029	84,642	87,085	88,207	92,725

[1] Figures are in millions of euro at constant 2000 prices

Notes:

1. figures are for outturn. As yet outturn figures are not available for 2001.
2. Figures converted to constant 2000 prices using EU15 deflator throughout.
3. Items are denominated in euro as that is the unit of account for the EC Budget.
4. Other spending includes spending on external policies and internal policies other than research.

Sources:

1. The Community Budget: The facts in figures, 2000 Edition; European Commission.
2. European Court of Auditors Report on the 2000 Budget (Official Journal C359, 15 December 2001).
3. Allocation of 2000 EU operating expenditure; European Commission (September 2001).
4. European Economy, Number 72, 2001 (Table 24, page 161); European Commission.

Working Time Directive

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the effect of the working time directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35883]

Ruth Kelly: Working hours are monitored in the Treasury. I am arranging to place in the Library of the House an update of the table which accompanied the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 773–74W.

Sufficient staff have been recruited to fill all complemented posts in the Treasury, and the Department has a number of alternative working policies in place such as flexible working hours, part-time working and compressed hours, as well as working at home. These are available to all staff by agreement with their line managers.

Departmental Assets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the value of the outstanding leases on *(a)* Allington Towers SW1, *(b)* Cheapside House EC2V and *(c)* Fleetbank House EC4Y; and if he will make a statement. [35972]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury terminated its lease on Cheapside House earlier this year, and has leased Eastcheap Court since March 2001.

The Department occupies each of these premises under an operating lease, held under normal commercial terms with regular rent reviews which do not give rise to any significant value for the Department's interests.

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review computer security at Capita-administered Government schemes or projects. [36080]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Each Department is responsible for specifying security requirements when letting contracts and ensuring that suppliers comply. The Office of the e-Envoy recommends technical security standards such as use of smartcards or digital signatures.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations the Government have received from the Capita Group since 24 October 2001. [36079]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This information is not held centrally.

Wanless Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to publish the next stage of the Wanless report. [36112]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Terms of Reference for Derek Wanless' review ask him to report to the Chancellor of the Exchequer by April 2002.

Princess Diana Memorial Committee

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason there is no specific provision in the 2001 accounts of the Royal Mint for sums to be paid to projects recommended by the Princess Diana Memorial Committee. [36114]

Ruth Kelly: The Royal Mint accounts for 2000–01 included a provision for the royalties due in respect of Princess Diana collector coin sales. In accordance with generally accepted accounting practice in the UK this provision was included within trade creditors in the published accounts.

West Bank and Gaza Strip (Imports)

Richard Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken by HM Customs to identify and monitor imports from the illegal settlements of the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and what action is taken where relevant authorities fail to co-operate in post-clearance verification inquiries. [36084]

Mr. Boateng: Customs are identifying imports declared to be of Israeli origin but which seem likely to have been produced in the settlements and are sending verification requests to Israel. As this is an EU wide issue, Customs intend to co-ordinate action with the European Commission and other member states in the event of failure to co-operate by the relevant authorities.

Richard Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how exporters of goods based in the illegal settlements of the West Bank and Gaza Strip will be alerted to the steps being taken by HM Customs in respect of the EC-wide exercise to ensure that origins of imports are properly declared. [36085]

Mr. Boateng: In their recent publicity HM Customs strongly advise importers that they should check with their Israeli suppliers that the products they are importing have not originated in the settlements. The Israeli authorities are also well aware of the position.

Richard Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice is given by Customs and Excise to importers to ensure that origins of imports are properly declared on all goods which originated in the illegal settlements of the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and in which trade magazines and on what website the advice will appear. [36083]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise strongly advise importers to check with their Israeli suppliers that the products they are declaring as of Israeli origin have not originated in the settlements. This advice has been published as Joint Customs Consultative Committee Information Paper (01) 55, which has been placed on the Customs website, http://www.hmce.gov.uk (under Forms and publications, Information papers). Articles have been provided to *International Trade Today* and *Croners*.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36186]

Ruth Kelly: No working days were lost as a result of industrial action by staff in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Department, agencies and non-governmental bodies in each of the last four years.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36283]

Ruth Kelly: Ministerial boxes originating from the Treasury are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

Conference Sponsorship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 116W, on the "Creating knowledge: Creating Wealth" conference, how many companies bid for the right to sponsor the conference; and if he will make a statement. [37050]

Ruth Kelly: This seminar was one of a series that followed publication of guidance on "Selling Government Services into Wider Markets", published by the Treasury in 1998. There were discussions with at least six different firms about whether they were interested in sponsoring one or more of these seminars.

Government Investment (Research and Development)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown, for each nation and region of the UK, of Government investment in research and development since 1995. [36412]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 25 February 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on Government investment in research and development since 1995. (36412)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) conducts an annual survey of UK Government Department's research and development (R&D) expenditure, from which the amount of R&D performed within Government establishments is available at Government Office Region (GOR) level. Figures for 1995 to 1999, by nation and GOR, can be found in the ONS publication Regional Trends, Chapter 13.9 as follows:

1995 Regional Trends 32, 1997

1996 Regional Trends 33, 1998

1997 Regional Trends 34, 1999

1998 Regional Trends 35, 2000

1999 Regional Trends 36, 2001.

This information can also be found at the following web address: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme—compendia/regionaltrends—2001/rt36.pdf.

Government funding into business enterprise R&D expenditure at GOR level is available from the annual survey of UK Business Enterprise R&D survey. Figures for the years 1995 to 2000 are shown in the attached table. Data for Government investment in other sectors of the economy (Higher Education and the Private Non-Profit sectors) are not available at a regional level.

Total UK Government funding of R&D can be found in the ONS Gross Domestic Expenditure on Research and Development First Release published in March every year. The latest available data relates to 1999, however no regional breakdown is available. This publication can be found at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/press—release/Archive.asp.

Government research and development funding to UK businesses by Government Office Region: 1995 to 2000

£ million

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
England	866	765	844	1,004	1,081	939
North East	5	5	2	3	5	2
North West	77	78	61	87	102	94
Yorkshire and Humberside	21	18	11	7	8	4
East Midlands	68	82	85	143	131	65
West Midlands	16	15	18	25	41	38
Eastern	174	146	214	239	256	330
London	59	60	85	91	97	111
South East	273	233	237	238	266	176
South West	173	129	129	170	177	119
Northern Ireland	12	6	6	6	5	6
Scotland	71	66	58	78	58	59
Wales	5	5	7	7	13	7
United Kingdom	953	842	915	1,094	1,157	1,011

Source:

Survey of UK Business Enterprise Research & Development, ONS

Self-assessment

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have sent in self-assessment tax forms since 31 January; how many of those have *(a)* paid the £100 fine and *(b)* been excused the £100 fine; and if he will make a statement. [36718]

Dawn Primarolo: Between 31 January and 8 February 2002, 444,750 returns have been sent in. Penalty notices have not yet been issued so we have no information on penalties for this year but we would not expect any significant numbers of people to have yet paid a penalty.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of liable taxpayers failed to meet his Department's deadlines for submitting tax self-assessment forms; what estimate he has of the total revenue from penalties for late submission; and if he will make a statement. [36416]

Dawn Primarolo: The latest year for which figures are available is the year to 31 January 2001.

10 per cent. of SA taxpayers to whom a return was issued failed to file by the filing deadline.

The Inland Revenue accounts for its receipts in accounts years running from November to October.

For the account year 2000, receipts from self-assessment penalties totalled £33 million and the figures for account year 2001 will be available later this financial year.

Child Care Costs

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the level of support to families to pay for child care costs. [36409]

Dawn Primarolo: The child care tax credit element of working families tax credit is a targeted measure to help low paid parents, for whom the cost of child care can be a significant barrier to work. The credit is worth 70 per cent. of eligible child care costs up to limits of £135 a week for a family with one child and £200 for a family with two or more children. The limits were increased to this level in June 2001 in response to representations about the costs of child care. The child care tax credit element has been extremely successful with around 155,000 families benefiting. This is more than three times the number who benefited from the family credit disregard at its peak.

Under the new system of tax credits which will be introduced from April 2003 the new working tax credit will contain a child care component. The Government welcome evidence about the cost of child care and keep the levels of support under review. Rates and thresholds for the new tax credits will be set in Budget 2002.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the proportion of child care costs met by *(a)* Government, *(b)* business and *(c)* parents; [36410]

(2) what the percentage is of child care costs met by *(a)* Government, *(b)* business and *(c)* parents in other member states of the EU. [36411]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government do not collect data on the proportion of the cost met through different sources, nor does such data exist on an internationally comparable basis.

The National Childcare Strategy is ensuring that affordable, accessible and good quality child care is available in every neighbourhood, and Spending Review 2000 allocated an additional £225 million from 2001 to 2004 to tackle the child care gap between disadvantaged and more affluent areas.

To support working families with their child care costs, the working families tax credit includes a child care tax credit component which pays 70 per cent. of the costs of eligible child care up to limits of £135 per week for one child and £200 per week for two or more children. Around 155,000 families are receiving support with their child care costs, over three times as many as benefited from the child care disregard under family credit at its peak.

The Government's Work Life Balance Campaign is increasing awareness and take-up of employment policies and practices which benefit business and help employees enjoy a better balance between work and other demands on their lives.

Benefits (Walthamstow)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the Walthamstow constituency are in receipt of *(a)* working families tax credit and *(b)* children's tax credit. [36949]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 694W.

Student Finances

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many full-time students registered entitlement to national insurance eligibility in the financial year in the last three financial years; and what proportion established eligibility over a full contribution year; [37034]

(2) if he will estimate how many full-time students have earnings; how many claimed holiday earnings exemptions under form P38(S); and how many students may have overpaid tax in the last three full financial years. [37035]

Dawn Primarolo: A national insurance number is generally notified to a person shortly before they reach their sixteenth birthday. Any employee over the age of 16 is liable to pay Class 1 contributions where, in any tax week, earnings are paid which exceed the NICs employees's earnings threshold. We have no information on numbers of students who pay contributions.

I regret that I cannot provide reliable estimates for these questions as the Inland Revenue do not hold this information centrally.

G7 Meeting (Ottawa)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent G7 meeting in Ottawa. [36551]

Ruth Kelly: G7 Finance Ministers and Central bank governors met in Ottawa on the 8 and 9 February. They discussed the global economy; the importance of fostering development; and on-going efforts to combat the financing of terrorism.

Ministers and governors agreed that since they had last met, prospects had generally strengthened for resumed expansion in their economies, although risks remained. Ministers and governors agreed the need for more effective use of development assistance and a commitment to sound policies, good governance and the rule of law by all countries. They considered possible innovative ways to mobilize additional domestic and external resources, trade and external debt, and looked forward to continued discussions at the UN Financing for Development conference in Monterrey in March.

The full statement from the meeting, including an action plan on combating the financing of terrorism, is available in the Library.

EU Budget (British Rebate)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total value, in sterling, of the British rebate from the EU budget is from 1984 to the most recent year for which figures are available. [36385]

Ruth Kelly: The total value of the UK abatement up to the end of 2000–01 can be found in the final paragraph of Chapter 14.4 of the Departmental Report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments (Cm 5116) published in April 2001.

Railtrack

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 702W, on Railtrack, which criteria he used when determining that disclosure would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion. [R] [36939]

Mr. Andrew Smith: As I said in my previous answer, a railway administration order was made in respect of Railtrack plc under the provisions of the Railways Act 1993. No extra legislation was necessary to put the company into administration.

There is no obligation to disclose confidential communications between Departments, in accordance with Exemption 2 (Internal discussion and advice) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

I have nothing to add to that answer.

Kingscrest Associates and Montecello

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the appeal against the London VAT Tribunal decision in the case of Kingscrest Associates and Montecello to be heard; and what legal costs Customs have incurred in this case. [36705]

Mr. Boateng: The appeal by Customs will be heard by the High Court on either the 18 or 19 February 2002. The costs incurred to date are £26,466.

Headwear (VAT)

Phil Sawford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue the Treasury has received from VAT on riding hats in each of the past five years for which figures are available; and what figures he has collated on the rate of VAT levied on *(a)* motorcycle helmets, *(b)* bicycle helmets and *(c)* riding hats in each of the EU member states. [36456]

Mr. Boateng: No such information is available.

Business R and D

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* total and *(b)* business research and development is as a percentage of GDP for (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland. [36413]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 25 February 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about what the (a) total and (b) business research and development as a percentage of GDP for (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland. (36413)

The latest available information is in respect of 1999.

The UK total research & development (R&D) as a percentage of GDP for 1999 is 1.8 per cent. Total R&D data in respect of 2000 will be available from March 2002. There is no regional breakdown available and therefore no information is available for Scotland.

UK Business R&D as a percentage of GDP for 1999 is 1.2 per cent. Business R&D as a percentage of GDP for 1999 for Scotland is 0.5 per cent. Regional business R&D as a percentage of GDP for 2000 will not be available until the completion of 2000 regional GDP figures in April 2002.

National Insurance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees in each region and nation of the UK, and what percentage of all employees, had earnings below the lower earnings limit for national insurance in each year since 1997; and what proportion of such workers were women. [37291]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 25 February 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of employees earning below the lower earnings limit for National Insurance since 1997. (37291)

The attached table gives the available information from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the autumn (September to November) quarters of each year from 1997 to 2001.

Numbers and percentages of employees whose gross weekly earnings are less than the lower limit for national insurance. Autumn (September to November) quarters 1996 to 2001, not seasonally adjusted

Government Office Regions	*Thousands*	*Percentage of all employees*	*Percentage who are women*
Autumn (September to November) 1996			
United Kingdom	2,534	11.1	78.1
England	2,164	11.2	78.1
North East	120	12.3	80.0
North West	302	11.6	82.7
Yorkshire and the Humber	217	11.3	75.7
East Midlands	224	13.0	81.8
West Midlands	225	10.7	85.9
Eastern	261	12.0	81.3
London	167	6.3	72.4
South East	392	11.9	74.7
South West	258	13.9	71.3
Wales	137	13.2	74.8
Scotland	186	9.2	77.3
Northern Ireland	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Autumn (September to November) 1997			
United Kingdom	2,509	10.7	78.8
England	2,131	10.8	78.6
North East	127	13.1	80.7
North West	291	11.0	78.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	222	11.2	79.9
East Midlands	209	11.9	77.8
West Midlands	236	10.9	76.9
Eastern	242	10.8	82.8
London	189	6.8	72.7
South East	362	10.8	79.0
South West	253	13.1	79.0
Wales	107	10.3	83.2
Scotland	216	10.6	78.7
Northern Ireland	55	9.5	74.3
Autumn (September to November) 1998			
United Kingdom	2,435	10.1	78.5
England	2,058	10.2	78.6
North East	133	13.8	80.2
North West	298	11.1	80.5
Yorkshire and the Humber	201	9.9	82.5
East Midlands	190	10.8	78.4
West Midlands	230	10.4	78.8
Eastern	236	10.3	78.4
London	195	6.8	67.9
South East	333	9.5	78.4
South West	243	12.2	81.2
Wales	121	11.3	81.9
Scotland	205	9.8	79.3
Northern Ireland	51	8.7	65.2
Autumn (September to November) 1999			
United Kingdom	2,262	9.3	76.8
England	1,901	9.3	76.7
North East	109	11.3	83.1
North West	255	9.2	74.2
Yorkshire and the Humber	167	8.2	85.1
East Midlands	170	9.6	79.1
West Midlands	228	10.4	79.2
Eastern	217	9.4	78.9
London	202	6.9	64.4
South East	319	9.1	73.7
South West	233	11.4	78.7
Wales	129	11.8	77.6
Scotland	189	9.0	77.5
Northern Ireland	43	7.3	78.1
Autumn (September to November) 2000			
United Kingdom	2,104	8.5	75.2
England	1,774	8.5	75.1
North East	88	8.8	78.2
North West	227	8.2	77.2
Yorkshire and the Humber	220	10.5	73.0
East Midlands	152	8.5	80.6
West Midlands	203	9.2	78.1
Eastern	203	8.5	75.2
London	170	5.9	64.3
South East	319	9.0	76.7
South West	192	9.3	73.3
Wales	116	10.6	69.6
Scotland	166	7.7	77.0
Northern Ireland	48	7.9	87.0

Numbers and percentages of employees whose gross weekly earnings are less than the lower limit for national insurance. Autumn (September to November) quarters 1996 to 2001, not seasonally adjusted

Government Office Regions	*Thousands*	*Percentage of all employees*	*Percentage who are women*
Autumn (September to November) 2001			
United Kingdom	2,060	8.3	75.3
England	1,746	8.3	75.0
North East	84	8.3	77.4
North West	223	8.0	76.4
Yorkshire and the Humber	191	9.2	78.0
East Midlands	161	8.9	77.5
West Midlands	191	8.5	80.6
Eastern	220	9.1	73.6
London	154	5.1	64.9
South East	291	8.1	74.1
South West	231	11.1	73.5
Wales	96	8.7	81.7
Scotland	158	7.4	77.1
Northern Ireland	59	9.7	66.9

[1] Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey.

Marriage Statistics

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many marriages were contracted between UK nationals residing in the UK and spouses living abroad; and how many and what percentage were arranged marriages in each year since 1997. [36481]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 25 February 2002:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of marriages contracted between UK nationals residing in the UK and spouses living abroad, and the percentage of these marriages that were arranged marriages, in each year since 1997. I am replying in his absence. (36841)

I regret that the information requested is not available. Only marriages which are solemnised within England and Wales are routinely registered in this country. The nationalities of the spouses are not recorded amongst the details in the Marriage Register; nor whether the marriage was arranged or not.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees in his Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36693]

Ruth Kelly: 134 staff took advantage of the free eyesight test during 2001. The eyesight test service is communicated to the Department by:

The Health and Safety Policy;

Health and Safety Intranet Home Page;

Regular electronic messages of the day;

Articles in our house magazine;

Reception training;

Electronic training DSE package;

Issue to everyone of the HSE booklet "Working with VDUs";

Minutes of Health and Safety Hon. and S Committee which includes statistics on eyesight testing;

DSE risk assessments;

Poster campaigns.

Landfill Tax

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what landfill tax proceeds have passed to Entrust in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 for (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland. [36449]

Mr. Boateng: Entrust, the regulator of the environmental bodies landfill tax credit scheme, receives none of the proceeds from landfill tax. Contributions made by landfill site operators under the scheme to environmental bodies are:

	£
(i) For the UK	
1998–99	82,676,183
1999–2000	96,221,885
2000–01	115,774,454
(ii) For Scotland	
1998–99	7,488,354
1999–2000	7,992,538
2000–01	7,808,311

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been raised by the landfill tax in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, and *(c)* 2000–01 in (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland. [36448]

Mr. Boateng: Figures relating to landfill tax are not available for separate countries or regions within the UK. This is due to the method of collection of the tax, where each landfill operator is registered according to the location of their head office.

Scottish Executive (Funding)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 518W, if he will set out for each year since 1997 and for each Department, in total and by project, the changes in their planned expenditure which have produced a share of such changes for the Scottish Executive under the Barnett formula; what the total value of such changes was by Department; what the resulting change in funding for the Scottish Executive was in total and in each case; and what the *(a)* changes in spending for each Department were as a percentage of total identifiable spending in England and *(b)* resulting produced changes for the Scottish Executive were as a percentage of total identifiable expenditure in Scotland. [36751]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Details of the Barnett formula used in the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review were published in the Statement of Funding Policy in March 1999. An updated version of the statement was published in July 2000 showing details of the Barnett formula used in the 2000 Spending Review. The spending settlements for Scotland and for Government Departments were published in the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review (Cm 4011) and 2000 Spending Review (Cm 4807). Details of identifiable total managed spending by function and country were published in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (Cm 5101) in April 2001.

Macmillan Cancer Relief

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the VAT on building costs paid by Macmillan Cancer Relief; and if he will take measures to support Macmillan Cancer Relief. [36913]

Mr. Boateng: The Government greatly appreciate the work of Macmillan Cancer Relief.

The Government have received a number of representations concerning the VAT implications of Macmillan Cancer Relief's building programme. Customs have recently had useful and constructive initial discussions with Macmillan, and are currently giving further consideration to the issues raised.

Tax Payments (Euros)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether UK residents can pay their tax bills in euros. [36714]

Ruth Kelly: The Inland Revenue accepts payment of tax bills in euros, in the same way as it accepts payment in other foreign currencies.

GDP Expenditure (Public Services)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average proportion of gross domestic product spent on public services was during *(a)* 1975 to 1979, *(b)* 1980 to 1990, *(c)* 1990 to 1997 and *(d)* 1998 to 2001; and what his estimate is of the proportion of GDP that will be spent on public services between 2002 and 2006. [36601]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The proportions of gross domestic product accounted for by public spending, defined as Total Managed Expenditure (TME), for each financial year from 1970–71 to 2000–01 were published in the pre-Budget report (Cm5318), table B23. The equivalent projections for future years are set out in the table.

	TME as percentage of GDP
2001–02	39.5
2002–03	40.0
2003–04	40.4
2004–05	40.5
2005–06	40.5
2006–07	40.4

Rail Journeys

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37502]

Ruth Kelly: In 2001, 1,057 first class rail tickets were purchased by the Treasury (43 per cent. of the total tickets purchased). The average cost of a first class journey in that year was £116. Total spending on rail tickets over the past three years is set out in the table. Information for 1998 is not available. No analysis by grade is available.

	Spending (£)
1999	131,186
2000	156,524
2001	172,727

Terrorism

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on the retail sector of changes in the level of insurance premiums since 11 September 2001. [37262]

Ruth Kelly: The terms, conditions and price of insurance products change constantly in response to market conditions. I am not aware of any significant changes directly attributable to 11 September, except in the availability of insurance against terrorism risk.

Royal Mint

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many euros have been produced by the Royal Mint; and if he will make a statement. [37085]

Ruth Kelly: The Royal Mint has supplied euro blanks, mainly copper plated steel 1c, 2c and 5c blanks, to nine of the first wave countries. Most of the individual contracts are confidential but the total blanks supplied exceeds 11,000 tonnes.

Household Incomes/Consumption

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* household income and *(b)* individual consumption expenditure in total and as a percentage of the UK total; and what the annual percentage change was in each of the last five years in each nation and region of the UK. [37564]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Peter Wishart, dated 25 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on estimates of household income and individual consumption expenditure in the countries and regions of the United Kingdom. (37564)

The latest data available are for the year 1999, and were published as an ONS News Release on 26 July 2001. These data are presented in the attached tables.

The ONS is currently compiling estimates for data up to the year 2000 for sub-national household income. We plan to publish these estimates later in the spring. It is planned that estimates for sub-national individual consumption expenditure for the same period will be published in the summer.

The publication referred to in this answer is available in the House of Commons Library and on the web at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/regionalaccounts.

Total household income by region 1995–99

£ million

	1995	*1996*	*1997*[1]	*1998*[1]	*1999*[1]
United Kingdom[2]	706,351	749,815	789,791	830,192	873,724
North East	27,286	28,753	29,542	30,320	31,120
North West	76,975	81,446	84,836	88,272	92,262
Yorkshire and Humber	55,208	59,157	61,112	63,953	67,775
East Midlands	46,654	49,986	52,763	54,971	57,445

Total household income by region 1995–99

£ million

	1995	*1996*	*1997*[1]	*1998*[1]	*1999*[1]
West Midlands	59,808	62,279	64,358	67,619	71,638
East	67,523	71,582	77,970	83,517	88,824
London	102,265	109,534	116,740	124,156	130,403
South East	105,705	113,456	120,734	127,477	135,433
South West	56,152	59,591	63,522	66,263	69,456
Wales	30,948	32,503	33,614	35,198	37,169
Scotland	60,408	63,381	65,305	68,397	71,296
Northern Ireland	16,858	17,527	18,680	19,434	20,287
UK less Extra-Regio	705,791	749,197	789,175	829,576	873,108
Extra-Regio[1]	560	618	616	616	616

Percentage of UK Household Income (excluding extra-regio)

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
United Kingdom[2]	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
North East	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.6
North West	10.9	10.9	10.7	10.6	10.6
Yorkshire and Humber	7.8	7.9	7.7	7.7	7.8
East Midlands	6.6	6.7	6.7	6.6	6.6
West Midlands	8.5	8.3	8.2	8.2	8.2
East	9.6	9.6	9.9	10.1	10.2
London	14.5	14.6	14.8	15.0	14.9
South East	15.0	15.1	15.3	15.4	15.5
South West	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0
Wales	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.3
Scotland	8.6	8.5	8.3	8.2	8.2
Northern Ireland	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.3

Household income—year on year percentage change (excluding extra-regio)

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
United Kingdom[2]	5.8	6.1	5.3	5.1	5.2
North East	4.8	5.4	2.7	2.6	2.6
North West	5.0	5.8	4.2	4.1	4.5
Yorkshire and Humber	4.9	7.2	3.3	4.6	6.0
East Midlands	5.1	7.1	5.6	4.2	4.5
West Midlands	6.8	4.1	3.3	5.1	5.9
East	5.6	6.0	8.9	7.1	6.4
London	6.0	7.1	6.6	6.4	5.0
South East	5.9	7.3	6.4	5.6	6.2
South West	7.2	6.1	6.6	4.3	4.8
Wales	6.5	5.0	3.4	4.7	5.6
Scotland	5.8	4.9	3.0	4.7	4.2
Northern Ireland	6.7	4.0	6.6	4.0	4.4

Individual consumption expenditure by region 1995–99

£ million

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*[1]
United Kingdom[2]	454,934	486,226	517,909	551,823	586,906
North East	18,241	19,272	20,150	20,998	20,659
North West	50,717	53,864	57,489	59,774	64,133
Yorkshire and Humber	36,798	39,108	41,255	44,248	44,956
East Midlands	31,245	32,865	34,787	36,261	37,961
West Midlands	39,106	40,993	43,309	46,107	49,416
East	41,554	44,989	47,712	52,258	54,607
London	63,080	66,893	72,873	80,737	89,241
South East	68,110	73,585	78,921	85,207	92,024
South West	35,717	38,979	41,784	43,887	47,384
Wales	20,443	22,578	23,553	23,716	24,103
Scotland	38,787	41,129	43,556	45,520	48,421
Northern Ireland	11,192	11,977	12,521	13,109	14,009

Percentage of UK individual consumption expenditure

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
United Kingdom[2]	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
North East	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.5
North West	11.1	11.1	11.1	10.8	10.9
Yorkshire and Humber	8.1	8.0	8.0	8.0	7.7
East Midlands	6.9	6.8	6.7	6.6	6.5
West Midlands	8.6	8.4	8.4	8.4	8.4
East	9.1	9.3	9.2	9.5	9.3
London	13.9	13.8	14.1	14.6	15.2
South East	15.0	15.1	15.2	15.4	15.7
South West	7.9	8.0	8.1	8.0	8.1
Wales	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.3	4.1
Scotland	8.5	8.5	8.4	8.2	8.3
Northern Ireland	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.4

Individual consumption expenditure—year on year percentage change

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
United Kingdom[2]	4.7	6.9	6.5	6.5	6.4
North East	4.3	5.8	4.6	4.2	−1.6
North West	3.6	6.2	6.7	4.0	7.3
Yorkshire and Humber	3.4	6.3	5.5	7.3	1.6
East Midlands	6.2	5.2	5.8	4.2	4.7
West Midlands	6.6	4.8	5.6	6.5	7.2
East	7.9	8.3	6.1	9.5	4.5
London	3.0	6.0	8.9	10.8	10.5
South East	4.0	8.1	7.3	8.0	8.0
South West	5.8	9.1	7.2	5.0	8.0
Wales	6.8	10.5	4.3	0.7	1.6
Scotland	2.9	6.0	5.9	4.5	6.4
Northern Ireland	5.9	7.0	4.5	4.7	6.9

[1] Provisional

[2] Components may not sum to totals as a result of rounding

[3] Parts of the UK economic territory that can not be attached to any particular region

Source:

Regional Accounts 2001 Part 2 Regional Household Income and ICE

Vocational Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have claimed tax relief for vocational training in each of the last four years; and what has been the cost to public funds in each year. [24823]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[pursuant to his reply, 8 January 2002, C.810W]:* The table unfortunately contained a number of errors. The correct information is as follows:

Year	*Claims received*[1]	*Cost of tax relief*[2] *£ million*
2000–01	125,000	30
1999–2000	250,000	60
1998–99	300,000	50
1997–98	300,000	45

[1] Number of claims received and not the number of trainees as an individual could make more than one claim in a tax year. It was estimated that there were probably about 200,000 people claiming VTR in 1997–98 and 1998–99.

[2] On an accrued basis.

Charities

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a statutory minimum threshold for the amount or percentage of donations raised by registered charities to be dedicated to the charities' beneficiaries. [35254]

Angela Eagle: This issue is currently being considered by Cabinet Office's performance and innovation unit as part of its review of the legal and regulatory framework for charities and the voluntary sector. The report of the review is due to be published in spring.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the average proportion of moneys raised by registered charities which is dedicated directly to the charities' beneficiaries in the last year for which figures are available; [35252]

(2) how many registered charities were *(a)* investigated and *(b)* taken into administration on the grounds that an insufficient proportion of their received donations was dedicated directly to the charities' beneficiaries in each year since 1997; [35253]

(3) if he will introduce guidance as to the minimum acceptable threshold for the amount or percentage of donations raised by registered charities to be dedicated to the charities' beneficiaries; [35251]

(4) what steps he takes to ensure that registered charities inform potential donors of the proportion of moneys raised that is dedicated directly to the charities' beneficiaries. [35250]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

These are matters for the Charity Commission as the regulator of charities in England and Wales. The Chief Charity Commissioner will write to the hon. Member and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 26 February 2002

HEALTH

Dementia

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the level of Government support for research into the causes and treatment of dementia; and if he will make a statement. [23323]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Older People highlights the development of services for people with dementia as a high priority. As such, future research underpinning the continued development of services for older people will take full account of dementia services.

We welcomed the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) appraisal of anti dementia drugs in January last year. The widespread availability for the anti dementia drugs appraised will have a profound effect on the quality of life for mental health sufferers; it will tilt the balance of specialist services towards earlier diagnosis and a more clinic-based approach than has been the case to date. With £12 million being made available for the prescribing of these drugs, it is expected that 15,000 people will benefit from NICE's guidance.

The Medical Research Council (MRC), the main agency through with the Government support research on the causes and treatment of disease and funded via the Department of Trade and Industry, spent approximately £8.2 million on dementia research in 2000–01.

Ward Refurbishments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been made available to the Worthing and Southlands hospital trust over the last five years for the refurbishment of wards. [26497]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Each year national health service trusts receive an allocation of capital to be spent at the trust's discretion, referred to as block capital.

The Worthing and Southlands trust's allocations for the last five years were:

	Block capital allocation (£000)	*Increase on previous year*	
		(£000)	*(Percentage)*
1997–98	775	—	—
1998–99	930	155	20.5
1999–2000	1,589	659	70.9
2000–01	1,610	21	1.3
2001–02	1,983	373	23.2

Regarding revenue, in 2000–01 and 2001–02 the trusts received additional ring-fenced ward budgets specifically available to be spent at the discretion of the ward sister. These were £2,500 per ward in 2000–01 and £5,000 per ward, £150,000 in total, in 2001–02.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28403]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W.

Mortality Rate

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government are doing to help reduce the UK's seasonal mortality rate. [27183]

Yvette Cooper: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 363–66W.

Addiction (Young People)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount will be spent in the next financial year to assist *(a)* pre-teenagers and *(b)* teenagers in dealing with (i) alcohol and (ii) tobacco addictions. [28113]

Ms Blears: The funds spent on the treatment of alcohol and tobacco addiction among children and young people form part of the general budgets allocated to health authorities and local authorities. The amounts devoted to each cannot be separately identified.

Multiple Sclerosis (Drug Prices)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with pharmaceutical companies which manufacture disease modifying drugs for MS concerning their pricing policy for the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [28582]

Ms Blears: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1241W.

Anorexia

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further action he is taking to improve support to those diagnosed with anorexia. [28821]

Jacqui Smith: We want to ensure that all mental health problems are addressed through good quality services which are sensitive to service users needs, gender and ethnicity. That is why we published a National Service Framework (NSF) for mental health, in September 1999. This sets national standards in five key areas with time scales and targets for achievement. Eating disorders, including anorexia, is one of the common mental health problems, which the framework seeks to address.

We have made significant additional investment in mental health services—£700 million over three years in addition to the £3 billion already invested. Strong monitoring mechanisms have been introduced to ensure that money for mental health is actually spent on implementing the NSF. It is for health authorities to plan and decide on the level of additional investment locally to meet the standards of NSF in relation to eating disorders.

Services for people with eating disorders have been defined as specialist mental health services. This means that primary care trusts will be expected to act collaboratively to ensure that the right level and quality of service is available to their populations. The new strategic health authorities will have a role in ensuring that this happens. Consideration is also being given to a means of achieving national oversight of specialised mental health services to ensure that they become increasingly available to the whole population.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence will be developing a specific guideline on the management of eating disorders and the further development of NHS Direct will mean that eating disorders sufferers will be able to get first-level advice and referral on to specialised helplines or to local services.

We support a number of charitable organisations in this field, including the Eating Disorders Association and 'Weight Concern'.

Churches Child Protection Advisory Service

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service has spent the section 64 funding allocated to it by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [29229]

Jacqui Smith: The section 64 scheme core grant of £48,000 per year over the three years from 2000–01 to 2002–03 was awarded to help fund the central administrative costs of the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service. The grant is being used by the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service, among other things, to:

Develop programmes to prevent abuse and support families;

Help churches and other organisations prepare and implement child protection policies;

Provide advice in individual cases through a telephone helpline and face-to-face contact;

Provide advice to social services and the police carrying out child protection inquiries in religious communities, and counselling to church leaders, adults and children before, during and after such inquiries;

Provide advice and support to denominational child protection advisers; and

Run child protection training events across the country.

Technology Advisory Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* remit and *(b)* responsibilities of the Technology Advisory Group are; and if he will list (i) the members and (ii) their declared interests. [28813]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Technologies Advisory Group is an internal Department of Health committee, with external advisers, which advises Ministers on topics which might be referred for appraisal by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). Members of the group and advisers are asked to declare interests in relation to specific topics under discussion. We will shortly be publishing a consultation paper with proposals to clarify and strengthen the way in which topics are selected for referral to NICE, including proposals for the future composition of the Technologies Advisory Group.

Perioperative Death

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he knew that the National Confidential Inquiry into Perioperative Death's report, "Changing the Way we Operate", would be published on 4 December 2001; and when he first saw a copy of the report. [29286]

Yvette Cooper: The National Confidential Inquiry into Perioperative Death told the Department in August 2001 that it intended to publish its report in December. It confirmed on 30 October that the date would be 4 December. An advance copy of the report was sent to the Department on 21 November.

Correspondence

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters of 14 November and 13 December from the hon. Member for Spelthorne about his constituent J. Packman's letter to him dated 1 October. [28867]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent on 24 January 2002.

Heart Bypass Operations

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average wait for heart bypass operations *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* of patients in Gloucestershire was in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [29317]

Ms Blears: Data are not collected on average waiting times for heart bypass operations specifically. Instead, data have been provided for the last 12 months on the average waiting time for in-patient procedures in the cardiothoracic surgery and cardiology specialties in England and in Gloucestershire health authority. Waiting times in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Administrations.

£15 million investment was announced in November 2001 for extra heart operations; the national health service is now working towards a 12-month maximum wait by March, which we are expecting to be achieved in most areas. The waiting and choice initiative from July will give patients who wait more than six months for their operation the choice to move to an alternative provider, which will mean a shorter wait for many.

Average waiting times in cardiothoracic surgery and cardiology in Gloucestershire health authority and in England from the quarters ending March 2001 to December 2001

HA/quarter	*Total waiting*	*Average[1] waiting time (months)*
Cardiothoracic surgery		
Gloucestershire HA		
March 2001	83	2.8
June 2001	44	2.8
September 2001	104	3.0
December 2001	114	4.7
England		
March 2001	14.555	4.3
June 2001	14.230	4.3
September 2001	13.967	4.4
December 2001	13.744	4.3
Cardiology		
Gloucestershire HA		
March 2001	182	2.1
June 2001	125	2.1
September 2001	200	2.6
December 2001	198	2.4
England		
March 2001	23.702	2.7
June 2001	25.402	2.7
September 2001	25.173	2.7
December 2001	26.159	2.6

[1] Median

Care Homes

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the numbers of *(a)* private and *(b)* local authority homes that (i) have closed and (ii) plan to close due to the higher standards of care set out in the Care Standards Act 2000; [30296]

(2) what financial assistance he will make available to local authorities to enable them to ensure that their care homes meet the standards set out in the Care Standards Act 2000; [30294]

(3) what financial assistance he will make available to enable private care homes to meet the standards set out in the Care Standards Act 2000; [30293]

(4) what date private nursing homes and residential units for the elderly must meet the standards of care stated in the Care Standards Act 2000. [30295]

Jacqui Smith: There is no evidence of a direct correlation between the introduction of national minimum standards under the Care Standards Act 2000 and the reduction in numbers of care home beds. Many providers already meet or exceed the standards and will have no reason to be concerned about them.

We do not consider it appropriate to provide direct financial assistance to care homes who do not meet the standards. However, we are providing significant additional resources for social services. Resources for social services have increased by 20.4 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–03, and average annual increase of 3.1 per cent. This means that local authorities have the resources they need to purchase services at realistic prices. In contracting with care homes we expect local authorities to take into account a range of provider costs such as implementing national standards. The additional resources include the £300 million that we announced on 9 October for this year and next.

The standards for care homes for older people will apply from 1 April 2002, unless otherwise stated in any standard. However, this does not mean that homes must meet all the standards immediately. If standards were not being met in a few respects, the National Care Standards Commission would note this in its inspection report and write to the home owner giving reasonable time in which to make the changes. The national minimum standards for care homes for older people were published on 2 March 2001 and a copy placed in the Library. The standards for care homes for younger adults were approved in December 2001 and are available on the Department of Health website (www.doh.gov.uk/ncsc). The final version will be published shortly and placed in the Library.

We are determined that the standards will be introduced in a way that will ensure that the application of the new standards does not lead to the closure of good quality homes. On 30 January I launched a package of measures to help smooth the introduction of the standards. This included statutory guidance to the Commission. In particular, the guidance says the Commission should consider whether care homes can fulfil the needs of service users without making environmental changes to meet the standards. The guidance particularly covers issues of room size, lifts, baths and shared rooms. The guidance has been welcomed by the major associations representing care homes, the Registered Nursing Homes Association, the National Care Homes Association and the Independent Health Care Association.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish guidance on those health care items which should be free at the point of delivery to people in care homes; and if he will make a statement. [34697]

Jacqui Smith: All items provided to people in care homes by the national health service are free at the point of delivery.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential homes have converted to nursing care homes since January 2001. [37606]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of residential care homes that have converted to nursing homes is not available centrally.

Mental Health

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients detained under section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 were detained for the full 28 days without having a mental health review tribunal hearing despite having requested such a hearing within the appropriate period in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [30388]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect the information required.

Fireworks

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many firework-related injuries were treated by hospitals during the Christmas and new year period. [30266]

Yvette Cooper: The latest data available show that, of 127 hospital in-patient episodes[1] in England in 2000–01 with the cause code "Discharge of Firework"[2], seven were admitted in the December/January period. These figures exclude accident and emergency patients who were not admitted as an in-patient.

[1] A finished consultant episode is a period of in-patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. These figures do not represent the number of patients as a person may have more than one episode within the year.

[2] ICD10 Cause code W39: Discharge of Firework.

MS

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the use of Copaxone in the treatment of MS; [30379]

(2) how long the decision to prescribe beta interferon and Copaxone for MS sufferers has been under review; and what guidance is in place for health authorities in relation to prescribing Copaxone; [30377]

(3) when he expects to make a final decision on the prescription of beta interferon and Copaxone; [30381]

(4) if he will list health authority areas where beta interferon and Copaxone are made available to MS patients; [30380]

(5) what recent representations he has received from patients using Copaxone; and if he will make a statement. [30378]

Ms Blears: In August 1999, we asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to conduct a detailed appraisal of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of beta interferon and glatiramer acetate (brand name Copaxone). NICE issued its guidance on 4 February 2002. NICE recommends that these products are not cost effective on the current arrangements for supply to the NHS.

On 5 September 2001, following NICE's recommendation in its Provisional Appraisal Determination, the Department of Health commenced discussions with the manufacturers of beta interferon and glatiramer acetate about the possible provision of these therapies for patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) on the national health service in a manner which could be considered to be cost-effective. These discussions are complete and on Monday 4 February we announced details of an innovative scheme to make these products available on the NHS. The scheme starts on 6 May 2002. Details are contained in Health Service Circular 2002/004 which has been issued widely across the NHS.

We do not hold information centrally on individual health authority policies on treatments for MS.

According to our records, since 5 September (when the discussions with manufacturers commenced) we have received no written representations from patients using glatiramer acetate.

Departmental Performance Targets

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the performance against target in replying to letters from members of the public to his Department for each of the last 12 months. [30968]

Ms Blears: Performance against service first targets is shown in the table.

	Percentage
January	78.8
February	82.2
March	75.9
April	79.8
May	93.7
June	96.2
July	88.5
August	84.4
September	87.7
October	90.9
November	97.5
December	98.7

Private Hospitals

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the regulatory regime for *(a)* private sector hospitals, *(b)* private sector general practitioners and *(c)* private sector consultants. [30853]

Jacqui Smith: Independent hospitals are currently regulated by health authorities under the Registered Homes Act 1984. Private general practitioners are not currently regulated, although those who work in the national health service as well as the independent sector will be subject to inspection by the Commission for Health Improvement.

Consultant surgeons who are in charge of their own independent clinics are regulated by health authorities, but those who are granted practising privileges in independent hospitals but have no managerial role there, are not.

On 1 April the national care standards commission will take over from health authorities the regulation of independent hospitals and clinics under the Care Standards Act 2000. From that date, general practitioners who work exclusively in the private sector will be brought under regulation by the national care standards commission for the first time. Private consultants with practising privileges in independent hospitals will, as before, not be required to register personally with the commission. However, the registered providers will be held responsible for the quality of treatment those consultants provide.

The regulations and national minimum standards for the independent health care sector have been published and are available on the website www.doh.gov.uk/ncsc. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Electronic Medical Equipment

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to introduce national *(a)* standards and *(b)* assessments for NHS staff who use electronic medical equipment in the NHS; [29772]

(2) what work is being carried out by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS Executive to raise the standards of NHS staff who operate electronic medical equipment within the NHS; [29774]

(3) what plans he has to introduce training for NHS staff in the use of electronic medical equipment in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [29775]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* National health service clinicians learn to operate an appropriate range of electronic medical equipment as part of their basic professional education. The Department does not set the curricula for pre-registration and undergraduate health professional education. This is a matter for the professional regulatory bodies.

Developing and maintaining the standards and skills of NHS staff who use electronic medical equipment is the responsibility of individual local NHS employers working in partnership with regulatory and professional bodies. However, as part of Medical Devices Agency's (MDA's) guidance and leverage programme, the MDA provide information routinely to health care professionals which assists in the training and safe use of electronic medical equipment and devices. This information is in the form of: device safety alerts, covering specific device related problems; technical notes; device bulletins; posters; and other written communications. Device bulletins in particular cover in more detail general device issues and have included training and management guidance.

The MDA has issued advice on "Medical Devices and Equipment Management for Hospitals and Community-based Organisations" (DB 9801 January 1998). The MDA have also co-operated with professional bodies and training organisations in developing targeted training for health care workers using electronic medical devices and equipment.

Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on waiting lists of the implementation of the advice on prion transmission by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. [32783]

Yvette Cooper: The move to single use instruments for tonsil and adenoid surgery in January 2001 was part of the Department's strategy to reduce the theoretical risk of transmitting variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (vCJD) through surgical instruments. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) advised that single use instruments be considered for tonsil and adenoid surgery as part of this strategy "provided patient safety would not be compromised".

An initial shortage of single-use instruments led to the number of patients waiting for tonsil and adenoid surgery rising between January and June 2001, however the waiting list has fallen each month since June 2001. The number of patients waiting over 18 months for tonsil and adenoid surgery peaked in July 2001 at 206, but this figure had reduced to eight by November 2001.

Following the increase in provision of single use instruments in June 2001 the Medical Devices Agency Adverse Incident Centre received reports of adverse events with their use in tonsil and adenoid surgery. This included an increase in primary and secondary bleeding that required re-hospitalisation, return to theatre and blood transfusion. In the interests of patient safety and taking account of the improvement in central sterile services in hospitals to decontaminate instruments, it was decided to advise surgeons to use reusable instruments. As a result of this action on 14 December 2001, we expect all tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy patients to be treated within the 18 month maximum in-patient waiting time guarantee.

Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32826]

Ms Blears: Regardless of grade or job title the normal age of retirement for all staff in the Department and its agencies is 60. Some staff who transferred into the Department from the national health service retained the right to retire on NHS terms at the age of 65. The Department is currently involved in taking forward a Cabinet Office led initiative called "Winning The Generation Game" looking at flexible retirement options.

Prostate Surgery

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Wyre Forest constituency are waiting for non-urgent prostate surgery; and how long they can expect to wait. [33534]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised that there are currently 54 Wyre Forest residents waiting for non-urgent prostate surgery, the majority of which will be treated within 12 months.

I am further advised by the trust that in cases where the clinical need is judged the greatest, the waiting time will be far shorter. The trust expects that all patients waiting for non-urgent prostate operations will be treated within 15 months, and urgent cases of prostate cancer patients will be treated within two weeks of diagnosis.

Figures for Wyre Forest residents are in line with non-urgent prostate surgery waiting times in Worcestershire as a whole.

Care Bed Losses

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing home and residential care beds have been lost in the last three years by region; and if he will make a statement. [33594]

Jacqui Smith: The numbers of care homes and beds at 31 March each year by national health service region are shown in [illegible]e tables.

Table 1: Number of residential and nursing care homes by NHS region, England, 1999 to 2001—at 31 March

Rounded numbers

NHS region	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Residential care homes			
Eastern	2,080	2,070	2,040
London	2,320	2,310	2,330
North West	3,580	3,700	3,590
Northern and Yorkshire	2,990	3,040	2,950

Table 1: Number of residential and nursing care homes by NHS region, England, 1999 to 2001—at 31 March

Rounded numbers

NHS region	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
South East	5,200	5,210	4,950
South West	3,870	3,710	3,610
Trent	2,270	2,310	2,230
West Midlands	2,490	2,420	2,390
Total	24,800	24,770	24,080
Nursing care homes[1]			
Eastern	460	440	420
London	550	550	550
North West	970	930	880
Northern and Yorkshire	830	8,010	780
South East	1,070	1,040	990
South West	880	840	810
Trent	730	690	670
West Midlands	610	600	580
Total	6,110	5,880	5,680

[1] Private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics

Source:

Department of Health's annual return

Table 2: Number of residential and nursing care beds by NHS region, England, 1999 to 2001—at 31 March

Rounded numbers

NHS region	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Residential care beds			
Eastern	34,190	35,070	35,380
London	29,530	30,140	29,340
North West	50,340	50,460	49,760
Northern and Yorkshire	45,570	45,950	45,340
South East	69,290	69,070	67,280
South West	46,240	45,760	44,790
Trent	35,550	36,960	37,200
West Midlands	33,330	32,500	32,090
Total	344,040	345,910	341,180
Nursing care beds			
Eastern	15,590	15,140	14,770
London	18,260	18,290	18,080
North West	35,190	33,470	31,500
Northern and Yorkshire	29,620	27,620	26,950
South East	33,280	32,360	31,340
South West	25,930	24,660	24,070
Trent	22,780	21,380	20,080
West Midlands	21,510	20,420	20,040
Total	202,150	193,330	186,830

Source:

Department of Health's annual return

Thrombolytic Drugs

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the date when paramedics will commence administering thrombolytic drugs to heart attack patients in the Wyre Forest constituency before their journey to hospital in Worcester. [33533]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Plan contained a commitment to improve 'call-to-needle' times for administering thrombolytic drugs for treating heart attack victims.

I am advised that the Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service National Health Service Trust are already meeting targets set for ambulance response times.

I understand that the trust, in collaboration with Herefordshire and Worcestershire health authorities, Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust and Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, have initiated procedures laid down in the NHS Plan, published in July 2000, for a three year programme to train and equip ambulance paramedics to provide thrombolysis safely for appropriate patients.

I am advised that paramedics at Hertfordshire and Worcestershire Ambulance Service will commence administering thrombolytic drugs to heart attack patients in the Wyre Forest constituency in May this year. This is part of an 18 month programme covering all 14 ambulance stations in the area.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33233]

Ms Blears: The Department does not record centrally or separately the numbers of televisions, integrated digital or analogue, that it purchases for use within the Department. Specific guidance on the purchase of televisions is not published or disseminated to officials, but buyers are required to follow normal departmental procurement guidance and procedures whenever purchasing such goods.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34217]

Ms Blears: The information requested is as shown.

Losses and thefts 1997–98

Item(s)

NEC Vodaphone mobile phone

NEC P3 mobile phone

Nokia 101 mobile phone

Telephone answering machine

Ericsson Hotline mobile phone

Desktop calculator

Nokia mobile phone

MS mouse

Nokia mobile phone

Microsoft mouse

Losses and thefts 1998–99

Item(s)

Nokia mobile phone

Motorola D460 mobile phone

Mobile phone

Mobile phone

Nokia 5110 mobile phone

Nokia mobile phone

Nokia 232 mobile phone

Nokia 5110 mobile phone

Nokia 1611 mobile phone
Motorola d460 mobile phone
Nokia 2110 mobile phone
Nokia 3110 mobile phone and charger
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone

Losses and thefts 1999–2000

Item(s)

Nokia mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Battery charger for Nokia 1611 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia 2110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 8110 mobile phone
Charger for a Nokia phone
Nokia mobile phone
Charger for a Nokia phone
Charger for a Nokia phone
Mobile phone
Mobile phone
Mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Mobile phone
16Mb DIMM (computer memory chip)
Mobile phone
Mobile phone

Losses and thefts 2000–01

Item(s)

Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
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Nokia NHE 4NX mobile phone
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Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Ericsson A1018s mobile phone
Nokia 5210 mobile phone
Nokia 8110 mobile phon
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia 8210 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone and charger
Vodaphone mobile phone
Nokia 8210 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Ericsson GA628 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone

Losses and thefts 2001–02

Item(s)

Ericsson GA318 mobile phone
Siemens C351 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Siemens C351 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Siemens C351 mobile phone, battery and charger
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia 5100 mobile phone
Nokia 6210 mobile phone
Nokia mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone
Siemens C35 mobile phone
Siemens C35i mobile phone
Nokia 5110 mobile phone.

Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the publications issued by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34191]

Ms Blears: The majority of departmental publications issued since 1997 are listed on two departmental databases available on the internet. These are Circulars on the internet (COIN) (www.doh.gov.uk/publications/coinh.html) and Publications on the internet (POINT) (www.doh.gov.uk/publications/pointh.html).

This information on *(a)* cost, *(b)* circulation and *(c)* purpose of each is not collected centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

MMR Vaccine

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children received the measles vaccine in *(a)* each county or health authority and *(b)* England in each of the five years before the introduction of the MMR vaccine; and what proportion those who had received the vaccine represented of the total number of children under five years of age. [34356]

Yvette Cooper: Immunisation coverage for the years 1983 to 1988 was measured at two years of age. A table of the available information has been placed in the Library. This shows the proportion of under-twos to have received the vaccine.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance his Department has given to nursery schools and other providers of early years education and child care about accepting children who *(a)* have and *(b)* have not had the MMR vaccine. [36504]

Yvette Cooper: The Department has not given guidance to nursery schools and other providers of early years education and child care about accepting children who have or have not had MMR vaccine.

Migraine

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the Department has given to *(a)* research into migraine and *(b)* care for severe migraine sufferers in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [34634]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is not currently funding any research into migraine, and has not funded any research in the past five years. The MRC, however, always welcomes high quality applications for support into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance.

The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service. The Health Technology Assessment Programme is currently supporting a project on "Acupuncture for migraine and headache in primary care: a pragmatic, randomised trial" at a total cost of £161,532. This project started in October 1998 and is due to be completed late in 2002.

Figures on how much is spent by the national health service to treat and care for patients with particular conditions such as migraine are not collected centrally.

Funding (Wigan and Bolton Health Authority)

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* increases in funding have been given to the Wigan and Bolton health authority and *(b)* grants for specific projects have been given to the Wigan Leigh NHS Hospital Trust since May 1997. [32217]

Jacqui Smith: Wigan and Bolton health authority received the following increases in allocations since May 1997:

	£000	*Percentage*
1997–98	11,928	4.62
1998–99	14,021	5.41
1999–2000	24,996	7.18
2000–01	35,415	9.46
2001–02	37,252	9.10
2002–03	45,361	10.17

The former[1] Wigan and Leigh Health Services National Health Service Trust received the following conditional capital allocations during this period:

1997–98: £1,563,000: Final element of the Phase 3 refurbishment scheme;

1998–99: £665,000: Mental Health Intensive Care Unit;

1999–2000: £480,000[2]: Start of Phase 4 service rationalisation;

Between 1999–2000 and 2000–01: £1,950,000 in respect of modernisation, waiting list moneys as well as "action on funds"; and

2001–02: £2,700,000 for accident and emergency reprovision together with £961,000 for a new mortuary.

[1] The Wigan and Leigh Health Services NHS Trust merged with the Wrightington Hospital NHS Trust on 1 April 2001 to form the Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust. Conditional capital allocations to the Wrightington hospital have not been included in this response.

[2] The total value of this scheme is £22,000,000 and is due to be completed in 2004–05.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost was for setting up primary care trusts within the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [36304]

Mr. Hutton: Approximately £63.1 million of central funding has been made available to support the establishment of primary care trusts.

	£ million
1999–2000	6.6
2000–01	27.0
2001–02	29.5

Maternity Services

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the £100 million for maternity services has been allocated; and whether it has been spent in the way originally intended. [36418]

Yvette Cooper: The £100 million was allocated on the basis of individual bids submitted by maternity units after consultation with local staff and users. The bids were prioritised and allocations recommended by regional offices to target hospitals which were in greatest need. A central panel reviewed the bids to ensure national consistency.

Over 200 units across the country received a share of this investment. Regional offices are monitoring the expenditure and progress reports will be provided. Plans are well under way for the refurbishment work, and all projects are due to be completed by the end of March 2003.

Mixed Sex Wards

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce the use of mixed sex wards in NHS hospitals; and if he will make a statement about the scale of use of such wards. [36452]

Ms Blears: Guidance on maintaining privacy and dignity was first issued to the service in 1997 and since then the national health service has been working towards a clear target to eliminate mixed sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of national health service trusts by December 2002.

Ongoing monitoring of the progress of the project continues and indicates that progress towards the targets is being maintained and work is continuing to ensure that this remains so.

Additional professional and technical support is being made available to those who are finding meeting the targets particularly challenging.

It is not possible to provide information at the level of the individual ward. The majority of hospital wards are usually subdivided into bays which are designated as male or female. Depending on the case mix and local need, the exact proportion of male to female bays will vary.

Dentistry

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the national average has been in the last five years of the numbers of registrations to NHS dental practices. [36398]

Ms Blears: The average number of General Dental Service (GDS) registrations in England during the years 1996–97 to 2000–01 is shown in the table.

Registration numbers were reduced by the shortening of the registration period for new registrations from September 1996. For adults the period fell from 24 to 15 months. Children's registrations used to lapse at the end of the following calendar year; they now last for 24 months. This affected registration numbers between December 1997 and August 1998. Data for 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 are not comparable with later years.

Patients who are not registered with a dentist or choose not to register, can obtain treatment on an occasional basis.

General Dental Service: Average registration list sizes from 1996–97 to 2000–01, England

	Adults	*Children*	*Total*
1996–97	19,582,630	6,897,598	26,480,228
1997–98	19,082,300	7,036,038	26,118,339
1998–99	16,945,524	6,782,506	23,728,030
1999–2000	16,673,848	6,829,233	23,503,081
2000–01	16,818,256	6,846,298	23,664,553

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the future resources that will be made available to NHS dentists. [36396]

Ms Blears: An estimated £1.2 billion will be spent on the general dental service and in excess of £50 million revenue will be invested in personal dental service pilot schemes in the current financial year. In addition local health authorities invest their own resources in the community dental services (information on the levels of this investment is not held centrally). These levels of expenditure are anticipated to continue in the next financial year.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of people are registered with an NHS dentist in *(a)* Stoke-on-Trent, North, *(b)* Staffordshire, *(c)* Stoke-on-Trent and *(d)* the United Kingdom. [36395]

Ms Blears: The number of people registered with General Dental Services (GDS) dentists as a percentage of the population in North and South Staffordshire health authority areas at 31 December 2001 was 43 per cent. and 46 per cent. respectively. The combined North and South Staffordshire HA registration rate at 31 December 2001 was 44 per cent. The registration rate in the United Kingdom was 48 per cent.

Patients who are not registered with a GDS dentist, or choose not to, can attend occasionally.

The numbers of dental registrations for Stoke-on-Trent, North, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are not available centrally.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential places were available for the treatment of drug addicts in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2000; and if he will make a statement. [37103]

Ms Blears: Statistics are not held centrally for the years requested. However, the Department conducted a survey in 2001 to establish the number of residential places across England for those requiring treatment for substance misuse problems, including drugs and alcohol. The results of this indicate that there are approximately a total of 3,100 residential places covering both adults and young people available within this sector.

Commission on Health Improvement

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to the Commission on Health Improvement on taking evidence from local trade union representatives when they are investigating local health facilities; and if he will make a statement. [36613]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 February 2002]*: We have given no guidance to the independent Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) on those bodies or individuals from whom it should take evidence when investigating local health facilities.

However, when carrying out a local review, CHI spends two days meeting with local people and non-statutory organisation with an interest in the national health service trust concerned. Stakeholders may include members of the public, voluntary and non-profit organisations, staff associations and trade union representatives.

Health Action Zones

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure in each of the past three years *(a)* on each health action zone and *(b)* envisaged for 2002–03. [36612]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The table lists expenditure for each of the 26 health action zones in the three years from 1999, and that envisaged for 2002–03, some £237 million. In addition, health authorities in HAZ areas have received targeted funding or health inequalities adjustment funding of £305 million in the same period.

HAZ expenditure 1999–2000 to 2002–03

£000

HAZ	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*Planned 2002–03*	*Grand total*
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	4,356	3,818	3,808	3,871	15,853
East London	3,962	3,152	3,216	3,362	13,692
Plymouth	1,545	1,401	1,438	1,301	5,685
Luton	960	1,580	1,587	1,039	5,166
Sandwell	1,617	1,249	1,535	1,634	6,035
South Yorkshire Coalfields	3,821	3,051	3,058	3,188	13,118
Manchester, Salford and Trafford	4,853	4,080	4,484	4,643	18,060
Bradford	2,740	2,540	2,538	2,653	10,471
Tyne and Wear	6,170	4,564	4,612	4,898	20,244
Northumberland	1,771	1,524	1,413	1,299	6,007
North Cumbria	1,670	1,259	1,351	1,363	5,643
1 wave total	33,465	28,218	29,040	29,251	119,974
Tees	1,958	2,834	2,932	2,831	19,555
Wakefield	978	1,206	1,296	1,264	4,744
Leeds	2,040	2,721	2,766	2,726	10,253
Hull and East Riding	1,668	2,377	2,415	2,377	8,837
Merseyside	4,221	5,794	5,773	5,859	21,647
Bury and Rochdale	1,152	1,558	1,558	1,545	5,813
Nottingham	1,768	2,385	2,370	2,355	8,878
Sheffield	1,736	2,222	2,041	2,048	8,047
Leicester City	925	1,361	1,467	1,391	5,144
Wolverhampton	868	1,247	1,343	1,280	4,738
Walsall	845	1,248	1,286	1,245	4,624
North Staffordshire	1,251	1,581	1,639	1,544	6,015
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1,369	1,688	1,906	1,902	6,865
Camden and Islington	1,453	1,893	1,904	1,878	7,128
Brent	793	1,031	1,039	982	3,845
2 wave total	23,025	31,146	31,735	31,227	117,133
Grand total	56,490	59,364	60,775	60,478	237,107

Note:

The totals indicated in the table include Smoking Cessation, Drugs Prevention and Innovations Fund Moneys as well as core Programme and Development funding. (There has been no Drugs Prevention funding allocated for 2002–03).

Health Authority Expenditure

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list health authorities by expenditure per weighted head in the last 12 months. [37378]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 450W.

HIV

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral statement of the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 732, what his policy is on recruitment of HIV-positive nurses to the NHS; and how many such nurses have been recruited. [30845]

Yvette Cooper: The national health service does not target developing countries for recruitment of nurses and no recruitment activity is planned in countries of sub-Saharan Africa, which have been hardest hit by the HIV epidemic. However, many developing countries have invited the UK to offer job opportunities to health care professionals, particularly to enhance their clinical practice and to benefit from further education and training in the NHS.

While the safety of patients is of paramount importance, it should be recognised that the procedures involved in most nursing duties do not pose a risk of HIV infection to patients, provided normal infection control precautions are observed. There have been no reported cases of HIV transmission from infected health care workers to patients in the UK.

Existing guidelines place health care workers who are or may be HIV infected under ethical and legal duties to protect the health and safety of their patients by seeking counselling and HIV testing if they believe they have been at risk of infection. If infected, they are required to seek and follow confidential occupational health advice about the need to modify or limit their working practices.

Information on the numbers of HIV infected nurses working in the NHS is not held centrally.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on HIV in the west midlands; and what measures are being taken to combat cases in Coventry. [37307]

Yvette Cooper: The west midlands regional surveillance system of HIV provides an accurate picture of the epidemiology of HIV infection in the west midlands in order to ensure appropriate targeting of preventative interventions and to monitor progress in tackling the epidemic.

I am advised that Coventry health authority has highly proactive educational, preventive and support programmes that work with individuals and their families and various target groups. The health authority works closely with national health service providers as well as the Terrence Higgins Trust and has a continuous programme of needs assessment in order to tailor the services to the changing epidemiology. Coventry also has a well established needle and syringe exchange scheme.

In terms of funding, in 2001–02, the west midlands received £7.7 million for HIV treatment and care and £4.3 million for HIV prevention. During the same period, Coventry health authority received £481,000 for HIV treatment and £268,000 for HIV prevention.

Hospital Virus Outbreak

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to contain the outbreak of the virus at the Victoria Infirmary and the Southern General Hospital in Glasgow. [31336]

Ms Blears: This is a matter for the Scottish Executive. However, infection control is an issue that we take seriously and we are determined to ensure that there are universally robust infection control arrangements in place. This should ensure that all patients receive the level and quality of care they expect. National standards for infection control have been developed to be delivered in all national health service trusts in England. These are independently reviewed and monitored by both the Audit Commission and the Commission for Health Improvement.

NHS Operations (Europe)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who pays the fares of patients travelling to Europe for NHS operations. [37939]

Mr. Hutton: Regulations have now come into force to amend the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) Regulations 1988 to permit NHS bodies to pay for the travel of NHS patients going overseas for treatment funded by the NHS. Where patients travel abroad for treatment the NHS meets the cost of the patient's travel from the point at which they begin their international journey (the airport, ferry port or international train station) to the foreign provider. Reimbursement of travel expenses between the patient's home to the airport, ferry port or international train station are governed by the same rules that apply to payment of travelling expenses to hospitals in England. This change ensures that patients treated overseas under the auspices of the NHS are not disadvantaged by having to travel further for that treatment.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1046W, what the area in square feet of the property is that has been empty since July 2000. [37895]

Ms Blears: The Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre in Birmingham comprises of 6,954 m^2 of building space and 3.2 hectares of open ground.

NHS Operations (Private Sector)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the value for money provided by private sector contracts to perform NHS operations. [35527]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 686W.

Unmarried Couples (Adoption)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding adoption by unmarried couples. [35528]

Jacqui Smith: Since the introduction of the Adoption and Children Bill on 19 October 2001, the Department has received representations regarding adoption by unmarried couples from BAAF Adoption and Fostering, three hon. Members and one private individual.

Road Traffic Incidents

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of visits to accident and emergency departments in the last 12 months for which figures are available were by people injured in a road traffic accident, broken down by health authority; and what estimate he has made of the saving to the NHS which an *(a)* 5 per cent. *(b)* 10 per cent. and *(c)* 20 per cent. reduction in road traffic injury represents. [37461]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect figures relating to accident and emergency department (A&E) attendances as a result of road traffic accidents. However, the number of in-patient admissions for traffic accidents via A&E departments are shown in the table.

The Department is able to recover the cost of treating those road traffic accident victims who go on to receive personal injury compensation. In 2000–01, hospitals in England recovered £67,001,618.

Hospital episode statistics: Finished consultant episodes (FCE's) where the cause code is ICD10 codes V01-V89, by health authority of treatment and month of admission, NHS hospital trusts in England, 2000–01

Code/Health authority	*Number*
QA2 Hillingdon HA	186
QA3 Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	311
QA4 Enfield and Haringey HA	104
QA5 Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	364
QA6 Bedfordshire HA	344

Hospital episode statistics: Finished consultant episodes (FCE[1]s) where the cause code is ICD10 codes V01-V89, by health authority of treatment and month of admission, NHS hospital trusts in England, 2000–01

Hospital episode statistics: Finished consultant episodes (FCE[1]s) where the cause code is ICD10 codes V01-V89, by health authority of treatment and month of admission, NHS hospital trusts in England, 2000–01

Code/Health authority	*Number*
QA7 Berkshire HA	589
QA8 Buckinghamshire HA	566
QAA Bexley and Greenwich HA	278
QAC Bromley Ha	150
QAD Croydon Ha	187
QAE East Kent HA	537
QAF West Kent Ha	1,086
QAG Kingston and Richmond HA	202
QAH Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	641
QAJ Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	462
QAL West Surrey HA	733
QAM East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	645
QAN West Sussex Ha	895
QAP Barking and Havering HA	226
QAQ Barnet Ha	275
QAR Brent and Harrow HA	24
QAT Camden and Islington HA	490
QAV Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	278
QAW East London and The City HA	444
QAX North Essex HA	855
QAY South Essex HA	493
QC1 South Lancashire HA	80
QC2 Liverpool HA	506
QC3 Manchester HA	422
QC4 Morecambe Bay HA	414
QC5 St. Helens and Knowsley HA	388
QC6 Salford and Trafford HA	288
QC7 Sefton HA	350
QC8 Stockport HA	223
QC9 West Pennine HA	494
QCC Northamptonshire HA	425
QCE Oxfordshire HA	625
QCF Suffolk HA	634
QCG Barnsley HA	283
QCH North Derbyshire HA	235
QCJ South Derbyshire HA	446
QCK Doncaster HA	287
QCL Leicestershire HA	517
QCM Lincolnshire HA	890
QCN North Nottinghamshire HA	610
QCP Nottingham Ha	852
QCQ Rotherham HA	257
QCR Sheffield HA	317
QCT Bury and Rochdale HA	247
QCV North Cheshire Ha	329
QCW South cheshire Ha	723
QCX East Lancashire HA	416
QCY North West Lancashire HA	493
QD1 North and Mid Hampshire HA	301
QD2 Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	594
QD3 Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	282
QD4 Isle of Wight HA	63
QD5 Somerset HA	489
QD6 South and West Devon HA	560
QD7 Wiltshire HA	548
QD8 Avon Ha	1,210
QD9 Birmingham Ha	1,347
QDA Wigan and Bolton HA	485
QDC Wirral HA	182
QDD Bradford HA	414
QDE County Durham HA	363
QDF East Riding HA	472
QDG Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	254
QDH Leeds HA	741
QDJ Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	445
QDK North Cumbria HA	240
QDL South Humber HA	460
QDM Northumberland HA	378
QDN Sunderland HA	286
QDP Tees HA	647
QDQ Wakefield HA	371
QDR North Yorkshire HA	808
QDT Calderdale and Kirklees HA	404
QDV Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	417
QDW Dorset HA	627
QDX North and East Devon HA	493
QDY Gloucestershire HA	593
QEA Coventry HA	393
QEC Dudley HA	309
QED Herefordshire HA	250
QEE Sandwell HA	148
QEF Shropshire HA	554
QEH North Staffordshire HA	236
QEJ South Staffordshire HA	319
QEK Walsall HA	206
QEL Warwickshire HA	406
QEM Wolverhampton HA	185
QEN Worcestershire HA	435
QEP East and North Hertfordshire HA	318
QEQ West Hertfordshire HA	254
QER Cambridge HA	1,046
QET Norfolk HA	981
Total	43,630

[1] An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

Notes:

1. The cause code is a supplementary code which indicates the nature of the condition.
2. Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

NHS Patients (Overseas Treatment)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he uses to decide on whether to withhold information on the grounds of commercial confidentiality in relation to contracts abroad with foreign companies. [36517]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish cost details for those NHS patients who have received treatment in continental hospitals; and why this information was not published before treatment was given. [37313]

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy on *(a)* commercial confidentiality and *(b)* public accountability in contracts made for patients to be treated abroad. [36519]

Mr. Hutton: We will not publish details about the cost to the national health service of individual operations carried out on NHS patients treated at particular hospitals in Europe as part of the pilot scheme.

It would not be possible to publish this information without breaching commercial confidentiality. It would also undermine the negotiating position of the NHS with existing and potential healthcare providers.

This is consistent with the approach to release of information set out in the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Information about overall expenditure on treatment for patients under the pilot scheme will be published in due course.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* facilities and *(b)* treatments are available in the NHS for sufferers of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. [37126]

Jacqui Smith: Patients with Duchenne muscular dystrophy can take advantage of the usual primary care/secondary and tertiary services available. Children form a considerable part of the caseload for children's community nursing services and many receive services from children's hospices.

Clinical and laboratory services for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy are available through existing networks of regional genetics centres. In April 2001 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a £30 million investment aimed at improving NHS genetics services. This should help patients with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy and other genetic diseases.

There is no specific treatment for any of the forms of muscular dystrophy. Physical therapy and corrective orthopaedic surgery may be needed to improve the quality of life in some cases.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research his Department is funding into Duchenne muscular dystrophy; [37124]

(2) what support he will give to expanding research into finding a cure for Duchenne muscular dystrophy. [37125]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. In 2000–01 the MRC spent £920,000 on research into Muscular Dystrophy. This included a number of projects and fellowships looking specifically at Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy and a major programme of work on the molecular analysis of Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy at the MRC Functional Genetics unit in Oxford. This work is at a basic level and it is hoped that such research will lead to treatments in the future.

The MRC always welcomes high quality applications for support into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance to human health.

The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service. The Department provides support to NHS trusts to allow work funded by others such as the Research Councils and charities to be conducted within the NHS. Details of ongoing and recently completed research projects funded by, or of interest to, the NHS are available on the National Research Register which is available on the internet at http://www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

The Department has provided support over the last decade to the umbrella charity "The Genetic Interest Group", of which the Duchenne Family Support Group is a member organisation. This funding has been targeted to a range of initiatives intended to raise awareness of all inherited diseases.

Pharmacists

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of pharmacists are employed at grades *(a)* D and *(b)* E level in (i) hospital pharmacies and (ii) PCG/PCT pharmacies. [37137]

Ms Blears: The information requested is in the table.

Percentage of Grade D and E pharmacists employed at trusts

Grade	*Whole time equivalent*	*Headcount*
D	32	32
E	17	16

Notes:

1. The above information is for a sample of NHS trusts. It shows what percentage grade D and E make up of the total number of pharmacists.

2. The sample of PCT we have available is too limited to provide meaningful data on this subject.

3. We do not hold information on PCGs.

(4.) NHS Earnings Survey 2000. The results are based on a survey at August 2000 covering almost 500 thousand staff, (about 50 per cent. of NHS trusts and health authorities) with pay information taken directly from payroll records.

Source: Department of Health: 2000 Earnings Survey.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the vacancy rates for hospital pharmacists in each hospital trust in the last 12 months. [37617]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to promote an extended role for pharmacists in performing medication review. [37142]

Ms Blears: The NHS Plan set a target for all primary care trusts to have schemes in place so that people get more help from pharmacists in using their medicines by 2004. We have set up a collaborative medicines management programme, hosted by the National Prescribing Centre. The first wave of 26 pilot sites was announced last July and the second wave of 40 sites was announced on 12 February. We are also supporting a trial of structured services based exclusively in community pharmacies for patients with coronary heart disease. These initiatives build on and complement other local initiatives under which pharmacists are involved in reviewing patients' medication.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to minimise the handling charge imposed by pharmacists dealing with monitored dosage systems. [37127]

Ms Blears: Under their national health service terms of service, pharmacies are not required to provide monitored dosage systems. Any charges for the supply of monitored dosage systems are therefore a commercial matter.

Hospital Readmissions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest available readmission rates to hospitals within two months are for *(a)* all patients in

England and Wales and *(b)* each hospital trust in England and Wales; and if he will break down the readmitted patients by age. [37128]

Jacqui Smith: We do not have information on readmission rates within two months.

Information for England showing emergency readmissions to hospital within 28 days of last previous discharge from hospital by trust and health authority was published on Wednesday 20 February. This information will be placed in the Library and can be found on www.doh.gov.uk/nhsperformanceindicators/index.htm

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the type of home of over 65-year-old patients readmitted to hospitals within two months of discharge, broken down by *(a)* residential/nursing home and *(b)* private home with domiciliary care. [37311]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available currently.

MRSA

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many non-fatal cases of the MRSA superbug have been reported in each hospital trust in each of the last five years. [37141]

Ms Blears: The data requested are not held centrally. Information about bacteraemias blood stream infections due to MRSA has been collected from all acute trusts as the first stage of a new comprehensive and compulsory surveillance system since 1 April 2001. Early data from this surveillance was published in the 'Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Disease Report on 8 February 2002', copies of which are available in the Library.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inpatient deaths have been attributed to MRSA in each of the last five years. [37140]

Ms Blears: There are no centrally held statistics on deaths caused by health care associated infections, including Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).

MRSA infection can take many forms, from trivial skin infection to pneumonia or septicaemia. Often the causative micro-organism is not specified on the death certificate. MRSA does not have a distinct code within the revision of the international classification of diseases used for encoding death registration data at the Office for National Statistics.

Leonard Cheshire Organisation

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the costs of mandatory care staff training required under the National Care Standards Regulations for the Leonard Cheshire Organisation; [37134]

(2) what discussions he has had at ministerial level with representatives of the Leonard Cheshire Organisation regarding capital costs involved with improving their properties to meet national care standards; [37138]

(3) what estimate he has made of the conversion costs of residential rooms operated by the Leonard Cheshire Organisation to comply with new national care standards. [37139]

Jacqui Smith: I have met with representatives of the Leonard Cheshire Organisation, as have departmental officials, to discuss a range of issues including the costs associated with complying with the new national minimum standards.

Pharmacies

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those medicines which are now available via pharmacy sale rather than on a doctor prescription only basis; and what PCT areas *(a)* offer this service and *(b)* have plans to. [37620]

Ms Blears: There are nearly 5,000 medicines which can be sold or supplied by a pharmacy without a prescription. We are aware of a small number of primary care trust areas where some medicines which do not require a prescription are supplied on the national health service, through a pharmacy, without patients needing to see their general practitioner. A larger number of PCT areas are using patient group directions to make a limited range of prescription only medicines available through pharmacies. However, as there are local initiatives, no definitive list of such schemes, nor of PCTs which plan to establish such schemes, is held centrally.

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has held with operators of simple hyperbaric oxygen therapy facilities in the community offering treatment for MS sufferers regarding the new requirements under the Care Standards Act 2000. [37608]

Jacqui Smith: There have been exchanges of correspondence on the new requirements between the Department and the headquarters of the leading charitable provider of hyperbaric oxygen therapy since November 2000. In July last year the proposed regulations and national minimum standards for independent health care providers were published for consultation. This exercise prompted a good response and the proposed standards were revised in light of the comments made. Consequently, the requirements for hyperbaric facilities for therapeutic use are considerably fewer than for those used to treat patients with acute medical conditions, and proportionate to their simpler operation.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the likely compliance cost of the Care Standards to operators of simple hyperbaric oxygen therapy facilities in the community providing treatment to MS sufferers. [37604]

Jacqui Smith: The standards for hyperbaric facilities for therapeutic use are considerably fewer than for those used to treat patients with acute medical conditions, and proportionate to their simpler operation. Consequently, we expect the costs of compliance to be minimal.

Cancelled Operations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many operations were cancelled in each region in each of the last three years, broken down into those cancelled *(a)* once, *(b)* twice and *(c)* three times or more before treatment was obtained; and if he will express these figures as a percentage of total operations carried out; [37143]

(2) if he will give a breakdown of reasons for cancelled operations in the last year in each health authority region that are defined as non-clinical cancellations. [37312]

Mr. Hutton: Data are not collected on the number of times operations are cancelled or on the non-clinical reasons for cancelling operations.

The National Health Service Modernisation Agency is working with a number of trusts in order to optimise theatre utilisation and reduce cancelled operations. The pilot sites involved in the project are identifying good practice arrangements to avoid cancellation of operations. The lessons learned are being shared with the rest of the NHS.

The nine pilot sites are showing good progress. Six out of nine pilots achieved the NHS Plan cancelled operations guarantee in December 2001, with the other three achieving the guarantee for over 90 per cent. of patients.

30. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to reduce the number of cancelled operations; and if he will make a statement. [34731]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan sets out our intentions for improving the national health service. From April 2002, if an operation is cancelled on the day of surgery for non-clinical reasons, the hospital will have to offer another binding date within 28 days or fund the patient's treatment at the time and hospital of the patient's choice.

The NHS Modernisation Agency is looking at optimising theatre utilisation and reducing cancelled operations. The lessons learned are being shared with the rest of the NHS.

The nine pilot sites involved in this work are showing good progress. Six out of nine pilots achieved the NHS Plan cancelled operations guarantee in December 2001, with the other three achieving the guarantee for over 90 per cent. of patients.

GPs

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in calculating the ratio of GPs to local populations for qualification to the golden hello scheme, at what dates the relevant figures for GPs and patients in Worthing were taken. [37616]

Mr. Hutton: In 2001–02, all newly appointed general practitioners receive a golden hello payment of up to £5,000. If the GP is appointed in an under-doctored primary care group/trust, the GP will receive a further payment of up to £5,000.

The GP and patient figures used to determine qualification for golden hello payments for 2001–02 are as follows:

GPs are the estimated whole time equivalent unrestricted principals and equivalents taken from the GP census of September 2000.

PCG/T population data are the GP relevant PCG/T populations taken from the GP registrations system in April 2000. These figures have been reconciled to ONS projections of health authority populations to adjust for list inflation.

PCG/Ts have then been ranked by whole time equivalent UPEs per 100,000 weighted population and the bottom 50 per cent. qualify for the additional payment.

NHS Chief Executives

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those chief executives of hospital trusts awarded a zero star rating who remain in post; and on what criteria they were judged to have made progress. [37123]

Mr. Hutton: Eight of the 12 chief executives awarded a zero star rating remain in post.

Stewart Welling: Brighton Healthcare National Health Service Trust

Jan Filochowski: The Medway NHS Trust

Fiona Wise (interim): Stoke Mandeville NHS Trust

John De Braux: Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust

David Highton: Oxford Radcliffe NHS Trust

Hugh Ross: United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust

David Loughton: University Hospitals of Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust.

Each of the zero star rated trusts was required to provide an action plan setting out how performance improvement was to be delivered; each action plan was assessed by the Department together with progress made by the trust since the publication of the ratings. Where appropriate the Department additionally used the progress reports provided by the Commission for Health Improvement.

Elderly People (Care Costs)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what account is taken of the type of property tenure when calculating care costs for the elderly; [37755]

(2) whether tenants of leasehold properties are treated differently from residents of freehold properties for the purposes of calculating care costs for the elderly. [37756]

Jacqui Smith: In the statutory charging system for residential care the value of a property is generally taken into account when assessing a person's ability to contribute to the cost of their care. Each council will need to establish the amount a property is worth. This is done by referring each case to the district valuer or a professional valuer who will give them the current market price. The value of a property can depend on whether it is freehold or leasehold. Other than this, the tenants of leasehold properties and residents of freehold properties are treated identically when they are financially assessed for residential accommodation.

A and E Waiting Times

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to reduce waiting times in hospital accident and emergency departments. [34712]

Ms Blears: The NHS Plan set a target to reduce waiting times in accident and emergency departments to a maximum of four hours from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge by 2004.

The national health service is on track to meet the NHS Plan target with 77 per cent. of all A&E attenders currently spending four hours or less in A&E. And in nearly a third of trusts, at least 90 per cent. of people attending A&E are discharged or admitted within four hours.

The Government launched the Reforming Emergency Care Strategy last October, supported by investment of £118 million. This is helping hospitals around the country tackle waiting times in accident and emergency departments and meet the NHS Plan target.

Residential Care (Elderly)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of NHS beds in the north-west of England that are occupied by elderly people who should be in residential care. [34568]

Jacqui Smith: In the north-west region, in September 2001, 259 hospital beds were occupied by patients who were awaiting social services funding or waiting for placements in residential care homes. This is the latest information available. It is based on returns from 15 of the 16 health authorities in the region.

National Care Standards

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the number of additional nursing staff required to comply with the National Care Standards in the *(a)* voluntary, *(b)* local authority and *(c)* NHS sectors. [37136]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance to assess the required number of nursing staff is currently being developed.

In the longer term work force confederations will work with the voluntary and local authority sectors to assess the impact of the guidance on local plans.

Angiograms

11. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to reduce the waiting time for angiograms. [34710]

Mr. Milburn: Last November I announced funding of £80 million to provide new angiography equipment at 37 hospitals and new laboratory facilities for angiography at 22 hospitals. This first wave of funding will enable the national health service to carry out an extra 14,000 angiograms each year, and so reduce waiting times.

Mental Health Services

12. **Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in improving mental health services. [34711]

Jacqui Smith: The targets set in the Mental Health National Service Framework (NSF) for April 2001 were all achieved on time. These included 170 assertive outreach teams; almost 500 additional secure beds; over 320 additional 24 hour staffed care beds; access to services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year for all those with complex mental health problems; investment to improve the physical environments in psychiatric wards; and guidance has been issued to ensure the safety, privacy and dignity of mental health patients.

All other targets set in the NSF and the NHS Plan are all on target to be met.

15. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the role of assertive outreach teams in reducing admissions to mental hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [34715]

Jacqui Smith: It is not possible to forecast with precision what the impact on hospital admissions will be once assertive outreach services are provided to all those people who need them. Research to date indicates that significant reductions in admissions can be achieved, and further research on the matter has been commissioned.

36. **Mr. Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on mental health provision in London. [34737]

Jacqui Smith: Mental health services face many challenges in London due to the needs of the population and the complex structure of services. However, good progress is being made in many areas of the implementation of the National Service Framework (NSF) for Mental Health Services in London.

Key achievements arising from the NSF Implementation and the London Mental Health Strategy—"A Strategy for Action (2000)" include integration of health and social care and the involvement of users/survivors and carers. A new London group has been established to develop the forensic mental health services plan for London. London's 'Invest to Save' project involving social and health care agencies and the police and probation service is testing information-sharing protocols. Virtuall continues to provide resources to support agencies to deliver better mental health for Londoners and has been nominated for a modernisation award. Pilot projects to develop the leadership role of local authorities in improving mental well-being have been established. Also additional capital of £1.6 million was made available in 2001–02 to improve acute adult mental health in-patient services.

It is recognised that mental health services need to improve their ability to meet the needs of black and minority ethnic groups. Consultation and capacity building is happening across London to support this.

Care Home Places

13. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in care homes there were in Leicestershire in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [34713]

Jacqui Smith: In 1997, there were 8,423 residential and nursing care beds in Leicestershire. By 2001, there were 8,263.

19. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of care home places in south-east England. [34720]

Jacqui Smith: Since 1997 the number of residential beds in London and the south-east has decreased by 5 per cent. from 101,960 to 96,620. In the same period the number of nursing care beds has increased by 5 per cent., from 47,080 to 49,420.

Altogether, since 1997, the total number of care beds in London and the south-east has decreased by 3,000, a loss of just 2 per cent.

Children's Services

14. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve children's services in health and social care; and if he will make a statement. [34714]

Jacqui Smith: We have already made significant improvements to health and social care services for children. The Quality Protects programme, an £885 million programme running from 1999–2004, has led to demonstrable improvements to the outcomes of some of the most vulnerable children in our society and children are benefiting from our strategy to invest in and transform the national health service.

But there is much more to do. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced last year the development of a National Service Framework for Children, which will encompass health and social care services for children.

Health Inequalities (East London)

16. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in tackling health inequalities in East London. [34716]

Yvette Cooper: This Government are taking practical measures to narrow health inequalities across all areas of the country. In East London, additional funding and strong local partnerships, are successfully supporting action to tackle the causes of the widespread inequalities in the area.

CT Scanners

17. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the criteria which will determine the distribution of the new CT scanners. [34717]

Mr. Hutton: Consultations regarding criteria for the allocation of 50 additional CT scanners, as outlined in the NHS Cancer Plan, will begin by the end of this month and will involve regions, strategic health authorities and the cancer networks. It is expected that final allocations will be published in the summer.

One of the factors in establishing criteria for the allocation of additional equipment will be the relative provision of CT services to the population served.

Delayed Discharges

18. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to tackle delayed discharges from hospital. [34718]

24. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure closer co-operation between the national health service and social services departments to reduce delayed discharges from hospitals. [34725]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State earlier today.

Long-term Care

20. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many long-term care beds there were in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001 in the (i) private, (ii) voluntary and (iii) public sectors. [34721]

Jacqui Smith: Among private sector care homes there were 407,130 beds in 1997 and 409,800 beds in 2001. Among voluntary sector care homes there were 64,460 beds in 1997 and 67,350 beds in 2001. Among local authority staffed homes there were 65,820 beds in 1997 and 50,860 beds in 2001.

In addition the average daily number of beds managed by NHS trusts for residential care was 5,420 in 1997–98 and 5,659 in 2000–01.

Dental Health (Children)

21. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to improve the dental health of children in those areas where the incidence of dental decay is worst. [34722]

Ms Blears: Oral health promotion features in Government initiatives aimed at reducing deprivation and health inequalities including Sure Start, Health Action Zones and Healthy Living Centres. More specifically, our "Brushing for Life" scheme provides free toothbrushes and fluoridated toothpaste to families with young children in the 21 health authorities where dental decay is highest.

Emergency Acute Services (Rural Areas)

22. **Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the requirements for emergency acute services in remote rural areas. [34723]

Ms Blears: Each health community is responsible for developing services that meet the needs of the community they serve, taking account of clinical standards and safety and the views of local people.

The NHS Plan sets out our vision for a health service designed around the patient, with a commitment to provide a comprehensive range of services for everyone, using the guiding principle of providing as much care as possible as close to home as possible.

Each Primary Care Trust needs to consider how best to plan and commission services to meet local needs, rather than imposing a single model of service from the centre.

Kent and Canterbury Hospital

23. **Hugh Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the downgrading of the Kent and Canterbury Hospital. [34724]

Ms Blears: The proposals for the reconfiguration of acute hospital services in East Kent, which include the future role of Kent and Canterbury Hospital, are currently the subject of a public consultation. The consultation period runs until 28 February, therefore it would not be appropriate for me to pre-empt that exercise by commenting on the future of Kent and Canterbury at this time.

Consultants (Contracts)

25. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to conclude negotiations on the national health service consultants' contracts. [34726]

Mr. Hutton: The Government's proposals for the new consultant contract were published in February 2001 and these, alongside the British Medical Association's own proposals, form the basis of continuing negotiations. We have discussed a range of issues and options in the negotiations and I believe we are making good progress.

Nurses

26. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on steps being taken to increase the number of NHS nurses working in Worcester. [34727]

Yvette Cooper: Initiatives to increase the number of national health service nurses now working in the Worcester area include the appointment of a recruitment adviser, the provision of additional nursery places, Improving Working Lives initiatives, local, regional and overseas recruitment initiatives and the introduction of comprehensive professional development opportunities for nursing staff.

27. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future supply of nurses. [34728]

Mr. Hutton: Figures released on 5 February show that we have met the NHS Plan target for 20,000 more nurses by 2004 well ahead of schedule.

The NHS Plan also commits us to 5,500 more nurses and midwives entering training each year by 2004. We are on course to achieve this and applications for nurse training are rising. Over the last two years the number of applicants for nursing and midwifery diploma courses has risen by 86 per cent.

Obesity (Young People)

28. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to reduce the levels of obesity in young people. [34729]

Yvette Cooper: We are tackling levels of obesity in young people by improving diet and physical activity. This includes investment from the New Opportunities Fund for a PE and Sports Programme, a National School Fruit Scheme and nutritional standards for school lunches. Local strategies on reducing overweight and obesity are also being developed as part of the National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease.

Acupuncturists

29. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of acupuncturists practising in *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* the private sector. [34730]

Yvette Cooper: The Department does not record the number of people practising complementary medicine in the national health service. However organisations representing NHS professionals that use some acupuncture have over 3,000 members. A further 2,200 acupuncturists who practise mainly in the private sector belong to the British Acupuncture Council.

NHS Plan (Birmingham)

31. **Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implementation of the NHS Plan in Birmingham. [34732]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Plan is being implemented by the Birmingham health economy in a coherent and strategic way. The strong history of partnership working across Birmingham has allowed the local modernisation review process to continue to modernise and develop services for local people.

Plans for the development of acute services in the south of the city are well under way, and the emerging primary care trusts will build on the work already undertaken to improve the health and well-being of the people of Birmingham.

Accident and Emergency Services

32. **Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on statistical techniques for measuring waiting times in accident and emergency units. [34733]

Ms Blears: The Department requires the national health service to report quarterly on the numbers of patients who are admitted to hospital through accident and emergency and the length of time they waited following the decision to admit.

The waiting time for an emergency hospital admission is measured from the time when the decision is made to admit or when treatment in accident and emergency is completed, whichever is the latest, to the time when the patient is received into:

(a) a bed in an appropriate ward (a bed in an accident and emergency observation and assessment ward would count, but a trolley, bed or chair in a corridor would not); or

(b) an operating theatre; or

(c) another setting for immediate treatment (for example, an X-ray department) before being received into a bed in an appropriate ward.

The NHS Plan set a new target for accident and emergency:

> Reduce the maximum wait in accident and emergency from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours by 2004. With the following interim milestones;
>
> 75 per cent. of patients attending accident and emergency to wait four hours or less from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge by March 2002.
>
> 90 per cent. of patients attending accident and emergency to wait four hours or less from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge by March 2003.

In line with this, from August 2001, the Department has collected data on total time in accident and emergency from arrival to transfer, admission or discharge. Information suggests that the NHS is on track to meet the March 2002 milestone. Currently 77 per cent. of all accident and emergency attenders spend four hours or less in accident and emergency.

In the majority of NHS trusts, information on waiting times in accident and emergency are extracted from patient records on hospital computer systems. If IT systems are not yet in place, NHS trusts can use sampling methodology to provide the figures. Guidance on sampling is provided in "Patient's Charter monitoring guide".

35. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to visit the Royal National Hospital in Bath to discuss accident and emergency services. [34736]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to visit the Royal United Hospital Bath National Health Service Trust to discuss accident and emergency services.

Endometriosis

33. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on services for sufferers from endometriosis. [34734]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 179–80W.

Poverty (Health Effects)

34. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of poverty on health; and if he will make a statement. [34735]

Yvette Cooper: Poverty has a major impact on health. The independent Acheson inquiry into inequalities in health commissioned by the Government in 1997 concluded that many studies and analyses have demonstrated the association between poor health and increasing material disadvantage.

Health inequalities is a priority for the whole Government. Two national targets to reduce health inequalities were announced in February 2001. A public consultation on the delivery of the targets was held in autumn 2001. We are currently undertaking a cross-cutting spending review to establish priorities for action to deliver the targets.

NHS Funding (Surrey and Sussex)

37. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about funding of the national health service in Surrey and Sussex. [34738]

Ms Blears: The 2002–03 allocations for Surrey and Sussex health authorities will be as follows:

	Total allocation	*Total increase*		*Real terms increase*	
Health authority	*(£000)*	*(£000)*	*(Percentage)*	*(£000)*	*(Percentage)*
East Surrey	324,719	27,582	9.31	19,686	6.65
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	666,721	59,913	9.89	43,674	7.21
West Surrey	485,877	42,183	9.57	30,398	6.89
West Sussex	618,829	53,847	9.58	38,824	6.91

This represents a substantial increase for all four health economies.

The 2002–03 allocations for English health authorities represent the biggest average rise for a decade.

Air Ambulance

38. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure 24-hour air ambulance cover for emergency journeys from islands to mainland hospitals. [34739]

Ms Blears: There are currently 12 charitably funded air ambulance services operating in England. The charities are responsible for the number of aircraft provided. These charitably funded air ambulances are called out to emergencies by national health service ambulance trusts and generally staffed by NHS staff.

Air ambulances have a role in delivering emergency care especially in rural areas and where road access is a problem. This can be an effective way of getting better and faster access to hospitals and valuable in supporting inter-hospital transfers. In 1995, the Department commissioned the Medical Research Unit at Sheffield university to report on air ambulances. The report failed to show benefits that would justify NHS investment.

In recognition of the growing public interest in air ambulances and the fact that circumstances may have changed since research was last undertaken, the Department has commissioned a wide-ranging piece of primary research that is examining the role and effectiveness of air ambulance services in a modern NHS.

Sure Start

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the expenditure to date on each Sure Start Scheme in London, broken down by ward and borough. [32293]

Yvette Cooper: The table gives information on the expenditure of Sure Start programmes broken down by borough in London for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Information is not available by ward. Figures for 2001–02 will not be available until after the end of the financial year.

Programme name/borough	Claimed revenue	Claimed capital
		£
Programmes announced in January 1999		
Aylesbury Plus—Southwark	1,330,847	89,231
Central Brent—Brent	280,284	0
Edmonton—Enfield	844,406	109,357
Euston—Camden	461,512	110,965
Greenwich—Greenwich	370,536	116,258
North Canning Town—Newham	186,791	0
Ocean Estate—Tower Hamlets	272,036	[illegible]
Queensbridge—Hackney	435,834*	188,707
St. James Street—Waltham Forest	255,988	0
Tulse Hill—Lambeth	452,212	0
West Green—Haringey	675,151	1,113,647
Programmes announced in November 1999		
Bellingham—Lewisham	157,834	0
Broad Green—Croydon	41,580	0
Coningham—Hammersmith and Fulham	186,044	0
Copenhagen—Islington	1,711	0
Hounslow—Hounslow	111,001	19,418
North West Kensington—Kensington and Chelsea	36,129	0
Penge—Bromley	153,668	0
South Northolt—Ealing	93,771	17,067
Thames View—Barking and Dagenham	56,590	0
Battersea—Wandsworth	111,042	14,210
Westminster—Westminster	107,398	43,400

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Battle of Trafalgar

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar; and if she will make a statement. [36555]

Dr. Howells: My Department has no plans to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. However, plans for a series of events to mark the bicentenary of Trafalgar in 2005 and to celebrate Britain's unique relationship with the sea are currently being prepared by the Official Nelson Commemoration Committee. The Committee has been established by the National Maritime Museum, which is funded by my Department, in conjunction with the Royal Naval Museum. The Committee brings together the interests of a wide range of maritime associations connected with the Nelson Heritage and is currently considering a number of events with a special emphasis on ways of involving young people.

Film Council

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what criteria she uses to determine grants to the Film Council; and what proportion has been allocated to *(a)* independent film makers and *(b)* television shows and soap operas. [36923]

Dr. Howells: Levels of grant to the Film Council are determined by the Secretary of State, taking account of the overall level of allocation from the Treasury, departmental spending priorities and the Film Council's performance in meeting targets set out in its Funding Agreement. It is not within the Film Council's remit to provide funding for television programmes.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the amount was of each award made by the Film Council since 1 April 2000 to organisations in which members of the Board of the Film Council had an interest. [36965]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The following list details the amount of each Lottery award made by the Film Council between 1 April 2000 to 31 December 2001 to organisations in which members of the Board of the Film Council have an interest.

Film council, Lottery awards to organisations in which board members had an interest since 1 April 2000[1]

Board member/Applicant	Date of award.	Name of project	Amount of award (£)	Fund	Relevant interest
Tim Bevan WT2 Ltd.	15 June 2000	Long Time Dead	1,000,000	Interim arrangements	Director
Tim Bevan, Duncan Kenworthy and Stewart Till NSCTP	1 August 2001	Project Development Workshops and Train the Trainers	21,306	Training	Governors or Trustees of National Film and Television School: NSCTP is a self-funding Unit of the School and a non-profit organisation
Parminder Vir Carlton Television	26 June 2001	The Prince of Dalston	8,250	Development	Employee of Carlton Television
Sarah Radclyffe S. Films	—	Fever—PILOT	10,000	New Cinema fund	Co-producer on this project
Paul Webster Century Films	6 April 2000	The Tyre	45,258	Interim arrangement	Director of Film Four. Film Four acts as a co-financier on these projects which are also supported by the Film Council. The awards are made to third party organisations and any benefits accruing to Film Four will be derived from its own investment in the projects and not through the Film Council.
Pipedream Pictures Ltd.	6 April 2000	Crush (aka A Certain Age)	875,000	Interim arrangement	—
Velvet Films	14 September 2000	dish	30,000	Interim arrangement	—

Film council, Lottery awards to organisations in which board members had an interest since 1 April 2000[1]

Board member/Applicant	*Date of award*	*Name of project*	*Amount of award (£)*	*Fund*	*Relevant interest*
WOW Prod & Trijbits Prod	18 May 2000	My Brother Tom (aka My Brother Rob)	359,989	Interim arrangement	—
Spectre Films Ltd.	26 September 2000	The Invasion	34,100	Interim arrangement	—
Feelgood Films	31 January 2001	Miranda (aka Carbon Miranda)	849,315	Premiere	—
Suspect Device	20 June 2001	Straightheads	8,500	Development	(Co-development with Film Four Lab)
Slat Films	15 August 2001	Once upon a time in the Midlands	690,000	New cinema Fund	—
Hot Property Ltd.	19 September 2000	Bodysong	350,000	New Cinema Fund	—
Total			4,281,718		

[1] To 31 December 2001

Lottery awards made to the three pre-existing Lottery film franchises in which board members had an interest since 1 April 2000[1]

Board member/Applicant	*Date of award*	*Name of project*	*Amount of award (£)*	*Fund*	*Relevant interest*
Duncan Kenworthy and James Lee					
DNA Films Ltd.	20 June 2001	28 Days Later	3,000,000	Franchise	Directors
DNA Films Ltd.	10 October 2001	Heartlands	1,430,000		
DNA Films Ltd.	21 March 2000	The Parole Officer	2,000,000		Soft commitment made pre 1 April
Sarah Radclyffe					
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	17 August 2000	A Romantic comedy about Divorce	38,750	Franchise	Former Director. Directorship ceased on 25 April 2001
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	17 August 2000	Agent X	37,500		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	17 August 2000	Dead Sexy	45,000		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	28 November 2001	Drunken Monkey	10,250		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	27 July 2000	Feet Up	41,750		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	21 November 2001	Hawksmoor	36,670		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	18 May 2000	It was an Accident	99,850		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	30 August 2001	Max Hoffman	1,971,830		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	1 March 2000	Minister of Fund	47,950		Soft commitment made pre 1 April
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	1 March 2000	Ode to Pandora	22,000		Soft commitment made pre 1 April
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	27 July 2000	The Abduction Club	1,200,000		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	27 July 2000	The Alchemist	41,750		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	21 November 2001	The Blitz	90,734		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	6 April 2000	The Hole	1,500,000		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	14 September 2000	The Mighty Walzer	57,000		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	20 June 2001	The Mushroom Prince	20,900		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	4 July 2001	The Season	47,515		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	27 July 2000	The Wedding Gift	41,750		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	27 July 2000	There's Only One Jimmy Grimble	60,000		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	21 February 2001	Thunderpants	2,000,000		Soft commitment made pre 1 April
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	21 November 2001	Thunderpants	53,867		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	5 December 2001	Tunnel Vision	36,500		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	8 January 2001	Ugly Streakers	2,500		
Pathé Pictures Ltd.	17 August 2000	Waterloo Sunset	50,000		
Chris Auty					
The Film consortium Ltd.	7 November 2001	24 Hour Party People	247,842	Franchise	(UK TV licence owned by Film Four)
The Film consortium Ltd.	26 September 2000	24 Hour Party People	2,000,000		(UK TV licence owned by Film Four)
The Film consortium Ltd.	20 June 2001	A Passionate Woman	20,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	18 May 2000	Brian Jones Project	19,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	20 December 2000	Chameleon	6,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	3 October 2001	Charlies Noads—RIP	5,597		
The Film consortium Ltd.	26 September 2000	Child of Air	11,500		Soft commitment made pre 1 April
The Film consortium Ltd.	7 November 2001	Christmas Carol	425,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	3 October 2001	Dead Souls	6,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	28 March 2001	Dr. Sleep	8,500		
The Film consortium Ltd.	28 March 2001	Dr. Sleep	1,375,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	26 September 2000	Dust	50,000		(UK TV licence owned by Film Four)
The Film consortium Ltd.	7 March 2001	Dust	59,410		(UK TV licence owned by Film Four)
The Film consortium Ltd.	26 September 2000	Fattypuffs and Thinifers	20,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	5 December 2001	Fourth Wall	30,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	7 November 2001	Gabriel and Me	101,243		
The Film consortium Ltd.	26 September 2000	Haroun and the Sea of Stories	60,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	17 January 2001	Innocence	8,750		
The Film consortium Ltd.	2 May 2001	Innocence	1,150,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	15 June 2000	Innocence	11,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	19 October 1999	Janice Beard	85,000		Soft commitment made pre 1 April
The Film consortium Ltd.	26 September 2001	Large	80,000		(UK TV licence owned by Film Four)
The Film consortium Ltd.	27 July 2000	Large	75,000		(UK TV licence owned by Film Four)
The Film consortium Ltd.	20 December 2000	Large	50,000		(UK TV licence owned by Film Four)
The Film consortium Ltd.	27 July 2000	Quiz Night	13,600		
The Film consortium Ltd.	4 July 2001	Room to Rent	80,000		(UK TV licence owned by Film Four)
The Film consortium Ltd.	14 September 2000	Seven Against the West	34,000		

Lottery awards made to the three pre-existing Lottery film franchises in which board members had an interest since 1 April 2000[1]

Board member/Applicant	*Date of award*	*Name of project*	*Amount of award (£)*	*Fund*	*Relevant interest*
The Film consortium Ltd.	2 May 2001	shame	10,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	6 April 2000	Streets Above Us	10,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	17 August 2000	The 51st State	2,000,000		
The Film consortium Ltd.	1 March 2000	Transgressions	15,000		Soft commitment made pre 1 April
The Film consortium Ltd.	20 December 2000	The Rose of Tralee	8,500		
The Film consortium Ltd.	21 March 2001	Room to Rent	20,000		
Total Franchises			22,095,008		(UK TV licence owned by Film Four)

[1] To 31 December 2001

Note:

1. This list includes sums provided to the three Lottery Film Franchises. The legal contracts committing the Franchise funds were signed in 1997–98 when the Lottery franchises were awarded by the Arts Council of England and are not new awards. The Franchisees are therefore contractually entitled to the funding irrespective of current Board membership.
2. Awards made to the Franchisees as soft commitments before 1 April 2000 are disclosed here as hard commitments. This disclosure follows the accounting treatment in the 2001 accounts.
3. Paul Webster is a Director of Film Four. Film Four acts as co-producer or co-funder on a number of projects also supported by the Film Council. However, the awards are made to third party organisations and any benefits accruing to Film Four will be derived from its own investment in the project and not through the Film Council. In the financial year 2000–01 the total amount of awards to such organisations was £4,468,072.
4. Other applications have been received from organisations in which Board members have an interest which are either pending a decision or have already been rejected.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the practice of the Film Council in relation to awards to organisations in which members of the board of the Film Council had an interest. [36967]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Evaluation of lottery funding applications has been delegated by the Film Council board through the Chief Executive Officer, as Accounting Officer, to fund or scheme managers. This ensures that members of the board do not participate in the discussion or determination of individual awards whether or not individual board members hold an interest in the application.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the awards made by the Film Council since 1 April 2000 to organisations in which members of the board of the Film Council had an interest. [36966]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The Film Council acknowledges that with a board which includes industry practitioners, there will be occasions when board members or organisations employing board members will apply for Film Council funding. The procedures adopted by the council for handling potential conflicts of interest provide that board members do not exert any influence in the determination of applications for lottery awards.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of the awards made by the Film Council since 1 April 2000 were made to organisations in which members of the board of the Film Council had an interest. [36964]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The proportion of new awards made to organisations in which board members have an interest, since 1 April 2000, and where no pre-existing commitments exist, is 9 per cent. However, awards honoured since 1 April 2000, including prior contractual commitments inherited by the Film Council from the Arts Council of England in respect of the three lottery film franchises, increased the proportion to 55 per cent.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been paid in awards by the Film Council since 1 April 2000. [36849]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Between 1 April 2000 and 31 December 2001 the Film Council committed new lottery awards for projects to a total of £47.6 million.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the dates of the meetings of the board of the Film Council since 1 April 2000, stating for each meeting the *(a)* members of the board present and *(b)* awards agreed on. [36848]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The following list sets out the dates of Film Council board meetings and the members of the board present for each. Minutes of the meetings are publicly available on request or through the library of the British Film Institute. Lottery awards are made outside of Film Council board meetings by fund or scheme managers.

Film Council board meetings: dates and attendees—April 2000 to present.

Sir Alan Parker is the chairman of the Film Council.

Board members are:

- Stewart Till (Deputy chair)
- Dawn Airey
- Joan Bakewell CBE
- Charles Denton
- James Lee
- Colin Leventhal
- Parminder Vir
- Iain Smith
- Chris Auty
- Tim Bevan
- John Hill
- Duncan Kenworthy OBE
- Sarah Radclyffe
- Paul Webster

18 April 2000

Attendees: Alan Parker, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, John Hill, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Sarah Radclyffe, I[illegible]Smith, Stewart Till, Paul Webster.

30 May 2000

Attendees: Alan Parker, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

There was no meeting in June 2000.

25 July 2000

Attendees: Alan Parker, Dawn Airey, Joan Bakewell, Charles Denton, John Hill, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Stewart Till, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

22 August 2000

Attendees: Alan Parker, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, James Lee, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Paul Webster.

26 September 2000

Attendees: Alan Parker, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, James Lee, Coin Leventhal, Sarah Radclyffe, Stewart Till, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

31 October 2000

Attendees: Alan Parker, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Duncan Kenworthy, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

28 November 2000

Attendees: Alan Parker, Chris Auty, Tim Bevan, John Hill, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Duncan Kenworthy, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Stewart Till, Parminder Vir.

19 December 2000

Attendees: Alan Parker, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Sarah Radclyffe, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

30 January 2001

Attendees: Alan Parker, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Duncan Kenworthy, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Stewart Till, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

27 February 2001

Attendees: Alan Parker, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Charles Denton, John Hill, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Duncan Kenworthy, Iain Smith, Stewart Till, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

27 March 2001

Attendees: Stewart Till, Chris Auty, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Parminder Vir.

24 April 2001

Attendees: Alan Parker, Dawn Airey, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Sarah Radclyffe, Stewart Till, Parminder Vir.

There was no meeting in May 2001.

26 June 2001

Attendees: Alan Parker, Chris Auty, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Stewart Till, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

31 July 2001

Attendees: Stewart Till, Charles Denton, John Hill, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

There was no meeting in August 2001.

25 September 2001

Attendees: Stewart Till, Dawn Airey, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Parminder Vir.

30 October 2001

Attendees: Stewart Till, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Charles Denton, John Hill, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

27 November 2001

Attendees: Stewart Till, Chris Auty, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Parminder Vir, Paul Webster.

19 December 2001

Attendees: Stewart Till, Joan Bakewell, Tim Bevan, Charles Denton, John Hill, Duncan Kenworthy, James Lee, Colin Leventhal, Sarah Radclyffe, Iain Smith, Parminder Vir.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the steps taken by the Film Council to ensure that no conflict of interest existed when decisions to make awards to organisations in which members of the board of the Film Council had an interest were taken. [36968]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Decisions on Lottery funding applications have been delegated to individual fund or scheme managers. This ensures that members of the board do not participate in the discussion or determination of matters in which they might have a direct interest. There is an onus on both the board member and on the Film Council to identify at an early stage any new interest a board member, their spouse or close family member or any person with whom they have a close personal relationship, whether or not living in the same household, has in projects or in activities resulting in an application to the Film Council for funding. A register of board members' interests is maintained and is updated annually.

Independent Film Makers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received concerning use of tax allowances by *(a)* independent film makers and *(b)* television producers. [36922]

Dr. Howells: Officials from my department have met a number of independent film producers, television producers, and broadcasters, as well as representatives from industry trade organisations, and the Film Council, to discuss the use of tax allowances. The views expressed were passed to the Inland Revenue as changes to the tax relief are, ultimately, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the extent to which tax allowances have been taken up by *(a)* independent film makers and *(b)* television shows. [36924]

Dr. Howells: About 50 per cent. of the tax relief, by value, goes to film producers, and 50 per cent. to television producers. The vast majority of applications from film makers for a 'British film' certificate to access the tax relief are from independent film makers, as opposed to the small number of films made each year in the UK by the major Hollywood studios.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff left the service of her Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many her Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37556]

Dr. Howells: The information is set out in the following table:

	DCMS	*RPA*
Left in year to 31 March 2001	3	2
Before retirement age	3	1
Responsibility for payments	3	1

Note:

This data exclude staff who left to join other Government Departments or to pursue employment elsewhere.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 506W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37888]

Mr. Caborn: The previous answer addressed the cost of refurbishment, which was taken to mean not merely redecoration and/or replacement furnishing but rather extensive building works. The cost of redecoration/refurnishing of ministerial offices has been £106,382.98 in the period November 1997 to January 1998. A sum of £22,134 in 1999 and £11,200 in late 2001.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 339W, what the area in square feet of the property referred to is. [37894]

Mr. Caborn: The premises referred to were a total of 5,690.94 square feet over three floors.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have concerning charitable status for sports clubs. [37883]

Mr. Caborn: The Charity Commission announced in November 2001 that certain local amateur sports clubs would be eligible to apply for charitable status on the grounds that such clubs promote healthy recreation. I have recently met the commission's chairman to discuss how best to encourage clubs to apply for charitable status, and to ensure that the widest possible range of sports are eligible. In the light of that meeting, I consider that charitable status will offer a great deal to many clubs.

That meeting followed detailed discussions with sport and other interested parties since the publication of the Treasury's consultation document, "Promoting Sport in the Community", on 30 November. These discussions included a consideration of the alternative, non-charitable, proposals included in the Treasury document, and I intend to raise the results of that consideration with Treasury Ministers shortly.

Handheld Televisions

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on applying the television licence fee to handheld televisions; and if she will make a statement. [37690]

Dr. Howells: A television licence is required to use any television receiver as defined in the Wireless Telegraphy (Television Licence Fees) Regulations 1997. The licence fee does not vary according to the size or portability of a television set. However, a television licence covers the use anywhere in the United Kingdom, by the licensee or a person normally living with the licensee at the licensed address, of a television receiver powered solely by its own internal batteries.

Television Licences

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will safeguard the £5 concessionary television licence for those living in schemes with a resident warden when a scheme loses its concessionary licence by accommodating those not of a pensionable age or by the landlord adopting a travelling warden service in place of a resident warden. [37718]

Dr. Howells: As announced last year, the Government propose to introduce measures to preserve the rights of beneficiaries of the Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) concessionary television licence scheme when the social mix or the level of warden cover in their sheltered housing change, so long as they remain in accommodation provided or managed by a local authority, a housing association or a development corporation. Consultations between officials and the BBC about the necessary amendments to the television licence fee regulations are currently under way. We intend to bring forward these amendments as soon as we can but it is important that in doing so we do not create any new anomalies or unnecessary administrative burdens.

Sport

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what levels of funding have been available for sport in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* in total in each of the last 10 years from (i) central Government and (ii) the Lottery. [37629]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 408–09W.

World Athletics

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the Government's response to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's report, "Unpicking the Lock: the World Athletics Championships in the UK". [38769]

Tessa Jowell: The Government's response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report "Unpicking the Lock: the World Athletics Championships in the UK" has been laid before both Houses today.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Miliband: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans there are to amend her Department's *(a)* departmental expenditure limit and *(b)* administration costs limits for 2001–02. [38913]

Tessa Jowell: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for 2001–02 will be increased by £10,211,000 from £1,169,881,000 to £1,180,092,000 and the Department's administration costs limit increased by £3,171,000 from £32,237,000 to £35,408,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	10,121
New DEL	1,037,374
of which:	
Voted	148,247
Non-voted	889,127
Capital	
Change	90
New DEL	142,718
of which:	
Voted	101,817
Non-voted	40,901

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the transfer of resources from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of £2,000,000 toward the costs of mounting the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester; the transfer of resources, as part of the machinery of government changes, from the Cabinet Office of £210,000 for the administration costs of the Commonwealth Games Unit; from the Home Office of £2,461,000 for the administration costs of the Golden Jubilee Unit and of the alcohol licensing, gambling, film and video licensing functions, of £1,265,000 for the receipts and £3,680,000 for the expenditure of the Gaming Board of Great Britain, and of £3,000,000 for grants and associated expenditure for the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

Other changes include the provision of additional resources under the end-year flexibility (EYF) arrangements, as set out in the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper, 2000–01 (Cm. 5243), of £35,000 for the Government Art Collection and to provide for a transfer of resources of £500,000 from the Department's research to administration costs budgets.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the transfer from the Home Office of £90,000 for the capital expenditure of the Golden Jubilee Unit. The increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the DEL reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Internet Sites

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on requiring internet service providers to remove access to sites that promote graffiti writing. [36240]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

There is no requirement on internet service providers to remove access to such sites, although they remove illegal material of which they become aware, (such as child pornography), from sites they are hosting.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34164]

Mr. Robin Cook: The available information is:

2000–01: £8,225

2001–02: £21,532.

The additional information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34393]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department spent a total of £5,589 on these items in financial year 2000–01. The more detailed information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

E-democracy

Margaret Moran: To ask the President of the Council what consultation he intends to undertake in introducing e-democracy to Parliament. [34745]

Mr. Robin Cook: The memorandum I presented to the Modernisation Committee before Christmas set out my desire to improve the way in which new technologies are used at Westminster. I welcome views from all Members on how we might better utilise Information and Communications Technologies in the House of Commons.

In addition, the Government will publish later this year a consultation paper on e-democracy and online consultation. We hope that this will inform the use of new technologies in Parliament and we will be seeking views from the public and Members of Parliament, including via e-mail, in response to that document.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35021]

Mr. Robin Cook: The available information is as follows:

2000–01: £9,614

2001–02[1]: £4,994

[1] To end January 2001

Additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Solicitor-General what plans there are to change the Attorney-General's Department's *(a)* departmental expenditure limit and *(b)* administration costs limit for 2001–02. [38770]

The Solicitor-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Attorney-General's Departments DEL will be increased by £8,681,000 from £451,563,000 to £460,244,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £7,731,000 from £322,103,000 to £329,834,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	6,362
New DEL	436,276
of which:	
Voted	426,276
Non-voted	10,000
Capital	
Change	2,319
New DEL	23,968
Of which:	
Voted	23,968
Non-voted	—

The Crown Prosecution Service's DEL will be increased by £8,286,000 from £414,893,000 to £423,179,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £7,267,000 from £296,974,000 to £304,241,000. The increase in the resource element of the DEL arises from speeding up the reform of the CPS to allow it to contribute fully to criminal justice targets, implementation of extended court sitting hours and the provision of resources for the CPS prosecutor recovered assets training project. The decrease in DEL arises from the transfer of £120,000 to the Home Office in respect of the CPS's contribution to CJIU. The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the take up of £2,000,000 of end year flexibility entitlement and a transfer of resources from the Home Office to support the video recording of police interviews. The decrease in capital arises from the return to the Home Office of £150,000 of Capital Modernisation Fund resources.

HM Procurator General and Treasury Solicitor's Department DEL will be decreased by £105,000 from £15,745,000 to £15,640,000 and the administration costs limits will be decreased by £36,000 from £10,629,000 to £10,593,000. The decrease in the resource element of the DEL is the net effect of a transfer of £106,000 to clients whose work will become chargeable in the current financial year. The decreases in HM Procurator General and Treasury Solicitor's Department DEL will be effected by a £1,000 Token Supplementary Estimate.

The Serious Fraud Office's DEL will be increased by £500,000 from £20,925,000 to £21,425,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £500,000 from £14,415,000 to £14,915,000. The increase in the resource element of the DEL arises from development of the Docman information support system and funding of early retirements in support of restructuring of the Serious Fraud Office to enable it to contribute fully to criminal justice targets.

The increases will be entirely met by a transfer from the Criminal Justice System reserve, transfers from the Home Office and take up of capital end year flexibility entitlement.

The additional expenditure will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) her Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34408]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The expenditure by my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, is as follows:

	£
1997–98	2,667.82
1998–99	3,213.09
1999–2000	2,843.69
2000–01	2,419.43

Current records do not distinguish the cost of calls made in the United Kingdom and abroad but the latter cost would be de minimis. Current records do not distinguish the cost of equipment and the cost of calls. There is no separate coding for reimbursement of costs of calls made from privately owned equipment but such expenditure would be de minimis.The Crown Prosecution Service has only provided mobile telephones and other associated equipment to its staff in the United Kingdom. The amount spent for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year is:

£

	Equipment	*Telephone calls*
1997–98	—	—
1998–99	1,000	—
1999–2000	96,000	9,000
2000–01	38,000	30,000

Reclaimed costs for calls made on privately owned mobile telephones are not recorded separately.

The expenditure on mobile telephone equipment and calls by the Treasury Solicitor's Department and Government property lawyers was as follows:

£

	TSD	*GPL*
1997–98	9,605.33	—
1998–99	8,443.21	2,069.28
1999–2000	9,513.81	720.04
2000–01	11,818.41	14.06

Current records do not distinguish the cost of equipment and the cost of calls. There is no separate coding for reimbursement of costs of calls made from privately owned equipment but such expenditure would be de minimis.

No equipment was purchased abroad but the figures given may include call charges incurred abroad.

The Serious Fraud Office makes available mobile telephone equipment for business use on a loan and permanent allocation basis to SFO staff. Financial information is available on the amounts spent providing this service but not to the level of detail requested. This would be available only at disproportionate cost.

£

	Equipment	*Calls*
1997–98	9,258.37	2,611.92
1998–99	3,652.42	826.31
1999–2000	3,559.03	3,090.59
2000–01	3,352.45	3,889.07

Information on the split between the United Kingdom and abroad would be available only at disproportionate cost. Information about amounts reclaimed by staff, which is minimal, would be available only at disproportionate cost.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 17 January 2000, *Official Report*, column 415W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37902]

Clare Short: The costs of refurbishing the two ministerial private offices were as follows:

1997: £7,978

1998: £7,376

1999: Nil

2000: Nil

2001: Approximately £60,000.[1]

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[1] This is an estimate of the cost of the works carried out in these areas, as part of the overall refurbishment of the whole of the 1 Palace Street building.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which she has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37811]

Clare Short: My Department has had no empty properties during the specified period. There are no other agencies or public bodies for which we are responsible.

Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the global fund for AIDS, TB and malaria will aim to treat those already infected with HIV. [37837]

Clare Short: The global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria (GFATM) is committed to adopting a balanced, integrated approach between treatment and prevention. Moreover, it will work through existing country co-ordination mechanisms wherever possible. These mechanisms will be free to shape any bid for funding around their own assessment and experience of in-country priorities. A decision on which of the first tranche of proposals to support will be made in April by the GFATM board, which has equal representation of donors and developing countries.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what procedures the global fund for AIDS, TB and malaria has in place to ensure that those with specific local knowledge of the regions in need are able to play a full part in the decision-making processes of the fund. [37835]

Clare Short: The global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria (GFATM) has incorporated a number of safeguards to ensure that those with specific local knowledge of the regions in need are able to play a full part in the decision-making process.

Applications to the fund will use existing country co-ordination mechanisms wherever possible. These mechanisms will be free to shape their applications around their own assessment and experience of in-country priorities.

The fund is in the process of establishing a technical review panel made up of experts from developed and developing countries and including those with an in-depth knowledge of working in regions in need. The panel will review applications submitted to the board and make recommendations to the board. The board, which itself comprises an equal number of representatives from developed and developing world countries, plus representatives from NGOs and the private sector, will take the final decisions on funding.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria has an overall policy to purchase drugs at the lowest possible cost. [37836]

Clare Short: Yes. The global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria (GFATM) has an overall policy to purchase drugs at the lowest possible price consistent with the trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS) agreement and the Doha ministerial declaration on TRIPS and public health.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development where and how the resources of the global fund for the alleviation of AIDS, TB and Malaria are being disbursed for health systems and treatments; what strategies were decided upon when the fund's management board met on 28 January; and if she will commit additional resources to the fund. [37838]

Clare Short: No decisions on disbursements from the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) will be made until the second board meeting in April. However, the fund does have agreed principles and an operating framework. The UK contributed to the process of agreeing these and was content with the outcome.

The first board meeting on 28–29 January resulted in the fund being legally established as a foundation in Switzerland. The board approved a call for proposals and finalised a set of guidelines for their submission, which also explain the proposal review process.

The main challenge for the fund in its first year will be to demonstrate value added and effectiveness in its use of the funds already committed. Donors including the UK will consider the level of future contributions in light of the fund's initial performance.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what proportion of the humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan announced on 19 September 2001 has been disbursed; [37735]

(2) what proportion of the humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan announced on 12 October 2001 has been disbursed. [37737]

Clare Short: On 19 September 2001 I announced £25 million to help meet the immediate humanitarian needs in response to the Afghanistan crisis. On 12 October 2001 I announced a further £15 million of humanitarian assistance. These allocations have been fully disbursed through various United Nations agencies, the Red Cross movement and non-governmental organisations.

Pakistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the humanitarian assistance to Pakistan announced on 28 September 2001 has been disbursed. [37736]

Clare Short: The following table provides the current expenditure and invoiced totals against the individual project allocations.

Pakistan

Emergency short-term assistance	*Allocation (£000)*	*Spend to 20 February 2002 (£000)*	*Advanced or invoiced (£000)*	*Total (£000)*	*Percentage*
Lady health workers	5,200	—	4,424	4,424	85
NWFP Drugs	1,000	—	592	592	59
Balochistan Drugs	1,000	—	559	559	56
Sarhad rural support	1,100	309	342	651	59
Social marketing of condoms	2,700	1,944	527	2,471	92
Total	11,000	2,253	6,444	8,697	79

Notes:

Total column reflects expected expenditure in the current financial year, as agreed with Government of Pakistan based on need and absorptive capacity.

Balance of funds should disburse by end May.

Sexual/Reproductive Health

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contributions her Department has made to sexual and reproductive health non-governmental organisations in each of the last three years; and which of these organisations were British based. [37734]

Clare Short: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and to provide it would be at disproportionate cost to my department. However, a useful summary of payments made to all UK civil society organisations can be found in "Statistics on International Development 1996/97–2000/01", Table 14, DFID Expenditure through UK CSOs 2000/01, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 644W, what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which she has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37915]

Ms Hewitt: To ascertain the total area in square feet of empty freehold properties owned by the Department of Trade and Industry, her non-departmental public bodies and public corporations would involve disproportionate costs. However, we are able to supply the details for the National Environmental Council and British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Status	*Year*	*Empty freehold properties*	*Area per square foot*
NERC	2000	5	37,311.00
	2001	2	12,755.00
BNFL plc	1999	2	72,000.00
	2000	3	142,000.00
	2001	3	114,000.00

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37495]

Ms Hewitt: *(a)* The departmental travel agent arranged 16,616 first class rail journeys in 2001. This represents 60 per cent. of the journeys arranged by them. They do not, however, arrange all the department's rail journeys.

(b) The average cost of those first class journeys, booked as above, was £113.

(c) The DTI does not record cost of rail travel by grade of civil servant separately from other data on travel expenses paid for staff undertaking departmental business. To provide the information requested would entail disproportionate cost.

Postal Costs

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the percentage change in real postage prices is for *(a)* first and *(b)* second class letters over the last (i) five, (ii) 10 and (iii) 20 years; and what these prices would be in today's money; [36261]

(2) what figures she has collated on the cost of sending a first class letter weighing *(a)* 50 grams and *(b)* 60 grams in each European Union country. [36256]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 14 February 2002]*: I am informed by Consignia that the percentage change in real postage prices is as follows:

Years	*First class basic weight step percentage*	*Second class basic weight step percentage*
0–5	8.5	16.3
0–10	9.5	16.3
0–20	15.7	27.8

First and second basic weight step prices in September 2001 prices are:

Pence

Years ago	*First*	*Second*
Current	27.0	19.0
5	29.5	22.7
10	29.8	22.7
20	32.0	26.3

Small Businesses (Funding)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the current documents published that present concise details of the sources of funding for small businesses. [37596]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service has a brochure, Sources of Finance for your Business, which is aimed at helping small businesses decide what kind of finance is most appropriate to their needs. It contains details about sources of help and advice and contacts for further information. Copies of the booklet have been distributed throughout the Business Link network, and also with Banks, Accountants and a wide variety of other financial institutions and business support organisations.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Competition Commission, as part of its SME banking investigation, is investigating the practice of routinely requiring personal guarantees from the proprietors of small businesses seeking finance. [37597]

Nigel Griffiths: As the issue of personal guarantees relates to banking services, and the Government's response to the Competition Commission report into the supply of banking services to small and medium enterprises has not yet been published, it would be inappropriate to comment further at this time.

Post Offices

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her definition is of *(a)* the term 'rural' defined with repect to rural post offices and *(b)* the term 'community' defined with respect to community post offices. [37600]

Mr. Alexander: A rural post office is defined as one serving a community of up to 10,000 inhabitants. Community offices are post offices which keep shorter hours than usual in response to local conditions.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who is entitled to apply for funds from the fund which has been established to sustain community post offices; what the eligibility criteria are; and what attempts have been made to inform post offices of the fund. [37599]

Mr. Alexander: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) of 10 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 650W.

The former Minister for Competitiveness wrote to every parish and community council in the UK in March 2001 to announce the fund which is now promoted by rural transfer advisers from Post Office Limited.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what actions have been taken to prevent the avoidable closure of post offices; and what her definition is of the term avoidable closure defined in this context. [37601]

Mr. Alexander: Post Office Ltd. has set up a team of rural transfer advisers to explore options for keeping rural sub-post offices open and is administering the £2 million Government fund to assist volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or re-establish post office services in rural communities. Through such measures, Post Office Ltd. is continuing its efforts to reopen sub-post offices where there have been recent closures.

Consignia define an unavoidable closure of a post office as one where no one suitable is prepared to take over from the departing sub-postmaster, where no suitable premises remain available or can be identified or where an associated retail business is no longer commercially viable.

Small Business Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Small Business Service has published a strategy for *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2002–12, with associated milestones and targets. [36977]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service has published a strategy for 2001–04. Milestones and key performance targets are set out in SBS's annual business plan. The annual operational targets for SBS are announced in the House.

The strategy and business plan are available on www.sbs.gov.uk.

Post Office Staff

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average salary of a post office sub-postmaster is in *(a)* the constituency of the Ribble Valley, and Fulwood, *(b)* Lancashire, *(c)* the North West of England, *(d)* Wales and *(e)* the United Kingdom, in each year since 1997. [36424]

Mr. Alexander: I understand from Post Office Ltd. that the average figures for sub-postmasters' remuneration were:

	£000
1997	29.8
1998	29.9
1999	30.5
2000	31.0
2001	32.1

Figures are not kept on parliamentary constituency or regional bases.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many full-time equivalents are employed by Post Office Counters Ltd. in *(a)* the parliamentary constituency of the Ribble Valley and Fulwood, *(b)* Lancashire, *(c)* the North West of England, *(d)* Wales and *(e)* the United Kingdom, in each year since 1997. [36423]

Mr. Alexander: I understand from Post Office Ltd. that in the United Kingdom, since 1997, the numbers of full-time equivalents employed by Post Office Ltd. (POL) and previously Post Office Network (PON) and Post Office Counters Ltd. (POCL) were:

As at January		
1997	POCL	14,355
1998	POCL	14,157
1999	POCL	14,254
2000	PON, Network Banking and Cash Handling and Distribution	14,391
2001	PON, Network Banking	[1]12,266
2002	POL	[2]11,983

[1] Cash Handling and Distribution reporting as a separate business.

[2] Cash Handling and Distribution not included.

Note:

Figures are not kept on constituency or regional bases.

Belize Dam

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether AMEC has applied for export credit guarantees in connection with the Belize dam project. [36521]

Ms Hewitt: We have received no application from AMEC in respect of any Belize dam project.

Small Enterprises

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the performance of the UK recorded in the European Commission report, Implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises; and if she will make a statement. [37490]

Nigel Griffiths: The UK is delighted with the European Commission's full report on the implementation of "The European Charter for Small Enterprises". The Commission calls for the European Union to 'Think Small First' when developing enterprise policies—mirroring the approach already adopted by the United Kingdom. In their examination of national enterprise policies, the Commission highlighted the following UK initiatives:

the opening of a representative office in Brussels—smallbusinessEurope, a voice by small business for small business—where the UK has been the only member state to take direct action on this element of the charter.

among the lowest costs and shortest time required to start a business in the EU

steps introduced to modernise insolvency laws and allow honest failure

the introduction of scholarships for potential entrepreneurs from deprived areas

the establishment of a Regulatory Impact Assessment system that analyses alternatives to regulation

the High Technology Fund which invests in early-stage high-technology focused funds getting businesses to trade online with tough targets

the introduction of an E-Envoy

the launching of a programme to promote links between universities and business for the commercial exploitation of university research so we make the most of our innovative potential.

A copy of the UK's report to the Commission entitled "The European Charter for Small Enterprises—A Review of relevant actions in force in the United Kingdom" was placed in the Libraries of the House in November.

The UK looks forward to a full evaluation of the report at the spring summit in Barcelona and a clear reaffirmation of the EU to fulfilling all the commitments set out in the charter.

Late Payment

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the amount of interest that has been paid *(a)* in total and *(b)* to SMEs as a result of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. [36566]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department does not hold this information, because there is no requirement for businesses to report such amounts to the Department.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. [36565]

Nigel Griffiths: This Act is part of a package of measures that the Government have put in place to change the late payment culture here. The Credit Management Research Centre (CMRC) based at Leeds University has been monitoring late payment activity in England since 1998.

The CMRC reports show that there has been a fall of almost 7.5 per cent. in the percentage of payments that are reported as being late by the businesses that they survey. This fall relates to the period between their first survey and the survey for the quarter ending June 2001. During the same period the number of debtor days for small businesses has fallen by almost 24 per cent. and the mean number of debtor days for all businesses has fallen by almost 20 per cent.

Finally, the "European Business Survey" for 2001, produced by the accountants Grant Thornton, shows the UK as having a payment period almost a week (five days) shorter than the EU average (52 days).

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she plans to introduce further measures to prevent delays in paying commercial debts. [36564]

Nigel Griffiths: We are currently working to give businesses two significant new entitlements; the right to claim reasonable debt-recovery costs without having to go to court; and the ability for grossly unfair terms and conditions that work against the intent of the late payment legislation to be challenged and their continued use prevented.

The changes will come into effect from 8 August 2002, and from that date the late payment legislation will be available to all businesses and organisations irrespective of their size. Currently only small businesses can use the legislation, although previously this right was to have been extended to all business and organisations from 1 November 2002.

Employee Statistics

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many enterprises there were with *(a)* fewer than 50, *(b)* between 50 and 249, *(c)* between 250 and 499 and *(d)* over 500 employees in each nation and region of the UK in each of the last five years; and what the percentage annual change was in each category and for each year. [37565]

Nigel Griffiths: Regional data on the number of businesses are available for the years 1997, 1998 and 1999.

	Businesses (number)			*Annual change (percentage)*		
Size (number of employees)	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
North East						
0–49	95,990	98,005	90,160	[1]—	2.1	–8.0
50–249	925	905	885	[1]—	–2.2	–2.2
250–499	130	120	110	[1]—	–7.7	–8.3
500 plus	105	110	100	[1]—	4.8	–9.1
North West						
0–49	380,325	352,620	352,740	[1]—	–7.3	0.0
50–249	2,935	2,845	2,730	[1]—	–3.1	–4.0
250–499	380	360	330	[1]—	–5.3	–8.3
500 plus	355	365	375	[1]—	2.8	2.7
Yorkshire and the Humber						
0–49	288,650	267,275	256,590	[1]—	–7.4	–4.0
50–249	2,410	2,120	2,075	[1]—	–12.0	–2.1
250–499	290	280	265	[1]—	–3.4	–5.4
500 plus	315	285	300	[1]—	–9.5	5.3
East Midlands						
0–49	237,795	226,685	232,540	[1]—	–4.7	2.6
50–249	2,080	2,010	1,895	[1]—	–3.4	–5.7
250–499	240	235	240	[1]—	–2.1	2.1
500 plus	245	265	250	[1]—	8.2	–5.7
West Midlands						
0–49	303,580	283,865	285,775	[1]—	–6.5	0.7
50–249	2,515	2,465	2,305	[1]—	–2.0	–6.5
250–499	325	330	310	[1]—	1.5	–6.1
500 plus	340	335	330	[1]—	–1.5	–1.5
East of England						
0–49	376,025	376,250	349,390	[1]—	0.1	–7.1
50–249	2,310	2,300	2,205	[1]—	–0.4	–4.1
250–499	310	305	280	[1]—	–1.6	–8.2
500 plus	320	310	325	[1]—	–3.1	4.8
London						
0–49	562,500	563,145	660,990	[1]—	0.1	17.4
50–249	3,800	3,705	3,465	[1]—	–2.5	–6.5
250–499	605	590	565	[1]—	–2.5	–4.2
500 plus	730	720	710	[1]—	–1.4	–1.4

	Businesses (number)			*Annual change (percentage)*		
Size (number of employees)	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
South East						
0–49	608,445	614,995	601,610	[1]—	1.1	-2.2
50–249	3,685	3,580	3,375	[1]—	-2.8	-5.7
250–499	485	500	475	[1]—	3.1	-5.0
500 plus	545	555	540	[1]—	1.8	-2.7
South West						
0–49	361,220	368,955	358,330	[1]—	2.1	-2.9
50–249	1,880	1,835	1,745	[1]—	-2.4	-4.9
250–499	220	240	240	[1]—	9.1	0.0
500 plus	215	225	215	[1]—	4.7	-4.4
England						
0–49	3,214,530	3,151,795	3,188,125	[1]—	-2.0	1.2
50–249	22,540	21,750	20,680	[1]—	-3.5	-4.9
250–499	2,985	2,955	2,810	[1]—	-1.0	-4.9
500 plus	3,170	3,175	3,140	[1]—	0.2	-1.1
Wales						
0–49	156,980	152,225	143,080	[1]—	-3.0	-6.0
50–249	910	890	845	[1]—	-2.2	-5.1
250–499	125	125	115	[1]—	0.0	-8.0
500 plus	90	95	95	[1]—	5.6	0.0
Scotland						
0–49	241,480	244,595	231,040	[1]—	1.3	-5.5
50–249	2,020	2,005	1,935	[1]—	-0.7	-3.5
250–499	240	235	220	[1]—	-2.1	-6.4
500 plus	255	260	240	[1]—	2.0	-7.7
Northern Ireland						
0–49	83,730	82,470	83,785	[1]—	-1.5	1.6
50–249	700	760	720	[1]—	8.6	-5.3
250–499	60	80	75	[1]—	33.3	-6.3
500 plus	45	45	40	[1]—	0.0	-11.1

[1] Not available

Source:

SME statistics for the UK 1997, 1998 and 1999

Exports

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate for each of the last five years and provide forecasts where available for the next two years, the value of exported goods by nation and region of the UK and for the UK in total. [37568]

Nigel Griffiths: Statistics on UK trade in goods, analysed by nation and region of the UK, are available from 1999 onwards only. The available information is given in the table:

Value of Exports

£ million

Region	*1999*	*2000*
Eastern	15,511	18,497
East Midlands	10,134	10,484
London	20,553	23,668
North East	5,668	6,797
North West	10,722	12,574
South East	23,865	27,717
South West	8,168	9,623
West Midlands	12,170	12,857
Yorkshire and the Humber	7,634	8,714
England	114,425	130,931
Northern Ireland	2,731	3,315
Scotland	15,649	18,221
Wales	5,918	6,416
Total	138,723	158,883

Source:

HM Customs and Excise News Release 01–2002, 17 January 2002

The Department does not make forecasts for regional exports.

Telecommunications (Liabilities)

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies granted a licence under section 10 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 have complied with the requirement under Condition 16 of Schedule 4 of their licence to have satisfied the Director General of Oftel that they have sufficient funds secured to meet any liabilities arising from their activities. [37202]

Mr. Alexander: Two operators, Orange and Vodafone, have satisfied the Director in accordance with condition 16 of their licences. Discussions are taking place between Oftel and two further operators, Energis and Telewest.

In order to improve this position and to reflect changes in the industry since the original Condition 16 arrangements were established, the Director General has had detailed discussions with both the industry and the Highway Authorities and has now completed a public consultation on proposals to change these arrangements. He hopes to commence a second public consultation shortly on a proposal for a new approach which will be easier to implement and should prove to be less costly for the companies concerned.

Postal Services

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the implications are for postal services of the judgment in Consignia plc *v.* Hays plc; and if she will make a statement. [33489]

Mr. Alexander: I understand that this matter is still before the courts. It would therefore be inappropriate to make a statement at this time. If the final decision in this case has important implications for postal services these will need to be considered in the first instance by Postcomm.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government will take to safeguard the future of postal services in rural areas. [31275]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* Under the Postal Services Act 2000 the postal regulator the Postal Services Commission (Postcomm) has the primary duty to ensure the provision of a universal postal service. The obligation consists of a service provided at an affordable price determined by a public tariff uniform throughout the UK and includes the delivery each working day to the home or premises of every individual in the UK and a collection each working day from access points.

Subject to this primary responsibility Postcomm is also under a duty to exercise its functions in the manner which it considers is best calculated to further the interests of users of postal services, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition between postal operators. In performing this secondary duty Postcomm shall have regard to the interests of, amongst others, individuals residing in rural areas.

Currently Postcomm requires Consignia plc, in the licence to provide a universal postal service. Subject to Consignia's universal service obligations, the number and timing of deliveries is an operational issue for Consignia.

Broadband

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether the Broadband Fund has received clearance from the European Commission as required by the state aid regulations; [33753]

(2) what *(a)* technical support and *(b)* state aid regulations compliance support is being provided to the South West Regional Development Agency by her Department to assist them in the construction of their policy for broadband deployment in the South West. [33743]

Mr. Alexander: Although the Broadband Fund has not been notified to the European Commission, any expenditure therefrom, to the extent that it amounts to state aid within the meaning of Article 87(1) of the EC Treaty, will have to be in conformity with the block exemption regulations or alternatively notified to, and approved by, the Commission.

The responsibilities of an RDA Accounting Officer encompass ensuring compliance with the EC rules on state aids. Advice and guidance on compliance is available to all public sector bodies from the State Aid Policy Unit in the Department. In particular, this Unit publishes "European Community State Aids—Guidance for All Departments and Agencies".

All projects under the UK Broadband Fund have been developed in consultation with DTI officials, although use of funds is a matter for SWRDA.

Road Bridges

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to ensure that contractors accessing pylons under construction are not endangering road bridges over railways. [37635]

Mr. Wilson: I have had no such discussions.

Sellafield

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how much caesium-147 is stored in above-ground tanks at the BNFL reprocessing plant at Sellafield; [37701]

(2) when the tanks used to store high-level radioactive waste at the BNFL B215 facility at Sellafield were constructed; and what projections were made regarding their useful and safe lifespan at the time of construction; [37697]

(3) if she will make a statement on arrangements for the storage of high-level radioactive waste at the BNFL B215 facility at Sellafield. [37696]

Mr. Wilson: The liquid high-level radioactive waste (Highly Active Liquid (HAL)) held at the B215 facility at Sellafield contains essentially all the radioactive isotopes produced in a nuclear reactor. This includes caesium 137 which is estimated to account for approximately a quarter of the total activity contained in the HAL. The total amount of HAL kept in the highly active storage tanks at any one time is related primarily to (1) the total amount of HAL arising from spent fuel reprocessed at Sellafield and (2) the amount of HAL that is converted from liquid form into vitrified form (solid glass blocks).

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published a number of detailed reports by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) on the safety of storage of liquid high level waste (HLW) at Sellafield. The report published by HSE in February 2000 assesses the key safety issues associated with HLW storage at Sellafield and the actions to be taken to reduce the stocks of liquid waste contained in the tanks to buffer volumes by the agreed target date of 2015. This report and an addendum to it that was published by HSE in August 2001 are in the Libraries of the House. The February 2000 report includes at appendix B a detailed outline of the history of HLW storage at Sellafield. From this it can be seen that the first eight tanks at B215 were commissioned in 1955 with a further 13 commissioned during the period between 1970 and 1990.

There is no projected design lifespan for the highly active storage tanks. BNFL and HSE monitor them carefully to ensure that no factors have arisen that might affect their continued safe operation. To ensure defence in-depth for the continued safe operation of the HASTs, the NII continues to require BNFL to maintain one in four of the tanks in reserve as spares.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has received concerning the adequacy of current security provision at BNFL's B215 facility at Sellafield, with particular reference to waste storage containers. [37700]

Mr. Wilson: I responded on 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 541W to a question on this matter from my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) and the Minister for Industry and Energy responded to a question from the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 511W which concerned intermediate and high level nuclear waste storage facilities. There have also been a number of letters from hon. Members on behalf of their constituents including references to high level waste storage at Sellafield as well as a few letters received direct from the public and one from the Isle of Man Government received in January through the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Statutory Social and Environmental Guidelines

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department will issue the statutory social and environmental guidelines to the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority. [37699]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is looking afresh at the draft social and environmental guidance in the light of the Energy Review report published on 14 February by the Performance and Innovation Unit. The report has implications for the guidance, and will need to be considered carefully. Once that process has been undertaken, we will be in a better position to assess the timing for issue of the guidance.

CHP

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure that the Government's CHP target is reflected in her Department's aims and objectives with particular reference to guidelines on sustainable development; and when she plans to issue them to the non-Ministerial Government departments for which she is responsible. [37703]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 February 2001 to PQ No. 35387.

Construction Industry Certification Scheme

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will encourage the Construction Industry Certification Scheme to recognise the Rolo Scheme launched by the British Association of Landscape Industries; [37623]

(2) what discussions she has had with the Chairman of the Construction Industry Certification Scheme following their refusal to recognise the Registration of Landbased Operatives Scheme launched by the British Association of Landscape Industries. [37624]

Mr. Wilson: It is the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) and not the Construction Industry Certification Scheme to which I believe the hon. Gentleman is referring. There has been no ministerial contact with the Chairman of CSCS following their refusal to permit the affiliation of the registration of Landbased Operatives Scheme (ROLO) launched by the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI). Both BALI and CSCS are independent organisations. CSCS has set down affiliation criteria which the ROLO scheme has not satisfied. It would however, be inappropriate for Government to intervene in this matter. However, as Minister for construction, I welcome all initiatives which seek to improve skills competence, training and health and safety.

Developing Countries

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when and in what format the results of the work by the World Bank on the effects of services liberalisation on developing countries, funded by her Department, will be made available. [37861]

Ms Hewitt: World Bank work in this area is being supported with funding by the Department for International Development. The work undertaken as part of the project is continually updated on the World Bank website www.wto.org.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of TRIPs royalties on developing countries' debt repayments. [37943]

Ms Hewitt: Any royalties or licence fees paid in developing countries in respect of intellectual property rights would be commercial matters between private parties and as such should not directly impact on debt repayment by national governments.

GATS

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether Article VI of the GATS will apply to all service sectors. [37862]

Ms Hewitt: This is one of the issues to be resolved in the current WTO services negotiations.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has made to WTO members on the drafting of a clarification of the GATS exclusion of public services. [37860]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has met a number of WTO members informally on this issue. In principle the Government are open to clarification of this provision if it can be achieved without creating new areas of uncertainty.

Domestic Subsidies

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the export and trade-distorting domestic subsidies that were discussed at the Doha ministerial meeting on trade of November 2001. [37857]

Ms Hewitt: The reference to export and trade-distorting subsidies can be found in the section of the 5th Ministerial Declaration relating to Agriculture. Without prejudging the outcome, member Governments have committed themselves to comprehensive negotiations aimed at the reduction, with a view to phasing out, all forms of exports subsidies for agriculture and substantial reductions for domestic supports in agriculture that distort trade.

It was also agreed at the WTO 5th ministerial meeting in Doha to proceed with negotiations on fisheries subsidies and aimed at clarifying and improving disciplines under the Agreements on Implementation of Art VI GATT and Subsidies and Countervailing Measures.

WTO

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the mechanisms by which the agreement that the WTO Special and Differential Treatment system should become a more integral part of trade negotiations, reached at the Doha Ministerial meeting on trade of November 2001, will be implemented. [37859]

Ms Hewitt: The 'Decision on Implementation Related Issues and Concerns', agreed at Doha, instructed the WTO Committee on Trade and Development to consider the status and effective operation of existing Special and Differential Treatment provisions and to report to the General Council with clear recommendations for a Decision by July 2002 and, within the context of the work programme agreed at Doha, to consider how Special and Differential Treatment may be incorporated into the architecture of WTO rules. Discussions in the Committee on Trade and Development are ongoing.

As set out in the White Paper, 'Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalisation Work for the Poor', we will be arguing for the EU to support approaches that recognise even more explicitly than at present that WTO Members are at different stages of development.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the steps necessary for the WTO to be more transparent and open and its rules easier to understand. [37856]

Ms Hewitt: The Doha Ministerial Declaration, agreed by all members of the WTO in November 2001, recognised the challenges posed by an expanding membership, and confirmed the need to ensure internal transparency within the organisation and the effective participation of all members in the decision making process. Members also committed themselves to making the WTO's operations more transparent to outside parties, including through better dissemination of information and improved dialogue with the public.

I support the need for such measures in order to maintain confidence in the multilateral trading system.

Offshore Wind Farms (Fishing)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the safety implications for *(a)* vessels and *(b)* wind turbines, of fishing within an offshore wind farm; and if she will impose exclusion zones. [37748]

Mr. Wilson: I have not undertaken a broad safety assessment in relation to windfarms and fishing interests as the implications will vary from site to site. Safety will be a matter that I and other regulators will look at carefully when considering specific proposals which may include exclusion zones, and will of course also be a key consideration by the developers themselves.

Unified Science Strategy

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will establish a unified science strategy for the UK. [37750]

Ms Hewitt: The Science and Innovation White Paper—"Excellence and Opportunity: A science and innovation policy for the 21st century"—was published in July 2000. It set out the Government's strategy for building on the UK's record of scientific excellence, and for ensuring that the outputs from scientific research are harnessed in innovative products and services that will yield economic and social benefits for the people of the UK.

One of the commitments in the White Paper was that each Government Department should publish a science and innovation strategy setting out the broad framework within which science and technology are used to meet its policy objectives. These science and innovation strategies, with complementary material from the Research Councils and the devolved Administrations, were the theme for "The Forward Look 2001 of Government-funded science, engineering and technology", published in December 2001, which provides an overview of the Government's approach to the use of science and technology and priorities for expenditure.

The Government have also established a new Cabinet Ministerial Committee on Science Policy, which I chair, to look across the board at the Government's policies in relation to scientific advances and the public's acceptance of them.

RRS Darwin

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she plans to replace the RRS Darwin; and if she will make a statement. [37749]

Ms Hewitt: Following approval by the Natural Environment Research Council of the science and business cases for the replacement of the RRS Charles Darwin, the project will be considered, alongside other research spending priorities, in the context of the present spending review. It is anticipated that the procurement of the new ship would take approximately four years.

Queen Elizabeth's Foundation

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations she has received on the planned closure of the Bradmere house factory in Leatherhead by the Queen Elizabeth's Foundation; [30032]

(2) if she will make a statement on the reasons for the changes in Government funding for the Queen Elizabeth's Foundation. [30033]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

We have been in contact with representatives of the Queen Elizabeth's Foundation and have asked to be kept informed of the progress of the consultation they are conducting regarding the future of the Bradmere house factory. We intend to work with the Foundation to consider all the options for securing the future employment of the disabled people who work at the factory.

The funding arrangements for residential training contracts changed from advance to arrears payments in April 2000. This change was made to bring the funding arrangements in line with Government accounting procedures, which require all activities funded through contracts to be paid in arrears. The system for the arrears payment is much simpler and providers were expected to be able save on administration costs.

All residential training providers were informed of this change in writing in January 2000 and arrangements were made for advance payments to be reconciled by June 2000. The introduction of the change was staggered through the first quarter of the financial year 2000–01 to ease any short-term difficulties.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Women's Unit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for Women what budgetary provision there is for the current financial year for the cost of the Women and Equality Unit. [37147]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The budget for the Women's Unit at the start of the year, on 1 April 2001 was £2.2 million.

Following the general election, in June 2001, the budget increased to £11.4 million when the unit took on new responsibilities for gender equality, co-ordination of sexual orientation policy and sponsorship of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

DEFENCE

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change the departmental expenditure limits for 2001–02. [38464]

Mr. Ingram: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the Ministry of Defence Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £813,795,000 from £23,876,578,000 to £24,690,373,000. Within the Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

	£000
Resources	
Change	663,096
New DEL	19,034,434
of which:	
Voted	18,733,640
Non-voted	300,794
Capital	
Change	150,699
New DEL	5,655,939
of which:	
Voted	5,596,969
Non-voted	58,970

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

An increase of £356,761,000 for conflict prevention activities in Bosnia, Kosovo, the Gulf, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan.

Transfers of £261,594,000 from capital to resource DEL.

A transfer from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions of £3,435,000 for royal travel.

A transfer from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of £1,154,000 for the British Defence Staff in Washington.

A transfer to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of £125,000 for an increase in the MOD's contribution to the running costs on Ascension Island.

A transfer from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of £12,045,000 for conflict prevention activities.

A transfer from the Department for International Development of £3,500,000 for conflict prevention activities.

An increase in cash release from provisions of £25,400,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

An increase of £47,766,000 for urgent operational requirements for conflict prevention activities.

An increase of £305,927,000, which is in partial anticipation of a successful PPP for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

A bringing forward from FY 2003–04 of £97,400,000 for the Defence Logistic Organisation Business Change Programme.

A reduction of £38,800,000 in trading fund capital expenditure as a result of the vesting of QinetiQ as a self-financing public corporation on 1 July 2001.

Transfers to resource DEL of £261,594,000.

The increase will be offset by inter-department transfers and charges to the DEL reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The total amount included in spring supplementary estimates for the UK military commitment in Afghanistan is £261,000,000 (Resource DEL £195,000,000, Capital DEL £57,000,000 and Annually Managed Expenditure £9,000,000). This figure includes the cost of munitions consumed and represents the total estimated additional cost of operations in 2001–02 over and above the cost of planned activities.

Terrorism

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the Government have made available to his Department for urgent operational requirements for the campaign against international terrorism. [38465]

Mr. Ingram: I am pleased to announce that the Treasury has agreed to make available from the Reserve a further £55 million for urgent operational requirements for the campaign against international terrorism. This is in addition to the £100 million that the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on 27 November 2001 in his pre-Budget report.

The urgent operational requirements that this funding allows us to meet include: equipment to improve our ability to work with the US and other allies, such as additional secure communications equipment; enhancements to our intelligence capabilities; and a range of small but significant enhancements to our forces for operations in the campaign against international terrorism.

Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library an unclassified summary of the report of the Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme. [38466]

Mr. Hoon: I have done so.

Defence Bills Agency

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Defence Bills Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [38467]

Dr. Moonie: Targets have been set for the Defence Bills Agency for the financial year 2002–03 in accordance with the agency's Service Level Agreement with the Ministry of Defence. The key targets build on the already high standards of service provided by the agency since its formation in 1996 and are as follows:

(a) To make a progressive reduction in the unit costs of output for bills and invoices of 10 per cent. and 5 per cent. respectively by March 2003 over the target set for 2001–02.

(b) Produce accounting and financial information to the ISO 9001–2000 quality standard and to the times set out at Annexes B and C of the Service Level Agreement.

(c) To pay 100 per cent. of correctly presented bills within 11 calendar days of receipt as part of the Department's 30-day payment target.

(d) To raise 97 per cent. of invoices accurately within four days of receipt of a correctly authorised claimable document.

(e) Within the permitted tolerances, meet the performance targets prescribed at Annexe B of the Service Level Agreement.

(f) To make a progressive improvement of at least 1 per cent. in the overall level of customer satisfaction over the target set for 2001–02.

Skynet 5 Programme

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Skynet 5 programme. [38468]

Dr. Moonie: I am delighted to announce that Paradigm has today been selected as the preferred bidder for the Skynet 5 project. This is the largest Ministry of Defence Private Finance Initiative project to have reached the preferred bidder stage, and will deliver the next generation of satellite communications services for Britain's armed forces. The Skynet 5 solution will be based on a constellation of at least two satellites, which will be owned and operated by Paradigm. We expect to place a contract with Paradigm later this year, with an initial service being provided from 2005. In preparation for this, Paradigm will take over responsibility in 2003 for the existing Skynet 4 capability. The PFI approach offers significantly better value for money when compared to the whole life costs of a conventional acquisition. The Skynet 5 project will provide UK industry with valuable high technology work, and we expect that around 1,500 jobs will be created or sustained.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters in each grade (1) in the UK are available to the Defence Housing Executive; and how many service families are entitled to quarters in each grade; [35645]

(2) overseas are available to the Defence Housing Executive; and how many service families are entitled to quarters in each grade. [35646]

Dr. Moonie: Married personnel in the armed forces are entitled to a quarter. The type of quarter (i.e. its size, design and number of rooms) to which a married service person is entitled is determined mainly by rank for officers and mainly by family size for other ranks. Family housing in mainland UK is managed by the Defence Housing Executive (DHE) whereas that in Northern Ireland and overseas is managed by the relevant service authorities. A breakdown by Type of the family housing stock is shown in the table.

Figures for numbers of entitled service families are not readily available in the form requested. However, many personnel do not take up their entitlement to family housing, preferring to buy their own. The DHE does not normally house entitled personnel in houses of a type below their entitlement: instead, additional houses are rented by the Ministry of Defence on an ad hoc basis where necessary to meet entitlement.

	Officers						*Other Ranks*					
Type	*I*[1]	*II*	*III*	*IV*	*V*	*Total*	*D*[1]	*C*	*B*	*A*	*Total*	*Grand Total*
UK Mainland	69	370	1,920	3,949	5,119	11,427	3,640	25,530	13,897	—	43,067	54,494
Northern Ireland	1	20	69	124	207	421	207	1,751	851	14	2,823	3,244
Gibraltar	0	4	13	54	67	138	0	195	227	39	461	599
Falkland Island[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	36
Germany[3]	7	11	514	1,223	990	2,745	805	571	4,777	78	6,231	8,976
Cyprus[3]	1	4	67	172	256	500	40	203	653	—	896	1,396
Belize	—	—	—	3	4	7	—	14	—	—	14	21
Brunei[2,3]	—	—	—	—	—	24	—	—	—	—	425	449
Canada[3]	—	—	1	1	1	3	9	65	57	—	131	134
Total	9	39	664	1,577	1,525	3,838	1,061	2,799	6,565	131	10,981	14,855

[1] Largest

[2] Not assessed by type

[3] Includes hirings

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much expenditure earmarked for single living accommodation maintenance was diverted to high priority items in the last financial year. [36823]

Dr. Moonie: Responsibility for the allocation of maintenance expenditure is delegated to top level budget holders, though they are guided by the high priority we attach to improving single living accommodation, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in March last year. The nature of property maintenance expenditure means that it is difficult in practice to attribute it precisely between single living accommodation and other areas. This information could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Service Attributable Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Army service personnel have been granted service attributable pensions under the armed forces pension scheme since 1973; [32682]

(2) how many Army *(a)* war disablement pensions and *(b)* service attributable pensions were correctly treated for tax purposes since (i) 1973 and (ii) the earliest point for which he has recently examined the records; [32681]

(3) how many service personnel records remain to be examined in the effort to identify Army *(a)* war disablement pensions and *(b)* service attributable pensions which have been incorrectly treated for tax purposes; [32680]

(4) what estimate he has made of the number of identified cases where tax has been incorrectly deducted from war disablement pensions and service attributable pensions; and if he will make a statement. [32679]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* War Disablement Pensions (WDP) were recognised as being tax-free both before 1973 and since. As WDPs are exempt from tax, the War Pensions Agency has no mechanism to deduct tax and no record of any deductions. There may have been occasional individual problems with regard to tax affecting WDPs but we are aware of none.

We would need to conduct a manual search of current and closed pension files in order to identify the number of Army Service Attributable Pensions (SAP) correctly treated for tax purposes since 1973. The current problem has arisen principally with respect to Service Invaliding Pensions (SIP). It is possible, however, that in a small number of Army cases an error may have arisen for SAPs in those cases where the scheme rules require the SAP to be paid at the SIP rate where the latter is higher. This is because the pension will have been recorded as a SIP within our computer systems and Inland Revenue may have been advised of eligibility for tax on that basis.

The number of SIP cases identified as a result of our review of the some 20,000 relevant live Army pension files, following recognition of the error in 1998, is as set out.

	Pre-1973	*Post-1973*	*Totals*
Pensioners	182	795	977
Widow(er)s	24	2	26
Estates	nil	nil	nil
Totals	206	797	1,003

We do not consider it practicable to conduct a search of the very large number of Army pension files where the recipient is now deceased. We are in the process of conducting a sample search of those files dating from the 1940s where we have been able to establish that a SIP might have been in payment and might therefore have been incorrectly taxed. This work should be completed shortly and should provide a clearer perspective on the scope of the problem. It has not so far proved practicable to, similarly, identify 'at risk' cases before this period.

For those cases where the pensioner is deceased, as well as for any other cases where a pensioner or spouse considers that his/her pension was incorrectly taxed, we have invited claims support by basic service identification. We will consider these claims as quickly as possible.

We expect the numbers of outstanding cases where SIPs/SAPs were wrongly taxed to be small as, to qualify for such a pension, personnel had to serve 14 years before 1945, 12 years before 1973 and 5 years before 1988. This would exclude those who only served as conscripts, volunteers or national servicemen, as well as many regulars.

Unmanned Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what involvement his Department has had with the development of unmanned aircraft; with which partner countries; how much has been spent in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [36952]

Dr. Moonie: The Phoenix system, the Ministry of Defence only in-service unmanned air vehicle (UAV), entered service in 1998. Development of future UAV capability is being pursued through two projects: "Watchkeeper", which is planned to deliver a tactical UAV towards the end of this decade; and the Future Offensive Air System (FOAS) programme, where we are assessing the feasiblity of UAVs contributing to our future strike capability from about 2020 onwards.

The MOD's expenditure on UAV development over the last three years was approximately £9 million in 1999–2000, £17 million in 2000–01, and £18 million in 2001–02. This does not include the cost of broader-based research, which could bring benefit in due course to a range of capability areas including UAVs.

To date, our UAV development work has been conducted on a national basis. However, we have recently initiated information exchanges with the USA, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Norway and Australia in order to support our mutual interests in UAV development, acquisition, and operation.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on the *(a)* organic air vehicle and *(b)* micro air vehicle development in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [36951]

Dr. Moonie: I assume the hon. Member is referring to unmanned aerial vehicles and that the term organic air vehicles relates to small UAVs developed as an integral part of a military platform. Against this common understanding, there has been no expenditure by the Ministry of Defence specifically on the development of organic or micro air vehicles in the last three years. There are elements of the research programme that may in the longer term prove applicable to organic or micro air vehicles but no specific apportionment of expenditure is possible.

Private Military Companies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many private military companies have been employed by the Government since 1997; and in what capacity. [37172]

Mr. Ingram: Ministry of Defence records do not separately identify contracts with "private military companies". As the Command Paper "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation" published by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 12 February makes clear, the term "private military company" covers a wide range of people, corporations and activities. The MOD has and continues to seek the involvement of private sector companies who can provide assistance with military support activities, for example maintenance and training. Types of activity where the MOD is involving the private sector in public-private partnerships were listed in my answer to the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1082–84W.

Armed Forces Personnel (Northern Ireland)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers there were in Northern Ireland, excluding those troops under the command of the GOC NI that were based in Great Britain, at 31 December in each of the last five years. [37689]

Mr. Ingram: The number of armed forces personnel (Army, Navy and RAF), under the command of the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland (GOC NI), stationed in Northern Ireland for the last five years are set out in the table:

As at 31 December	*Number of armed force personnel*
1997	16,082
1998	14,983
1999	14,319
2000	13,763
2001	13,595

As already explained on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 995W, the GOC NI also has under his command troops that are rear based in Great Britain that can be called forward to the Province as and when required. In addition other troops can be made available to the GOC NI from Land Command if required, for example during the marching season.

Missiles

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* ASRAAM, *(b)* Storm Shadow and *(c)* Brimstone missiles will be available for operational service. [35650]

Dr. Moonie: ASRAAM is in service and is available for use now if need but safety, training, integration and other clearance activities mean that we are unlikely to deploy the missile before this summer.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to purchase upgraded Tomahawk cruise missiles from the US Administration. [36553]

Dr. Moonie: The United Kingdom has already purchased some remanufactured Tomahawk land attack missiles to replace those used during the Kosovo campaign. A contract for a further purchase has recently been signed. No decision has yet been taken on whether the UK should purchase the next generation, Tactical Tomahawk, missile.

Eurofighter

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the RAF will take delivery of its Eurofighter aircraft. [35647]

Dr. Moonie: The RAF is expecting to receive its first Eurofighter aircraft in June this year. Given the inherent risks in a programme of this size and complexity, we have sought confirmation from industry that the programme remains achievable.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects training of pilots and ground crew to fly and service the Eurofighter to begin; and if he will make a statement. [37660]

Dr. Moonie: On current plans ground crew training will begin in September 2002. Aircrew ground-based training will commence in May 2002. Flying training in Eurofighter will commence when aircraft are available. Deliveries are due to commence in June but we recognise the risks to this date and our planning is sufficiently flexible to accommodate delay if necessary.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated final cost is of the 232 Eurofighters that have been ordered; and if he will make a statement. [37666]

Dr. Moonie: The estimated final cost of the Eurofighter procurement programme for the Royal Air Force, based on 232 aircraft, is £18,869 million. This figure excludes initial in-service support. Fifty-five aircraft have so far been ordered for the RAF. Detailed costings are provided in the National Audit Office's Major Project Report 2001, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much is being withheld on the Eurofighter contract; when his Department expects the money to be released to the contractor; and if he will make a statement. [37667]

Dr. Moonie: Payments on Eurofighter contracts are made when milestones are achieved. Some milestones are overdue, but the value of payments relating to those milestones is commercially sensitive. Therefore, I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information that relates to third party commercial confidences.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Eurofighter programme agreed milestones, from development to in-service at full squadron strength; and if he will make a statement. [37668]

Dr. Moonie: The main development contracts were placed in 1988 and the first development aircraft flight took place in 1994. In 1995, the contracts were re-orientated following the end of the Cold War, and the production contracts were awarded in 1998. The next major milestone will be the first flight of an instrumented production aircraft, trials of which will permit acceptance into service of series production aircraft. Royal Air Force Eurofighters will initially operate from the BAES site at Warton before the first squadron forms at RAF Coningsby in 2004. Full operational capability is expected to be achieved during the second half of the decade.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Ministers were first informed of problems relating to foreign suppliers with regard to the Eurofighter programme; what action was taken; and if he will make a statement. [37659]

Dr. Moonie: Eurofighter is a collaborative project involving many companies from all four partner nations. The Eurofighter prime contracts are with international industrial consortiums based in Germany. In working with the prime contractors to resolve problems we do not distinguish between UK and non-UK suppliers.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the contract penalties to the prime contractor are relating to the missing of development and contractual milestones in respect of the Eurofighter programme; and if he will make a statement. [37665]

Dr. Moonie: Eurofighter contract payments are subject to the achievement of milestones, and liquidated damages apply if aircraft deliveries are delayed. The amounts involved are commercially sensitive and I am withholdng this information in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information that relates to third party commercial confidences.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contingency plans he has made in the event that the Eurofighter programme is delayed; and if he will make a statement. [37664]

Dr. Moonie: Eurofighter is not expected to begin displacing existing front line aircraft for some time. If the build-up of Eurofighter capability is delayed, there is scope for existing aircraft to continue in service.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what briefings by his Department's staff have been given to hon. Members on the Eurofighter programme in the last six months; which hon. Members have been sent briefings; when the briefings were sent out; and if he will make a statement. [37670]

Dr. Moonie: The hon. Members for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) received oral briefings as part of a visit to the Royal Air Force at High Wycombe on 13 December 2001. The briefings were wide ranging and included references to Eurofighter.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when his Department was first informed of delays to the Eurofighter programme; and if he will make a statement; [37661]

(2) what ministerial action was taken once his Department was informed of the delays to the Eurofighter programme; when it was taken; and if he will make a statement. [37662]

Dr. Moonie: The prime contractors have not formally advised the Ministry of Defence that delivery of the first Eurofighter to the Royal Air Force will be delayed. Nevertheless, we know through our continuous monitoring of industry's progress that achieving the June in-service date is becoming increasingly challenging. The risk of delay is not unusual in a project of this size and complexity, but we have made it clear that we expect the prime contractors to take all necessary action to mitigate this risk.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost to his Department of expenditure on the Eurofighter programme has been to date; and if he will make a statement. [37663]

Dr. Moonie: Expenditure to the end of January 2002 totalled £6,300 million.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what variations have been made since the contract for the Eurofighter programme was first signed; and if he will make a statement. [37669]

Dr. Moonie: There have been no significant variations to the Eurofighter aircraft specification or contracts since re-orientation of the programme in 1995 to take account of the changed strategic context following the end of the cold war.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if BAE Systems face penalty payments in connection with the Eurofighter programme. [37167]

Dr. Moonie: The prime contract for Eurofighter, which is with Eurofighter GmbH of which BAE Systems own 33 per cent., includes provision for liquidated damages to be paid in the event that deliveries are delayed. In addition, payments on the contract are made only when milestones and deliveries are achieved.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what arrangements will be followed to introduce the Eurofighter into RAF service; and if he will make a statement; [37164]

(2) if he will make a statement on the timetable of events which will lead to the introduction into service of the Eurofighter Typhoon. [37165]

Dr. Moonie: Instrumented production aircraft flights, which provide technical information on performance and safety, are expected to commence in March and will allow the first series production aircraft to be accepted and operated by the Royal Air Force. Arrangements for the introduction to service include the setting up of facilities at BAES's Warton site to support operation of the aircraft during its initial months in service, and the establishment of a Royal Air Force unit at Warton for initial training and operational evaluation. Thereafter, Royal Air Force units will be established at Coningsby in 2004, followed by Leeming and Leuchars. Full operational employment of the aircraft is planned to take place during the second half of the decade.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the projected in-service dates for the Eurofighter will be achieved; [37166]

(2) if he expects delays to the in-service date for the Eurofighter; and if he will make a statement. [37168]

Dr. Moonie: Industry is working hard to achieve the June 2002 delivery date called for in the contract, and we continue to emphasise its importance. Nevertheless, we know through our continuous monitoring of industry's progress that achieving the June in-service date is becoming increasingly challenging.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the cost of Eurofighter has increased; and if he will make a statement. [37691]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the detailed explanation of cost changes on the Eurofighter programme that was included in the National Audit Office's Major Project Report 2001, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Fair Trade Goods

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 13W, on Fair Trade goods, if he will increase the amount of fairly traded goods used in his Department. [35459]

Dr. Moonie: My answer of 19 November remains extant because EU rules dictate that we seek the best price in the open market, consistent with our quality standard. If Fair Trade goods meet the necessary criteria, they will be considered in competition with similar products from other countries.

Type 45 Destroyer

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the armament of the Type 45 Destroyer will be; and what plans there are for a land attack capability for surface warships. [35719]

Dr. Moonie: With reference to the Type 45's armament, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 232W to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies).

We are considering whether a contribution to land attack capability is required from the Type 45 Anti-Air Warfare Destroyer (which might be provided through a larger calibre gun or land attack missiles), and in the longer term from the Future Surface Combatant. This is in the context of the land attack capability of our submarines, and the marked increase in maritime offensive air power planned with the introduction of the Future Aircraft Carrier and Future Joint Combat Aircraft.

RAF Chilmark

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of *(a)* decontamination and *(b)* other identified works at the site of former RAF Chilmark. [36154]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of clearing explosive ordnance over five years since the closure of the former RAF Chilmark is approximately £1.7 million. The average annual cost of providing maintenance works and upkeep to those parts of the former RAF Chilmark still owned by the Ministry of Defence is £100,000.

Directed Energy Weapons

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evaluation has been made of directed energy weapons; what joint studies on the development of such weapons have taken place; and if he will make a statement. [36953]

Dr. Moonie: The importance of utilising technology to create battle winning forces is a key theme of the Strategic Defence Review. Directed Energy Technology offers a potentially significant military enhancement to our forces but it is just one area of technology development currently being assessed.

This assessment is taking place within the boundaries laid down by conventions and international law.

The MOD investigate Directed Energy Weapons in order to identify potential technologies that may meet joint capability requirements. Details of programmes are classified and I am therefore withholding disclosure of this information under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Floor Covering Contracts (Military Installations)

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tendering process was employed prior to the award of contracts to supply floor coverings to military facilities with effect from the end of 2001. [36765]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has used OGCbuying.solutions as its contracting agent for a range of stores including floor coverings since 1991. OGCbuying.solutions (formerly The Buying Agency) awards all its contracts on the basis of rigorous competitive tendering which is compliant with legislative requirements, fitness for purpose, defined performance standards and best value for money.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason a single contract for the provision of carpeting to all military installations in the United Kingdom and overseas was awarded. [36766]

Dr. Moonie: There is no single contract for the provision of carpeting to all military installations in the UK and overseas.

Future Command and Liaison Vehicle

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in introducing the Army's Future Command and Liaison Vehicle; and if he will make a statement. [36552]

Dr. Moonie: The Future Command and Liaison Vehicle is in its assessment phase. Work is continuing, in conjunction with industry, to identify and reduce areas of risk, and to finalise the requirement. Once the trials are complete and the results have been assessed, we plan to issue an Invitation to Tender later this year.

Post-combat Trauma

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the paper published in the *British Medical Journal* of 8 February concerning post-conflict trauma. [36467]

Dr. Moonie: The paper "Post-combat Syndromes from the Boer War to the Gulf War: A Cluster Analysis of their Nature and Attribution" is a valuable contribution to understanding post-combat health. The researchers concluded that all modern conflicts have been associated with post-combat disorders characterised by unexplained medical symptoms and that the form that these assume, the terms used to describe them and the explanations offered, seem to be influenced by advances in medical science, changes in the nature of warfare and underlying cultural forces. These findings will be taken into account as we continue to evolve our policies, procedures and practices for managing health issues in the armed forces.

Heavy Lift Aircraft

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether heavy lift aircraft in use by the RAF are equipped with defensive aids and counter measures; and whether he intends that heavy lift aircraft *(a)* leased and *(b)* purchased for the RAF in future programmes will be equipped with defensive aids and counter measures. [37289]

Mr. Ingram: Aircraft are equipped with a defensive capability commensurate with the assessed level of threat of the environment in which they are expected to operate. However, disclosure of detailed information about the defensive capabilities of aircraft would be operationally sensitive. I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to national security and defence.

Territorial Army (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Territorial Army reside in Scotland; and what the equivalent figure was in each of the last five years. [37387]

Dr. Moonie: The number of Territorial Army personnel currently residing in Scotland as at 1 January 2002 is shown in the table.

Officers	*Soldiers*	*Total*
565	4,178	4,743

I regret that the Ministry of Defence does not hold equivalent historical data in the form required by the hon. Member.

Low Flying (Wind Farms)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions his Department was notified of wind-power developments proposed within low-flying training areas; and on how many occasions his Department *(a)* took no action and *(b)* prevented the proposal proceeding in the last five years. [37255]

Dr. Moonie: During the last five years the Ministry of Defence have been consulted on a total of 44 windfarm proposals within tactical training areas (where military fast jet and Hercules transport aircraft may fly down to 100 ft minimum separation distance from the ground or any other object). A full appraisal has always been carried out on each proposal. Of the 44 proposals submitted we have had no objections to 10 and have objected to 34.

Firing Range Safety

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the minimum safe distance between a live firing range and a public road. [37385]

Mr. Ingram: The minimum safe distance between a live firing range and a public road is determined by the type of live firing activity on the range.

A safe distance between a live firing range and a public road is maintained by applying the appropriate danger area for the live firing activity and ensuring that any hazard is contained well within the range boundary. If there is a public road within a range boundary, it is closed to the public for the duration of any hazard caused by the live firing.

Surplus Equipment

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what surplus military equipment the UK has *(a)* given and *(b)* sold at discount values to (i) Estonia and (ii) Slovenia in the last three years; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [3[illegible]20]

Dr. Moonie: No surplus military equipment has been given or sold at discount values by the United Kingdom to either Estonia or Slovenia during the past three years.

Faslane

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many police officers were deployed at Faslane on *(a)* 8, *(b)* 11, *(c)* 12 and *(d)* 13 February; and how many MOD Police officers have been deployed at the Faslane base in each of the last 12 months. [37256]

Dr. Moonie: I am withholding details of the number of Ministry of Defence Police officers deployed at HMNB Clyde in accordance with Exemption 1 (defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I can confirm, however, that additional MDP officers were deployed on 11, 12 and 13 February 2002 at HMNB Clyde in response to planned demonstrator activity.

Inflight Refuelling Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to outsource the inflight refuelling services of the Royal Air Force; how many *(a)* aircraft and *(b)* service personnel are involved with that outsourcing; and which (i) companies and (ii) consortiums are involved in bidding for such services. [37827]

Dr. Moonie: The future Strategic Tanker Aircraft (FSTA) is planned to replace our VC10 and TriStar air to air refuelling/air transport aircraft from around 2007. Two consortiums have submitted bids for this prospective PFI programme. They are AirTanker Ltd., comprising Rolls Royce, Cobham, Halliburton, EADS and Thales; and the Tanker Transport Service Company Ltd., which comprises BAE Systems, Boeing, Serco and Spectrum Capital. A mix of Regular RAF, Sponsored Reservist and civilian personnel are expected to operate and support the FSTA service. We are currently engaged in preliminary negotiations with both consortiums and expect to decide later this year whether PFI offers the best value for money and, if it does, which of the two consortiums is our preferred bidder. It is too early to say how many Service personnel and aircraft will be involved.

Offset Agreements

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many offset agreements have been negotiated in Government to Government defence export contracts and MOUs in the last three years; and what the total value of such offset arrangements is estimated to be in the last three years. [37830]

Dr. Moonie: No offset agreements have been negotiated in Government to Government defence exports contracts or Memorandums of Understanding in the last three years.

QinetiQ

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the United States companies purchased by QinetiQ; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [37169]

Mr. Hoon: Since its creation as a company on 1 July 2001, QinetiQ has not purchased any United States companies. However, QinetiQ did form a US subsidiary last year, QinetiQ, Inc, with the aim of enhancing the growth of QinetiQ's business with government and commercial customers in the US market. In addition, QinetiQ has recently re-formed a new US company, QinetiQ Trusted Information Management, Inc, as a wholly owned subsidiary of QinetiQ, Inc.

A400M

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings have been scheduled between Ministers in his Department and their German counterparts prior to 31 March in order to discuss the A400M strategic transport aircraft programme. [37834]

Dr. Moonie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has discussed this issue with his German counterpart on several occasions. No further meetings between Ministers are currently scheduled. Senior officials however are in regular contact with their counterparts in the other participating nations.

Chinook Helicopter Crash

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make a statement on the findings of the House of Lords Select Committee on the accident to RAF Chinook HC2 ZD576. [37833]

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to issue his response to the report of the House of Lords Committee inquiry into the Chinook helicopter crash in 1994. [37758]

Mr. Ingram: Work is already under way to consider the findings of the Select Committee. When this is completed a formal response will be made to the Chairman of the Committee, Lord Jauncey, and to the House of Lords.

Deployments (Central and Eastern Europe)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many *(a)* MOD staff and *(b)* non-military staff have been involved in deployments to (i) Estonia, (ii) Lithuania and (iii) Latvia in the last three years; at what cost; and if he will make a statement; [36940]

(2) how many *(a)* MOD staff and *(b)* non-military MOD staff have been involved in deployments to (i) Albania, (ii) Romania and (iii) Slovenia in the last three years; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [37121]

Mr. Ingram: Numbers of military and Ministry of Defence civilian personnel deployed to Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia, Albania and Romania during the last three years are given in the table. The figures for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 were previously published in MOD Performance Reports (Cm5000 Annexe G and Cm5920 Annexe H). They include members of visiting training and advisory teams and resident in-country advisers. The costs shown are approximate.

	Military	*Cost £000*	*Civilian*	*Cost £000*
1999–2000				
Estonia	13	87	1	18
Lithuania	21	230	1	72
Latvia	19	121	1	36
Slovenia	—	—	—	—
Albania	—	—	—	—
Romania	6	404	1	72
2000–01				
Estonia	10	72	—	—
Lithuania	12	250	1	75
Latvia	13	116	1	75
Slovenia	—	—	1	75
Albania	—	—	—	—
Romania	2	230	1	75
2001–02				
Estonia	17	213	—	—
Lithuania	22	108	2	80
Latvia	23	107	4	84
Slovenia	1	2.5	2	80
Albania	—	—	—	—
Romania	2	240	1	78

These deployments form part of the Outreach programme in central and eastern Europe which, in turn, is part of the wider Defence Diplomacy mission. Outreach contributes to international stability by assisting countries in the region to establish democratically accountable, cost-effective armed forces capable of contributing both to national and regional security and, increasingly, to international security through participation in peace support operations.

Not all personnel taking part in Outreach activities are captured in the annually published figures. The inclusion of personnel engaged in one-off, short duration activities would distort the overall picture.

There are Defence Attachés in the British embassies in Latvia, Lithuania, Albania, Slovenia and Romania, each of which has a military assistant. They are not included in the statistics as their role is diplomatic, facilitating military assistance rather than providing it directly.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35016]

Mr. MacShane: The cost of external consultants was:

	£ million
1997–1998	15.8
1998–1999	14.5
1999–2000	14.0
2000–2001	17.9

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34987]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. D. Foster) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 717–18W.

Arms Dealing (Mr. John Bredenkamp)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has collated on the arms dealing activities of Mr. John Bredenkamp and companies associated with him in *(a)* Zimbabwe and *(b)* the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [34903]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are aware of past arms dealing activities by Mr. Bredenkamp. If any person has any information about sanctions breaking, they should inform the relevant UK authorities. I am unable to provide the information requested by my hon. Friend under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35925]

Mr. Bradshaw: Information on cases of work-related stress is not held and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost. No compensation has been paid to employees as a result of work-related stress.

As part of the Government's Revitalising Health and Safety initiative, the FCO commissioned a stress audit by external consultants, who reported in 2001. An action plan was subsequently produced to implement the consultant's recommendations. Under the direction of an action group, management courses are now being redesigned to ensure that staff are better trained to recognise and deal with work-related stress; health promotion activities have been enhanced; and ways of improving existing access to confidential advice and support are being investigated. Since these activities form part of the ongoing work of the FCO's Administration, it is impossible to identify the costs involved separately.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35887]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO is committed to reducing the number of its employees working long hours. In order to balance this commitment with the requirements of running a round-the-clock business world-wide, we have concluded an agreement on Working Time with the Trades Unions representing our employees.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and Civil Service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35837]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* We cannot divulge the exact details requested by the hon. Member without the permission of the seconding organisations. Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice to Government Information applies.

However, since May 1997 there have been 63 members of the private sector seconded into the FCO, 46 of whom did so under the Short-Term Business Attachment Scheme (STBAS). These secondees have all been appointed into middle management range posts (i. e. DS5, D6, C4). As for most forms of interchange, departments have borne their own staff's salary costs. The duration of each of these appointments has varied, from six months to four years (with the exception of STBAS which have varied from 3–12 months). The figures can be further broken down as follows:

Staff seconded to the FCO from the private sector:	
April 1997–1998	17
April 1998–1999	12
April 1999–2000	17
April 2000–2001	7
April 2001—to date	10

As part of a wider Government initiative that promotes and encourages the exchange of people and good practice between the Public and Private sectors, British Trade International actively seeks interchange partners. Interchange is very flexible, offering a range of activities that allow people from different organisations to share good practice, ideas and experience. There are real personnel development benefits as well as a strong business case for this type of activity. Before an interchange can occur all parties must be satisfied that no conflict of interest arises.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36180]

Mr. Bradshaw: There has been no industrial action by staff in this department in the UK, or in the NDPBs for which it is responsible, over the last four years.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the statutory instruments issued by his Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36233]

Mr. Straw: A list of instruments issued or originated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the purpose of each instrument is attached. To provide an assessment would incur disproportionate costs.

S.I. title	*Number*	*Purpose*
The Iraq (United Nations Sanctions) (Overseas Territories)(Amendment) 2001	2001/395	This instrument corrects an error in The Iraq (United Nations Sanctions) (Overseas Territories) 2000.
The Afghanistan (United Nations Sanctions) Order 2001	2001/396	Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1333, which came into force on 19 January 2001.
The United Nations (International Tribunals) (Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda) (Amendment) Order 2001	2001/412	To assist the International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR) in trying large numbers of accused within a reasonable time, by establishing a pool of "ad litem" judges in addition to the 14 permanent judges of the Tribunal.
The Liberia (United Nations Sanctions) (Overseas Territories) Order 2001	2001/946	The UN Security Council Resolution 1344 imposed sanctions against Liberia. This order gives effect in the Overseas Territories to the arms embargo and the ban on provision of related technical assistance and training.
The Liberia (United Nations Sanctions) Order 2001	2001/947	The UN Security Council Resolution 1344 imposed sanctions against Liberia. This order gives effect to the arms embargo and the ban on provision of related technical assistance and training.
Civil Aviation Act 1982 (Overseas Territories) Order 2001	2001/1452	To allow for an increase in the penalties that may be imposed for offences under the air navigation legislation in the Overseas Territories and to allow for regulations to be made governing the investigation of aircraft accidents. It also makes consequential amendment to the Civil Aviation Act 1949 (Overseas Territories) Order 1969.
The Liberia (United Nations Sanctions) (Overseas Territories) (No. 2) Order 2001	2001/1867	The order gives effect to the ban on the import of rough diamonds in the Overseas Territories.
The Advisory Centre on WTO Law (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2001	2001/1868	This order confers the legal capacities of a body corporate on the Advisory Centre for WTO Law. This legal capacity is conferred in accordance with Article 10(1) of the agreement establishing the Advisory Centre on WTO Law (cm.4721). The order will enable Her Majesty's Government to give effect to Article 10(1) of the agreement, and will come into force on the date on which the agreement enters into force in respect of the United Kingdom.
The International Criminal Court Act 2001 (Commencement) Order 2001	2001/2161	The ICC Act contains powers enabling orders to be made which supplement the provisions of the Act, which will allow secondary legislation to come into force on 1 September 2001.
The Air Navigation (Overseas Territories) Order 2001	2001/2128	Regulation of aviation activity in the Overseas Territories.
The International Criminal Court Act 2001 (Commencement) (Amendment) Order 2001	2001/2304	Corrects a defect in S.I. 2001/2161.
The International Criminal Court Act 2001 (Elements of Crimes) Regulations 2001	2001/2505	To enable the UK courts to take Elements of Crimes into account in a domestic trial.
The Afghanistan (United Nations Sanctions) (Amendment) Order 2001	2001/2557	This order was made under the United Nations Act 1946 to amend the Afghanistan (United Nations Sanctions) Order 2001 to enhance the financial sanctions regime imposed against the Taliban.
The Afghanistan (United Nations Sanctions) (Amendment) (Overseas Territories) Order 2001	2001/2558	This order was made under the United Nations Act 1946 to amend the Afghanistan (United Nations Sanctions) Order 2001 to enhance the financial sanctions regime imposed against the Taliban.
The International Criminal Court Act 2001 (Reservations and Declarations) Order 2001	2001/2559	This order was made under the International Criminal Court Act 2001 and sets out the relevant reservations and declarations made by the United Kingdom when ratifying various treaties.
The Specialized Agencies of the United Nations (Immunities and Privileges of UNESCO) Order 2001	2001/2560	The United Kingdom rejoined UNESCO on 1 July 1997. This order restores the privileges and immunities previously enjoyed by UNESCO and persons connected with it by re-applying the 1974 order to them.

S.I. title	*Number*	*Purpose*
The Bermuda Constitution (Amendment) Order 2001	2001/2579	To enable the Bermuda Constituency Boundaries Commission to make recommendations on the establishment of single-member constituencies for elections to the House of Assembly and to make some unrelated and uncontroversial amendments to the Constitution of Bermuda.
The Terrorism (United Nations Measures) Order 2001	2001/3365	This order was made to enforce the prohibition of fundraising for terrorism purposes and restrict the making available of funds and financial services to terrorists and provides powers to freeze accounts of suspected terrorists pursuant to a decision of the Security Council of the United Nations in its resolution 1373 of 28 September 2001.
The Terrorism (United Nations Measures) (Overseas Territories) Order 2001	2001/3366	This order was made for the same purpose as S.I. 2001/3365 above, for application in the Overseas Territories.
The Civil Aviation Act 1982 (Overseas Territories) (No. 2) Order 2001	2001/3367	This order extends, with modifications, section 76(4) of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 to the Territories listed in Schedule 2 to the order.
The British Nationality Act 1981 (Amendment of Schedule 6) Order 2001	2001/3497	The order updates the list of British dependent territories in Schedule 6 to the British National Act 1981.
The Consular Fees (Amendment) Order 2001	2001/3498	To implement the increase in passport fees on passports issued by the United Kingdom Passport Service.
The Landmines Act 1998 (Overseas Territories) Order 2001	2001/3499	This order was made to extend the provisions of the Act.
The Continental Shelf (Designation of Areas) Order 2001	2001/3670	To ensure that the legislation of either Ireland or the United Kingdom applies to the entire length of the pipeline. The order implements the agreement contained in the exchange of letters dated 31 October 2001. The order also corrects an error in the Continental Shelf (Designation of Areas) (Consolidation) Order 2000.
The European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (European School) Order 2001	2001/3671	This order declares the Exchange of Notes dated 20 December 2000 and 12 January 2001 between Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Board of Governors of the European School amending the agreement between the Government of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Board of Governors of the European School at Culham to be a Community Treaty as defined in section (2) of the European Communities Act 1972.
The European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization) Order 2001	2001/3672	This order declares the Exchange of Notes dated 20 December 2000 and 4 January 2001 between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation to be a Community Treaty as defined in section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972.
The European Communities (Immunities and Privileges of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization) Order 2001	2001/3673	To enable the granting of relief from Insurance Premium Tax and Air Passenger Duty to NASCO.
The European Communities (Privileges of the European School) Order 2001	2001/3674	To enable the granting of relief from Insurance Premium Tax and Air Passenger Duty to NASCO.
The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2001	2001/3921	This order confers privileges and immunities upon the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, on representatives of its members, its officials and experts.
The Visiting Forces Act (Application to Bermuda) Order 2001	2001/3922	The order extends to Bermuda the Visiting Forces Act 1952. This allows most of the provisions of the 1951 NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to be implemented in Bermuda, once that agreement is extended to Bermuda.
Children and Young Persons: The Child Abduction and Custody (Parties to Conventions) (Amendment) Order 2001	2001/3923	The order amends Schedule 1 to the Child Abduction (Parties to Conventions) Order 1986.
The al-Qaeda and Taliban (United Nations Measures) Order 2002	2002/111	This order was made to impose sanctions on Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and the territory of Afghanistan.
The al-Qaeda and Taliban (United Nations Measures) (Overseas Territories) Order 2002	2002/112	This order was made to impose sanctions on Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and the territory of Afghanistan extending to the territories listed in Schedule 1.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36141]

Mr. MacShane: The costs (excluding staff) of the FCO website (www.fco.gov.uk) over the past four years are as follows:

		£
1997	Initial set up and design costs	53,490
1998	Technical support and running costs	47,000
1999	Technical support and running costs	47,000
2000	Design enhancement, technical support and running costs	118,970
2001	Design enhancement, technical support and running costs	135,856

Total page impressions for each year are:

	Number
1998	5,863,634
1999	10,522,512
2000	24,733,818
2001	27,000,000

Saudi Arabia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Saudi Arabia about allegations of torture in Saudi police stations, detention centres and jails. [36046]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government are concerned about the allegations of torture in Saudi Arabia in the Amnesty International "Rights at Risk" publication. Saudi Arabia acceded to the UN Convention against Torture in October 1997. We continue to encourage the Saudis to fully implement the convention. We raise our concerns with the Saudis about human rights at all levels.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Saudi Arabia about recent allegations of torture of British nationals in Saudi Arabia; and what investigations have been launched on the basis of such allegations. [36047]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government have made representations at the highest levels to the Saudi Government about those British nationals detained following a series of bombings. We continue to do so. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, other Ministers and I have raised these cases in our contact with the Saudi Government.

Prisoners (Afghanistan)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances the UK Government have received from the US Administration about the treatment of prisoners transferred from UK forces to US forces in Afghanistan. [36045]

Mr. Bradshaw: The issue has not arisen since we have not transferred any prisoners between UK and US forces in Afghanistan.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when the European Union observing team will publish its final report on the election process in Zimbabwe; [36370]

(2) what plans there are for the European Union observing team to publish interim reports on the election process in Zimbabwe; [36375]

(3) what access the European Union observers are guaranteed to ballot stations during the voting process in Zimbabwe's presidential elections under the terms outlined in the letter of invitation sent by the Government of Zimbabwe to the European Union; [36374]

(4) how many election observers the European Union will send to Zimbabwe to monitor the election process; what the nationality is of each of these observers; in which of the eight provinces of Zimbabwe the observers will be deployed; and how many observers will be deployed in each province; [36373]

(5) which members of the European Union may send observers to monitor the Presidential election in Zimbabwe under the terms outlined in the letter of invitation sent by the Government of Zimbabwe to the European Union; [36372]

(6) how many election observers the European Union may send to Zimbabwe under the terms outlined in the letter of invitation sent by the Government of Zimbabwe to the European Union. [36371]

Mr. Straw: The EU tried for eight months to engage Zimbabwe in constructive consultation, under the Cotonou agreement. President Mugabe refused to engage. The EU accordingly moved to Article 96 consultations in October 2001. This was a final opportunity for the Government of Zimbabwe to engage positively. Again, they did not.

As a consequence, at the General Affairs council on 28 January the EU decided it would close Article 96 Consultations and implement targeted sanctions if the Government of Zimbabwe prevented the deployment of an EU observer mission, or impeded its effective operation; if they prevented the international media from having free access to cover the election; if there was a serious deterioration in the human rights situation, or attacks on the opposition; or if the election was assessed as not being free and fair.

On 4 February the Zimbabwean Government sent a letter to the European Union, inviting it to send observers to cover the election. The letter specifically excluded the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany and Finland from sending observers. It did not specify how many could be sent, (the EU had intended to send a total of 150). The letter did not specify either what access they would have to voting stations.

On 16 February, the Government of Zimbabwe expelled the Swedish leader of the EU observer team, Pierre Schori.

Mr. Schori reported to the General Affairs Council (GAC) on 18 February that an EU election observation mission was untenable because the Zimbabwe Government was obstructing the deployment of observers and because of the unremitting violence and restrictions on the media. The GAC therefore decided to impose targeted sanctions (asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo) against 20 senior members of the Zimbabwe Government. The vote was unanimous. A copy of these conclusions has been placed in the Library.

The GAC conclusions note that the EU reserves the right to take additional targeted restrictive measures, at a later date, if the situation deteriorates further.

Commercial Contracts (Ministerial Endorsement)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British embassies have submitted requests for *(a)* prime ministerial and *(b)* other ministerial endorsement of commercial contracts in their respective countries in the last three years, broken down by (i) UK companies and (ii) other companies, indicating in each case the value of contracts concerned and the outcome of each of the endorsements. [36703]

Mr. Straw: Ministers write frequently in support of UK commercial interests in overseas markets. The information is not, however, available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indonesian Government following the establishment of a National Investigation Commission (KPN) to investigate the killing of Papuan pro-independence leader, Theys Eluay; and what assessment he has made of the composition of the investigation team. [36929]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 29 November, the day after the establishment of a National Investigation Commission, the Chargé d'Affaires in Jakarta raised our concerns about this case with Manuel Kaisiepo, the Minister for the Development of Eastern Indonesia. On 5 February Foreign Office officials raised the issue of the National Investigation Commission with the Indonesian Ambassador in London. They reiterated the need for an independent investigation and for any findings to be made public.

The UK Government are aware of widespread concern over the composition of the National Investigation Commission, and the presence of the separate Indonesian armed forces investigation team. The Indonesian Government must now show they are able to investigate the case objectively and transparently, and subsequently apply the law appropriately.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospect of the alleged perpetrators of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in East Timor being brought to justice in Indonesia in proceedings which meet international human rights standards before the Ad Hoc Human Rights Court established for that purpose. [36927]

Mr. Bradshaw: While there has been good progress in East Timor in bringing to account those who committed crimes in 1999, progress in Jakarta has been disappointingly slow. However, judges and prosecutors for the Ad Hoc Tribunal have now been appointed and the tribunal is expected to begin hearing cases in March.

While it is important for the tribunal to begin as soon as possible, we will continue to raise our concerns about the jurisdictional limitations of the tribunal with the Indonesian authorities. The question of retroactive prosecutions will be for the tribunal to determine. The judges and prosecutors appointed to the tribunal are professional lawyers.

There is currently no provision for victim/witness protection under Indonesian law. However, it is expected that this will be included in forthcoming legislation.

The embassy in Jakarta will monitor the proceedings of thet tribunal closely.

The Indonesian Government and representatives from the UN Transitional Administration to East Timor (UNTAET) and the East Timorese leadership meet regularly to discuss a range of bilateral issues.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a substantive reply will be given to Captain Alan Croft's letter of 30 October 2001, concerning Mr. Shwe Tun Aung. [36836]

Mr. Bradshaw: I am sorry that, due to an administrative error, the hon. Member did not receive a reply to his letter of 30 October 2001.

The matter will be investigated and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as I am able.

Gibraltar

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Spanish Government since 1 January on the right of self-determination for the people of Gibraltar. [36536]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 738–39.

Taiwan

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Chinese Government concerning its policy towards Taiwan; and if he will make a statement. [36482]

Mr. MacShane: In my meeting with the Chinese Ambassador on 19 December, I urged China to rule out the rule of force against Taiwan and pursue a peaceful resolution through negotiation. We believe that the future of Taiwan is a matter to be settled by the Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Straits.

Vietnam

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Vietnam on persecution of Christians. [37938]

Mr. Bradshaw: Promotion of human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience and religion, is at the heart of our foreign policy. Whenever the opportunity arises we condemn instances where individuals are persecuted because of their faith or belief, in Vietnam and elsewhere, and whatever the religion of the individual or group concerned.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised human rights issues in general when he met the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Mr. Nien, in London in September 2001. When my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister visited Vietnam in December 2001, he raised the treatment of the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Nong Duc Manh. The EU Human Rights Working Group in Hanoi, in which our Embassy plays a leading role, has also raised the treatment of religious believers on several occasions during its regular dialogue with the Vietnamese authorities.

Biological Weapons Convention

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will publish a paper making suggestions on methods of strengthening the biological weapons convention; and if he will make a statement. [36749]

Mr. Straw: I intend to publish a Green Paper in April setting out a range of possible measures to deal with the threat from biological weapons. These measures will include ways of strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention.

LNM Holdings

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), during his term of office as Minister for Europe, met *(a)* Mr. Mittal of LNM Holdings and *(b)* other employees of that company; and what was discussed. [37153]

Peter Hain: In his official capacity of Minister for Europe my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East met Mr. Mittal of LNM Holdings at a lunch for the President of Kazakhstan on 17 November 2000 where UK/Kazakhstan relations were discussed. There are no meetings recorded between my hon. Friend as Minister for Europe and other employees of LNM Holdings.

Private Military Companies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are in place to ensure that a British mercenary is unable to be employed in activity against British interests. [37173]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign Enlistment Act 1870 makes it an offence for a British subject without licence from Her Majesty to enlist in the armed forces of a foreign state at war with another foreign state which is at peace with the UK. However, no successful prosecutions have been brought under the Act.

The FCO published on 12 February a consultation paper entitled "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation", which examines the involvement of the private sector in military and security activity and outlines options for regulation. The FCO welcomes comments on this issue prior to the ministerial decisions.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what regulations are in place to ensure that private military companies based in the UK are held accountable for their actions. [37171]

Mr. MacShane: No regulations specifically directed towards the activities of private military companies are presently in place.

That is why, in its Paper entitled "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation" which was published on 12 February, the FCO outlined options for regulating the activities of private military companies. The Government will make final decisions after the six-month consultation period.

EU-USA Productivity Gap

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures the Government will be proposing at the European Council in Barcelona to close the productivity gap between the European Union and the United States of America. [37180]

Peter Hain: One of the key objectives of the Lisbon economic and social reform strategy is to make the EU the most dynamic and competitive economy in the world. Improving EU productivity levels is central to achieving that aim. At the second annual review of the Lisbon strategy, in Barcelona, the Spanish Presidency is proposing to concentrate on five priority areas: transport and communication networks; energy; education and training; financial services; labour markets. The Government fully support this approach. All five areas have a key role to play in improving EU productivity. Better interconnection between transport and communication networks will improve physical and virtual mobility and delivery; more energy liberalisation and interconnection will improve competition and lower prices; the right approach to education and training will deliver the skills and adaptability required by the 21 Century workplace; integrated financial markets will lower the cost of capital and increase consumer and business choice; more flexible and dynamic labour markets will facilitate job creation and labour mobility.

PRIME MINISTER

Business Contacts

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister (1) on how many occasions in the last 12 months he has written to heads of state or Government of other countries on behalf of companies with fewer than 150 employees in the UK; [37160]

(2) what briefing papers he received concerning LNM Holdings prior to his signing the July 2001 letter he sent concerning the company to his Romanian counterpart; and which department sent them; [37159]

(3) on how many occasions in the last 12 months he has written to the Romanian Prime Minister; and if he will list the date of each letter; [37162]

(4) on how many occasions in the last 12 months he has written to heads of state or Government on behalf of individual companies; [37161]

(5) if he will publish the criteria by which he decides whether it is appropriate for him to write to a foreign Government on behalf of an individual company. [37155]

Mr. Gale: To ask the Prime Minister if he will name the companies on whose behalf he has signed letters in support of *(a)* export and *(b)* other business interests since 1 May 1997. [37688]

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of benefit for the British economy of the awarding of a contract to LNM Holdings to build a steel plant in Romania. [37816]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave the hon. Members for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) has written to him within the last two years concerning *(a)* Mr. Mittal of LNM Holdings and *(b)* that company. [37154]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East did not write to me concerning these matters.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions he has met Mr. Mittal of LNM Holdings. [37156]

The Prime Minister: As my official spokesman has already confirmed, I have not had any bilateral meetings with Mr. Mittal.

I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister (1) when he was informed of the attempt by the LNM Group to acquire Sidex; [37931]

(2) how many letters of congratulations he has sent to heads of foreign Governments for allowing the acquisition of assets by companies or individuals which are supported by the British Government; and what were the *(a)* days on which the letters were sent and *(b)* foreign countries concerned. [37930]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

London Underground

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many changes to the requirements have been notified to bidders for the London Underground PPP since the original invitation to bid. [22705]

Mr. Spellar: London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the Tube infrastructure. I understand that London Underground has made a number of changes to the contractual requirements as it has developed is plans.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* full-time drivers, *(b)* full-time guards and *(c)* full-time station staff were employed by London Underground in each of the last 10 years. [37241]

Mr. Spellar: London Underground has provided the information in the following table:

	Number of full-time train operators	*Number of full-time guards*	*Number of full-time station staff*
1991–92	2,645	838	4,430
1992–93	1,924	842	4,038
1993–94	2,016	779	4,207
1994–95	2,079	612	4,204
1995–96	2,225	459	4,078
1996–97	2,384	508	4,123
1997–98	2,560	525	4,095
1998–99	2,638	594	4,182
1999–2000	2,908	7	4,966
2000–01	3,005	4	5,145

Note:

For years 1993–94 to 1997–98 inclusive, the figures represent the average number of staff over the whole year. Figures for other years represent staff numbers at the end of the financial year.

The large drop in the number of guards in 1999–2000 was due to the introduction of new Northern Line trains, which do not require guards.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many affordable housing units have been built in each year since 1997 *(a)* with social housing grant, *(b)* with local authority social housing grant and *(c)* with no public funding (i) in England and (ii) in rural districts. [35160]

Ms Keeble: Information on points *(a)* and *(b)* is given in the following table. Provisional data on point *(c)* were collected for the first time covering last year, but returns were incomplete. We have made changes to this year's return to encourage more complete reporting.

Affordable housing units build in England

	Units funded through Social Housing Grant:	
	(a) Housing Corporation	*(b) Local Authority*
1997–98		
Deep rural	1,128	894
Mixed rural	4,172	2,427
All rural authorities	5,300	3,321
All authorities	29,551	10,161
1998–99		
Deep rural	823	718
Mixed rural	4,181	1,764
All rural authorities	5,004	2,482
All authorities	28,207	9,714
1999–2000		
Deep rural	734	728
Mixed rural	3,197	1,652
All rural authorities	3,931	2,380
All authorities	23,568	8,396
2000–01		
Deep rural	802	478
Mixed rural	3,190	1,532
All rural authorities	3,992	2,010
All authorities	20,867	8,081

Note:

1. Completions in respect of any schemes originally approved prior to 1996–97. Involving both Housing Corporation and Local Authority Social Housing Grant Support will be counted under both headings, but cannot be distinguished.

2. Affordable housing schemes comprise those for rent (including tariff and mixed funded schemes); temporary social housing schemes (including MiniHag, and short-life housing); and shared or outright ownership schemes (including leasehold for the elderly).

Source:

Housing Corporation returns

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to increase the availability of affordable housing. [37177]

Ms Keeble: The Government recognise the pressures on affordable housing in many parts of the country. We are taking a number of steps to address this.

We are significantly increasing the resources available for the provision of additional affordable housing. By 2003–04, funding for the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme will be almost double last year's level, at £1.2 billion.

We are also providing £250 million through the Starter Home Initiative to help some 10,000 key workers in high demand areas to purchase a home.

In addition, we are consulting on proposals to replace the present system of negotiated planning obligations with a tariff-based approach. We expect this to increase the provision of affordable housing through the planning process.

We have also established the Affordable Housing Unit to work closely with partners and stakeholders to improve delivery of affordable housing over the next three years. This work will concentrate on expanding development opportunity, speeding up negotiation and approval of schemes, increased funding, and making better use of the existing housing stock.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for the *(a)* provision and *(b)* development of affordable housing in the Greater London area. [37109]

Ms Keeble: Over the next two years we are making available an additional £300 million above current levels for the provision of affordable housing in London. In 2001–02 the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme will invest £338 million in London, rising to £411 million in 2002–03 and £545 million in 2003–04.

We are also providing £146 million through the Starter Home Initiative to help key workers in London to purchase a home. We expect about 2,300 nurses and other health workers, 1,600 teachers, 550 police and 200 other key workers to benefit, mainly through shared ownership or equity loans. In addition, 4,000 units of affordable rental accommodation for health staff are being provided by the NHS's Housing Co-ordinator, mainly in London and the South East.

We have also established the Affordable Housing Unit to work closely with partners and stakeholders to improve delivery of affordable housing over the next three years, particularly in areas of acute pressure on housing such as London. This work will concentrate on expanding development opportunity, speeding up negotiation and approval of schemes, increased funding, and making better use of the existing housing stock.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the accuracy of his Department's figures for annual provision of new affordable housing units; and what representations he has received on them from interested organisations. [37082]

Ms Keeble: The Housing Corporation monitors Approved Development Programme and Local Authority Social Housing Grant scheme approvals and completions. We are satisfied with the accuracy of these figures.

Local authorities are now asked to provide summary information on all affordable housing activity as part of their annual Housing Investment Programme returns and we are dependent on the accuracy of the figures they supply. On the basis of their first responses on last year's return, we believe that there may have been under-reporting of Registered Social Landlord provision, and there are changes to this year's return with the aim of improving the accuracy.

Over the past three months, Ministers have replied to 26 letters and five parliamentary questions on the provision of affordable housing units. Over the same period, Lord Falconer, Minister for Housing, has discussed rural affordable housing in several meetings with the Countryside Agency. He has also discussed affordable housing with the National Housing Forum, and visited the Priory Heights Community Housing Project in London. In addition, I attended a debate on affordable housing in South Gloucestershire.

Special Purpose Vehicles

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice he has received from Arthur Andersen on establishing special purpose vehicles. [34828]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* None.

Railtrack

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will make the final decision on which owner takes over Railtrack; and what criteria will be used. [36725]

Mr. Jamieson: Section 59 and Schedule 7 of the Railways Act 1993 provide for the Special Railway Administrator to submit a transfer scheme to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for approval. My right hon. Friend set out the principal issues upon which he will need to be satisfied before approving a scheme in his reply of 31 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 669–71W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker).

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with Treasury Ministers on the definition of his proposed company limited by guarantee as a replacement for Railtrack and the PSBR. [37240]

Mr. Byers: DTLR Ministers and officials have discussions with colleagues in other Departments on a range of subjects on a regular basis.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what time of day on average rough sleeping head counts supervised by the Rough Sleepers Unit took place during the last year. [36986]

Ms Keeble: The DTLR's guidance "Evaluating the Extent of Rough Sleeping" states that rough sleeper counts should take place on a single night and should take place between midnight and 6am.

The guidance contains the methodology for carrying out a count of rough sleepers. This methodology was developed by voluntary sector agencies including Shelter in the early 1990s and has been tested and developed through independent research. The methodology has remained unchanged and has been used nationally for over five years.

Rough sleeping counts are arranged and supervised by staff from voluntary agencies and local authorities. Members of the Rough Sleepers Unit assist local authority and voluntary agencies in a voluntary capacity in carrying out street counts.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what payments the Rough Sleepers Unit have made in the last year to house rough sleepers in temporary accommodation; and if he will publish a breakdown of expenditure. [36987]

Ms Keeble: The Rough Sleepers Unit funds a range of housing associations and voluntary organisations in England to provide temporary accommodation, including hostels and rolling shelters, for rough sleepers. In financial year 2001–02, this amounted to £8,193,000.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are taken during rough sleeping counts supervised by the Rough Sleepers Unit to ensure the personal safety of those conducting the count. [36985]

Ms Keeble: Rough sleeping counts are arranged and supervised by staff from voluntary agencies and local authorities. Guidance issued to local authorities highlights that the safety of counters should be the overriding priority when carrying out a count and that safety is discussed before a count takes place.

Counters work in pairs for safety reasons and to verify the accuracy of the records made. In some cases voluntary organisations have drawn up additional safety and good practice guidelines to ensure the well being of their staff and volunteers who help out with counts.

Arrangements should also be made in advance by local authorities or the voluntary agencies for the safe transport home of counters, by taxi if necessary.

Housing Stock Transfers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives to local authorities regarding information in publicity material about stock transfer of local authority homes; and what advice he gives to tenants questioning the accuracy of such information. [36600]

Ms Keeble: Guidance on publicity material is contained in the Department's "Housing Transfer Guidance—2002 Programme" which includes a Good Practice Guide on consultation material. A copy of this document is in the Library of the House. If tenants have any concerns they should raise them with the local authority or the Independent Tenants Adviser.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much was spent in 2001 and what budget is allocated for *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 for early debt redemption costs of housing stock transfers in England and Wales. [37645]

Ms Keeble: The Department currently has no budget for this purpose because local authorities in England are required to meet the early debt redemption premiums that may be incurred when authorities repay housing debt at the time of a housing stock transfer. Responsibility for housing in Wales is a devolved issue and is now a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Transport Capacity Studies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when work will begin on the Greater Manchester capacity study. [37238]

Mr. Spellar: A high level strategic study was carried out last year jointly funded by the Strategic Rail Authority, Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive, Manchester Airport, Railtrack and the Highways Agency.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on when work will begin on the West Midlands capacity study. [37231]

Mr. Spellar: The West Midlands capacity study was completed last year. Railtrack is undertaking further development work to refine the proposals.

Nottingham Express Transit

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Nottingham Express Transit Light Rail scheme; and when he expects it to open. [37254]

Mr. Spellar: The Nottingham Express Transit is a 14km light rail line running from Hucknall, north of Nottingham, through other former mining communities and disadvantaged inner city areas before reaching the city centre and terminating at Nottingham railway station. The scheme will promote regeneration and ease congestion by providing better transport choices in the area and easy interchange with local and national rail services. The line is under construction and scheduled to open in November 2003.

Train Operating Companies (Fines)

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what responsibilities *(a)* the Strategic Rail Authority and *(b)* the Office of the Rail Regulator have in levying fines on train operating companies. [37233]

Mr. Spellar: Section 55 of the Railways Act 1993 (as amended by section 225 of the Transport Act 2000) established an enforcement regime in the hands of the appropriate authority which permits it to impose a monetary penalty for contraventions of (a) licence conditions, franchise agreements and certain obligations concerning closures of railway facilities and (b) enforcement orders made to secure compliance with any such obligation. The Rail Regulator is the appropriate authority for licences. The SRA is the appropriate authority for franchises and closure obligations.

Social Housing

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council dwellings were built in each of the past 10 years for which figures are available. [37299]

Ms Keeble: The figures for the number of council dwellings built over the past 10 years are given in the table together with the new build in the first nine months of 2001–02.

Local authority new building: England

Year	*Number of dwellings*
1991–92	7,001
1992–93	2,381
1993–94	1,431
1994–95	853
1995–96	752
1996–97	451
1997–98	323
1998–99	194
1999–2000	102
2000–01	717
2001–02[1]	94

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[1] Provisional estimate for April 2001 to December 2002.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions further to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 140, on housing associations, if he will publish his assessment of the value for money of house construction by housing associations and councils, indicating in both cases the allowance made for housing benefit and other associated benefit costs. [37738]

Ms Keeble: We generally expect house construction by housing associations to offer better value for money for the taxpayer than construction by councils, owing to the greater ability of housing associations to draw on private sources of funding.

Council Tax (Sussex Police Authority)

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average amount of council tax is, based on the average band D dwelling, that tax-payers in East Sussex *(a)* contribute towards policing through the Sussex Police Authority and *(b)* contributed towards policing in tax-year 1996–97; and what the English shire average for these periods was. [37904]

Dr. Whitehead: The table shows the band D council tax set by Sussex police authority in financial years 1996–97 and 2001–02. This is the amount of council tax per band D property in East Sussex that was contributed towards the cost of policing in Sussex. The average band D figures for the English shire police authorities are also provided.

£

	1996–97	*2001–02*
Band D council tax for Sussex police authority	46	59
Average Band D council tax for English shire police authorities	47	72

Rail Safety

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made on implementing the recommendations of red/green zone working—A report on the progress with maximisation of green zone working on Railtrack infrastructure. [37723]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for a written progress report on each of the ten recommendations in the Railway Inspectorate's report "Red/Green Zone working—A report on the progress with maximisation of green zone working on Railtrack infrastructure". I will write to my hon. Friend shortly with the HSE's response and place copies in the House Libraries.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many (1) employees of railway companies and their contractors successfully completed safety training courses in each year since 1990; [37724]

(2) hours of safety training were provided to employees of railway companies and their contractors in each year since 1990. [37716]

Mr. Jamieson: Neither the Health and Safety Executive nor the individual railway companies hold this information in the form requested.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* fatal and *(b)* major injuries there were to (i) railway staff and (ii) their contractors in each year since 1990. [37714]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive do not record separate figures for railway and contractor staff. The table therefore shows the number of fatal and major injuries to railway and contractor staff combined.

Comprehensive statistics and information on accidents to railway employees and contractors can be found in the Chief Inspector of Railways' Annual Report on railway safety, copies of which are available in both House Libraries.

	Fatalities	*Major injuries*
1990	22	306
1991[1]	5	76
1991–92	17	278
1992–93	11	284
1993–94	8	262
1994–95	9	252
1995–96	5	225
1996–97	2	310
1997–98	3	351
1998–99	4	376
1999–2000	5	340
2000–01	8	300

[1] The figures for 1991 cover 1 January 1991–31 March 1991.

Passenger Fatalities

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average number of people per 100 million passenger journeys who were *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured by each major mode of transport was in each of the last three years. [37725]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of passengers *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured per 100 million passenger journeys by each major mode of transport in each of the last three years in Great Britain are given in the tables.

Number of passengers[1] killed per 100 million passenger journeys (GB)

	1998	*1999*	*2000*
Rail[2]	1	2	1
Water[3]	3	2	3
Air[4]	0	6	4
Car	4	4	4
Van	1	1	1
Bus and coach	0.3	0.2	0.3
Two-wheeled motor vehicle	180	174	194
Pedal cycle	15	16	12
Pedestrian	4	4	4

Number of passengers[1] seriously injured per 100 million passenger journeys (GB)

	1998	*1999*	*2000*
Rail[2,5]	n/a	n/a	NA
Water[3]	201	150	232
Air[4]	1	4	6
Car	45	42	41
Van	18	16	15
Bus and coach	11	11	10
Two-wheeled motor vehicle	2,151	2,026	2,172
Pedal cycle	301	274	247
Pedestrian	44	40	39

[1] Staff and crew are not included for rail, water and air. Drivers are not included for bus and coach but are included for car, van, two-wheeled motor vehicle and pedal cycle.

[2] Financial years.

[3] World passenger services of UK registered vehicles.

[4] World passenger services of UK airlines.

[5] Since 1996, rail passenger injury figures have been collected under different definitions.

Empty Properties (Departmental Estate)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which he has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37810]

Dr. Whitehead: We do not hold this information centrally, and obtaining this data, covering a period of four years, from approaching a hundred different property centres which manage the Department's administrative and operational estate, would involve disproportionate cost.

Cycle Safety

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to set requirements for *(a)* the level of brightness and *(b)* the size of cycle lamps. [38089]

Mr. Jamieson: The Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 require cycle lamps to comply with the British Standard BS 6102 and be marked accordingly. This includes a requirement for minimum intensity at various positions and angles from the lens.

There is no requirement for the size of the illuminated area of cycle lamps. There are currently no plans to introduce such a requirement.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to make the wearing of cycle helmets by cyclists a statutory requirement. [38090]

Mr. Jamieson: We will continue to monitor wearing rates and review the option of compulsory wearing from time to time.

Asylum Seekers (Housing)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which housing authority will have responsibility for housing applicants for asylum approved for indefinite leave to remain under the proposals in the White Paper, Asylum Law. [37275]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 181W. Under the proposals in the White Paper, asylum seekers granted refugee status would, as now, be granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

Malicious Fires

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many malicious dwelling fires there were in each region and nation of the United Kingdom in each year since 1997; and how many fires there were per *(a)* dwelling and *(b)* capita in each region in each year since 1997. [37832]

Dr. Whitehead: A table showing the number of malicious dwelling fires attended by local authority fire brigades in the UK for the period 1997 to 2000 has today been placed in the Libraries of the House. These figures are also expressed as a rate per million of the population (PMP) and per 10,000 dwellings.

Housing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what regulations are in place on minimum standards for the size and quality of housing. [37176]

Ms Keeble: There are a number of regulations in place in relation to the size and quality of housing.

Under the housing fitness standard, set out in section 604 in the Housing Act 1985, as amended by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, a dwelling is unfit if, in the opinion of the local authority, it fails to meet one of nine specified requirements and, by reason of that failure, is not reasonably suitable for occupation. The requirements constitute the minimum deemed necessary for a dwelling house to be fit for human habitation. They include that a dwelling house should be free from serious disrepair, that it should be structurally safe, and that it should be free from dampness prejudicial to the health of the occupants.

When parliamentary time allows, the Government intend to replace the housing fitness standard with a new risk-based assessment procedure—the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. This will improve upon the existing standard by covering all the important health and safety risks in the home.

Local authorities have a range of powers to improve standards in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)—primarily through section 352 of the Housing Act 1985, as amended. This power enables a local authority to serve a notice requiring a landlord to carry out works to ensure the physical condition of the property is adequate for the number of occupants. The Government are also committed to introducing a mandatory licensing scheme for HMOs which will operate closely alongside the proposed Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

In addition, the Government have set a target to bring all social homes up to set standards of decency by 2010, and to reduce the number of social tenants living in non-decent homes by one-third by April 2004, with most of this reduction taking place in deprived areas.

A decent home must:

be above the current statutory minimum standard for housing;

be in a reasonable state of repair;

have reasonably modern facilities and services; and

provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

The decent home standard is not set down in statute.

The Government have also developed with the Housing Corporation the Housing Quality Indicator (HQI) system, which is a measurement and assessment tool designed to allow housing schemes to be evaluated on the basis of quality rather than simply of cost. The HQI assesses the quality of a housing project using three main categories: location, design and performance. These three categories produce 10 "Quality Indicators", which include an assessment of unit size. An HQI assessment generates separate scores for each indicator, producing a profile of the scheme and an overall HQI score. From April 1 2001 the Housing Corporation Scheme Development Standards require HQIs to be used on all new developments utilising social housing grant. In addition, as part of the process of completing the HQI assessment, potential developers and architects should also be able to make design decisions which result in higher quality housing with minimal cost implications.

Overcrowding standards are set out in Part X of the Housing Act 1985. The room standard is breached if two people of opposite sexes, who are not living together as husband and wife, must sleep in the same room. The space standard specifies the number of people who may sleep in a dwelling according to the number of rooms.

Building work, which includes the erection or extension of a house, is subject to the Building Regulations which set out the requirements to ensure the health and safety of people in and around buildings, energy efficiency, and access and facilities for disabled people. They make no requirements for size, but in respect of quality, it is stipulated that the work shall be carried out with adequate and proper materials and in a workmanlike manner.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many houses were built in each region by housing associations in each of the last five years. [37465]

Ms Keeble: The number of dwellings built by registered social landlords for the last five financial years are given in the table, together with the first nine months data of the latest year. The figures do not include those dwellings bought by registered social landlords, or dwellings provided by converting existing dwellings or other buildings such as offices.

Housebuilding by registered social landlords—number of completions by Government office region

Region	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
North East	1,036	900	667	803	636	439
North West	3,590	2,661	2,284	2,884	3,226	2,221
Yorkshire and the Humber	2,709	1,540	1,586	1,195	917	670
East Midlands	1,149	1,361	1,295	1,172	898	411
West Midlands	2,179	1,855	2,152	2,184	1,713	859
East	2,903	2,436	2,480	1,718	1,678	1,192
London	4,858	4,329	3,198	2,934	3,710	2,434
South East	3,634	4,069	3,643	2,884	2,716	2,035
South West	2,477	2,246	1,615	1,589	1,788	1,111
England	24,535	21,397	18,920	17,363	17,282	11,372

[1] April-December only. Figures for this period are provisional and subject to change.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he plans to put into place to encourage greater co-operation between planning and housing officers of local authorities. [37467]

Ms Keeble: We have set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3, "Housing", our expectation that planning and housing departments should work together to assess the housing needs of their communities. In the good practice guides we have published to support PPG3 we have underlined the value of close co-operation between planning and housing officers and have highlighted those areas where maximum benefit is to be gained.

Local Government Funding

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what increases in resources have been given to local government since 1997; what additional resources have been given to local government for personal social services; and if he will make a statement. [37179]

Dr. Whitehead: For the period from 1997–98 to 2002–03, the actual increase on a like-for-like basis in Government grant to local authorities is £11.3 billion. The actual increase on a like-for-like basis in personal social services provision (standard spending assessment increase plus earmarked grant increase) over the same period is £2.7 billion. These levels of increase are enough that all authorities should be able to deliver improvements to public services while sticking to reasonable council tax increases.

Exmoor National Park Authority

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the decision of the Exmoor National Park Authority not to pursue its policy of restricting ownership, with particular reference to second home owners. [37469]

Ms Keeble: Last year, Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) put forward proposals in the context of the National Park local plan review to tackle a shortage of affordable houses for the park community and what it perceived as excessive numbers of second homes.

The Government believed such local policies would give rise to serious problems of definition and enforcement. We therefore objected to the proposed plan policy.

I understand that ENPA are still considering representations made on their deposited local plan and have not made any new decisions about policies, including those on second homes. The Government's position remains unchanged.

Mobile Telephone Masts

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice is given to local planning authorities about the distance that Tetra masts should be sited from residential properties. [37742]

Ms Keeble: Current Government planning policy for telecommunications is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 8 (revised): Telecommunications. The guidance advises that all telecommunications operators have a duty under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the Management of the Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to ensure that so far as is reasonably practicable, their work activities—which would include the installation and operation of their equipment—do not expose people to risks to their health and safety.

Following publication of the Stewart report on mobile phones and health in May 2000, the Government accepted that, as a precautionary measure, the emissions from mobile phone base stations should meet the more restrictive International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidelines for public exposure (as expressed in the EU Council Recommendation of 12 July 1999 on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields (0 Hz to 300GHz)). Most base stations already meet the ICNIRP guidelines and all new base stations will do so.

The Stewart report recommended the establishment of clearly defined physical exclusion zones around base station antennas, which delineate areas within which exposure guidelines may be exceeded, to prevent the public from exposure radio frequency radiation above the ICNIRP guidelines. These exclusion zones relate to an area directly in front of and at the height of the antenna. The report did not recommend the introduction of a minimum distance between masts and existing development and we have no plans to introduce such a requirement.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what landscape criteria are considered in applications to site Tetra masts. [37743]

Ms Keeble: TETRA mast development is subject to the normal telecommunications planning arrangements in place throughout England. Our revised Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 'Telecommunications' (PPG8) states the Government's policy on telecommunications development.

In particular, we attach great importance to minimising the impact of telecommunications development on the environment. Our policy is to encourage mast and site sharing and to make good use of existing buildings and other structures for the siting of antennas. We also encourage the use of sympathetic design and camouflage. Particularly in designated areas, the aim should be for apparatus to blend into the landscape.

It is for operators and local authorities to consider together what might be the best location and design solution for an individual mast.

Fishing Industry Accidents

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many fishermen who have lost their lives at sea in UK waters in each of the past five years were *(a)* UK citizens, *(b)* crew of a UK-registered flag of convenience vessel and *(c)* crew of foreign vessels. [37951]

Mr. Jamieson: The numbers of fishermen who have lost their lives in the United Kingdom's 12-mile territorial waters are recorded in the database of the Marine Accidents Investigation Branch. The record refers to the lives lost from UK and non-UK registered vessels and does not identify citizenship details of fatalities nor the nationality of the beneficial ownership of a fishing vessel.

Details of the beneficial ownership of a fishing vessel have been obtained from the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The figures are produced in tabular form.

	Deaths from UK registered vessels	*Number of which are from vessels beneficially owned by foreign interests*	*Deaths from non-UK registered vessels*
1997	9	0	3
1998	13	0	1
1999	6	0	1
2000	8	1	2
2001	6	0	0

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* accidents at sea, *(b)* fishing vessels lost and *(c)* lives lost there were in the UK fishing industry during 2001. [37950]

Mr. Jamieson: Provisional figures for UK fishing industry accidents reported to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch during 2001 are:

(a) Fishing vessel accidents at sea 312;

(b) Fishing vessel losses 33; and

(c) Lives lost from fishing vessels 9.

Road Haulage

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total number and value of grants made under the Road Haulage Modernisation Fund is, broken down by nation or region. [37717]

Mr. Jamieson: Decisions on spending in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for the appropriate devolved Administration.

DTLR manages £81.2 million of the £100 million Road Haulage Modernisation fund in England, and £2.9 million for increased enforcement effort in Great Britain.

In England £52 million has been allocated in the first two years of the fund to four areas; retrofitting vehicles through the Clean Up scheme, fuel efficiency advice, driver training initiatives and a self help pilot scheme.

Starter Home Initiative (Worthing and Adur)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what bids for starter home initiative funding have been received from organisations in Worthing and Adur since the start of the scheme. [37131]

Ms Keeble: Two bids were submitted to help key workers in Worthing and Adur in response to the first bidding round for Starter Home Initiative funding. The bids proposed to help five key workers in Worthing and five in Adur and Horsham. Both bids were unsuccessful.

The Round 2 bidding guidance issued on 16 January invites bids by 14 March 2002 to administer the Starter Home Initiative equity loan scheme to help key workers in a number of high demand areas. Adur and Worthing are not specifically targeted, but bids are sought to help 33 police in Sussex.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason no starter home initiative bids from organisations within Worthing and Adur were successful in the recent round. [37132]

Ms Keeble: Since the value of Round 1 bids far outweighed the available Starter Home Initiative (SHI) funding it was necessary to concentrate resources on the most cost effective bids in those areas where the need for the scheme was greatest. The main factors taken into account in making allocations were: the relative need for SHI based on house prices, incomes and assessments of recruitment and retention difficulties for key worker groups in different areas; and the cost effectiveness of competing bids. Taking into account all these factors, the two bids submitted for Worthing and Adur were unsuccessful.

Asbestos

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what clinical evidence his Department has evaluated regarding mortality resulting from exposure to asbestos. [37588]

Dr. Whitehead: Over the five years from 1996 to 2000 specialist chest and occupational physicians participating in the Surveillance of Work-related and Occupational Respiratory Disease (SWORD) and the Occupational Physicians Reporting Activity (OPRA) schemes for the surveillance of occupational respiratory diseases have seen an estimated 4,046 cases of mesothelioma and 434 of lung cancer which they attributed to asbestos exposure, virtually all occupational. Nearly all these cases will eventually have been fatal.

Not all such cases are seen by the SWORD/OPRA network, and the mesothelioma register records that a total of 7,123 people have died from this cause over the five years from 1995 to 1999 (data for 2000 not yet available). The epidemiological evidence suggests that almost all these will have been caused by asbestos

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Health and Safety Executive will produce confirmed pathology of mortality from handling asbestos cement in the UK in the last 30 years. [37610]

Dr. Whitehead: It is not possible to confirm the source of asbestos leading to individual cases of asbestos-related disease.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent estimate he has made of the likely cost involved in compliance with the EU ban on white asbestos. [37611]

Dr. Whitehead: When the Health and Safety Commission consulted in 1998 on draft regulations planned to implement the European Commission Directive banning the marketing and use of all types of asbestos, it carried out a regulatory impact assessment of the costs and benefits entailed.

This assessment estimated that the total costs of regulation in the UK over 10 years would be between £191 million and £241 million. No more recent estimate of cost has been carried out.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Health and Safety Executive will produce confirmed pathology for cases of mesotheliomas linked to white asbestos for persons aged *(a)* under and *(b)* over 60 years of age. [37609]

Dr. Whitehead: It is not possible to link individual cases reliably to particular types of asbestos.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what independent scientific reports have been used by the Health and Safety Executive in formulating their policy toward white asbestos; and which independent scientists have advised the Health and Safety Executive about the dangers of white asbestos. [37587]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety Executive has over the years taken advice and commissioned research from a wide range of scientists working in this area. It has also kept the relevant scientific literature under review. In this context it has taken account of the conclusions of the following more recent key reports; Asbestos, Effects on Health of Exposure to Asbestos (Doll and Peto) 1995; Fibrous Materials in the Environment (Institute for Environment and Health) 1997; the 1998 World Health Organisation report on white asbestos; and the 2000 Hodgson and Darnton paper on the quantitative risks of mesothelioma and lung cancer in relation to asbestos exposure. All are published and copies of the report are available in the Libraries of the House.

Firefighters (Vacancies)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish a list of vacancies for retained firefighters at each *(a)* fire station in West Sussex and East Sussex and *(b)* fire brigade area in England and Wales. [37133]

Dr. Whitehead: The establishment and strength figures for retained firefighters are in the following table.

	Establishment[1]	*Strength*[1]
Station		
(a) East Sussex Fire Brigade[2]		
Lewes	20	12
Barcombe	12	11
Newhaven	20	12
Seaford	18	18
The Ridge	12	9
Forest Row	12	7
Uckfield	20	16
Crowborough	20	15
Mayfield	12	7
Wadhurst	18	11
Burwash	12	10
Battle	20	14
Broad Oak	12	13
Rye	18	16
Heathfield	18	18
Bexhill	20	16
Pevensey	12	10
Herstmonceux	12	9
Hailsham	12	13
Total	300	237
West Sussex Fire Brigade[2]		
Worthing	19	10.75
East Preston	20	10
Lancing	20	11.5
Findon	12	7.25
Shoreham	17	6
Arundel	12	8.75
Littlehampton	20	17.25
Crawley	13	12.25
Partridge Green	12	6.25
Steyning	12	10
Horsham	13	12
Billingshurst	12	7.5
Storrington	20	12.5
Selsey	12	8.5
East Wittering	12	7.25
Chichester	13	8.5
Bosham	12	7.75
Midhurst	16	12.75
Bognor Regis	19	10.5

	Establishment[1]	*Strength*[1]
Petworth	20	13.25
Turners Hill	12	6.5
East Grinstead	12	7.75
Haywards Heath	12	7.5
Burgess Hill	20	14.5
Henfield	12	9.25
Keymer	12	9
Hirstpierpoint	12	7.25
Total	398	262.25
Brigade name *(b) Retained Establishment & Strength in England & Wales*[3]		
Avon	212	159.50
Bedfordshire and Luton	161	114.50
Buckinghamshire	226	151.75
Cambridgeshire	380	294.75
Cheshire	182	146.00
Cleveland	72	62.00
Cornwall	425	406.50
County Durham and Darlington	168	118.75
Cumbria	474	369.75
Derbyshire	360	231.25
Devon	756	647.75
Dorset	356	287.75
East Sussex	300	200.50
Essex	430	372.75
Gloucestershire	306	257.00
Greater Manchester	64	26.20
Hampshire	616	545.75
Hereford and Worcester	369	294.00
Hertfordshire	276	212.25
Humberside	328	275.75
Isle of Wight	168	152.00
Isles of Scilly	34	34.00
Kent	714	494.23
Lancashire	374	285.00
Leicestershire	216	143.50
Lincolnshire	495	412.50
London	0	0.00
Meseyside	0	0.00
Mid and West Wales	713	659.75
Norfolk	512	424.25
North Wales	553	483.00
North Yorkshire	368	331.25
Northamptonshire	235	182.25
Northumberland	155	151.75
Nottinghamshire	252	202.25
Oxfordshire	336	237.00
Royal Berkshire	156	122.00
Shropshire	284	249.25
Somerset	390	350.75
South Wales	447	252.40
South Yorkshire	80	38.83
Staffordshire	376	304.25
Suffolk	426	351.50
Surrey	144	103.25
Tyne and Wear	24	17.50
Warwickshire	166	148.75
West Midlands	12	8.00
West Sussex	398	271.75
West Yorkshire	148	165.50
Wiltshire	303	271.50
Total	14,940	12,022.41

[1] In 24 hour units of cover (e.g. a firefighter contracted to provide 24 hour cover in any 24 hour period = one unit; or giving 12 hours = 0.50)

[2] At 31 January 2002

[3] At 31 March 2001

Flooding

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce proposals to make *(a)* the developer and *(b)* the planning authority responsible for (i) flood defences and (ii) buildings on flood plains which are subsequently flooded. [37632]

Ms Keeble: No. Planning Policy Guidance Note 25 issued in July 2001 already advises that flooding is a material planning consideration and that, where flood defences are needed because of a development, their provision and maintenance should be fully funded as part of the development. The report by the steering group for "The flood defence funding review" published on 13 February by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs concluded that it is difficult to justify replacing these arrangements before they have a chance to demonstrate their value.

Developers are advised to carry out an assessment of the risk of flooding to their proposed development and its impact on flooding elsewhere and to submit this with the application for planning permission. Advised as necessary by the Environment Agency, a local planning authority should consider that assessment alongside other material planning considerations in determining whether permission should be granted. It is for purchasers to make such inquiries as they consider necessary to determine whether a property they are considering purchasing is at risk of flooding.

Road Detrunking Programme

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will monitor maintenance levels of local authority roads following the completion of the detrunking programme. [37807]

Mr. Jamieson: Maintenance levels of local authority roads are monitored by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. This will continue to be the case after the completion of the detrunking programme.

Coalfield Regeneration Programme

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of English Partnerships and their responsibility for the coalfield regeneration programme. [37653]

Ms Keeble: EPs' role and responsibility for the coalfields site programme is being considered along with their other functions as part of the review. An announcement will be made on the outcome of stage one of the review in the near future. However, there is no question of abandoning the proposed remediation of the 86 sites within the existing programme.

Housebuilding Targets

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on travel patterns of the housebuilding targets. [37276]

Mr. Byers: It is not this Government's policy to set housebuilding targets. The new annual rates of regional housing provision and their distribution are set through Regional Planning Guidance. These are kept under regular review by the regional planning bodies.

The analysis carried out for the 10-year plan for transport included an adjustment to traffic levels, to reflect the expected impact of planning policies which aim to locate new development so as to reduce the need to travel.

The model we are now developing will be able to estimate more accurately the travel impacts of different geographical patterns of household location.

Voting Systems

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the timing and structure of the proposed review of the new voting systems for the devolved administrations and the European Parliament and the report of the Jenkins Commission. [37644]

Dr. Whitehead: In our manifesto, which sets out our intentions for this Parliament, we said we would review our experience of the new voting systems for the devolved Administrations, the European Parliament, and the London Assembly along with the recommendations of the Jenkins report to assess whether changes might be made to the electoral system for the House of Commons. That remains our intention. The timing and structure of any review has yet to be decided.

Housing Revenue Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the annual level of national housing revenue accounts load debt was in each year from 1997–98 to date; and what the capital financing costs of that debt were; [37648]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost of paying off all local authority historic housing debt. [37649]

Ms Keeble: Local authority debt is held and managed centrally within each authority. For the purposes of determining the Housing Revenue Account's (HRA) contribution to the cost of overall debt, a notional level of HRA indebtedness is calculated each financial year. This is known as the HRA credit ceiling. The table sets out the HRA credit ceiling at the start of each financial year, together with the associated capital financing costs, for financial years 1997–98 to 2001–02:

£ million

	HRA credit ceiling	*Capital financing costs*
2001–02	17,894	—[1]
2000–01	18,426	1,894
1999–2000	19,161	2,013
1998–99	19,620	2,149
1997–98	20,121	2,231

[1] No data available for 2001–02 at present; it is estimated to be £1,793 million.

Repayment of an amount equivalent to the HRA credit ceiling will give rise to additional liabilities in respect of early redemption premiums, which will depend on the profile of each authority's own debt portfolio. It is therefore not possible to estimate the cost of repaying this debt.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the level of capital receipts from the sale of housing and other housing revenue assets was in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01. [37647]

Ms Keeble: The available information reported by local authorities is as set out:

Gross housing capital receipts of local authorities: England

£000

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*[1]
Sale of Fixed Assets	1,514,214	2,133,840	2,310,956
Repayments of grants and advances	106,966	97,187	94,964
Leasing disposals	9,208	17,840	27,144
Total	1,630,387	2,248,867	2,433,065

[1] Figures for 2000–01 are provisional

Note:

Fixed Asset sales include housing stock sold under Right to Buy, and through Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (LSVTs).

Source: DTLR Capital Outturn Return (COR) forms.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to permit local authorities to redirect funds originating in their housing revenue accounts to *(a)* set up arm's length housing management organisations and *(b)* direct investment in municipally owned housing. [37646]

Ms Keeble: It is a matter for authorities to determine how to use the resources available to them in their housing revenue account. Authorities which are proposing to establish an arm's length organisation (ALMO) to manage their stock may apply for additional resources. If they are successful and meet the necessary standard, those resources are expected to be targeted on investment in the authority's stock. We have provided resources to enable additional investment of £460 million by ALMOs over the next two years.

Political Parties (Policy Development Grants)

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will estimate the amount of state funding the Labour Party will receive from the policy development grant in the next four years; [37852]

(2) how much each political party in receipt of policy development grant is projected to receive in the forthcoming year. [37850]

Dr. Whitehead: The calculation of the amount of policy development grant to be allocated in any one year to eligible parties, including the Labour Party, as provided for by the Scheme set out in the Schedule to The Elections (Policy Development Grants Scheme) Order 2002, is a matter for the Electoral Commission.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many press notices his Department has issued mentioning policy development grant since his Department received responsibility for electoral and political party regulation. [37853]

Dr. Whitehead: None.

Transport Multi-Modal Studies

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what transport multi-modal studies are *(a)* completed, *(b)* in progress and *(c)* planned; what their (i) expected publication date and (ii) location is; and which he has (1) accepted and (2) rejected. [37868]

Mr. Jamieson: The multi-modal studies that have reported are as follows:

Multi-modal study and location	*Reported*
Access to Hastings	Reported December 2000. Decision announced in July 2001
Cambridge to Huntingdon (A14)	Reported 20 August 2001. Decision announced in December 2001
South east Manchester (Stockport, Manchester airport link west, Poynton)	Reported September 2001
West midlands area (M5/M6 and M42 between M40 and M6)	Reported October 2001

The following multi-modal studies are currently in progress:

Multi-modal study and location	*Recommendations/report to RPB*
West midlands to north west (M6)	January 2002—recommendations to RPB. Final report due March 2002
Hull (east/west) corridor (A63 and A1033 to port of Hull)	End April 2002
London to south west and south Wales (A303, M4)	May 2002
A1 (north of Newcastle)	May 2002
Tyneside area (A1/A19)	May 2002
South and west Yorkshire motorway box (M1 J30 to A1 west Yorkshire/M18/M62 and A1(M)	June 2002
A453 (M1 to J24 (Nottingham)	April 2002
North/south movements in the east midlands (M1 junctions 21 to 30)	March 2002
South coast (Southampton to Folkestone coastal corridor)—(M27, A27 and A259)	Spring/summer 2002
Thames valley (London to Reading—M4)	Summer/autumn 2002
M60 junction 12–18 (west to north Manchester)	Summer 2002
ORBIT—Transport Solutions Around London (M25)	Autumn 2002
London to Ipswich (A12)	July 2002
London to south midlands (A1, M1, M11, A5 and A421)	December 2002
Norwich to Peterborough (A47)	February 2003
West midlands to east midlands (A42/M42 to M6 corridor and M69 and A38)	April 2003

The final two multi-modal studies have yet to commence. Dates have yet to be confirmed although we would expect these to report by end of 2003/early 2004:

Multi-modal study and location

A52 (Clifton bridge to Bingham, Nottinghamshire)

A34 (North from Southampton).

Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason he used his powers under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government Act 1992 to introduce the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001; and whether the regulations could have been enacted under the powers granted to him by the Local Government Act 2000. [37854]

Dr. Whitehead: The Secretary of State used the powers in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government Act 1992 to make the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001 (the 2001 Regulations) because they were specific powers that enabled him to achieve what was needed. The powers in the Local Government Act 2000 are more general powers but they are not wide enough to enable the making of all the provisions which are included in the 2001 Regulations.

KCC Speed Interactive

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1111W, on KCC speed interactive signs, if he will indicate when later in the year might be. [37308]

Mr. Jamieson: We cannot say when until the analysis has been completed and conclusions drawn.

Road Traffic Accidents (Mud)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance is issued by his Department to farmers and landowners regarding their duty of care relating to mud on road surfaces; what plans he has to publish a code of practice for farmers and landowners clarifying their liability in road traffic accidents where mud is cited as a contributory factor to the hazardous road condition; and if he will make a statement. [37918]

Mr. Jamieson: The National Farmers Union already issues guidance to farmers and landowners about preventing the dropping of mud onto the road surface which they are currently in the process of updating. I have no plans for my Department to duplicate this guidance.

There are specific regulations aimed against mud being dropped onto the highway. Sections 148 and 161(1) of the Highways Act 1980 make it an offence to deposit anything, including mud and manure, on roads. Section 149 of the Highways Act 1980 enables highway authorities to take action against anyone who deposits anything on the highway that constitutes a nuisance or danger. Section 6 of the Road Traffic Act 1991 makes it an offence to cause anything to be left on the road if it would be obvious to a reasonable person that to do so would be dangerous.

High Hedges

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 884W, on high hedges, when he estimates there will be space in the parliamentary timetable for such legislation. [37855]

Ms Keeble: The Government's legislative programme is set out in each successive Queen's Speech. I cannot therefore anticipate the timing of Government legislation on high hedges.

Business Tenancies (Reform)

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce his conclusions on his Department's consultation paper on the reform of business tenancies in England and Wales. [38634]

Ms Keeble: I have placed a paper setting out our conclusions on the consultation exercise in the Library of the House. We are also making it available on my Department's website.

We are still considering issues raised from the separate consultation of section 57 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954, and will make a further announcement in due course.

Emergency Planning

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions since 11 September 2001, what assessments have taken place on the capability of regional and city disaster plans and the engagement of the *(a)* emergency planning committees, *(b)* police service, *(c)* fire brigade, *(d)* ambulance service, *(e)* hospitals and NHS trusts, *(f)* St. John Ambulance, *(g)* British Red Cross, *(h)* Territorial Army, *(i)* armed forces and *(j)* local authorities in these plans. [36721]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

As the Prime Minister told the House on 8 October, since the terrible events of 11 September every one or our arrangements has been under scrutiny. For security reasons the Government do not publish contingency plans or the operational and procedural matters relating to them.

Local authorities have a power to plan and work together with other local agencies to formulate locally based, multi-agency emergency planning arrangements. Mutual aid arrangements will draw resources from further afield if necessary. Although the process started before 11 September, the Government are reviewing the Future of Emergency Planning in England and Wales. A summary of the responses to this consultation has been placed in the Library and on the Cabinet Office website (www.ukresilience).

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office maintains regular contact with local authority representatives, the emergency services, emergency planning officers and others involved in handling civil emergencies.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information she has received concerning the deployment of British-made Stormer armoured vehicles to Aceh, Indonesia; and what representations on that subject he has made to the Indonesian Government. [36930]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

The British Embassy in Jakarta received information that three Stormer armoured personnel carriers were being used to provide protective transport for visitors to the Indonesian Army Headquarters in Lhokseumawe, Aceh. Our Defence Attaché in Jakarta took the matter up immediately with the Indonesian authorities. He expressed concern that this was in breach of Indonesian Government assurances that British built equipment would not be used in Aceh. They admitted that a mistake had been made and offered renewed assurances about the use of British built equipment in Indonesia. The Defence Attaché later confirmed that the Stormer vehicles had been removed from Aceh.

NORTHERN IRELAND

IRA (Police Investigations)

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what police investigations are in progress into alleged criminal activities and murders by the Provisional IRA in 1972 in County Londonderry. [34973]

Jane Kennedy: The police investigations into serious crimes in County Londonderry in 1972 where no persons have been prosecuted remain open. The investigations are constantly reviewed and, should any evidence or information come to light, appropriate action will be taken to apprehend the suspects.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents of criminal damage against *(a)* police stations and *(b)* police vehicles in Northern Ireland were reported in 2000. [35337]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised me that the number of attacks on police stations and mobile patrols, as a result of terrorism or public disorder, in 2000 was *(a)* police stations: eight *(b)* police vehicles: 1,339.

Criminal Assault (Fireworks)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents of criminal assault were recorded in each year since 1997 in Northern Ireland relating to the use of fireworks. [35335]

Jane Kennedy: The statistics requested are not readily available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost. The misuse of fireworks in such circumstances is one of the areas of concern being addressed in the fireworks review, which I announced on 12 October 2001.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Bland Judgment

Andrew Selous: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in how many cases the courts have *(a)* considered and *(b)* agreed to the withdrawal of nutrition and hydration for patients in a persistent vegetative state since the Bland judgment. [34095]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The courts have, since the Bland judgment in 1993, considered 29 such cases in respect of people in a permanent vegetative state, and on each occasion have issued a declaration authorising the withdrawal of artificial nutrition and hydration.

Civilian Court Staff

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether civilian enforcement officers employed by magistrates courts committees have direct access to the police national computer for the purposes of *(a)* entering and *(b)* reading data; and if he will make a statement. [37674]

Mr. Wills: Civilian Enforcement Officers do not have direct access to the Police National Computer (PNC) for purposes of either entering or reading data.

The Lord Chancellor's officials, in consultation with representatives from magistrates courts committees, are currently preparing an application to the Police Information Technology Organisation to enable court staff to have direct access to PNC for enforcement purposes.

Court Orders

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether targets are set in respect of the time taken to execute warrants on individuals who have not complied with criminal court orders; and if he will make a statement. [37675]

Mr. Wills: Lead responsibility of the execution of financial warrants and community breach warrants was transferred from the police to the magistrates courts committees on 1 April 2001. No targets were set for execution of these warrants during the first year of operation to enable baseline data to be collected. I will shortly be announcing targets for execution of both financial and non-financial warrants for 2002–03.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what procedures exist for dealing with the execution of a warrant in respect of an individual who has breached a community court order if that individual is deemed to be a high risk to the public; and if he will make a statement. [37677]

Mr. Wills: Warrants issued in respect of an individual who has breached a community penalty order may be executed by civilian enforcement officers employed by magistrates courts committees, by staff of approved enforcement agencies working under contract to magistrates courts committees or by the police. The National Framework Agreement agreed between the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Home Office, sets out the arrangements for execution of warrants in respect of individuals who have breached a community court order. Where there is a risk of violence or disorder, the person executing the warrant may request police assistance. If the probation service or youth offending team identifies an individual as high risk to the public they would normally ask the police or the enforcement officer or agency to give execution of the warrant a high priority.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether magistrates courts committees can execute warrants in respect of non-compliance of criminal court order if the individual concerned moves to Scotland. [37676]

Mr. Wills: Where an offender has moved to Scotland, the execution of warrants in respect of non-compliance with a criminal court order is the responsibility of the police in Scotland.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 255W, what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which he has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37912]

Mr. Wills: In the written answer that I gave to the hon. Member on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 255W, I confirmed that the Lord Chancellor's Department has owned no empty properties in the last four years. The Court Service and the Northern Ireland Court Service have owned a total of 17 properties which have empty at some point over the last four years. In all cases these buildings were empty only while being marketed for sale, except in one case where the building was empty prior to conversion. The total area in square feet of the empty properties in each of the last four financial years is shown in the table:

Period	*Total area (square feet)*
1997–98	38,929.07
1998–99	45,841.95
1999–2000	51,526.82
2000–01	61,108.90

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans there are to change the *(a)* departmental expenditure limit and *(b)* administration costs limits for 2001–02. [38914]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the Lord Chancellor's Departments (including Northern Ireland Court Service and Public Records Office) DEL will be increased by £89,792,000 from £2,871,573,000 to £2,961,365,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £31,308,000 from £684,425,000 to £715,733,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£000

	LCD	*NICtS*	*PRO*	*Total*
Resources				
Change	85,181	−3,378	4,750	86,553
New DEL	2,798,549	78,622	32,345	2,909,516
of which:				
Voted	2,709,690	73,082	32,345	2,815,117
Non-voted	88,859	5,540	0	94,399
Capital				
Change	−3,672	6,561	350	3,239
New DEL	37,894	12,561	1,394	51,849
of which:				
Voted	30,094	12,561	1,394	49,049
Non-voted	7,800	—	—	7,800

The change in the resource element of the DEL is the net effect of take-up of £60,000,000 from the Asylum Reserve; draw-down of £226,000 administration costs from the Invest to Save Budget; transfer of £7,000,000 (administration costs) from Northern Ireland Court Service; reduction of Departmental Unallocated Provision of £12,208,000, of which £4,674,000 is administration costs; transfers from the Home Office in respect of: Machinery of Government changes, £2,371,000, of which £121,000 is administration costs; CJS Reserve entitlement, £1,241,000 administration costs, and other projects, £207,000 of which £83,000 is administration costs; a total transfer from the Department of Health in respect of various projects in the sum of £164,000 of which £123,000 is administration costs; transfer to the Department of Trade and Industry of £50,000; transfers from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions of £512,000 administration costs; transfer to the Public Record Office of £300,000 administration costs; a reduction of £436,000 administration costs arising from an adjustment of incorrect recording of NAO fees; take-up of £27,000,000 from the Reserve of which £5,000,000 is administration costs to the Public Guardianship Office; a transfer of £10,000,000 to LCDHQ administration costs in accordance with the Chief Secretary of the Treasury's letter to the Lord Chancellor of 14 February 2002; and a transfer of £5,100,000 administration costs from capital.

The decrease in the Northern Ireland Court Service's resource element of DEL is the net effect of a transfer of £7,000,000 of RfR1 administration costs to the LCD; a transfer from the Northern Ireland Office of £2,200,000 into RfR1 administration and End Year Flexibility draw-down of £1,442,000.

The change in the Public Record Office resource element of DEL arises from the take-up of £4,200,000 End Year Flexibility, £250,000 in respect of the Modernising Government initiative and a transfer of £300,000 administration costs from LCD.

The change in the capital element of the DEL is the net effect of a transfer from the Home Office of £307,000 in respect of the Capital Modernisation Fund; drawdown of £65,000 from the Invest to Save Budget; a transfer of £5,000,000 to the Northern Ireland Court Service; and a transfer of £5,100,000 to LCDHQ administration costs.

The change in the Northern Ireland Court Service's capital element of DEL arises from take-up of End Year Flexibility entitlement of £1,561,000 and a transfer of £5,000,000 from LCD.

The change in the Public Record Office capital element of DEL arises from the take-up of £350,000 End Year Flexibility entitlement.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers, increases to Appropriations in Aid, take-up of End Year Flexibility entitlements and a charge to the DEL Reserve and will therefore not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

CAP Payments (North Yorkshire)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department expects to contribute to farmers in North Yorkshire this year in CAP payments; and how many farms will receive payments. [34682]

Mr. Morley: The latest available CAP scheme payments made to farmers in North Yorkshire, and the number of farms paid under each scheme are:

CAP scheme and year[1]	*Amount paid (£)*	*Number of farms paid*
Arable Area Payment Scheme (2001)	[2]46,821,495	2,897
Beef Special Premium Scheme (2001)	[3]4,584,681	2,791
Veal and Calf Slaughter Premium Scheme (2000)	53.25	3
Slaughter Premium Scheme (2000)	2,292,063	2,135
Suckler Cow Premium Scheme (2000)	4,439,554	1,304
Extensification Payment Scheme (2000)	3,343,953	1,495
Sheep Annual Premium Scheme (2000)	12,046,965	1,658
Hill Farm Allowance (2001)	6,607,832	1,894

[1] Figures from latest available scheme year
[2] After modulation
[3] Before modulation

The total number of farms paid cannot be provided as the same farm may be covered by more than one of the CAP schemes.

Regional Food

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 90W, ref. 32897, if she will list the activities being pursued in the eastern region. [36480]

Mr. Morley: We do not hold centrally information on all the regional food chain supply and marketing initiatives carried out by Government and Government funded organisations in the eastern region. However, through 'Food From Britain' and the Countryside Agency, the Government have contributed to the funding of the Regional Food Group, 'Taste of Anglia'. These funds have been used to provide various business support and promotional activities including, "Meet the Buyer" events, the publication of regional food and drink guides, attendance at local, regional and national shows, the holding of workshops and seminars and the promotion of farmers markets.

A number of projects in the eastern region involving the processing and marketing of food have been awarded grants under the rural enterprise scheme and the processing and marketing grant scheme which form part of the England rural development programme. Producers and processors in the eastern region may also benefit from some of the national projects funded under the agricultural development scheme.

Waste Disposal

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take action to make doorstep recycling available throughout the United Kingdom. [37271]

Mr. Meacher: Recycling is a matter for the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England, approximately 43 per cent. of households receive this service and we expect the number to increase greatly. The Government have set statutory performance standards for all local authorities, which will triple the recycling and composting of household waste in the five years to 2005–06. Each authority will decide how best to meet these targets, taking into account local circumstances, but the Government encourage them to introduce or extend kerbside collection of recyclable waste, where this is environmentally and economically the best option.

The Government also found significant new resources for English local authorities in the last spending review, both in the general settlement and a separate fund of £140 million for the waste minimisation and recycling fund. The Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government have also found extra resources for recycling.

The New Opportunities Fund has also identified £50 million for the UK to support community sector waste minimisation, re-use and recycling schemes, which may include kerbside schemes.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36192]

Mr. Morley: During 2001–02, 16,201 days were lost owing to industrial action by PCS staff in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its agencies.

During 1998–99, 1999–2000, and 2000–01, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the agencies which are now part of DEFRA did not lose any days owing to industrial action by staff.

In the time available and given the number of NDPBs for which DEFRA is responsible, it is not possible to confirm the position for all NDPBs at reasonable cost.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many employees in her Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36699]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created in June 2001. Statistics covering staff currently in DEFRA but previously in the DETR or the Home Office are not available prior to that date. Under the current contract arrangements—which have been in place since 1 May 2000—1,399 members of staff to date have taken up the provision of a free eye test.

Full scheme details are accessible via the Department's intranet Health and Safety website. The service is advertised using a variety of office notice systems (electronic and hard-copy), regular reminders on the intranet, and is also detailed in a variety of departmental health and safety booklets which are given to new entrants by personnel and line managers.

Future of Farming and Food

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the cost of printing and publishing the report of the Policy Commission on the future of farming and food; how many copies have been printed; what arrangements have been made for distribution of hard copies of the report to the public; what is the ISBN number of the report; and if she will make a statement. [35291]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I understand that the cost of printing and publishing the report of the independent Policy Commission on the future of farming and food, was £5,650. This was for the initial printing of 2,500 copies. To meet demand, a further 2,000 copies are being printed at a cost of £3,995. The report does not have an ISBN number. Though the Commission's report was to the Government, the Commission sent copies of the report to all those involved in the consultation exercise, and have made it publicly available on their website www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/farming. Copies are available free of charge from my Department.

Copies of the report have also been placed in the House Libraries and the Vote Office.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reasons underlie the differences in the percentage levels of designations to Nitrate Vulnerable Zones in England, Scotland and Wales; for what reason the criteria used for the designation of rivers has changed since 1996; what consultation there was with the agricultural sector on this change; what representations she has received on the financial impact on farmers who are to implement this directive; and if she will give financial assistance to enable them to do so. [34492]

Mr. Meacher: The difference in the scale of Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) proposed in England, Scotland and Wales are due mainly to differences in rainfall, the pattern and intensity of agricultural activity, and the nature of the soil and geology.

Changes have been made to the criteria for identifying nitrate polluted rivers and other waters, so as to protect the water environment and not just drinking water supplies. These changes, and changes to the methodology used to identify areas for designation as NVZs, are based on legal advice about the requirements of the Nitrates Directive following a European Court of Justice decision in December 2000 that the UK had failed to implement the directive properly.

DEFRA is currently consulting on proposals to implement the Nitrates Directive, through the consultation document "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive" published on 20 December 2001. One of the options is to designate new NVZs, and the new methodology on which this option is based is set out in the consultation document.

Representations about the financial impact on farmers are being received in response to the consultation and are being collated and analysed at the moment. It is intended to extend the farm waste grant scheme to the new areas where farmers will be required to implement measures to tackle nitrate pollution under the directive. This will make financial assistance available to those farmers facing the most significant compliance costs, in particular for the construction of new slurry storage. The grant rate is currently 40 per cent. (the EU State Aid Rules maximum) for construction or upgrade of storage facilities up to an investment ceiling of £85,000. We are currently considering offering 50 per cent. in less favoured areas, as permitted by the EU State Aid Rules. From experience in current NVZs, the average cost of new slurry storage construction to comply with Action Programme measures is between £30,000 and £40,000.

Farm Business Statistics

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the proportion of registered holdings which are farmed by people other than the owner or tenant under *(a)* contract farming, *(b)* share farming and *(c)* similar arrangements; and what the proportion was (i) five and (ii) 10 years ago. [36586]

Mr. Morley: We have no reliable data to show the proportion of registered holdings which are farmed by people other than the owner or tenant under contract farming arrangements.

So far as share farming is concerned the Farm Business Survey for 2000–01 showed that 35 of the 2,183 'full-time' farm businesses surveyed in England were involved in share farming. This is equivalent to 1.6 per cent. of the farm businesses in the survey.

Results from the June 2000 census (which included full and part-time holdings) in England showed that 0.7 per cent. of respondents were involved in share farming, and the total area share farmed was 1.0 per cent. of the respondents' total area. No data on share farming are available for five or 10 years ago.

We have no data for holdings farmed under similar arrangements.

Farm Practices (Archaeological Sites)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to protect buried archaeological treasures from farming practices which might disturb them. [36483]

Mr. Morley: The objectives of our agri-environment schemes include conserving areas which demonstrate their history and to protect important features and major earthworks by measures such as low intensity grazing, scrub control and by converting cultivated land to pasture. A number of scheme options support those objectives.

In recognition of the threat to archaeological sites in intensively farmed landscapes, DEFRA has commissioned a research project from the Oxford Archaeological Unit to investigate the impact of arable management on buried archaeological sites. Their report, which is expected in the next few months, will contribute to the development of best practice guidelines for managing archaeological features in arable landscapes, while retaining land, where possible, in production.

These initiatives add to the existing legal protection for archaeological features that are formally recognised. Steps have also been taken to encourage the voluntary reporting of all archaeological finds.

Environment Agency Committees

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost was of the advertisements for the chairmen of the Environment Agency Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee; and in which publications advertisements were placed. [34929]

Mr. Morley: In total advertising costs for the most recent Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee Chair appointment exercise was £10,200. Advertisements were placed in *The Times*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Anglers Mail* and also appeared on the Department's website.

Farm Subsidy Claims

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 249–50W, on farm subsidy claims, how the Government intend to implement the new penalty structure; and what progress the RPA has made in amending its policy to reflect this change in the regulations. [34687]

Mr. Morley: The new penalty structure for IACS is set out in detail in Commission Regulation No. 2419/2001, which came into force on 1 January and is directly applicable in the UK. IACS claims made during the course of this scheme year will be dealt with in accordance with the new penalty provisions.

The RPA is in the process of finalising scheme literature for distribution to claimants explaining the new penalty provisions in respect of the various IACS schemes. A supplement to the IACS Booklet will be issued in late March and the other specific scheme literature will be updated and issued at the usual times during the course of the year.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of her Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32822]

Mr. Morley: As at 1 January, there were 13,990 permanent, casual and fixed-term contract staff employed by the Department and the agencies. Of these, 7,384 staff were of Executive Officer (or equivalent grade) and above. These grades normally retire at age 60. There were 6,606 staff in Administrative Officer, Administrative Assistant and Support grades. These staff are subject to a maximum retirement age of 65.

Staff may be retained beyond normal retirement age for short periods where there is a specific business need (this might, for example, be to complete a particular task or to cover the time until a replacement arrives). Flexible early retirement may be offered if the Department needs to resolve a structural problem.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire dated 18 March and 18 June, concerning Mr. A. Tabbenor of Brooklands, Barnes Lane, Youlgrave, Derbyshire, and his suckler cow premium; [5881]

(2) when she will reply to the letters dated 18 March and 18 June from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire concerning Mr. A. Tabbenor of Brooklands, Youlgrave, in Derbyshire and his suckler cow premium. [21002]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* A response to the hon. Member's letters of 18 March and 18 June 2001 was sent on 10 February 2002.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 801W, when she will reply to the letter from the Surrey County Agricultural Society dated 16 January regarding the showing of animals at the county show that will take place on 3 June. [31461]

Mr. Morley: We have no record of having received the letter from the Surrey County Agricultural Society dated 17 January referred to by the hon. Member.

Recreational Craft Directive

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what agreement was reached at the Council of Ministers' meeting on 29 October on amendments to the recreational craft directive, with particular reference to exhaust noise emissions levels. [12311]

Mr. Meacher: At the Council of Ministers' meeting on 29 October, political agreement on a common position was reached on the amendment to Directive 94/25/EC laying down limit values for exhaust and noise emissions from new recreational craft placed on the Community market. The Council agreed limit values at the levels proposed by the European Commission in COM(2000) 639 dated 12 October 2000. Particularly in relation to noise emissions, agreement was reached on less costly methods of demonstrating compliance. Overall the agreement represented a reasonable balance between achieving challenging environmental objectives while minimising the cost to small and medium-sized business and individuals.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent on administering the Common Agricultural Policy in the United Kingdom, and what proportion of total CAP spending in the UK was paid to farmers in each of the last five years. [33101]

Mr. Morley: We estimate the cost of administering CAP market support measures throughout the UK to have been £78 million in the financial year 2000–01. We estimate the cost of administering direct support measures in England in that year to have been £52 million. The administration of direct payments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the devolved Ministers.

The following table gives estimates of (a) expenditure on CAP market support measures and (b) direct payments to the agriculture sector under the CAP in the UK in the last five years. It is not possible to calculate how much of the expenditure on market support was paid to farmers, as traders can also be eligible. Almost all the direct payments will have gone to farmers.

£ million

	Total expenditure under the CAP	*Expenditure on CAP market support measures*	*Of which: Expenditure on CAP direct payments to the agriculture sector*
1996–97	4,278	1,621	2,657
1997–98	3,546	1,281	2,265
1998–99	3,455	1,013	2,443
1999–2000	3,131	710	2,421
2000–01	2,977	665	2,312

Note:

The final column includes expenditure on HLCAs and LFAs.

Animal Movements (Restrictions)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the financial losses incurred by UK farmers through animal movement restrictions preventing transport to market until after stock had passed 30 months of age. [27028]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 February 2002]:* It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of these losses. There are no statistics available to identify the number of cattle that entered the over thirty months scheme as a result of the movement restrictions introduced to control the spread of foot and mouth disease.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the instances in which her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32036]

Mr. Morley: All departments are committed to pay 100 per cent. of correctly presented invoices on time, however payment terms may vary between departments and suppliers. For the financial year 2000–01 DEFRA and its agencies paid 93.9 per cent. of invoices on time. The failure has been cut by 4.4 per cent. since 1999–00.

Note:

248,083 invoices were paid in 2000–01 of which 15,054 were paid late. These are not readily presentable in a list without disproportionate cost.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many press releases were issued about foot and mouth disease between 19 February and 18 March 2001; and how many refer to an epidemic. [33711]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Between 19 February and 18 March 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food issued 17 press releases. The word epidemic was not used in any of them.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what samples were kept for further investigation of those animals slaughtered on suspicion during the recent foot and mouth outbreak. [37475]

Mr. Morley: As at 19 February 2002, samples had been taken on 331 Slaughter on Suspicion (SOS) premises to investigate the presence of foot and mouth virus.

Sample types included the following material:

epithelium from the feet and mouth

blood

Probang samples.

Many samples used for diagnosis during the outbreak remain in storage at the Institute of Animal Health at Pirbright, but we are informed that to identify how many of these samples were originally from SOS premises would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

New Potatoes

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the derivation, by country, of UK cultivated new potatoes; and what measures are in place to ensure the accurate labelling of early new potatoes entering the retail chain. [35880]

Mr. Morley: Only those seed potatoes which have been produced in EU member states or in Switzerland are permitted to enter the UK and be planted here. These measures are laid down in the Plant Health (Great Britain) Order 1993 (as amended) and in the Plant Health Order (Northern Ireland) 1993 (as amended). However, information on the seed varieties imported is not available so it is not possible to distinguish between those destined for early and ware production.

As far as labelling is concerned, the Food Labelling Regulations 1996 require only the variety of potato to be mentioned on the label.

Rural Land Register

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made on data gathering and database design for the Rural Land Register; and if she will make a statement. [35276]

Mr. Morley: A contract was awarded on 8 November 2001 to a consortium to capture and digitise all land parcels registered under the Integrated Administration and Control System. The work is in progress and is due to be completed by December 2003. A prototype of the database to hold the digitised field data has been prepared and will be further developed over the coming months.

Cameraria Ohridella

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 477W, on cameraria ohridella, if she will state *(a)* how close cameraria ohridella has spread towards the UK and on what date this was, *(b)* what the rate of spread towards the United Kingdom is and *(c)* what action the Government plan to take to prevent transmission across the channel; and whether she estimates that the disease is likely to have spread to the UK by the spring. [35820]

Mr. Morley: Since it was first detected in Macedonia in 1985, cameraria ohridella has spread rapidly across Europe and is now present in the Netherlands where it was found in 1999 and in France and Belgium where it was found in 2000.

Although the natural rate of spread of the moth is quite low, passive carriage on vehicles from infested areas is a highly effective and speedy means of dispersal, which explains the recent expansion of range across Europe. Because of this, it is not considered practicable to try to prevent its spread through the imposition of phytosanitary controls. Transmission to Britain is considered highly likely, although it is not possible at this stage to estimate when this might happen.

As I indicated previously, in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 362W, the Forestry Commission will shortly publish an exotic pest alert which will be sent to foresters, local authority tree experts and others. In addition to providing a colour-illustrated guide to the biology and symptoms of the moth, it will ask readers to report any sightings so that these can be investigated without delay.

May I also draw the hon. Member's attention to the Forest Research Annual Report for 2000–01 (HC 247), copies of which are in the Library of the House. The report gives a detailed account of the information known to date about this pest, an assessment of the level of threat posed to this country and the control options that have been assessed.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36216]

Mr. Morley: In the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its agencies, 378 staff have received paid leave to undertake union duties throughout 2001–02. During 1998–99, 1999–2000, and 2000–01, the figures for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food totalled 230, 364 and 389 respectively.

During each of these years, up to 25 days was available to each union representative to undertake trade union activities although the average claimed was less.

From the information received annually over the 1 April to 30 March period, the cost to public funds has been £431,990 during 1998–99; £438,753 during 1999–2000, and £439,130 during 2000–01 based on full salary cost. Figures for the 2001–02 financial year are not yet available.

In the time available and given the number of NDPBs for which DEFRA is responsible, it is not possible to confirm the position for all NDPBs at reasonable cost.

Fish Quotas

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* overall and *(b)* cumulative change in fish quotas available to UK regional fishing vessels for the past five years has been according to (i) sector and (ii) species. [37949]

Mr. Morley: The following table gives the UK quota figures for the past five years organised by species and ICES fishing areas:

UK quota 1998–2002 by species

Stock	*1998 UK quota*	*1999 U quota*	*2000 UK quota*	*2001 UK quota*	*2002 UK quota*
Sandeel IIa North Sea	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	17,794
Herring I, II	113,000	25,190	24,210	16,460	16,460
Herring IVa,b	38,910	40,570	40,570	40,570	38,169
Herring IVc, VIId	1,700	1,693	1,693	1,693	4,094
Herring Vb, VIaN, VIb	46,360	39,240	24,990	21,570	21,571
Herring VIa (Clyde)	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Herring VIIa	6,660	4,880	3,960	5,100	3,550
Herring VIIe,f	500	500	500	500	500
Herring VIIg-k	30	30	30	30	10
Herring IIa North Sea industrial by-catch	—	550	660	660	660
Cod I, lib	2,789	2,034	1,650	—	—
Cod IIa, IV	58,740	56,260	34,360	18,930	19,397
Cod Vb, VI, XII, XIV	5,520	5,960	3,530	2,222	2,960
Cod VIIa	2,045	1,585	605	895	1,378
Cod VIIb-k, VIII, IX, X	1,660	1,570	1,330	870	712
Megrim IIa North Sea	—	2,880	2,880	2,600	2,599
Megrim Vb, VI, XII, XIV	1,520	1,520	1,520	1,370	1,367
Megrim VII	3,210	3,210	2,570	2,150	1,874
Dab and Flounder IIa North Sea	—	2,590	2,590	2,330	2,331
Anglers IIa North Sea	—	17,960	14,370	11,495	8,545
Anglers Vb, VI, XII, XIV	2,650	2,650	2,460	1,975	1,513
Anglers VII	4,800	4,800	4,140	3,870	3,295
Haddock IIa, IV	66,000	57,045	53,045	41,780	59,805
Haddock Vb, CI, XII, XIV	20,710	15,110	15,110	10,820	10,992
Haddock VII, VIII, IX, X	2,000	2,200	1,320	1,200	830
Haddock VIIa (additional to haddock VII)	—	2,390	1,629	1,293	622
Whiting IIa, IV	27,415	24,590	19,470	13,335	18,853
Whiting Vb, VI, XII, XIV	5,805	4,060	2,775	2,580	2,157
Whiting VIIa	1,930	1,720	1,020	685	443
Whiting VIIb-k	2,900	2,680	2,410	2,250	3,402
Hake IIa, IV	370	350	270	160	170
Hake Vb, VI, VII, XII, XIV	5,960	5,550	4,240	2,500	2,662
Blue whiting IIa, IV	1,070	1,070	1,070	1,070	592
Blue whiting Vb, VI, VII, XII, XIV	—	35,000	38,030	45,350	25,032
Blue whiting VIIIabde	—	7,241	7,241	7,241	4,004
Lemon sole IIa North Sea	—	7,330	7,330	6,580	5,937
Nephrops IIa, IV	13,165	13,165	14,895	13,380	14,398
Nephrops Vb, VI	12,305	12,305	12,305	11,070	11,072
Nephrops VII	7,545	7,545	6,885	6,200	5,856
Northern prawn IIa, IV	—	1,948	1,948	1,778	1,074
Plaice IIa, IV	23,880	28,070	26,810	21,780	20,808
Plaice Vb, VI, XII, XIV	1,450	1,450	1,450	1,170	1,050
Plaice VIIa	885	885	885	835	1,223
Plaice VIId,e	1,660	2,150	1,890	1,750	1,946
Plaice VIIf,g	250	205	185	180	119
Plaice VIIh,j,k	170	170	170	150	146
Pollack Vb, VI, XII, XIV	400	400	400	400	403
Pollack VII	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,964
Saithe IIa, III, IV	7,790	8,830	6,820	6,980	10,838

UK quota 1998–2002 by species

Stock	*1998 UK quota*	*1999 U quota*	*2000 UK quota*	*2001 UK quota*	*2002 UK quota*
Saithe Vb, VI, XII, XIV	3,425	3,125	3,080	3,255	3,211
Saithe VII, VIII, IX, X	1,350	1,350	970	805	1,340
Turbot and brill IIa North Sea	—	1,390	1,390	1,110	1,042
Skates and rays IIa North Sea	—	3,920	3,920	3,128	3,136
Mackerel IIa (EC), III, IV	1,390	1,390	1,540	1,580	1,611
Mackerel IIa (non-EC), Vb, VI, VII, VIIIabde, XII, XIV	179,590	165,480	193,240	197,069	201,647
Sole II, IV	820	945	945	815	686
Sole Vb, VI, XII, XIV	30	30	30	30	25
Sole VIIa	200	200	240	240	244
Sole VIId	1,005	905	790	885	1,000
Sole VIIe	395	410	385	355	309
Sole VIIf,g	240	270	325	285	301
Sole VIIh,j,k	120	120	120	110	138
Sprat II, IV	4,950	5,900	8,350	8,350	8,348
Sprat VIId,e	6,300	6,300	6,300	6,300	6,300
Spurdog IIa, IV	—	7,177	7,177	7,177	5,745
Horse mackerel IIa North Sea	5,530	5,840	4,960	4,960	4,960
Horse mackerel Vb, VI, VII, VIIIabde, XII, XIV	30,700	25,310	22,850	22,850	14,026

Veterinary Service

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will extend the role of the temporary veterinary inspector towards a territorial army of vets. [37477]

Mr. Morley: The Department is currently evaluating future arrangements for the engagement of temporary veterinary resources. This will, among other issues, encompass an examination of the current terms and conditions for the engagement of temporary veterinary inspectors (TVIs).

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what Government-funded training is available for private veterinary surgeons to ensure that they have access to knowledge about animal disease. [37478]

Mr. Morley: Private veterinarians are appointed as local veterinary inspectors (LVIs) by the Department in order to carry out specific functions.

Part of the appointment process involves departmental training in those areas to which the appointment relates. The objectives of such training are to improve the ability and performance of the LVI in carrying out work for the Department and to provide motivation to achieve and maintain satisfactory standards.

Following a successful assessment of the trainee's suitability a temporary appointment of six months will be established. During this period an assessment of the officer's competence will be made. Satisfactory assessment leads to a full appointment.

It is the responsibility of the Department to maintain a level of training suitable for the LVI to perform his or her functions. Training is complemented with written instructions, newsletters and practice liaison meetings during which new issues and instructions are discussed. The Departments official journal of the SVS—*State Veterinary Journal*—is published and distributed to LVI practices bi-annually. These publications have included a series of articles on notifiable diseases. All LVIs have access to a departmental veterinary officer 24 hours a day 365 days a year.

Woodland

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment is being made of the value of woodland in urban areas. [37145]

Mr. Morley: The Forestry Commission has a programme of social research to assess the value of woodland in urban areas. A number of projects are being conducted under this programme including investigating how woodlands enhance communities, and the value of woodlands in relation to recreation, social inclusion, land regeneration and economic development. The links between access to the natural environment and improved physical and mental health will also be investigated.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions also plans to commission research into the feasibility of developing a tool for putting an economic value on the benefits derived from the provision and maintenance of street trees. This is likely to build on the study currently being carried out by the National Urban Forestry Unit into the impact of street trees on residential property values.

In addition, the urban green spaces taskforce, chaired by the Minister responsible for regeneration, the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), is developing proposals for improving the quality of green spaces, through better design, planning and management. As part of this work, the taskforce has been reviewing current evidence on the state of parks and green spaces, including any wider benefits to people's quality of life in the urban environment. Their thinking has been informed by research carried out by the University of Sheffield, the results of which we expect to publish alongside the taskforce's final report in April.

Private Sewers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research has been undertaken by her Department in respect of private sewers; and if she will make a statement. [37875]

Mr. Meacher: We have appointed outside consultants to undertake research into existing private sewers, the main objective of which is to establish their extent, identify and examine the problems associated with them and to produce workable solutions. The research began in December and is due to last 18 months. Further details will be provided in an announcement that I will be making at the end of this month.

Food Supplements

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the impact of European directives on the supply of health supplements. [35661]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

A common position on a draft European Union Directive on Food Supplements was agreed by the Council of Ministers on 3 December and is currently at second reading stage in the European Parliament. The proposed directive would establish a framework for harmonised controls on vitamin and mineral content of food supplements and introduce a number of useful labelling measures.

The impact of this directive on consumer choice and the specialist food supplement sector will depend on future developments on maximum limits and lists of permitted nutrients. We are firmly committed to the view that, in the interests of consumer choice, the law should allow food supplements which are safe and properly labelled to be freely marketed.

Shellfish Poisoning

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the incidents of diarrhetic shellfish poisoning in the UK the past five years, and their impact on the shellfish industry. [34537]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The last year for which figures on the number of incidents of diarrhetic shellfish poisoning are readily available is 2000. In this year there were approximately 60 closures of shellfish beds due to the presence of this poison, lasting from a few weeks to several months. Closures are put in place in order to protect public health, the beds reopening when further testing indicates that the poison is absent. This Department has no information on the impact of such closures on the shellfish industry.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has commissioned into the causes of diarrhetic shellfish poisoning. [34536]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Standards Agency has an extensive on-going programme of research on shellfish poisoning. This contains a specific project that seeks to understand more about the relationship between the source of the toxins, microscopic algae in the water that shellfish feed on, and the presence of toxin in the shellfish. Diarrhetic shellfish poisoning is included in this work.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether diarrhetic shellfish poisoning is classified as being caused by a pest. [34534]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning occurs when shellfish ingest toxins present in certain types of the microscopic algae on which they feed. These algae occur naturally in the waters in which shellfish are grown and are not classified as being a pest in the context of the Food Safety (Fishery Products and Live Shellfish) (Hygiene) Regulations 1998.

Urban Green Spaces

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to receive the final report of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force. [37146]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

The final report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce will be published in April.

Rural Postal Services

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to carry out a rural-proofing analysis of Postcomm's proposals to reform the postal industry; and if she will make a statement; [34854]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact on rural communities of Postcomm's proposals to reform the postal industry; and if she will make a statement. [34855]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today to PQ No. 31275 from my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart), at column 1126W.

Postcomm's document "Proposals for effective competition in UK postal services", published on Thursday 31 January, is a public consultation. I understand that the Countryside Agency, the Government's statutory adviser on rural issues, intends to respond to Postcomm on the proposals put forward in that document and will include in that response an analysis of the impact of the proposals on rural areas which it will also make public.

TREASURY

Entrust

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what Entrust's expenditure was in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 for (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland. [36450]

Mr. Boateng: Expenditure by environmental bodies under the environment bodies landfill tax credit scheme is:

	£
(i) for the UK	
1998–99	46,835,182
1999–2000	82,040,006
2001–01	117,659,08
(ii) for Scotland	
1998–99	5,475,538
1999–2000	9,904,464
2000–01	2,670,705

Income Tax

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out for each of the last five years, in total, for employment income and self-employed income, for income ranges *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £5,000–£10,000, *(c)* £10,000–£15,000, *(d)* £15,000–£20,000, *(e)* £20,000–£30,000, *(f)* £30,000–£50,000 and *(g)* £50,000 plus, the number of people paying income tax, the total amount raised and proportion of UK totals in each nation and region of the UK; and if he will provide estimates for 2002–03 where available. [37567]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Tax Returns

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 693W, if he will update his reply to take account of the advice on the Inland Revenue website (at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/workingtogether/tax-net-prov-figs.htm) under the heading, Tax Returns and Provisional Figures Update; and if he will make a statement. [35105]

Dawn Primarolo *[hol[illegible] answer 14 February 2002]:* Based on earlier legal [illegible]ce and understanding of the law the Inland Reve[illegible]s practice was to reject as unsatisfactory any re[illegible] that contained a provisional or estimated figure that [illegible] not have an adequate explanation or indication of wh[illegible]h final figure would be supplied.

Following an appeal against a late filing penalty the Inland Revenue sought fresh legal advice. From 23 October 2001, because of this new advice, the Inland Revenue now accept that a customer has made a return which contains an unexplained estimated or provisional figure and does not indicate when the final figure will be supplied.

A detailed explanation of the new position was published on the Inland Revenue's internet site and in their Tax Bulletin 57 published in January 2002.

Consumer Debt Advice

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce financial advice bureaux to provide consumer debt advice and counselling. [37473]

Ruth Kelly: Good consumer debt advice and counselling can be vital to individuals with serious financial difficulties. That is why we welcome it being widely available though Citizens Advice Bureaux, National Debtline, other independent advice centres, the Consumer Credit Counselling Service (CCCS) and local authority advice centres, all of which provide free help to those in difficulties. These are already funded by a combination of central and local government, and industry support channelled through the Money Advice Trust and CCCS.

In addition recent reports by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Consumer Policy Institute, as well as proposals from the Financial Services Authority in their Consultation Paper 121, focus attention on the way financial advice is delivered and funded. We are following the debate that has accompanied those initiatives closely.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of the Financial Services Authority in consumer debt advice and counselling. [37474]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services and Markets Act 2001 gives the Financial Services Authority (FSA) specific objectives:

> to promote public understanding of the financial system, including promoting awareness of the benefits and risks of investments and other financial dealing, and the provision of appropriate information and advice, and
>
> to secure the appropriate degree of protection for consumers.

In addition the FSA has powers to challenge terms in financial services consumer contracts that are unfair.

In the future a new FSA mortgage regime will regulate advice on the largest debt most people are ever likely to enter into.

The FSA seeks to ensure consumers are better able to make informed choices and achieve fair deals. An understanding of credit and debt and the role they play in financial planning is an essential part of this. To help ordinary consumers understand and use their rights the FSA operates a dedicated consumer website including a section on credit and debt, produces publications dealing, for example, with mortgages and unfair contract terms, and has developed materials to support work in schools. The latter includes material aimed at developing financial capability for pupils aged 14 to 19 that specifically addresses credit and debt.

The FSA does not duplicate the work done by others. Instead it provides links where appropriate to the more detailed specialist information provided by agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux and other local government and voluntary initiatives.

Where the FSA is contacted by people with debt problems it refers them to the appropriate agency such as their local CAB or the National Debtline.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance he has received from the ONS on the definition of a company limited by guarantee as a replacement for Railtrack in the national accounts. [37274]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 26 February 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on what guidance has been received from the ONS on the definition of a company limited by guarantee as a replacement for Railtrack in the national accounts. (37274)

In October 2001 ONS provided provisional statistical classification advice on plans for a company limited by guarantee. This provisional advice was that the company would be classified as a private non-financial corporation, if the detailed plans were developed as discussed. ONS will update this advice when detailed plans for the company have been finalised.

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the impact of Railtrack in administration will be on the PSBR. [37277]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer given to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 202W.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 702W, on Railtrack, in what way the disclosure of information on the consultations on draft legislation would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussions. [37759]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave her on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1052W.

National Savings

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the main components of the cost of re-branding National Savings; and what the cost was of advertising the name change in national newspapers. [37170]

Ruth Kelly: As a key part of its marketing strategy, all costs associated with the re-positioning have been met from National Savings and Investments' existing marketing and running costs budgets. The costs of communicating the name change and a new 24 hour, seven days a week telephone service in the national newspapers is £430,000. A breakdown of the main components of the re-positioning of National Savings and Investments is as follows:

	£ million
Promotion to current and potential customers	1.1
Programme of cross business/internal communication, training and implementation to staff of National Savings and Investments (120 staff), Siemens Business Services (2,000 staff), and Post Office Ltd. (17,500 branches).	0.4
Development and design fees for corporate identity and advertising and media fees.	0.6
Total	2.1

Film and TV Industry

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning use of tax allowances by *(a)* independent film makers and *(b)* television producers. [36108]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor receives numerous budget representations from various sources. All taxes are kept under review and decisions are made as part of the normal Budget process.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria he uses when determining tax allowances for *(a)* independent film makers and *(b)* television shows and soap operas. [36109]

Dawn Primarolo: There are three main measures providing enhanced tax relief for the production or acquisition of film, Sections 40A to D of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1992, Section 42 of the same Act, and Section 48 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1997. The measures are designed to promote growth, employment, investment and opportunities in the British film industry.

Transport 10-Year Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 243W, on funding for the 10-year transport plan, whether there will be a decrease of £1.962 billion for payment over the years 2006–07 to 2011–12. [37227]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Of the £1.962 billion figure, £1.5 billion reflected the advancement of direct grants due to Railtrack in future control periods. The long-term savings resulting from this advancement of grant will be one of a number of factors to be taken into account in this year's review of the Ten Year Plan.

Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with which British overseas and dependent territories the United States of America has exchange of information agreements for tax purposes. [37825]

Dawn Primarolo: The United States of America has a Tax Information Exchange Agreement with the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions in each of the last three years British regulators and official investigators have requested information from the regulatory authorities of the British overseas territories and Crown dependencies. [37826]

Ruth Kelly: Records of requests for information made to the regulatory authorities of the British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies are not maintained centrally. The Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies have powers to provide information to overseas regulators, law enforcement authorities and judicial authorities and powers to obtain the necessary information including, if necessary, by using compulsory powers.

Carter Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the submissions to the Carter report on payroll burdens; and if he will make a statement on the report. [37803]

Dawn Primarolo: Over 50 responses have been received from a wide range of interested parties, including most of the main bodies representing employers. Responses are still being received and are being reviewed.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* complaints he has received and *(b)* errors he has detected in connection with the Inland Revenue's electronic lodgement service in each year since it began; and in how many cases each year breaches of security have been established. [37829]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is as follows: *(a)* The Chancellor of the Exchequer has received one complaint in connection with the Inland Revenue's Electronic Lodgement Service. This was in the tax year 2000–01.

(b) The Inland Revenue is constantly reviewing, updating and improving the Electronic Lodgement Service following feedback from customers, software developers and Inland Revenue staff. The Inland Revenue is not aware of any instances where tax return information has been recorded against the wrong taxpayer.

(b) The Inland Revenue takes security very seriously. All possible security measures are taken to ensure the Electronic Lodgement Service is secure. It is also constantly monitored for any potential security breaches. The Inland Revenue has no reported incidents of unauthorised access to the Electronic Lodgement Service.

VAT

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much VAT revenue the Treasury has received in each of the last five years from the sale of *(a)* audio-visual equipment and *(b)* consumer electronics. [38128]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not available.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what systems exist to enable members of the public to inform the Inland Revenue of cases of tax evasion. [38196]

Dawn Primarolo: Anyone who suspects someone of evading tax can report that suspicion in confidence to any local tax office. Alternatively, they can call the Inland Revenue's anti-fraud helpline on 0800 788887.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 957W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37900]

Ruth Kelly: Information at this level of detail is not available. Expenditure on all Treasury offices since May 1997 has been limited to maintenance works pending the move to new accommodation.

Treasury Building

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 841W, on the Treasury Building PFI deal, what further operating costs there are for the Treasury Building under the Treasury PFI deal, other than those specified as hard services and soft services. [38031]

Ruth Kelly: None.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer using the Treasury's inflation assumptions for the Treasury Building PFI deal, what he estimates the total amount of cash paid by the Treasury to Exchequer Partnership will be for service costs over the lifetime of the Treasury Building PFI deal. [37866]

Ruth Kelly: As I told the hon. Member on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 844W, the total amount of cash paid over the operating period, using HMT's inflation assumptions, will be £838.154 million. This equates to £169.3 million in net present cost terms, discounted at 6 per cent. in real terms and assuming 2.5 per cent. inflation. On the same basis, the services element would amount to £212.48 million over the operating period. This equates to £50.864 million in net present cost terms, discounted at 6 per cent. in real terms and assuming 2.5 per cent inflation. However, as its name implies, there is a single unitary payment for the provision of serviced accommodation so there is no services payment by HMT to Exchequer Partnership.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 228W, what is the total area in square feet of all empty properties referred to. [37893]

Ruth Kelly: The total number of empty properties for the year 2000–01 was 30 and the total area for these was 693,531 sq ft.

Eight were disposed of during the year and these had an area of 322,110 sq ft.

This left 22 properties with an area of 371,421 sq ft. empty for the full year.

Terrorism

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent financial action task force plenary meeting on terrorist financing, money laundering and non-cooperative jurisdictions held in Hong Kong. [37651]

Ruth Kelly: At the financial action task force plenary meeting in Hong Kong, China made good progress in taking forward the FATF's work on terrorist financing.

The FATF plenary was followed by a successful global terrorist financing forum, attended by almost 60 jurisdictions from FATF, FATF-style regional bodies and the OGBS, as well as nine international organisations. The forum stressed the importance of all jurisdictions adopting and implementing the eight special recommendations on terrorist financing issued by the FATF in October 2001. The forum called on all jurisdictions in the world to participate in a self-assessment exercise against the special recommendations on the same terms as FATF members.

The FATF confirmed that in June 2002, it will initiate a process to identify jurisdictions that lack appropriate measures to combat terrorist financing. FATF members reiterated their commitment of members to assist non-members, as appropriate, to comply with the special recommendations.

The FATF also reviewed its list of non-co-operative countries and territories (NCCTs) in the fight against money laundering, and welcomed the additional progress made by a number of the 19 jurisdictions on the list. The FATF will consider progress made by NCCT countries at its next meeting in June 2002, and will consider taking counter-measures against jurisdictions that have not made adequate progress in addressing deficiencies.

Debt Rescheduling

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the obstacles are which stand in the way of debt rescheduling that he refers to on page 40 of the Treasury document "Tackling Poverty, A Global New Deal". [37942]

Mr. Boateng: Over the past three years the international community has been working hard to develop a new framework of partnership between the public and private sectors for preventing and managing balance of payments problems so that all parties that benefit from the international financial system play their part in maintaining stability.

However, the ability of minority creditors to litigate successfully against sovereigns in default is a serious obstacle to debt restructuring, and can exacerbate creditor co-ordination problems. Thus some form of international bankruptcy procedure may be necessary to prevent disruptive litigation by minority credits.

More generally, there is a need to clarify the roles of debtors, creditors and the official sector within the crisis resolution framework, in order to provide the right incentives for creditors to co-ordinate effectively during debt restructuring negotiations.

Suicide

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths have occurred on average each year over the last three years in *(a)* England and *(b)* each county owing to suicide. [37733]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Mark Simmonds, dated 26 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question asking how many deaths have occurred on average each year over the last 3 years in England and each county owing to suicide. (37733).

The figures requested are given in the table below.

Suicides[1] by English counties[2] and former counties, years of occurrence 1998 to 2000

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*1998–2000*
England	4,815	4,828	4,598	14,241
Bedfordshire, former county of	43	60	41	144
Berkshire, former county of	76	72	75	223
Bristol/Bath area	82	82	76	240
Buckinghamshire, former county of	62	54	67	183
Cambridgeshire, former county of	55	57	65	177
Cheshire, former county of	102	97	95	294
Cornwall (and Isle of Scilly)	59	63	63	185
Cumbria	68	63	50	181
Derbyshire, former county of	75	96	90	261
Devon, former county of	119	137	134	390
Dorset, former county of	67	83	71	221
Durham, former county of	60	62	54	176
East Sussex, former county of	90	94	103	287
Essex, former county of	153	127	136	416
Gloucestershire	56	60	57	173
Greater London (Metropolitan County)	734	685	616	2,035
Greater Manchester (Metropolitan County)	297	263	266	826
Hampshire, former county of	157	167	148	472
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	70	91	80	241
Hertfordshire	72	61	65	198
Isle of Wight, former county of	20	17	15	52
Kent, former county of	150	124	147	421
Lancashire, former county of	181	170	162	513
Leicestershire, former county of	77	92	91	260
Lincolnshire	70	68	62	200
Merseyside (Metropolitan County)	141	140	130	411
Norfolk	92	75	74	241
North Yorkshire, former county of	86	61	73	220
Northamptonshire	54	63	43	160
Northumberland	28	34	25	87
Nottinghamshire, former county of	99	101	109	309
Oxfordshire	52	53	54	159
Shropshire, former county of	28	54	43	125
Somerset	43	41	55	139

Suicides[1] by English counties[2] and former counties, years of occurrence 1998 to 2000

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*1998–2000*
South Yorkshire (Metropolitan County)	129	117	120	366
Staffordshire, former county of	107	103	88	298
Suffolk	60	52	60	172
Surrey	85	72	85	242
Tees Valley less Darlington	51	46	44	141
The Humber	86	94	85	265
Tyne and Wear (Metropolitan County)	109	120	114	343
Warwickshire	45	50	44	139
West Midlands (Metropolitan County)	219	245	245	709
West Sussex	59	81	73	213
West Yorkshire (Metropolitan County)	199	235	158	592
Wiltshire, former county of	48	46	47	141

[1] Suicide is defined by ONS using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision: E950-E959, E980-E989, excluding E988.8

[2] Data are presented for English counties in 1998 to 2000, based on their boundaries in those years, and for former counties (based on the equivalent areas covered by current authorities.)

Pensions

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many self-invested pension plans there were at the most recent available date; and what their total value was. [37713]

Ruth Kelly: Information on the total number of self-invested personal pension plans and value of their funds is not available.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the changes in tax revenues if tax relief for pension contributions were *(a)* limited to the standard rate, *(b)* limited to the standard rate for contributions in excess of £5,000 per annum and *(c)* abolished for contributions in excess of (i) £5,000 per annum and (ii) £10,000 per annum. [37863]

Ruth Kelly: The estimated full year yields from restricting income tax relief on pension contributions by employees and the self-employed in 2001–02 are detailed in the table.

£ billion

	Full year yield
Contributions restricted to basic rate on:	
all contributions	1.7
contributions in excess of £5,000	0.5
All relief abolished on contributions:	
in excess of £5,000	1.1
in excess of £10,000	0.5

These estimates take no account of the impact on employer contributions, neither do they take account of the behavioural effects that are likely to result from such a change.

Population Trends (Lincolnshire)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the population was of *(a)* Humberside, *(b)* North East Lincolnshire and *(c)* North Lincolnshire, in each year from 1990 to 2001; and what predictions have been made of the population trends in each of these areas in the next 10 years. [37753]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Shona McIsaac, dated 26 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the population of Humberside, North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire from 1990–2011. (37753)

The attached table shows the estimated mid year population from 1990 to 2000 and the projected mid-year population from 2001 to 2011 for these areas. The projections are based on the mid-1996 subnational population estimates and use assumptions on future levels of births, deaths and migration. There is some discontinuity between the estimates and projections because the estimates for 1997 to 2000 are based on actual births, deaths and migration. These differed from the assumptions used when producing the projections. However, the projections are the best available information on the likely future population in the period 2001 to 2011.

Table 1: Population of Humberside, North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire, 1990–2011

Mid-year population (thousands)

	Humberside[1]	*North East Lincolnshire UA*	*North Lincolnshire UA*
1990[2]	872.5	161.4	152.5
1991[2]	877.3	161.7	153.6
1992[2]	881.4	161.6	153.5
1993[2]	884.4	162.0	152.6
1994[2]	889.5	161.4	153.2
1995[2]	889.2	160.1	152.1
1996[2]	886.7	158.6	152.4
1997[2]	884.7	157.6	152.4
1998[2]	883.1	156.2	152.3
1999[2]	881.6	156.0	152.0
2000[2]	881.0	155.2	152.5
2001[3]	983.8	153.7	151.1
2002[3]	894.8	152.7	150.7
2003[3]	895.8	151.6	150.4
2004[3]	896.8	150.5	150.0
2005[3]	897.8	149.4	149.7
2006[3]	898.7	148.3	149.4
2007[3]	899.8	147.3	149.1
2008[3]	900.8	146.2	148.8
2009[3]	901.9	145.1	148.5
2010[3]	903.0	144.1	148.3
2011[3]	904.2	143.1	148.0

[1] The are described as Humberside refers to the four unitary authorities of East Riding of Yorkshire, City of Kingston upon Hull, North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire which replaced the former administrative county on 1 April 1996.

[2] Estimated mid-year population.

[3] 1996-based projected mid-year population.

Source:

Office for National Statistics, Crown Copyright 2001

Departmental Organogram

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place an organogram of HM Treasury in the Library. [37683]

Ruth Kelly: An organogram of HM Treasury was placed in the Library on 12 April 2001 in HM Treasury's departmental report, "Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments: The Government's Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 and Main Estimates 2001–02" (Cm 5116). This is also available on the Treasury website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Customs and Excise (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of people promoted in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years had served at their previous grade for more than one year. [37757]

Mr. Boateng: In the calendar year 2001, 81.6 per cent. of people promoted in HM Customs and Excise in Northern Ireland had been in their previous job band (grade) for more than one year.

This percentage is based on people still in the Department, and excludes people who may have been promoted again in 2002. Earlier figures are unavailable because the datafields on the system do not lend themselves to historical interrogation of this type.

Disabled Person's Tax Credit (Tooting)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the Tooting constituency have been awarded the disabled person's tax credit in each of the last three years. [38204]

Dawn Primarolo: The disabled person's tax credit was introduced in October 1999. The number of recipients in each constituency appear in the DPTC Quarterly Enquiries from April 2000, copies of which are in the Library.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and civil service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35900]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Thirty-nine people have been seconded from the private sector to the Treasury since 1997, and four are currently serving.

Details of current secondees from all sectors outside central Government can be found on the Treasury website.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28412]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor's Departments have completed 12 Final Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) since August 2001:

HM Treasury

The Protection of the Euro against Counterfeiting Regulations 2001; The Money Laundering Regulations; The Insurance Fees Regulation; The Credit Unions Regulations (Increase in limits on deposits by persons too young to be members and of periods for repayment of loans); The Financial Services and Markets Act 2001 (Promotion of collective investment schemes); The Open Ended Investment Companies Regulations; The Money Laundering Regulations.

HM Customs and Excise

European Community Legislation: Proposal for a Council Directive Amending the Sixth VAT Directive (77/388/EEC), to simplify, modernise and harmonise the conditions laid down for VAT Invoicing; New VAT Registration Forms.

HM Inland Revenue

Life Insurance Polices, etc.—Information duties of Insurers; CIS: Issue of CIS5 (Partner) Certificates; New Tax Credits.

For additional information relating to costing methodology I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W.

European Investment Bank

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the timetable and process will be for deciding on the UK's contribution to the next replenishment of the European investment bank. [37804]

Ruth Kelly: Capital increases to the European investment bank have to be agreed by the bank's board of governors, acting unanimously. There are 15 such governors, representing the 15 member state shareholders of the bank. The UK governor is the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The EIB is currently nearing its maximum permitted level of exposure (for 100 billion euros of subscribed capital, 6 per cent. of which is paid in, it may have up to 250 billion euros of outstanding liabilities, ie a gearing ratio of 1:2.5). Unless the bank dramatically curtails its lending activities, there will therefore need to be a capital increase agreed this year, to take effect from 1 January 2003. Proposals put forward by the bank's staff and management committee envisage a capital increase paid for from the bank's own funds. There will therefore be no requirement for any further paid in contribution from the UK or other shareholders. This principle (that capital increases should be met from reserves) will be entrenched for future capital increases too. Nevertheless, there are implications for the UK's contingent liability, the volume of which increases in proportion to the size of the bank's exposure.

The decision on the capital increase will be taken at the annual board of governors meeting, which takes place this year on 4 June. Proposals are currently being considered by the board of directors, which has three UK members.

Parliamentary Questions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will answer the question of 18 January 2002 from the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell concerning the distribution of benefits from personal allowances; and if he will make a statement. [38298]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has no record of the question to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will answer the question of 2 February 2002 from the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell concerning fees; and if he will make a statement. [38300]

Ruth Kelly: I assume the hon. Gentleman is referring to his questions 33457 and 33464, which the Chief Secretary answered on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1148–52W, along with other related questions.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 741W, on special advisers, for what reason such records of contacts with the media are for internal purposes only. [38309]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 766.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Sure Start

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many full-time day-care places are available through the Sure Start initiative; and how many children are within reach of the programme. [33014]

Yvette Cooper: The first 260 Sure Start programmes will have created 10,000 new full-time child care places by 2003–2004, including full-time daycare, full-time child minder places and wraparound care places.

Sure Start will reach approximately 400,000 children under four living in areas of disadvantage by 2003–04. There are 190,000 children under four living in the 252 Sure Start programmes currently operational.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was budgeted and what was the *(a)* outturn and *(b)* planned outturn for Sure Start in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01 and (iv) 2001–02. [36018]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* Sure Start was launched in 1998 with a budget of £84 million for 1999–2000, £184 million for 2000–01 and £184 million for 2001–02, with £100 million for end year flexibility also available in 2001–02. Final outturn information is available for 1999–2000 when the outturn was £7 million and for 2000–01 when the outturn was £43 million.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) her Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34410]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The available information, as contained in the following table, cannot be broken down by amount spent in the UK and abroad, as our payments systems do not enable this. Information on agencies and NDPBs is not collected centrally.

£

Year	*Line rental/ Other expenditure*	*Calls*	*Total*
1997–98	117,693.37	52,352.41	170,045.78
1998–99	117,339.61	50,959.11	168,298.72
1999–2000	160,410.62	58,478.47	218,889.09
2000–01	237,861.51	91,335.48	329,196.99

The "Other" expenditure includes the purchase of new handsets, personal hands-free kits, carry cases etc, but it is not possible to provide separate totals for line rental and hardware costs.

Information on calls made from privately owned phones by Ministers and staff could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Government Initiatives

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for *(a)* Sure Start and *(b)* employment zones (i) the amount budgeted and (ii) the total expended in each financial year for the planned lifetime of each initiative. [35281]

Yvette Cooper: For Sure Start, the budgeted expenditure for 1999–2000 to 2003–04 is as follows:

£ million

	Budget
1999–2000	84
2000–01	184
2001–02	[1]184
2002–03	449
2003–04	499

[1] £100 million of end year flexibility also available

Sure Start's budget for 2004–05 and beyond is currently under consideration as part of Spending Review 2002. Final outturn figures are available for 1999–2000, when the total outturn was £7 million and for 2000–01, when the total outturn was £43 million. Employment Zones are the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions; I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 538W.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the teachers' pay initiative is distributed among teaching staff; and which guidelines direct this distribution. [36134]

Margaret Hodge: Each college receives a teaching pay initiative allocation calculated each year in proportion to its main funding allocation from the Learning and Skills Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Allocations to individual teaching staff are based on the national principles and criteria set out in "The Teaching Pay Initiative Guidance", for general further education colleges, and "The Professional Standards Payment Guidance" for sixth form colleges. This guidance was produced by the Association of Colleges and the Sixth Form Colleges' Employers' Forum, respectively, in consultation with college practitioners, college representative bodies and the Department for Education and Skills. A copy of the guidance will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Children's Day Care Facilities (Lincolnshire)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many day care providers, broken down by type of provider, there were in *(a)* north-east Lincolnshire and *(b)* north Lincolnshire in each year from 1997 to 2001; [35317]

(2) how many day care places broken down by type of providers there were in *(a)* north-east Lincolnshire and *(b)* north Lincolnshire in each year from 1997 to 2001. [35318]

Margaret Hodge: The available information is shown in the tables.

Latest figures on day care facilities in England were published by my Department in the Statistical Bulletin "Children's Day Care facilities at 31 March 2001 (08/01)" in October 2001, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on my Department's website (www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics).

Numbers of day care facilities and places for children, by category of provider, in North East Lincolnshire local authority: 1997–2001

	Day nurseries[1]		*Child minders*[1]		*Playgroups and pre-schools*[1]		*Out of school clubs*[2]		*Holiday schemes*[2,3]	
Position as at 31 March	*Providers*	*Places*	*Providers*	*Places*	*Providers*	*Places*	*Providers*	*Places*	*Providers*	*Places*
2001	14	488	84	311	34	720	13	297	5	215
2000	11	361	82	300	36	811	8	186	5	215
1999	10	327	91	339	42	965	10	210	[4]—	[4]—
1998	9	300	92	341	45	1,028	7	166	5	161
1997	10	187	107	473	48	912	2	40	0	0

[1] Provision for children under eight.

[2] Provision for children aged five to seven years.

[3] Additional guidelines were given to providers in 1999.

[4] The information supplied by the local authority was incomplete and is therefore excluded from the time series.

Numbers of day care facilities and places for children, by category of provider, in North Lincolnshire local authority: 1997–2001

	Day nurseries[1]		*Child minders*[1]		*Playgroups and pre-schools*[1]		*Out of school clubs*[2]		*Holiday schemes*[2,3]	
Position as at 31 March	*Providers*	*Places*	*Providers*	*Places*	*Providers*	*Places*	*Providers*	*Places*	*Providers*	*Places*
2001	14	454	123	493	44	1,097	14	330	414	15,028
2000	12	403	124	491	48	1,174	13	316	451	16,428
1999	12	411	146	756	54	1,259	13	278	405	16,049
1998	11	364	144	562	54	1,259	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1997	27	872	[4]—	627	64	1,216	8	160	2	60

[1] Provision for children under eight.

[2] Provision for children aged five to seven years.

[3] Additional guidelines were given to providers in 1999.

[4] Not available.

Sector Skills Councils

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what research within the Sector Skills Development Agency has been undertaken which reviews the occupational synergy between the gas, water, electricity and telecommunications industries;

(2) if she intends to establish a sector skills council which represents all the utilities;

(3) how she defines utilities with reference to the sector skills council. [37024]

John Healey: Sector skills councils (SSCs) will be licensed in sectors where employers want one and the SSC standard is met. The licensing standard is contained in a development guide published in November 2001. A key criterion is for SSCs to have an employment base of economic or strategic significance. The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) will begin work in April 2002 and therefore has not undertaken any reviews of industry sectors. My Department has not defined the "utilities sector" and is looking to employers to bring forward proposals for sectors that meet the licensing standard and make sense to their industries. A Business Adviser has been allocated to work closely with interested employers to develop their proposals. Any formal expression of interest by employers to form an SSC in the utilities sector will be considered by the SSDA.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the implementation of sector skills councils and the arrangements to secure comprehensive coverage of all industrial, commercial, public and voluntary sectors of employment. [37303]

John Healey: Following our announcement of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in October 2001 we have made good progress in implementing this important UK skills and productivity initiative. A development guide was published in November 2001 that sets out the licensing standard for an SSC. Five Trailblazer SSCs have been selected and will be licensed very shortly. The Chair of the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) has been appointed. Other key appointments will be made in the next few weeks. The SSDA will begin work in April 2002 and will consider further proposals from employers to form SSCs.

Sector coverage of the SSC network will depend on employers coming forward with proposals that meet the licensing standard. A fundamental principle is that SSCs will be licensed only in sectors where employers come forward to provide influential leadership to significantly improve skills and productivity performance. The SSDA will be responsible for ensuring that essential industry, business and occupational sector-related work is delivered in support of employers and individuals in sectors without an SSC.

Education and Youth Council

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the outcome was of the Education and Youth Council held in Brussels on 14 February; what the Government's position was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [37298]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I represented the UK at the Education and Youth Council on 14 February.

The Council adopted a detailed work programme, setting out priority areas in educational policy for exchanging good practice and co-operative working between member states. The priorities follow on from the report on "Concrete Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems" presented to the Stockholm European Council in March 2001. The detailed work programme was adopted with little debate, and will be presented to the Barcelona European Council in March 2002.

The Council received information from the Commission on: its communication to the Barcelona European Council 'The Lisbon Strategy—making change happen'; its newly-published action plan on skills and mobility; and its proposal to extend the TEMPUS programme to include countries that border the Mediterranean.

The Council discussed the Commission's communication on "Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning". The UK supported the communication's practical proposals, and its commitment to maintaining the focus on the goals agreed at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000. I stressed the need to ensure coherence between the various strands of European level work in this area in order to support member states effectively in developing their lifelong learning policies.

The Council debated the Commission's white paper "A new impetus for European Youth" and adopted conclusions that stress the need to include the youth dimension in national and European policies, the need to reach out and include young people, and the need to ensure that co-operation at European level is flexible and respects national diversity. The UK emphasised the need to clarify the processes for taking forward this work at European level. We recognise the benefits of learning from other countries in this area and the need to include and consult all young people, including the most disengaged, to ensure that relevant policies meet their needs and aspirations as far as possible.

A copy of the council minutes will be placed in the Library in due course.

Skills Shortages

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will provide a breakdown of skills shortages in each region of the UK. [37592]

John Healey: The collection of such data in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a matter for the respective devolved administrations. The Employer Skills Survey 2001, commissioned by the Department shows that, on average, 3.6 per cent. of employers in England reported skills shortage vacancies[1], whilst the figures for employers in each region were as follows:

East Midlands 2.2 per cent.

Eastern 4.6 per cent.

London 4.2 per cent.

North East 2.9 per cent.

North West 3.5 per cent.

South East 3.7 per cent.

South West 4.4 per cent.

West Midlands 3.4 per cent.

Yorkshire and the Humber 2.2 per cent.

[1] Skills shortage vacancies are hard-to-fill vacancies caused by a lack of suitably skilled, qualified or experienced applicants, as defined by the National Skills Task Force.

Business Skills

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what training provision is made to meet the needs of small and medium enterprises. [37593]

John Healey: Much of the support for small and medium sized enterprises is provided through the Learning and Skills Council, which has an overall budget this year of 7.3 billion. Local LSCs will contract with small business service franchisees to provide advice to small and medium sized enterprises on workforce development services including support for Investors in People, access to Modern Apprenticeships and management development. In addition, the Department has provided the Learning and Skills Council with a specific workforce development budget of £48 million in the current financial year.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will take steps to incorporate entrepreneurship and business skills as an integral part of the curriculum from primary school through secondary, further and higher education. [37591]

John Healey: We are already taking steps to ensure that young people gain a knowledge and understanding of entrepreneurship and business skills.

Since assuming responsibility in April 2001, the Learning and Skills Council has, through education business links consortiums, formed partnerships with businesses and schools to help pupils gain key skills that prepare them for the world of work.

Entrepreneurship and business skills are already promoted via a range of subjects in schools—including mathematics, science, design and technology, citizenship and personal, social and health education.

We recently published the Green Paper "14–19: extending opportunities and raising standards". Our proposals will deliver a range of high quality, high status academic, vocational/technical and mixed options, covering entrepreneurship and business skills among others.

The independent Review of Enterprise and the Economy in Education, chaired by Sir Howard Davies whose report was published on 14 February, made a series of recommendations about how to promote understanding of the economy and enterprise throughout the school and further education system. We are considering the recommendations within the broader outcome of the spending review process and our other priorities in the education system, not least the 14–19 Green Paper.

We announced in November 2001 that the Department would be providing £1 million over 2002–04 to put in place arrangements with the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Learning and Teaching Support Network for the embedding of work-related skills more widely in HE provision. Negotiations are at an early stage but the work will include the embedding of entrepreneurial skills as well as other generic and vocational skills.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will introduce company learning accounts alongside individual learning accounts. [37589]

John Healey: It is too early to say exactly what form a replacement ILA-style scheme will take or what other arrangements may be introduced alongside the new scheme. Representatives of companies both large and small are being interviewed as part of the current stakeholder consultation exercise, which will report in April.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will introduce fiscal incentives to encourage small businesses to invest in training. [37595]

John Healey: Fiscal incentives are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Chancellor announced in his pre-Budget report in November pilot activity to test how financial incentives can support employers and individuals to tackle the problem of poor basic skills and attainment to an initial level 2 qualification.

The pilots will test out provision of free tuition, offering compensation to employers for releasing employees for training. The pilots will use a grant-based system and employers will be asked to volunteer to take part.

Local Learning and Skills Councils will run the pilots and we expect to announce the pilot areas in April 2002, with learning opportunities beginning in September.

Training Loans

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will take steps to increase the flexibility of soft loans to small businesses for training through changes to the restrictions on the achievement of whole National Vocational Qualifications. [37594]

John Healey: The Department for Education and Skills is responsible for the Small Firms Training Loan Programme. There are no qualification restrictions which apply to Small Firms Training Loans.

Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 984W, on teachers, how many teachers will reach the age of 60 in each of the next five school years. [37063]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 984W.

Consultants

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* amount and *(b)* date of the sponsorship of Government Department events by *(a)* Capita, *(b)* PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(c)* W.S. Atkins, *(d)* Nord Anglia, *(e)* Cambridge Education Associates, *(f)* KPMG and *(g)* Ernst and Young; and if she will place related documents in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [36851]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the occasions on which her Department has held meetings since May 1997 with representatives from *(a)* Capita, *(b)* PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(c)* W.S. Atkins, *(d)* Nord Anglia, *(e)* Cambridge Education Associates, *(f)* KPMG and *(g)* Ernst and Young; if she will state the purpose of each meeting; and if she will make a statement on agreements reached as a result. [36850]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Each of the organisations listed in the question is active in the education field and officials from my Department meet organisations' representatives frequently in the course of education related conferences and events, procurement processes, consultation exercises and the like. Information about the many occasions since May 1997 on which officials have met representatives from the named organisations, and the purpose of those meetings, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Overseas Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what mechanisms her Department has in place to ensure that appropriate checks on overseas teachers are made prior to overseas teachers beginning work in the UK; and what agencies carry out such checks on behalf of her Department. [37152]

Mr. Timms: Vetting of teachers and other staff, including those from overseas, is the responsibility of employers and employment agencies.

My Department gives guidance about the checks that need to be made in Circular 9/93: "Protection of Children: Disclosure Of Criminal Background Of Those With Access To Children" and Circular 7/96: "Use of Supply Teachers", issued to local education authorities and schools, and in Notes of Guidance to Teacher Employment Agencies and Businesses. All the guidance emphasises that no teacher should be placed in employment until satisfactory references have been obtained. Copies of the circulars are available in the Libraries.

The guidance lists a number of checks that are considered essential before any teacher, including a supply teacher, is employed to work in a school. The list includes: identity, qualifications, health, references, my Department's List 99 and, where possible, a police check. In the case of people from overseas, employers and agencies must also ensure that the person has permission to work in the UK.

There are no formal arrangements for employers to obtain checks of criminal records in countries outside the UK. However, some countries are able to provide individuals with official statements, which give details of convictions or confirm a clean record. The circulars and notes of guidance include information about these statements, and emphasise that, where such a statement is not available, particular care should be taken with other checks, such as references.

WALES

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31789]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I expect all my staff, and my Department's auditors, to remain vigilant and conscientiously to implement the financial and security controls which are intended to prevent fraud.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for his Department in each of the last four years. [27899]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In respect of part *(a)* of his question I refer the hon. Member to the answer he has received from the Cabinet Office on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 406W.

In respect of part *(b)*, expenditure has been incurred partly through department-wide taxi contracts, partly through local arrangements, and partly through individuals' travel and subsistence claims and it is not possible to provide aggregated figures.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [28003]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In 1997–98 a camera worth £200 and laptop accessories worth £107 were stolen from the former Welsh Office. I am not aware of any subsequent thefts from either the Welsh Office or the Wales Office.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34222]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No such thefts or losses have been recorded.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33237]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* My Department has bought three analogue television sets in the last 24 months.

As with all procurement decisions, officials are expected to find the most cost-effective solution to meet the expressed need.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36185]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff at this Department or its predecessor, the Welsh Office, in the last four years.

The Wales Office does not have any agencies or non-departmental public bodies. Information on the Welsh Office's agencies and non-departmental public bodies, for the period prior to July 1999, is not held centrally.

Job Losses

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many job losses there were in Wales, broken down by the lowest regional level for which data are available, in each of the last five years. [32231]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is not collected centrally from employers. Information on redundancies is collected in the UK Labour Force Survey but the sample size is not large enough to make reliable estimates for Wales.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Burkina Faso

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to improve human rights in Burkina Faso. [34652]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

Our ambassador to Burkina Faso raised a number of our concerns when he met President Compaore in September 2001. We reiterated these to the Burkinabè Ambassador to the EU in November 2001. We continue to lobby in the EU and the UN to encourage Burkina Faso to abide by international conventions they have ratified. These include core UN human rights treaties and ILO fundamental conventions (on Forced Labour, freedom of association, discrimination and child labour), we will maintain pressure on Burkina Faso to implement them fully.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her assessment of the levels of *(a)* child labour and *(b)* child trafficking in Burkina Faso. [34950]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

There is strong evidence that Burkinabè children are trafficked to neighbouring countries. We encourage regional efforts to prevent child trafficking and welcome Burkina Faso's ratification in July 2001 of ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. We also welcome efforts by both international and local NGOs and others to combat child trafficking, including the recent adoption of the Global Industry Protocol on addressing the worst forms of child labour in the cocoa industry, signed in Washington. Through the United Nations and European Union, we also contribute to reducing poverty, the root cause of child trafficking and exploitation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Violent Crime (Wales)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of *(a)* rape, *(b)* assault, *(c)* murder, *(d)* violent theft and *(e)* armed robbery there were in Wales in each year since 1997. [36422]

Mr. Denham: The available details from recorded crime data are given in the table. For assault, the total of offences of assault on a constable, common assault and racially aggravated common assault has been used; the former two categories were introduced as recorded crimes on 1 April 1998, and the latter was counted separately from 1 April 1999. The total for all homicides is given, and for violent theft, the robbery total is given. Armed robbery includes offences where air weapons were used.

Also, the British Crime Survey has shown that, in England and Wales as a whole, the number of violent crimes recorded in the survey decreased by 19 per cent. between the 1999 and 2000 calendar years, whereas violent crime recorded by the police increased by an estimated five per cent. Violent crime recorded by the police may therefore not necessarily be a reflection of real changes in the level of violent crime.

The annual risk of being a victim once or more of violent crime in Wales was 2.4 per cent, this being based on results for 1999 and 2000 from the British Crime Survey. This was lower than for any English region with the England and Wales average risk being 3.9 per cent.

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which expanded the offences covered, and placed a greater emphasis on counting crimes in terms of numbers of victims. Numbers of recorded crimes after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

Recorded crimes in Wales

Year	*Rape*	*Assaults*	*Homicide*	*Robbery*	*Robbery using a firearm*
1997[1]	374	n/a	43	811	25
1998–99[2]	376	8,222	32	853	27
1999–2000[2]	387	11,508	35	909	22
2000–01[2]	360	12,496	40	890	39

[1] Calendar year

[2] Year ending March

It should be noted that recorded violent crime is subject to changes in reporting and recording. For example, the 2001 British Crime Survey found that, over England and Wales as a whole, reporting to the police of common assault rose from 29 per cent. in 1999 to 39 per cent. in the year 2000.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the publications issued by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34188]

Angela Eagle: Details of the titles and costs of all the applications produced by the Home Office from 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2001 have been placed in the Library. Prior to 1 April 1999, the production of printed material was not centralised and no records exist.

Documents distribution is largely carried out by the commissioning client and no central circulation records are held. The purpose of printed material is to communicate Home Office policies to a wide range of target audiences including the general public and stakeholders, such as the police, courts and criminal justice system, and crime reduction organisations.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new entrants to the civil service employed in his Department in each of the last five years were aged 50 and over. [32886]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 6 February 2002]*: Information on the number of new entrants to the civil service aged 50 and over who joined the Home Office and its agencies is set out in the table. It has increased substantially since 1997 and the Home Office has recently changed its aged retirement policy to allow staff below the senior civil service to remain in work beyond the age of 60.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Home Office	28	35	109	244	204
Forensic Science Service	4	8	11	7	21
United Kingdom Passport Service	4	32	34	73	54
Prison Service	382	502	481	480	577
Fire Service College[1]	2	7	2	2	4
Total	420	584	637	806	860

[1] Responsibility for the Fire Service College transferred to Department for Transport, London and the Regions (DTLR) in June 2001.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 302W, if he will place in the Library the two recent letters received from Merseyside police in relation to the use of Landmark and Inn on the Park to house asylum seekers. [33598]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* I am making arrangements for copies of these letters to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with groups representing the interests of asylum seekers about the location of the proposed asylum accommodation centres; and if he will make a statement. [34482]

Angela Eagle: We have not had any consultation specifically about the location of accommodation centres with groups representing the interests of asylum seekers. My officials have had general discussions about accommodation centres with a number of groups representing the interests of asylum seekers. In addition, the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration With Diversity in Modern Britain" sets out our proposals for accommodation centres and we would welcome comments in response to that. Officials are discussing with relevant planning authorities the best way of consulting the public and other interested parties in the areas identified as having potential accommodation centre sites.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he collates on the *(a)* number, *(b)* source, *(c)* destination and *(d)* place of residence in the United Kingdom of (i) asylum seekers and (ii) other immigrants without leave to remain. [34677]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) collates information on the number of asylum applications in the United Kingdom lodged both at port and in country, as well as information on the nationality of the principal applicants, and the numbers of asylum seekers removed. These data are published quarterly on the RDS website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Figures detailing the number of persons against whom enforcement action has been initiated—illegal entrants detected and persons issued with a notice of intention to deport, recommended for deportation by a court or proceeded against under Section 10 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999—are published annually in the Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is also available in the Libraries and on the RDS website.

Reliable information is not available on the number of illegal entrants resident in the United Kingdom. However, the Home Office has commissioned a study which will consider methods of estimating the size and characteristics of the illegal population.

Information on the entry routes of asylum seekers from their country of origin to the United Kingdom and the destination of persons who are removed from the United Kingdom is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the cost of building and running asylum seeker accommodation centres will be met by local authorities in the localities proposed for such centres. [34581]

Angela Eagle: None.

The costs of building and running the trial accommodation centres will be met by the Home Office.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of asylum seeker accommodation centres in the Netherlands. [34586]

Angela Eagle: Home Office officials are having regard to information about accommodation centres in the Netherlands as they develop policy. In addition, the Home Office has recently commissioned research on the reception policies and practice of four European countries including the Netherlands. The research has two main objectives:

(i) to examine in detail the reception policies and practices of the European countries chosen as case studies (the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and Sweden); and

(ii) to investigate the intended and unintended impacts (both long and short term) of different reception policies and practices within the European countries chosen as case studies.

This research will provide valuable primary data on asylum and reception processes in other European countries and analyse alternative models of reception and accommodation systems for asylum seekers.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the application of human rights legislation to illegal immigrants and asylum seekers. [34149]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* There has been no formal assessment of the application of the Human Rights Act 1998 to illegal immigrants and asylum seekers.

Any individual subject to immigration control who makes an application to remain in the United Kingdom on human rights grounds will have those grounds considered. There is no opportunity to appeal to the Immigration Appellate Authority against an adverse decision.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the reference to a 3,000 total capacity in asylum accommodation centres in paragraph 4.30 of "Secure Borders, Safe Haven" refers to the total capacity the Government intends to provide; and if he will make a statement; [36708]

(2) over what period the effectiveness of the proposed asylum accommodation centres will be assessed; if the effectiveness of every trial centre will be assessed before conclusions are reached; and if the establishment of additional centres will be considered. [36709]

Angela Eagle: We intend to provide 3,000 accommodation centre places on a trial basis. Decisions on any expansion of accommodation centres beyond those 3,000 places will be taken in the light of emerging evidence, here and abroad, about what works. Subject to that, our aim is to phase out the current system of support and dispersal.

We are still considering the details of the evaluation process for accommodation centres.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if sites under consideration for an asylum accommodation centre which are not selected for one of the trial centres will be considered for later asylum accommodation centres. [36711]

Angela Eagle: It is possible that we may wish to consider sites identified as potential locations for trial centres for any future expansion of the accommodation centre programme.

Firearms

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* killings and *(b)* crimes causing personal injury involving all types of firearms there were in each of the last six years for which records exist. [36152]

Mr. Denham: The requested details for homicides and injuries caused by use of firearms, injuries caused by the use of handguns, and offences involving handguns and firearms in general in England and Wales are given in tables 3.1, 3.3 and 3.7 of 'Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2000', which was published in December 2001 and is available in the Library. The numbers of homicides in which a handgun was used are as follows:

Number of homicides using a handgun in England and Wales

Year	
1995[1]	39
1996[1]	30
1997[1]	39
1998–99[2]	32
1999–2000[2]	42
2000–01[2]	47

[1] Calendar years

[2] Years ending March

Police Cells

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cells there were in police stations in England and Wales in 1999. [R] [34852]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of cells in police stations is not held centrally.

Public Appointments

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33883]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is as set out. However, public appointees are not required to declare any political affiliation as this is a matter on which all citizens have the right to privacy.

Chairs of Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Name	*Term*	*Salary*
Advisory Board on Restricted Patients:		
Judge Valerie Pearlman*	3 months from 1 December 1997	Nil
Judge Elizabeth Fisher	3 years from 2 March 1998	Nil
Judge Elizabeth Fisher*	3 years from March 2001	Nil
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs:		
Prof. David Grahame-Smith	1 year from 1 November 1997	Nil
Prof. Michael Rawlins	4 years from 1 November 1998	Nil
Alcohol Education and Research Centre:		
Baroness Shreela Flather*	3 years from February 1999	Nil
Animal Procedures Committee:		
Rev. Prof. Michael Banner	4 years from 1 February 1998	£200 per day
Rev. Prof. Michael Banner*	4 years from 1 February 2002	£206 per day
Commission for Racial Equality:		
Sir Herman Ouseley*	2 years from 1 April 1998	£83,957pa
Gurbux Singh	4 years from May 2000	£111,755pa
Community Development Foundation:		
Eddie O'Hara MP	3 years from 1 January 1998	Nil
Eddie O'Hara MP	3 years from January 2001	Nil
Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel:		
Michael Lewer*	4 years from 1 April 1998	£57,728pa
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board:		
Right hon. Lord Carlisle of Bucklow*	2 years from 1 April 1998	£38,486pa
Firearms Consultative Committee:		
Lord Shrewsbury*	11 year from 16 December 98	Nil
David Penn	6 months from August 1999	Nil
David Penn*	2 years from February 2000	Nil
Gaming Board for Great Britain:		
Peter Dean	3 years from 1 July 1998	£39,922pa
Peter Dean*	5 years from June 2001	£39,922pa

Chairs of Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Name	*Term*	*Salary*
Horserace Betting Levy Appeals Tribunal:		
Thomas Brudenell* (Appointed by the Lord Chancellor)	3 years from 1 June 1998	£265 per day
Horserace Betting Levy Board:		
Robert Hughes	3 years from 1 September 1998	£48,250pa
Horserace Totaliser Board:		
Lord Wyatt of Weeford*	1 May 1997 to 30 June 1997	£103,108pa
Lord Wyatt of Weeford*	1 July 1997 to 31 July 1997	£103,108pa
Peter Jones	3 years from 1 August 1997	£81,119pa
Peter Jones*	3 years from August 2000	£83,552pa
Misuse of Drugs Advisory Body:		
Jean Southworth* (Appointed by the Lord Chancellor)	April 1999 to 20 April 2001	£363 per day
Misuse of Drugs Advisory Tribunal:		
Helen Sarkany*	3 years from 1 July 1997	£422 per day
Helen Sarkany* (Appointed by the Lord Chancellor)	3 years from 1 July 2000	£452 per day
Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner:		
John Scampion (Immigration Services Commissioner)	5 years from May 2000	£91,670pa
Parole Board:		
Usha Prashar	8 October 1997 to October 2000	£58,524pa
David Hatch	3 years from November 2000	£55,000pa
Police Discipline Appeals Tribunal:		
Louise Godfey	May 1997 for an unspecified term	£417 per day
Police Information Technology Organisation		
Lt. Gen. Sir Edmund Burton	2 years from January 2001	£120,000pa
Prison/Probation Accreditation Panel:		
Sir Duncan Nichol	3 years from May 1999	£500 per day
Sentencing Advisory Panel:		
Prof. Martin Wasik (Appointed by the Lord Chancellor)	3 years from July 1999	£250 per day
Youth Justice Board for England and Wales		
Lord Warner of Brockley	5 years from 30 September 1998	£85,000pa
Chairs of Commissions:		
Charity Commission:		
John Stoker (Chief Charity Commissioner)	5 years from July 1999	£92,112pa
Commission for Racial Equality:		
See above.	—	—
Chairs of Inquiries:		
Lawrence Inquiry:		
Sir William Macpherson of Cluny	31 July 1997 to 15 February 1999	—

* Reappointment.

Chairs of Agencies:

None of the Agencies sponsored by the Home Office is headed by a Chair.

Chairs of Task Forces:

Information on the number, remit and membership of taskforces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000, and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 31 April 2000. A third report was published on 13 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report: "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews", was issued in October 2001, covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Libraries.

Entry Clearance Refusals

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people from *(a)* the European Union, *(b)* the Commonwealth and *(c)* other countries were refused entry in the UK during 2001. [35996]

Angela Eagle: I regret that the information requested is not currently available.

Statistics on the number of persons refused entry and subsequently removed by nationality are due to be published in the Command Paper "Control of Immigration Statistics 2001" later this year.

Police Complaints Authority

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discretion the Police Complaints Authority has to publish information to inform the public of the outcome of its investigations. [35975]

Mr. Denham: Section 80 of the Police Act 1996 allows the Police Complaints Authority to publish summary or other general statements which do not identify the person from whom the information is received or any person to whom it relates.

In accordance with section 79 of the 1996 Act, the Authority also publishes an annual report on the discharge of its functions, which includes statistical data on outcomes.

Labour Party Conference (Policing)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he received urging him to make available additional resources to South Wales police to deal with the costs associated with the Labour Party's spring conference; and what they requested; [36245]

(2) what additional funding he made available to South Wales police to deal with the costs associated with the Labour Party's spring conference in Cardiff. [36244]

Mr. Denham: Representations were received from the Chief Constable of South Wales about the cost of policing in Labour Party spring conference. The additional costs were estimated at £406,000.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has decided to exceptionally make a special grant to the South Wales police of £275,000.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36176]

Angela Eagle: No days were lost to industrial action in the Home Office and its agencies during 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001.

Bogus Callers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department will organise a national campaign to alert people, especially the elderly, to the dangers of bogus callers to their homes; and if he will make a statement. [36291]

Mr. Denham: Bogus caller crime is nasty and pernicious because it is targeted at the most vulnerable in our community—the elderly. In April 2000 the Home Department launched a campaign, the National Distraction Burglary Task Force, in partnership with utility companies, voluntary groups, local authorities and the police. So far, Good Practice Guides and Toolkits have been produced. Campaigns are now under way in all regions across England and Wales to alert older people and their families to the problem. The Task Force also raises awareness among workers who call at older people's homes. The advice being given to older people is to remember the doorstep etiquette "Stop, Chain, Check", and not let anyone whom they do not know into their homes without a prearranged appointment. I believe that the work of the Task Force is an excellent example of central and local government co-operating with the private and voluntary sectors to combat crime.

Car Theft

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance to prevent police forces charging victims of car theft the cost of garaging their vehicles while forensic tests are carried out; and if he will make a statement. [36241]

Mr. Denham: The police have a power under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to remove a vehicle that has been left or parked illegally, obstructively or dangerously, or that has been abandoned or broken down. This may include vehicles that have been stolen. Where a vehicle is so removed, the police have a power to require the owner to meet the costs associated with that removal and subsequent storage. The police do not charge for the storage of vehicles that they retain as evidence or for forensic examination.

Removal and storage costs have to be met, but we are very sympathetic to the sense of injustice that a person may feel in having to meet these costs in order to recover his or her vehicle after it has been stolen. We are considering whether there are any changes to the current position that might be both possible and appropriate, taking into account all the relevant considerations.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter dated 19 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding his constituent Mr. N. Koudreiko of Fraserburgh. [36059]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. and noble Friend Lord Rooker wrote to the hon. Member on 12 February 2002. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Sentencing

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase powers of courts to issue custodial sentences for *(a)* mobile phone theft, *(b)* car-jacking and *(c)* possession of drugs with intent to supply. [34777]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The courts already have very extensive sentencing powers to deal with this kind of offending. The circumstances of the offence will determine whether a person stealing a mobile phone is convicted of theft or robbery. The latter is the more serious offence because it necessarily involves force or the threat of force. The maximum penalty for theft is seven years imprisonment and the maximum penalty for robbery is life imprisonment. Car-jacking is charged as robbery. Moreover, section 109 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 provides for an automatic life sentence for a second serious sexual or violent offence. The offence of robbery is a qualifying offence under section 109.

Similarly, extensive sentencing powers are available in order to provide public protection in respect of supply of drugs. The maximum penalty for possessing class A drugs with the intent to supply is life imprisonment. The maximum penalty for possessing class B drugs with intent to supply is 14 years and the maximum penalty for possessing class C drugs with intent to supply is five years imprisonment. Section 110 of the Powers of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 provides for a mandatory minimum sentence of seven years for a third class A drug trafficking offence.

The Government share public concern about the increasing prevalence of mobile phone robbery and car-jacking and about the continuing threats posed by drug offending. We need to protect the public from the harm that this kind of offending can inflict upon our communities. It is important that the courts treat these offences with the seriousness they deserve.

We are committed to making sense of sentencing. We need a new sentencing framework which will do more to support crime reduction and reparation, while meeting the needs of punishment, through the introduction of more flexible sentencing options such as a new generic community sentence and a new suspended sentence. We need to be better able to exploit the developing opportunities to work with offenders to reduce re-offending and in the new approaches to restorative justice and reparation.

Immigration Detainees

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were held, by venue, under immigration law, at the latest available date. [36629]

Angela Eagle [holding answer 25 February 2002]: The latest available information on the number of persons detained under Immigration Act powers by place of detention relates to 30 September 2001 and is given in the table.

Place of detention[1]	*Immigration Act detainees as at 30 September 2001*[2]
Oakington Reception Centre	195
Immigration detention centres	
Tinsley House	125
Harmondsworth	100
Campsfield House	80
Dover Harbour	20
Dungavel	20
Manchester Airport	10
Dedicated Immigration Service wings	
Rochester	180
Haslar	150
Lindholme	105
Prison establishments	
Liverpool	95
Wandsworth	65
Holme House	45
High Down	45
Cardiff	40
Gateside	40
Wormwood Scrubs	30
Manchester	20
Brixton	15
The Verne	15
Winchester	15
Belmarsh	10
The Mount	10
Craiginches	10
Pentonville	10
Leeds	10
Blakenhurst	10
Bullingdon	10
Other prison establishments[3]	150
Total	1,620

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five, and exclude persons detained in police cells.

[2] Figures include 260 persons detained in prison establishments under dual immigration and other powers.

[3] Other prison establishments with five or fewer detainees.

The temporary use of spaces in a number of local prisons ended in mid-January 2002, as did the use of the accommodation at Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Rochester.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 29 December 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Family Visitor Appeals

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the gross and *(b)* the net income for (i) oral and (ii) paper appeals during the first year of operation of family visitor appeals; and what were the administrative costs of the scheme. [32997]

Angela Eagle: The figures requested by my hon. Friend are as follows:

£

	Net income	*Gross income*
Paper	58,900	100,500
Oral	45,125	160,625

Note:

Net figures exclude refund payments made by the Home Office.

The Joint Entry Clearance Unit estimate Foreign and Commonwealth Office costs for the scheme as a whole at about £1.4 million in the first year, including set-up costs. The Lord Chancellor's Department spent £883,000 on the administration of appeals in the six months April to September 2001. Home Office administrative costs for the first year reached around £4,200.

Police Expenditure (East Sussex)

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the per capita expenditure on police in East Sussex was in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001; and what the national average was in those years. [34089]

Mr. Denham: Figures are not available separately for East Sussex. The gross cost per capita for Sussex in 1997–98 was £117.8 and in 2001–02 it is estimated at £132.5. The gross cost on an average per capita basis in England and Wales was £138.4 in 1997–98 and estimated at £165.5 in 2001–02.

Explanatory Note: All figures are from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police statistics: 1997–98 Actuals and 2001–02 Estimates.

West Mercia Police

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to increase the numbers of police officers in West Mercia by the number needed for it to reach the average of the 35 English and Welsh forces. [33733]

Mr. Denham: I understand that, subject to available funding being raised through the council tax, the authority has plans to increase the force's budgeted strength by 300 officers over the next three years to a total of 2,424. Based on current population estimates, this would take the force to a ratio of 212 officers per 100,000 population.

Police Officers (Public Health Care)

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police authorities provide private healthcare for their officers; and if he will make a statement. [36911]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally.

Cyclists

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he issues to police forces on penalising cyclists who *(a)* advance over the stop line and *(b)* ride without rear lights. [36461]

Mr. Denham: Police officers take appropriate action against cyclists who break road traffic laws in this way and who are a hazard to themselves and to other road users when they do so. We see no need for central guidance to police forces on this issue. Chief officers of police are best placed to decide the level of priority given to such offences in the light of local circumstances and other demands on police time and resources.

Drug Addicts

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners who were addicts of *(a)* heroin and *(b)* cocaine continued their habits after serving their sentences in each of the last five years; and what proportion died from drug misuse in the 12 month period after leaving prison. [36562]

Beverley Hughes: There are currently no figures available on how many inmates coming into prison addicted to heroin or cocaine resume their habit after serving their sentences. However, the Home Office is currently conducting research in this area and aims to publish a report on the findings in the summer.

Similarly, there are currently no figures available on drug-related deaths among ex-prisoners. The Home Office is currently conducting research in this area and aims to publish a report on the findings in May.

Copies of both reports will be placed in the Library.

Detainee Deaths

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy in relation to all deaths in police custody, prisons and immigration detention centres, to provide the family of the deceased person with a copy of any investigation carried out into his or her death. [36948]

Mr. Denham: The Government recognise the frustration and sadness that can be caused through any lack of communication and information in these cases.

Police investigating officers' reports form a class which the courts have ruled is entitled to public interest immunity.

Current Home Office guidance to the police on pre-inquest disclosure states that

> "disclosure of the investigating officer's report will not normally be expected to form part of the pre-inquest disclosure. That does not mean, however, that it is impossible for such a report to be disclosed where a chief officer considers that it would be right to do so".

There is no existing legal obligation on the police to make such a disclosure unless directed to do so by a court. However, the Police Reform Bill currently before Parliament includes a presumption in favour of the disclosure of information. The Bill expressly allows this duty to be fulfilled through the provision of a copy of the investigation report subject to a statutory test that will ensure no information that has the potential for causing harm is released.

Since 1999 the Prison Service has operated a policy of disclosure of investigation reports into deaths in prison custody to the family of the deceased. The Immigration Service would also disclose their investigation reports into deaths in immigration detention centres to the family of the deceased.

Prison Hospital Suicides

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* assessment he has made of and *(b)* steps he has taken to ascertain the accuracy of record keeping about the monitoring of suicide risks in prison hospitals. [36877]

Beverley Hughes: Those prisoners judged at risk of suicide or self-harm, whether in health care centres or other parts of prisons, are the subject of the "caring for prisoners at risk procedures" (the F2052SH system). Suicide prevention teams in each establishment examine this work and the quality of the procedures. The system is being reviewed as part of the Prison Service's three year suicide prevention strategy with the aim of improving the identification of those at risk and the subsequent care provided.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the process is to ensure that tetra base stations comply with relevant guidelines on limits of exposure to the public. [36594]

Mr. Denham: Terrestrial Trunked Radio System (TETRA) base stations for the police service are installed by the telecommunications operator for Airwave, mm02 which must comply with planning regulations and health and safety guidelines.

The Radiocommunications Agency (RA) of the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) is currently conducting a programme of checks on airwave base stations to ensure that the guidelines on limits of exposure are being met. The RA currently expect to publish the results obtained from the first six base stations tested on their website in mid June 2002. The extent of further work will be determined once the data obtained from these tests have been fully analysed.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets are set for replying to correspondence from members of the public to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; and what the level of performance is. [36769]

Angela Eagle: One million pieces of correspondence were received by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) post room in Croydon, during the last

12 months. The targets in the Public Service Agreement 2000–01 to 2003–04 commits all Home Office Directorates, including IND, to replying to 95 per cent. of public correspondence within 20 working days. Figures are not currently available for IND's present performance against the standards relating to public correspondence, but we aim to send a substantive reply to all letters as soon as possible.

Improving performance against published targets for dealing with correspondence is recognised as a priority for IND as part of the wider Home Office programme to modernise business processes and information management.

Prison Capacity (Wymott and Garth)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to *(a)* increase the prison population and *(b)* extend the site at (i) HMP Wymott and (ii) HMP Garth; and what recent discussions his Department has had with the (A) governor and (B) Prison Officers' Association on plans to extend (x) HMP Wymott and (y) HMP Garth. [36458]

Beverley Hughes: In order to meet possible need for extra capacity, the Prison Service has an overall strategy of applying for planning consent at prison sites where building more accommodation is a viable option.

Wymott and Garth prisons are two such sites. Planning consent has been in place to build an extra houseblock at each site since 1996. Applications have recently been made to extend this consent before it expires in order to keep all options open.

While the governor and Prison Officers' Association at each prison may be aware of the existing planning consent, no discussions have taken place as there are no plans to build at either prison in the near future. If the situation should change there will be the usual full and frank discussion.

Young Offenders

Mr. Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders (1) from each parliamentary constituency in the Greater London area were sentenced to custodial sentences in young offenders institutions in 2001; [37008]

(2) within each Metropolitan police divisional borough were sentenced to custodial sentences in young offenders institutions in 2001; [37007]

(3) within each parliamentary constituency in the Greater London area were sentenced to serve *(a)* less than one year, *(b)* one to three years and *(c)* three or more years in a young offenders institution in 2001; [37010]

(4) within each Metropolitan police divisional borough were sentenced to serve *(a)* less than one year, *(b)* one to three years and *(c)* three or more years in a young offenders institution in 2001. [37009]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information collected centrally does not allow a breakdown by parliamentary constituency in the Greater London area.

The available, information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relating to England and Wales 2000 is shown in the table. These data give offenders aged 10–17 sentenced to custodial sentences within the Metropolitan police area for *(a)* under one year, *(b)* one year and under three years and *(c)* over three years.

Information on court proceedings for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Number of persons aged 10–17 sentenced to custodial sentences in the Metropolitan police area shown by magistrates court (the committing court in Crown court cases) England and Wales 2000[1]

	Custodial sentence								
	Young offender institution			*Detention and training order*			*Secure training order*		
Sentencing court (Committing court in Crown court cases)	*Under 1 year*	*1 year and up to 2 years*	*Total*	*Under 1 year*	*1 year and up to 2 years*	*Total*	*Under 1 year*	*1 year and up to 2 years*	*Total*
Inner London magistrates courts[2]									
Bow Street	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Camberwell Green/Tower Bridge	1	4	5	1	6	7	0	0	0
Greenwich/Woolwich	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	1
Highbury Corner	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Horseferry Road	0	1	1	1	2	3	0	0	0
Marylebone	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
South Western	0	1	1	5	0	5	0	0	0
Thames	4	2	6	5	3	8	0	0	0
West London	1	1	2	5	5	10	0	0	0
Camberwell Youth court	24	4	28	78	13	91	1	0	1
South Western Youth court	0	1	1	33	6	39	0	0	0
Thames Youth court	12	6	18	57	31	88	0	0	0
West London Youth court	27	3	30	59	8	67	0	0	0
Outer London boroughs									
Barking and Dagenham	5	0	5	17	4	21	0	0	0
Havering	2	1	3	12	1	13	0	0	0
Redbridge	2	1	3	6	3	9	0	0	0
Newham	4	3	7	51	7	58	0	0	0
Waltham Forest	8	1	9	23	3	26	0	0	0
Bexley	3	0	3	11	1	12	0	0	0
Bromley	2	0	2	6	3	9	0	0	0
Croydon	8	2	10	21	15	36	0	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	4	0	4	10	0	10	0	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	4	0	4	4	1	5	0	0	0
Sutton	3	0	3	16	1	17	0	0	0

Number of persons aged 10–17 sentenced to custodial sentences in the Metropolitan police area shown by magistrates court (the committing court in Crown court cases) England and Wales 2000[1]

	Custodial sentence								
	Young offender institution			*Detention and training order*			*Secure training order*		
Sentencing court (Committing court in Crown court cases)	*Under 1 year*	*1 year and up to 2 years*	*Total*	*Under 1 year*	*1 year and up to 2 years*	*Total*	*Under 1 year*	*1 year and up to 2 years*	*Total*
Merton	0	0	0	13	3	16	0	0	0
Ealing	5	2	7	14	4	18	1	0	1
Barnet	3	5	8	18	10	28	0	0	0
Brent	3	2	5	13	8	21	0	0	0
Enfield	6	1	7	10	8	18	0	0	0
Harringey	1	7	8	28	4	32	0	0	0
Harrow	2	0	2	8	2	10	0	0	0
Hillingdon	6	1	7	25	6	31	0	0	0
Hounslow	4	2	6	17	1	18	0	0	0
Other (not recorded)	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0
Total	144	53	197	574	160	734	3	0	3

	Custodial sentence Section 90–92[3]				*Total immediate custody*			
Sentencing court (Committing court in Crown court cases)	*Under 1 year*	*1 year and under 3 years*	*3 years and over*	*Total*	*Under 1 year*	*1 year and under 3 years*	*3 years and over*	*Total*
Inner London magistrates courts[2]								
Bow Street	0	0	4	4	1	1	4	6
Camberwell Green/Tower Bridge	0	0	5	5	2	10	5	17
Greenwich/Woolwich	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	4
Highbury Corner	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	3
Horseferry Road	0	0	2	2	1	3	2	6
Marylebone	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	2
South Western	0	1	2	3	5	2	2	9
Thames	0	2	1	3	9	7	1	17
West London	0	0	6	6	6	6	6	18
Camberwell Youth court	0	4	12	16	103	21	12	136
South Western Youth court	0	1	8	9	33	8	8	49
Thames Youth court	0	5	13	18	69	42	13	124
West London Youth court	0	4	4	8	86	15	4	105
Outer London boroughs								
Barking and Dagenham	0	0	1	1	22	4	1	27
Havering	0	0	1	1	14	2	1	17
Redbridge	0	0	0	0	8	4	0	12
Newham	0	0	5	5	55	10	5	70
Waltham Forest	0	0	6	6	31	4	6	41
Bexley	0	0	1	1	14	1	1	16
Bromley	0	0	1	1	8	3	1	12
Croydon	0	2	4	6	29	19	4	52
Kingston-upon-Thames	0	0	4	4	14	0	4	18
Richmond-upon-Thames	0	1	1	2	8	2	1	11
Sutton	0	0	2	2	19	1	2	22
Merton	0	2	0	2	13	5	0	18
Ealing	0	0	1	1	20	6	1	27
Barnet	1	2	0	3	22	17	0	39
Brent	0	1	2	3	16	11	2	29
Enfield	0	1	0	1	16	10	0	26
Harringey	0	0	6	6	29	11	6	46
Harrow	0	0	0	0	10	2	0	12
Hillingdon	0	1	1	2	31	8	1	40
Hounslow	0	0	2	2	21	3	2	26
Other (not recorded)	1	3	5	9	4	3	5	12
Total	2	30	103	135	723	243	103	1,069

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis

[2] Information held centrally does not allow a breakdown of cases by borough in the Inner London area

[3] Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 (previously section 53(1) and (2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933)

Mr. Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how (1) many young offenders within each Metropolitan police divisional borough are serving custodial sentences in young offenders institutions; [37005]

(2) how many young offenders from each parliamentary constituency in the Greater London area are serving custodial sentences in young offenders institutions. [37006]

Beverley Hughes: The data show young offenders who were serving custodial sentences on 31 January 2002 and were first committed in a Greater London court. Addresses of inmates prior to custody are not held centrally. Attempting to break these figures down by constituency or Metropolitan police divisional borough would not be accurate, as young offenders are not always committed at a court within the constituency where they live.

	Number
Acton/Harrow	84
Barking	20
Barnet	4
Bexley	12
Bow	4
Brent	7
Bromley	12
Camberwell Green	41
Central Criminal Court	182
Croydon	154
Ealing	4
Enfield	7
Family Proceedings Courts (Inner London)	2
Feltham	9
Greenwich	9
Haringey	21
Harrow	9
Havering	11
Hendon	4
Highbury	15
Horseferry road	11
Inner London Session House	169
Isleworth	117
Kingston-Upon-Thames	96
Knightsbridge	63
Middlesex Guildhall	48
Redbridge	1
Snaresbrook	140
South Western	22
Southwark	91
Stratford	13
Sutton	3
Thames	36
Tower Bridge	4
Uxbridge	14
Waltham Forest	13
West London	17
Wimbledon	6
Wood Green	69
Woolwich	44
All	1,588

Long Lartin Prison

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on recruitment and retention of prison officers and other staff at Long Lartin prison. [36767]

Beverley Hughes: As at January 2002 Long Lartin prison had a total number of 514.5 unified staff against a target of 517 and 140.5 non-unified staff against a target of 141.5. The small number of vacancies will be filled shortly.

Long Lartin is located in a low unemployment area and while housing costs are rising this has not caused any significant problems with recruitment. Equally there is no difficulty recruiting other members of staff, with the possible exception of civilian works staff.

Arrests

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the time taken by police officers to complete the paperwork and processes necessary after arresting an individual; and what estimate he has made of the changes in that time associated with new *(a)* legislation, *(b)* regulations and *(c)* Government guidance since 1997. [36582]

Mr. Denham: On 1 November 2001, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published PA Consulting's study "Diary of a Police Officer" which had considered what more could be done to free police officers from unnecessary paperwork and other obstacles which prevent them from spending more time in public. The study found that officers were spending 43.1 per cent. of their time in the police station.

In the White Paper "Policing a New Century" (CM 5326), published on 5 December 2001, my right hon. Friend announced that he was setting up a task force, chaired by Sir David O'Dowd, to consider how to take forward the recommendations in this, and other, relevant reports, in order to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens on the police.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individual arrests were carried out by police forces in England and Wales during each of the last three years for which records are available. [36581]

Mr. Denham: Information given in the table is for arrests for notifiable offences within the financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Information for earlier years is not available on a consistent basis.

Persons arrested for notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force area, 1999–00 and 2000/01
England and Wales

Police force area	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	21,856	27,156
Bedfordshire	13,011	14,541
Cambridgeshire	12,418	12,153
Cheshire	18,202	16,959
Cleveland	20,521	18,019
Cumbria	15,568	13,226
Derbyshire	18,499	17,848
Devon and Cornwall	24,609	25,658
Dorset	12,471	11,002
Durham	[1]—	[1]—
Essex	24,405	26,581
Gloucestershire	11,352	11,155
Greater Manchester	73,366	68,803
Hampshire	42,598	39,420
Hertfordshire	14,115	15,749
Humberside	[1]—	26,766
Kent	34,684	30,360
Lancashire	37,535	36,998
Leicestershire	17,999	17,800
Lincolnshire	20,700	16,618
London, City of	[1]—	4,286
Merseyside	44,315	45,598
Metropolitan police	202,218	180,634
Norfolk	16,313	15,461
Northamptonshire	12,730	11,598
Northumbria	47,295	41,150
North Yorkshire	20,353	18,319
Nottinghamshire	33,001	32,707
South Yorkshire	34,727	33,573
Staffordshire	[1]—	[1]—
Suffolk	10,787	10,706
Surrey	12,993	15,590
Sussex	24,183	30,302

Persons arrested for notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force area, 1999–00 and 2000/01
England and Wales

Police force area	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Thames Valley	43,738	44,575
Warwickshire	8,377	7,073
West Mercia	21,172	18,235
West Midlands	78,592	91,685
West Yorkshire	44,800	62,410
Wiltshire	10,498	10,031
Dyfed-Powys	14,057	13,036
Gwent	27,829	24,642
North Wales	12,653	14,843
South Wales	[1]—	34,838
England and Wales[2]	1,277,900	1,264,200

[1] Not available
[2] Estimated

Volunteering

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made following the announcement in January 2001 of a package to develop volunteering; and if he will make a statement. [36382]

Angela Eagle: As part of the 2000 spending review settlement, the Government announced an extra £300 million for volunteering initiatives over three years, 2001–02 to 2003–04. £60 million was available to other Government Departments for match funding in supporting the use of volunteers in public sector services. The funding is worth a total of £120 million over three years when matched. 24 proposals were approved and are currently on course to involve an additional 290,000 volunteers in public service delivery by the end of March 2004.

Proposals for a second round of funding will be taken forward shortly.

A Mentoring Programme has been established which is providing: funding to develop the mentoring infrastructure; more money for mentoring already going on in local communities; and seven one-stop-shops for mentoring to be known as Mentor Points.

In addition, the Experience Corps Company has been established which, with funding of some £20 million, has started the roll-out (in November 2001) of an initiative aimed at encouraging a quarter of a million people aged 50 and over to become or remain active in their communities.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35929]

Angela Eagle: Information on sickness absence and compensation payments due to 'work-related' stress are not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Department, however, monitors through its staff surveys factors relating to work place stress including work load and working conditions. The Department has taken action to address some of the main identified factors, including improving communication arrangements and filling vacancies. The Home Office is committed to supporting staff in achieving a balance between their work and home responsibilities and has a range of flexible working patterns to help staff achieve this.

A welfare service is available and offers personal support for staff suffering from any form of stress. In addition, stress awareness workshops are available to staff and managers. Information on how to recognise stress and suggested coping strategies, is accessible via the Home Office Intranet; leaflets entitled "Stress and You", are also available.

The Department is aware of its obligations to provide a safe working environment and takes steps to ensure that it meets the requirements of health and safety legislation.

Youth Offending Teams

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who inspects the functioning of youth offending teams; and if he will make a statement. [35532]

Beverley Hughes: The operation of youth offending teams and the programmes they run are subject to a range of independent evaluation and monitoring commissioned and operated by the Youth Justice Board. The Board is also developing a tool to help them measure the effectiveness of youth offending teams' services. Evaluation of the pilot youth offending teams and the new final warnings scheme has been published by Sheffield university, and are available in the Library. Evaluations of the new intervention programmes will be published this spring.

Two youth offending team inspections have been carried out by multi-disciplinary inspection teams. The Home Office, in consultation with the Youth Justice Board, is developing a strategy for new independent inspection arrangements.

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35703]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people, broken down by nationality, on *(a)* temporary admission and *(b)* temporary release, applied for leave to enter on the grounds of marriage in each year from 1995 to the latest convenient date in 2001; and how many such applications in each year were (i) granted and (ii) refused. [35548]

Angela Eagle: The available information is given in the table.

The information relates to decisions on applications for leave to remain on the basis of marriage, by main nationality for 1995 to 2000, the latest year available. Data for 2001 are due to be published in the summer this year.

It is not possible to identify how many of the decisions were made in cases were the applicant was on temporary admission or release.

Grants and refusal of extensions of leave to remain[1] in the United Kingdom on the basis of marriage[2] by nationality, excluding EEA Nationals, 1995–2000

	1995			1996		
	Grants	*Refusals*	*Total decisions*	*Grants*	*Refusals*	*Total decisions*
All nationalities	17,560	1,590	19,150	17,060	1,410	18,470
Europe (excluding EEA)						
Bulgaria	60	[7]—	60	70	[7]—	80
Cyprus	120	[7]—	120	150	[7]—	150
Former Czechoslovakia	150	[7]—	150	200	[7]—	200
of which:						
Czech Republic[3]	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Slovakia	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Hungary	100	[7]—	100	90	—	90
Malta	30	—	30	20	—	20
Poland	360	10	370	370	20	400
Romania	150	[7]—	150	140	[7]—	140
Switzerland	80	—	80	90	[7]—	90
Turkey	550	40	590	570	30	600
Former USSR	370	10	380	440	10	460
of which:						
Estonia	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Latvia	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Lithuania	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Russia[4]	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Ukraine	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Other Former USSR	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Former Yugoslavia	500	10	510	410	20	430
of which:	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Croatia	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Slovenia	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Yugoslavia[5]	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Other Former Yugoslavia	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—	[8]—
Other Europe	20	—	20	20	—	20
Europe (excluding EEA)	2,500	80	2,580	2,580	90	2,670
Americas						
Argentina	40	[7]—	40	30	—	30
Barbados	40	—	40	40	[7]—	40
Brazil	400	10	410	360	[7]—	370
Canada	280	10	290	370	[7]—	370
Chile	30	—	30	30	[7]—	30
Colombia	130	10	140	150	10	160
Guyana	100	10	110	80	10	100
Jamaica	790	160	950	660	110	770
Mexico	70	[7]—	70	60	—	60
Peru	50	[7]—	50	70	[7]—	70
Trinidad and Tobago	120	10	130	120	[7]—	130
USA	1,340	10	1,350	1,320	10	1,330
Venezuela	40	[7]—	40	40	—	40
Other Americas	220	[7]—	220	190	[7]—	190
Americas	3,650	220	3,870	3,520	160	3,680
Africa						
Algeria	410	30	440	430	30	460
Angola	20	[7]—	20	[7]—	[7]—	10
Congo (Dem. Rep.)[6]	20	[7]—	20	120	—	120
Egypt	110	10	120	60	10	60
Ethiopia	40	—	40	700	[7]—	700
Ghana	870	200	1,070	210	180	390
Kenya	250	30	280	30	20	50
Libya	20	—	20	180	[7]—	180
Mauritius	210	20	230	250	20	270
Morocco	240	40	280	1,170	30	1,200
Nigeria	1,350	390	1,740	300	310	620
Sierra Leone	320	100	420	30	120	140
Somalia	20	[7]—	20	590	[7]—	600
South Africa	420	10	430	40	10	50
Sudan	60	[7]—	60	110	[7]—	110
Tanzania	100	[7]—	100	40	10	50

Grants and refusal of extensions of leave to remain[1] in the United Kingdom on the basis of marriage[2] by nationality, excluding EEA Nationals, 1995–2000

	1995			1996		
	Grants	*Refusals*	*Total decisions*	*Grants*	*Refusals*	*Total decisions*
Tunisia	50	[7]—	50	40	—	40
Uganda	40	10	50	20	[7]—	20
Zambia	80	10	90	70	10	80
Zimbabwe	120	20	140	120	20	130
Other Africa	300	40	340	310	50	360
Africa	5,030	910	5,940	4,820	840	5,660
Asia						
Indian sub-continent						
Bangladesh	380	30	410	370	30	410
India	1,150	60	1,220	1,110	60	1,170
Pakistan	1,070	150	1,220	970	120	1,090
Indian sub-continent	2,610	250	2,860	2,450	210	2,660
Middle East						
Iran	140	10	150	130	[7]—	130
Iraq	50	[7]—	50	40	[7]—	50
Israel	140	[7]—	140	130	—	130
Jordan	40	—	40	40	[7]—	40
Kuwait	[7]—	—	[7]—	[7]—	—	[7]—
Lebanon	80	[7]—	80	90	10	100
Saudi Arabia	10	—	10	10	—	10
Syria	40	[7]—	40	40	[7]—	40
Yemen	30	[7]—	30	30	—	30
Other Middle East	20	—	20	20	[7]—	30
Middle East	560	20	580	540	20	560
Remainder of Asia						
China	220	[7]—	220	190	[7]—	200
Hong Kong	290	10	300	260	10	270
Indonesia	40	—	40	30	—	30
Japan	300	10	310	360	[7]—	360
Malaysia	260	20	280	210	10	220
Philippines	360	10	370	330	10	340
Singapore	70	[7]—	70	50	[7]—	50
South Korea	30	[7]—	30	40	—	40
Sri Lanka	120	20	140	170	10	180
Taiwan	20	—	20	30	[7]—	30
Thailand	210	10	220	210	10	220
Other Asia	60	[7]—	60	70	[7]—	70
Remainder of Asia	1,990	90	2,080	1,970	60	2,030
Asia	5,150	350	5,500	4,960	300	5,260
Oceania						
Australia	70	10	710	670	10	680
New Zealand	330	10	340	340	[7]—	350
Other Oceania	10	[7]—	10	10	[7]—	10
Oceania	1,040	20	1,060	1,020	10	1,030
British Overseas citizens	40	[7]—	40	60	[7]—	60
Nationality unknown	150	10	160	100	10	110
All nationalities (excluding EEA)	17,560	1,590	19,150	17,060	1,410	18,470

[1] Excludes dependants of principal applicants, the outcome of appeals and withdrawn applications.

[2] Includes unmarried partners from 1997.

[3] Includes Czechoslovak passport holders.

[4] Includes Soviet Union passport holders.

[5] Includes holders of passports of the former Yugoslavia.

[6] The Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly known as Zaire.

Note:

Data rounded to the nearest 10 with [7] — = 5 or fewer

[8] — not available

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan, *(c)* Bangladesh, *(d)* Ghana, *(e)* Nigeria, *(f)* Malaysia, *(g)* Jamaica, *(h)* Zimbabwe and (j) Kenya, *(i)* applied for, (ii) were granted and (iii) were refused leave to remain in the UK on the ground of marriage in (A) 2000 and (B) 2001 to the latest convenient date; and how many people of each nationality applied (1) within their permitted leave and (2) after their leave had expired. [35547]

Angela Eagle: The available information is given in the table.

The information relates to decisions on applications for leave to remain in the United Kingdom on the basis of marriage. The latest available data are for the period January to December 2000.

It is not possible to identify how many of the decisions were made in cases where that applicant did not have current leave to remain at the time of application.

Grants and refusals of extensions of leave to remain[1] in the United Kingdom on the basis of marriage[2], excluding European Economic Area (EEA) nationals, 2000

	Number of decisions		
	Grants	*Refusals*	*Total*
India	1,640	40	1,680
Pakistan	1,380	60	1,440
Bangladesh	380	20	400
Ghana	700	60	760
Nigeria	1,520	300	1,820
Malaysia	370	10	380
Jamaica	2,200	130	2,330
Zimbabwe	270	10	280
Kenya	370	20	390
Total	8,830	640	9,470

[1] Excludes dependants of principal applicants, the outcome of appeals and withdrawn applications.

[2] Includes unmarried partners.

Notes:

1. Totals may not sum due to rounding. This is because all calculations are based on unrounded figures to ensure accuracy.
2. Data rounded to nearest 10

Youth Forums

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many youth fora have been set up; and at what cost. [35810]

Mr. Denham: There are many different types of youth forum established by local authorities, statutory agencies and voluntary organisations in order to ensure that young people are involved and consulted over policies and services relevant to them. The Government maintain no records of the numbers and costs of youth fora.

Prison Service

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the use of the private sector in the Prison Service. [38401]

Beverley Hughes: I am placing in the Library today a report of a review which the former Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), asked Patrick Carter, a non-executive member of the Strategy Board for Correctional Services, to carry out on the future role of the private sector in the prison system.

We believe that a mixed economy of provision is essential in achieving a modern, dynamic Prison Service.

I am most grateful to Patrick Carter for his report, which shows how much the private sector has achieved to date providing high quality prison services at lower cost. The report also shows how well the public sector prison service has responded to the challenge of private sector competition.

Both the public and the private sectors are important to the future of the Prison Service. Both can show big successes that benefit prisoners and the public. I want to create conditions in which both can flourish, but in which both have to continually prove themselves. I believe the overall thrust of the recommendations of the report will achieve this. Some can be implemented straight away, but others need further work or will have to be subject to discussions in the current spending review and our wider vision for modernising the Prison Service.

The proposal that under-performing prisons should be required to show how they will meet tough benchmarked standards, or face contracting out or closure, offers the potential for big improvements in performance and value for money. I announced on 19 December 2001 the first scheme of this kind, at Her Majesty's Prison Leicester and Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre Reading.

The report also provides a welcome contribution to finding ways of bringing the aging prison estate into the 21st century. I will consider this as part of our current assessment of the options for providing a range of carefully targeted new approaches to dealing with offenders, and the spending review.

I note the recommendation for a limited programme of market testing. For the moment, I believe the performance testing process I have announced offers a better, faster and cheaper means of improvement. But I do not rule out using market testing again in the future.

The private sector has demonstrated that it can make a valuable contribution to the delivery of a high quality service by prisons. This report outlines a way ahead for their continued involvement.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the Justice and Home Affairs European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 28 February; and what information is being provided by his Department to permit pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [[38035]

Angela Eagle: Arrangements fo[illegible]-ordination of European Union policy issues between Scottish Executive Ministers and the United Kingdom (UK) Government are set out in the Corcordat on co-ordination of European Union Policy issues, which supplements the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the devolved administrations and the UK Government. The Concordat states that decisions on Ministerial attendance at Council meetings will be taken on a case-by-case basis by the lead UK Minister, which in the case of the Justice and Home Affairs Council is my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Scottish Executive Ministers participate in the Justice and Home Affairs Council from time to time, when issues of particular interest to Scotland are on the agenda. They are not expected to attend on 28 February 2002. The Home Office is in frequent contact with the Scottish Executive Justice Department on European issues.

With regard to pre-Council scrutiny of European Union proposals, Explanatory Memoranda are circulated to the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament at the same time as they are deposited in the UK Parliament.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many his Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37542]

Mr. McCartney: A total of 15,804 people left the ex-DSS and ex-ES areas, which now make up the Department of Work and Pensions, during the year ending 31 March 2001.

Of that number 15,287 were under the formal retirement age of 60 years.

Of those leaving under the age of 60 years, 296 were entitled to receive either a severance payment or early retirement benefits from the Department.

Disability Living Allowance (Scotland)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons in *(a)* the Angus constituency and *(b)* Scotland have been awarded a reduced level of DLA when applying for a further award. [R] [37205]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available for Scotland or for individual constituencies. In 2000–01 about 17,900 people in Great Britain were awarded a lower amount of disability living allowance when they renewed their claims.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons in *(a)* the Angus constituency and *(b)* Scotland are in receipt of the mobility element of DLA at the (i) higher, (ii) middle and (iii) lower rate; and what the figures are in each of the last five years. [R] [37208]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table. There is no middle rate of the disability living allowance mobility component.

Numbers of disability living allowance mobility component recipients in the Angus constituency and Scotland

	Angus		Scotland	
	Higher rate	*Lower rate*	*Higher rate*	*Lower rate*
1997	1,500	500	152,600	42,100
1998	1,600	600	155,900	46,700
1999	1,600	600	156,500	50,500
2000	1,700	700	159,700	54,600
2001	1,900	800	166,100	60,600

Notes:

1. Scotland figures and 1997 constituency figures are from 5 per cent. sample and rounded to the nearest 100.
2. Constituency figures from 1998 onwards are from 100 per cent. extract and rounded to the nearest 1000.
3. Figures are at 31 May each year.

Source:

ASD Information Centre

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons in *(a)* the Angus constituency and *(b)* Scotland are in receipt of disability living allowance; and what the figures are for each of the last five years. [R] [37207]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Numbers of disability living allowance recipients in the Angus constituency and Scotland

	Angus	Scotland
1997	2,300	214,200
1998	2,500	224,900
1999	2,600	230,600
2000	2,800	237,300
2001	3,000	249,600

Notes:

1. Scotland figures and 1997 constituency figure from 5 per cent. sample and rounded to the nearest 100.
2. Constituency figures for 1998 onwards from 100 per cent. extract and rounded to the nearest 100.
3. Figures are at 31 May each year.

Source:

ASD Information Centre

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons in *(a)* the Angus constituency and *(b)* Scotland have been refused DLA when applying for a further award. [R] [37206]

Maria Eagle: This information is not available for Scotland or for individual constituencies. In 2000–01 about 36,600 people in Great Britain made unsuccessful renewal claims for disability living allowance.

Visual and Aural Impairment

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure that those from the deaf and blind communities are able to contact their hon. Member through the provision of Braille translation and typing facilities and in lip speaking and lip reading training. [37090]

Maria Eagle: Hon. Members have duties as service providers under the Disability Discrimination Act to make reasonable adjustments so that their disabled constituents can access their services. In October, I wrote to all hon. Members reminding them of their duties under the Act and enclosing some guidance to help them. Hon. Members may also wish to refer to a revised Code of Practice on Rights of Access which was published by the Disability Rights Commission today. The new Code explains the law and provides practical guidance for service-providers.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the RNIB about the use of Braille by public services and *(b)* the RNID about the use of (i) text phones, (ii) lip speaking and (iii) sign language by public services. [31244]

Maria Eagle: The Department is committed to providing services that are accessible to people with hearing or visual impairments. For example, Benefits Agency leaflets are available in Braille, large print and audio cassette; the Child Support Agency widely advertises its text phone service; and the Employment Service has regular contacts with the RNIB and the RNID about accessibility issues. Last February, the then Department for Education and Employment arranged for guidance, known as "Let's Make it Accessible", to be distributed to other Government Departments. It explains how to adopt a good practice approach in providing information to disabled people.

I regularly meet representatives of the major disability charities including the RNIB and the RNID. Most recently I have had discussions with the Chief Executive of the RNID about a videotelephony project to allow a remote British Sign Language interpreter service.

Fraud

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux on its implementation of fraud prevention methods, with particular regard to local authorities. [37463]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department has consulted with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux during the development of performance standards for housing benefit. The standards set out the requirements for providing secure and effective housing benefit and council tax benefit administration and counter-fraud activity.

The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate will be consulting the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux in the near future over the revision of the model claim form for housing benefit and council tax benefit. A revised version of the form will be issued to all local authorities in April this year.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of claimants found to have made fraudulent social security claims were prosecuted in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [31151]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27301]

Malcolm Wicks: We are taking determined steps to combat internal fraud. We have published an internal fraud policy that sets out staff responsibilities, and appointed a senior accountable officer and a supporting central probity team. There are also security specialists and staff to investigate suspected internal fraud vigorously when it arises. We know that the overwhelming majority of staff are completely honest and trustworthy, and instances of internal fraud are not common, but we remain vigilant.

The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in the current financial year.

The available information for the Employment Service, as recorded by the former Department for Education and Employment, and for the former Department of Social Security is in the tables.

Internal and contractor fraud in the Employment Service by financial year

	£
1997–98	972,42.00
1998–99	54,107.01
1999–2000	45,621.83
2000–01	3,023.20

Internal fraud in the former Department of Social Security by financial year

	£
1997–98	942,378.74
1998–99	443,964.03
1999–2000	416,967.11
2000–01	71,112.34

Local Exchange Trading Schemes

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice his Department is giving to local offices on the subject of local exchange trading schemes. [37464]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 3 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 135W.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and Civil Service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35843]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Secondments are part of the Interchange Initiative which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the civil service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: Voluntary, Education, Health, Public and Private. Interchange is a key component of the civil service reform agenda. The Modernising Government White Paper committed us to increasing interchange, in particular by bringing in more people on secondment and sending more of our people out.

I have placed a table in the Library which sets out the number of staff recorded as having been seconded in to the Department (including Employment Service and the former Department of Social Security) from May 1997 to the present date. Other inward secondments of three months or more recorded centrally were from the voluntary sector, local government and other parts of the public sector. Each of the entries relates to a single person.

For reasons of confidentiality names of individuals have not been given.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36284]

Maria Eagle: In accordance with central guidance on security, ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to Minister's homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many letters the Minister for Disabled People has received at her Department's address in the last 12 months; and how many have been passed to other Ministers for answer. [32923]

Maria Eagle: Since becoming Minister for Disabled People at the start of this Parliament I have received 636 letters for ministerial reply. I have replied personally to 354 of these that were about matters within my responsibilities. The others were passed to ministerial colleagues. I have also replied to a further 507 letters that were addressed to ministerial colleagues.

Minimum Income Guarantee Helpline

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people staff the minimum income guarantee helpline; and if he will make a statement. [33923]

Mr. McCartney: The minimum income guarantee claim line currently employs 75 staff, of which 51 are employed as claim line operators. The MIG claim line is open from 7am to 7pm Monday to Friday. There are three daily shift patterns to ensure that most of the operators are available at peak hours.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much the minimum income guarantee helpline cost in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [33925]

Mr. McCartney: The total running cost for the minimum income guarantee claim line for the 12 month period ending 31 December 2001 was £1.63 million.

Heating Allowance

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received from organisations representing disabled citizens seeking the extension of heating allowance paid to senior citizens and to all housebound disabled persons. [35408]

Mr. McCartney: From time to time, we have discussions with, or correspondence from, a variety of organisations representing disabled people. These can cover a range of issues which are of concern to them, which includes the eligibility criteria for Winter Fuel Payments.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will extend the heating allowance paid to senior citizens and to housebound disabled people. [35409]

Mr. McCartney: Help is already available, through disability benefits and the disability premium in Income Support, in recognition of the extra costs, including heating, which disabled people may have. There are no plans to extend the Winter Fuel Payment scheme to disabled people under age 60.

Pensioners

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many changes of circumstances affecting pensioners must be reported to his Department; how many cases of each are so reported each year; and what penalties are attached to failure to report without good reason. [35572]

Mr. McCartney: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Tim Boswell, dated 13 February 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how many changes of circumstances affecting pensioners must be report to his Department; how many cases of each are so reported each year; and what penalties are attached to failure to report without good reason.

The change of circumstances that pensioners should report vary according to the benefit. These are made clear to recipients of each benefit. Examples of changes of circumstances are changes to capital, occupational pensions or hospitalisation. Certain changes may not need to be reported for Retirement Pension but must be reported for Minimum Income Guarantee purposes. Details are not available about how many changes of circumstances are not reported.

Information available over the last two years shows that in 1999/2000 there were 6,270,268 changes of circumstances processed affecting pensioners. In 2000/2001 there were 6,527,051 changes of circumstances processed.

The penalties considered by the Department are prosecution, administrative penalties or formal caution.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36198]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available, for the financial year 2001–02, is in the table:

Department for Work and Pensions

Agency/body	*Full-time post allocation*[1]	*Approximate cost*[2] £
Headquarters	5.94	114,900[3]
Benefits Agency	207.76	4,017,100
Child Support Agency	28.50	551,100
Employment Service	45.00	538,500
Other	27.25	526,900
Total	314.45	5,748,500

[1] This is not necessarily equivalent to the number of union officials because (i) some officials are part-time; (ii) some union posts are not filled.

[2] The figures have been calculated using average, not actual, salaries.

[3] Amounts are rounded to the nearest one hundred pounds.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36138]

Mr. McCartney: The information on the annual cost of the DWP website www.dwp.gov.uk formerly the DSS website www.dss.gov.uk is not available throughout the last four years.

A new DSS website was launched in August 2000 at a production cost of £183,650 for the research, design and building of the site. In December 2001 the site was rebranded for DWP and broadened to include information for the new Department at a cost of £48,193.

In-house internet staff maintain the site and we would be unable to break these costs down without incurring disproportionate cost.

Web hosting and provision of web services is provided by the Department's IT contractor. However, internet services are not accounted for separately and it is not possible to disentangle the costs from overall IT services.

Hits received in each of the last four years are available from statistical records and are in the table:

	No. of hits received on DSS/DWP website
2000–01	36,415,365
1999–2000	32,487,969
1998–99	21,980,416
1997–98	8,986,375

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35937]

Mr. McCartney: We do not record details of absences specifically related to work-related stress or details of compensation payments by the alleged cause of the injury.

We have procedures in place in each of its businesses to enable managers and individuals to identify and report those issues which are causing uncomfortable pressure at work. The detail of the procedures differs across the businesses, but the Department is confident that each procedure follows the good practice recommended by the Health and Safety Executive. The cost of operating these procedures includes variable amounts of management and staff time, plus the costs of implementing changes and adjustments to control any identified risks. These costs are not quantifiable.

The Department intends, in the summer, to review the procedures in place across its businesses to ensure a continuum of best practice.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35893]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions is committed to improving the work-life balance of all staff, and is fully committed to implementing the provisions of the Working Time Directive. With this in mind, we are currently negotiating the detailed provisions of a collective agreement which includes measures aimed at minimising the numbers of staff working in excess of 48 hours per week, while maintaining operational effectiveness.

Departmental records show that in 1999, 54 staff had signed a waiver to say they were working in excess of 48 hours.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35354]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

10 people are employed on a formal job share basis. However, over 30,000 people work part-time, including some who are employed on an informal job share basis.

Our equal opportunities statement actively promotes and supports the use of flexible working patterns to enable those working for us to balance home and work responsibilities. Vacancies are open to people with different working patterns unless real operational needs preclude it.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35015]

Mr. McCartney: The average total cost to the Department of external consultations for the last four financial years was £27.85 million. This compares with an average of £41.65 million for the four years prior to that (1993–94 to 1996–97).

The information requested is set out for each of the last four financial years in the table:

	Cost at April 2002 prices £ million
2000–01	32.3
1999–2000	28.9
1998–99	27.5
1997–98	21.9

Figures relate to contracts awarded by the ex-Department of Social Security. Costs for the Department for Work and Pensions for the current financial year are not yet available.

Figures shown included costs for management consultants and IT consultants but exclude costs for contractors and professional services (accountancy, legal advice, etc.).

Housing Benefit

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the target time is for housing benefit appeals to be heard by the Appeals Tribunal, from the date of application for appeal; and what the average length of time has been for appeals to be heard by the Tribunal. [34548]

Malcolm Wicks: The target for hearing housing benefit appeals is for the average waiting time from receipt by the Appeals Service to first hearing to be no more than 14 weeks. No target exists for the time taken prior to receipt of the appeal by the Appeals Service for local authorities to prepare the schedule of evidence and to forward the appeal to the Appeals Service.

For housing benefit appeals, the average time taken from receipt at the Appeals Service and the first hearing is 8.0 weeks. The average time between being lodged at a local authority and the first hearing is 30.2 weeks.

Notes:

1. All figures are subject to change as more up to date data become available.

2. Figures are rounded to one decimal place.

3. All figures are provisional and based on the period 1 July 2001 to 30 October 2001.

Source: 100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many appeals against local authority housing benefit decisions have been *(a)* lodged and *(b)* heard since the introduction of the new appeals system in July 2001. [34549]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is as follows:

Housing benefit and housing/council tax benefit (combined)
Total case load, appeals lodged and number of first hearings:
1 July 2001 to 31 October 2001

	Housing benefit	*Housing/council tax benefit (combined)*
Total case load (August 2001)[1]	3,854,000	Not available
Lodged at a local authority[2]	925	870
Number of first hearings[2]	260	190

[1] The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple; the figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand; figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated; housing benefit figures exclude and extended payment cases; approximately 80 per cent. of housing benefit recipients also receive council tax benefit.

Source: Housing Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. case load stock count taken in August 2001.

[2] All figures are subject to change as more up to date data become available; figures are rounded to the nearest five; all figures are provisional.

Source: 100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System.

Benefit Payment Methods

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of benefits claimants have moved to a system of *(a)* automated credit transfer and *(b)* direct payment of benefits into a bank account since this service has been available. [34795]

Malcolm Wicks: Over 40 per cent. of benefit claimants are already paid by ACT directly into a bank or other account. The number is rising by two to three percentage points every year, showing that the status quo is not an option, because people are already voting with their feet.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many jobseeker's allowance claimants have had their benefit reduced as result of non-compliance in basic skills courses. [30344]

Malcolm Wicks: Six sanctions have been applied in the JSA basic skills pilots areas testing mandatory attendance on basic skills provision.

Community Sentence Orders

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which areas are piloting the provision in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 to reduce benefit for claimants who breach community service orders; and how many claimants in each area have been sanctioned since the pilots began. [27767]

Malcolm Wicks: There are four probation service areas piloting the provisions of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 relating to the reduction of benefit for people who breach community sentence orders. The four areas are Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Teesside and West Midlands (as detailed in SI 2001 No. 2619 (C.86)).

The pilot began on 15 October 2001. As at 1 February 2002, a total of 272 warning letters had been issued to those referred to court for breach proceedings. On 1 February 2002 four claimants had been sanctioned: three were from the Teesside pilot area and one from West Midlands. A slow start was expected because the measures do not apply retrospectively to breaches occurring before that date.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Emergency Planning

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will introduce *(a)* a programme of emergency loans for businesses affected by disaster and *(b)* a disaster-planning unit to produce disaster plans for foreseeable disasters. [37590]

Mr. Leslie: Advice to businesses on handling emergencies and planning for business continuity is available on the website www.ukresilience.info. The Government advice is that individual businesses should ensure that they are adequately insured.

In addition, the Government have asked the Small Business Service (SBS) to undertake an analysis of the existing financial support from the public and private sector for small businesses affected by disaster. Working with HM Treasury the SBS are identifying current market provision and will report back to Government with its findings and recommendations.

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office is co-ordinating the work being done in support of the Civil Contingencies Committee's current comprehensive review of the country's plans for dealing with emergencies.

Central Office of Information

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to revise and publish the guidelines governing the political impartiality of the Central Office of Information. [37157]

Mr. Leslie: None. As with all civil servants, staff in the Central Office of Information are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the requirements of the Civil Service Code. The Guidance on the Work of the Government Information also applies.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36203]

Mr. Leslie: The information is as follows:

Cabinet Office: one full time local union representative.

Cabinet Office agencies: two officers who spend part of their time undertaking union duties on an ad hoc basis, but do not have time formally allocated to them for this work.

Cabinet Office non-departmental public bodies: 14 staff who receive a total 367 days paid leave for union rates.

Cost to public funds

1998: £55,375

1999: £60,850

2000: £59,235

2001: £61,700.

Accountancy (Secondments)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish a list of the employees of *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Deloitte and Touche, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants who have been seconded to work for the Government in each year since 1997. [33416]

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33862]

Mr. Leslie: The information provided has been collected from Government Departments. Departments provided details of when any secondment started, to avoid double counting. A secondment covers all periods from three months to three years or more. When any secondment is set up great care is taken to ensure that no conflict of interest issues arise.

	Arthur Andersen	*Deloitte and Touche*	*Ernst and Young*	*KPMG*	*PricewaterhouseCoopers*
1997–98	2	1	1	1	9
1998–99	3	1	2	1	3
1999–2000	1	2	3	4	5
2000–01	1	1	6	2	4

Energy Industry

Tom Brake: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the value was of each sponsorship of Government *(a)* Departments and *(b)* events there has been by (i) BP, (ii) Shell, (iii) Exxon-Mobil, (iv) Enron, (v) Conoco, (vi) Texaco and (vii) TotaFinaElf (viii) in the last five years; when each occurred; if he will place related documentation in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [33220]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: In line with the Government's commitment in their response to the sixth report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in Departmental Annual Reports.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26992]

Mr. Leslie: Expenditure on newspaper advertising since 1997 is as follows.

£000

	Department	*Agencies*
1997–98	237	—
1998–99	242	—
1999–2000	552	14
2000–01	697	11

Expenditure for non-departmental public bodies is included within the Department figures and could be separately identified only at disproportionate cost.

The vast majority of the increase in advertising and spend between 1998–99 and 2000–01 was for recruitment advertising for open competition posts.

Each campaign may use national and regional media. The target audience/message to be conveyed influences our choice of media. For national advertising, a mix of broadsheets and tabloids have been used frequently. For regional advertising, space has been taken in many prominent regional newspapers as well as hundreds of more local papers.

A breakdown of their expenditure on newspaper advertising by title could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 27 February 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Q13. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister when he will reply to the letter he has received from Mr. Martin Cadman, dated 4 February. [35148]

The Prime Minister: I have asked a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister to reply to Mr. Cadman.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* faxes, *(b)* letters and *(c)* e-mails he has received on average each month in the last five years. [38162]

The Prime Minister: The information is not available in the manner requested. The number of letters and cards I receive varies significantly from week to week. I receive about 500,000 items of post per year, and my office works hard to deal with them as efficiently as possible.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years, giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34186]

The Prime Minister: My office supported "Building Bridges", a Christian-Muslim seminar held at Lambeth Palace on 17–18 January 2002, hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury. We provided approximately £7,000 towards the cost of the seminar.

British Companies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 611W, on British companies, when and by what means his letter to the Prime Minister of Romania regarding Sidex came into the public domain; if he will place a copy in the Library; if a copy of it was sent to Sidex; how many letters he has written in the last 12 months to foreign Governments *(a)* in advance of and *(b)* following British companies winning contracts abroad; and what his criteria are for deciding whether to support British companies seeking contacts abroad by means of contracts with foreign Governments. [38395]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Official Visits

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the parliamentary constituencies he has visited since 1 October 2001. [37770]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member for the answer I gave him on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 104W.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister for what reason his Chief of Staff accompanied him to Lord Levy's house during his visit of June 2001. [37973]

The Prime Minister: My Chief of Staff did not accompany me.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions members of the Policy Directorate have travelled overseas on official business since 7 June 2001; and if he will list the *(a)* destination and *(b)* total cost, including the (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance for each occasion. [37964]

The Prime Minister: Since 7 June 2001, members of the Policy Directorate have travelled overseas on official business on 13 occasions. The average cost of official travel was approximately £1,000 per visit.

All visits have been made in accordance with the rules set out in the Civil Service Management Code. These arrangements follow the practice of successive Administrations.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions his *(a)* Chief of Staff and *(b)* Director of Communications and Strategy have formed part of the official party accompanying him on overseas visits since 1 May 1997; and if he will list the *(a)* destination and *(b)* total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance on each occasion. [37970]

The Prime Minister: Since 1 May 1997, my Chief of Staff has accompanied me on 35 official overseas visits and my Director of Communications has accompanied me on 77 official overseas visits. All visits have been made in accordance with the rules set out in the Civil Service Management Code. These arrangements follow the practice of successive Administrations.

Information on the total travel and accommodation costs is included in the detailed list of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas and information on expenditure by all Ministers on travel overseas. Lists of overseas visits undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing more than £500 during the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2001 were placed in the Library of the House and published in the *Official Report* on 17 June 1999, columns 196–97W; on 28 July 2000, column 969W; and on 20 July 2001, column 467W. The list for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions his chief of staff had with Her Majesty's Ambassador in Bucharest in June and July 2001; and what matters were discussed. [37968]

The Prime Minister: None.

Special Advisers

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* special advisers were involved in the preparation of background material for his use during Prime Minister's Question Time on Wednesday 13 February; and how many hours were spent by those in each category above on such preparation. [37769]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware I am briefed in the same way as my predecessors were. A senior civil servant is in charge of preparing my briefing for PMQs, and draws on the input of other civil servants and special advisers as they see fit.

Business Contacts

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what messages relating to LNM Holdings were exchanged between 10 Downing Street and the British Embassy in Bucharest in the 12 months to September 2001; and on what dates; [37969]

(2) whether since 7 June 2001 he has made representations to foreign Governments on behalf of individual companies; and which they were. [37967]

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list each occasion since May 1997 when he has sent a personal message to heads of Government with the intention of advancing the commercial interest of British firms. [37774]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member and my right hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Members for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on Thursday 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Energy Industry

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 609W, on the energy industry, if he will state the reasons that he does not consider a precedent to be set by the provision of details of ministerial meetings with respect to Enron; and if he will make a statement. [39134]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

WALES

National Assembly (Electoral System)

9. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the operation of the electoral system for the National Assembly for Wales. [35115]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The electoral system for the Assembly elections was outlined in the 1997 White Paper "A Voice for Wales". The Government have no plans to change it.

Aerospace Industry

10. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the aerospace industry in north Wales. [35116]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon Friend the Secretary of State has regular discussions with the First Minister on a wide range of issues including the aerospace industry.

I am pleased to note that Airbus have made considerable progress in reducing the number of jobs at risk. This has been due in part to the good working relationship built up between management and the unions within Airbus UK.

Steel

11. **Dr. Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues and the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about measures to improve the local economy in the steel-making and former steel-making areas of Wales. [35117]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet Cabinet colleagues and the First Minister regularly to discuss a number of issues, including economic development in steel making and former steel making areas.

National Health Service

12. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary for Health and Social Services in the National Assembly for Wales, regarding the state of the national health service in Wales. [35118]

Mr. Touhig: I have regular discussions with the Assembly's Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the NHS inWales.

14. **Mr. Boris Johnson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding plans to reform the national health service in Wales. [35120]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. friend the Secretary of State and I have regular meetings with the Assembly First Minister and the Health and Social Services Minister to discuss the NHS and other health matters in Wales.

We have had detailed discussions with regard to the reforms to be taken forward through the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill and the legislation mentioned in the Queens speech which will be drafted to reform the provision of health services in Wales.

26. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the Welsh Assembly regarding the national health service in Wales. [35133]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I regularly meet with the National Assembly First Minister and the Assembly Health and Social Services Minister to discuss the NHS in Wales.

Objective 1

13. **Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about the progress of objective 1 programmes in Wales. [35119]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Secretary regularly to discuss a range of issues, including progress with the objective 1 programme. At 12 February 2002, over 470 objective 1 projects had been approved, worth a total of over £300 million in European grants. Over £64 million of Objective 1 grant has already been paid out by the Assembly.

Cross-border Flooding

15. **Matthew Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he had with the Environment Agency concerning cross-border flooding. [35121]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular contact with the Environment Agency, which include discussions on floods and related matters.

Additionally, the Wales Office and the Assembly are represented on the Interdepartmental Floods Task Force established by the Parliamentary Secretary of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Crime Reduction Partnerships

16. **Mr. Havard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with UK Government Ministers and representatives of the National Assembly for Wales on the work of crime reduction partnerships in Wales. [35122]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are in regular contact with colleagues and with the First Minister and his Cabinet colleagues about issues affecting Wales.

The Government's partnership approach to fighting crime is making a significant difference in communities across Wales. With funding running into millions of pounds, local crime and disorder reduction partnerships are implementing projects targeted at crime hotspots, domestic violence and drug related crime. Partnerships are currently undertaking the first formal review of their strategies, which are due for completion in April 2002. The Crime Reduction Director for Wales encourages partnerships to link this work with other local community strategies, particularly the Communities First programme.

Domestic Violence

17. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary about projects to combat domestic violence in Wales. [35123]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are in regular contact with colleagues about issues affecting Wales, including the need for measures to combat domestic violence and to protect its victims.

As part of our response, a new Ministerial Committee, Chaired by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs has been established to co-ordinate action across Government.

A number of important initiatives in Wales have been supported both by the Government and the National Assembly. Later this year, the Crime Reduction Unit for Wales will host two major conferences on domestic violence.

Violent Crime

18. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly about the level of violent crime in Wales. [35124]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have regular discussions with the First Minister and his Cabinet colleagues about a range of issues including levels of crime, and measures aimed at combating it.

The Government are committed to continuing to improve the reporting and detection of violent crime, and to tackling its underlying causes.

28. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department regarding violent crime in Wales. [35135]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are in regular contact with colleagues about issues affecting Wales, including levels of crime, and measures aimed at combating it.

The Government are committed to continuing to improve the reporting and detection of violent crime, and to tackling its underlying causes.

Crime Reduction

19. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with Whitehall colleagues and the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about the implementation of measures to reduce crime in Wales. [35125]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are in regular contact with colleagues and with the First Minister and his Cabinet colleagues about issues affecting Wales.

The Government's partnership approach to fighting crime is making a significant difference in communities across Wales. With funding running into millions of pounds, local crime and disorder reduction partnerships are implementing projects targeted at crime hotspots, domestic violence and drug related crime. The Crime Reduction Director for Wales encourages partnerships to link this work with other local community strategies, particularly the Communities First programme.

NHS Consultants' Contracts

21. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will discuss with the First Secretary of the National Assembly the reform of NHS consultants' contracts. [35127]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I regularly meet with the National Assembly First Minister and the Assembly Health and Social Services Minister to discuss the NHS in Wales.

I am aware that the Department of Health and the devolved Administrations have published a suggested framework for a new consultant contract together with proposals for combining the existing distinction award and discretionary points schemes to a single scheme, providing rewards for excellence.

Representatives from the Department of Health and the devolved Administrations are meeting the profession on a fortnightly basis to formulate a new form of contract which will have the support of both parties.

Business Regulation

22. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has made to other Government Ministers concerning the level of regulation on business in Wales. [35128]

Mr. Paul Murphy: As a Cabinet member I have regular discussions on a range of issues including regulation on business.

In July last year, I made a representation to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, on certain aspects of the Government's move toward improving the efficiency of dispute resolution in Britain for both employees and employers.

The Government's Regulatory Impact Unit (RIU) in the Cabinet Office is working to reduce regulation, bureaucracy and red tape in both the private and public sectors.

For example, when business told us we could reduce the administrative burden of the National Minimum Wage and the Working Time Directive without affecting entitlements, we did so. The Government are keen to ensure that regulations do not damage business competitiveness.

Training

23. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues and the First Secretary of the National Assembly about the progress of Government measures to improve the training and skills of the Welsh work force. [35129]

Mr. Touhig: I meet regularly with Cabinet colleagues and the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales.

The Government together with devolved Administrations are putting in place UK-wide arrangements for industry-led skills development, with new Sector Skills Councils supported by a Sector Skills Development Agency.

I understand that the National Assembly for Wales will publish its Skills and Employment action plan today that will set out over 50 actions to raise skills and economic activity and help address skills gaps and shortages experienced by employers.

Economy

24. **Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues and the First Secretary of the National Assembly about the performance of the Welsh economy. [35130]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues and with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales on a range of issues.

The Government understand that some parts of the economy, such as manufacturing, continue to face difficulties.

There are no simple solutions. However, the Government are convinced that their robust macro-economic policies will continue to provide the right economic environment for sustained growth with low inflation.

Manufacturing

25. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussion he has had with the First Secretary about the future viability of the manufacturing sector in Wales. [35131]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales on a range of issues including manufacturing in Wales.

In Wales, under DTI's £15 million UK-wide scheme, a Welsh Centre of Manufacturing Excellence is being set up, which will benefit up to 2,000 firms in the first three years.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary on new initiatives to assist manufacturing industries in Wales. [35111]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Secretary regularly to discuss a range of issues, including manufacturing in Wales.

The Government understand that some parts of the economy, such as manufacturing, continue to face real and sustained difficulties.

There are no simple solutions at hand to ease these problems, but the Government and Assembly are helping British manufacturing to raise its game and to shift its focus from competing on the basis of cost alone towards high skill, high value-added products and processes.

Job Losses

27. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary on developing a response to recent job losses in manufacturing in Wales. [35134]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales on a range of issues.

Where there are significant job losses announced in Wales, there is swift help available through the Employment Service, together with Education Learning Wales (ELWa), Careers Wales and "one-stop shops" to help those who have lost their jobs with a range of assistance. This assistance can include careers advice, assistance with their applications and retraining in order to maximise opportunities to help them back into full employment.

Wales Cinema Day

7. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what contribution his Department made to Wales cinema day this year; and what continuing commitment he has towards film-making and broadcasting in Wales. [35113]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department fully supports Wales cinema day. On 3rd December last year I visited the International Film School of Wales in Caerleon, Newport. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary also visited the film school on 9 November.

Miners' Compensation

20. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on the number of applications for miners' compensation in Wales that have been settled *(a)* in full and *(b)* on an interim basis. [35126]

Mr. Touhig: I have regular discussions on many aspects of coal health compensation with the Minister for Industry and Energy at the Department of Trade and Industry.

To date, there have been almost 34,000 respiratory disease and 17,000 vibration white finger claims registered in Wales. Nearly 12,000 interim payments and 2,800 full and final payments worth £71.2 million have been made in relation to respiratory disease. With regard to vibration white finger, 5,000 interim payments have been made and 4,600 claims have been settled by payment. The Department of Trade and Industry and their claim handlers IRISC are on target to make 15,000 respiratory disease offers in Wales by the end of the year.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions regarding miners' pension schemes. [35132]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly meets with Cabinet colleagues including the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

I very much welcome the announcement made by my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy on 17 January to enhance pensions for those miners on low pensions. The Government have been concerned about these miners for some time.

My hon. Friend also made a joint statement with trustees of the two former British Coal pension schemes, the mineworkers' pension scheme and the British Coal staff superannuation scheme, agreeing a review of arrangements for the Government's guarantee of Members' basic pension benefits.

Both the Government and the trustees recognise that there have been changes in circumstances since 1994 and have agreed to explore how these changes might best be reflected in revisions to the 1994 arrangements which would benefit Members. In doing so, they recognise that any revisions will need to be based on an equitable sharing of risks and reward between the schemes and the Exchequer, and will need to be sufficiently robust to operate satisfactorily in a wide variety of conditions.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if he will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37982]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Information is available only for the period since the Wales Office was established on 1 July 1999.

Departmental special advisers have accompanied Ministers on visits abroad on seven occasions. It is not practicable separately to identify the costs of these visits, but all journeys were judged to comply with the Civil Service code.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House in respect of the rules relating to the type of question hon. Members can ask Ministers. [37780]

Mr. Robin Cook: Not at present. The Procedure Committee is currently inquiring into parliamentary questions, and I await the outcome of that inquiry. The hon. Gentleman may wish to make proposals to them.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36205]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Privy Council Office website was established in August 2000. In 2000–01, the cost to my Department of running it (including the initial setting up costs) was approximately £7,200. During the calendar year 2001, there were 300,914 successful hits to the website. The further information requested is not available.

Services

Dr. Cable: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what services to Parliament are provided by outside contractors; when their contracts are due for renewal; and what services are provided in-house. [36716]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House of Commons Commission is responsible only for services to this House. A very wide range of services is provided to support the work of the House, its Committees, and individual Members. I could not provide the information my hon. Friend seeks, except at disproportionate cost. If my hon. Friend has particular services in mind, the Director of Finance and Administration will do his best to assist.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what assessment has been made of the work load and excess hours worked by staff supporting the *(a)* Parliamentary Commissioner for

Standards and *(b)* Registrar of Members' Interests; and if he will make a statement on the Commission's plans for remedy and recognition of the work load. [36863]

Mr. Kirkwood: I refer the hon. Gentleman to paragraph 13 of the Commission paper "Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards: Nomination of Candidate" (House of Commons Paper 598 of the present Session).

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, by what proportion Mrs. Filkin has been underpaid as Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; and when was the first day of work for which late payment is being made. [37118]

Mr. Kirkwood: Mrs. Filkin has not been underpaid. As the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) indicated in his response to the debate on the nomination of the new Commissioner on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 267, Mrs. Filkin has been paid for all the days she has worked. As in the case of any individual employed by the Commission, details of her pay are confidential.

John Stonborough

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether a daily rate of remuneration was agreed after Mr. John Stonborough was selected as Media Adviser to the House; and whether there is a bonus arrangement. [37266]

Mr. Kirkwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 210W.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, who keeps records of the days worked by Mr. John Stonborough for the House. [37267]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Director of Finance and Administration arranged Mr. Stonborough's terms of engagement, and is monitoring the contract.

Recycling

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what percentage of waste within each department in the Palace of Westminster is recycled. [36712]

Mrs. Roe: Information on recycling is not recorded on a departmental basis. However, from March 2002, monthly data will be published, which will show the total amount of waste sent for recycling from the parliamentary estate under the following headings: paper, cardboard, glass, cooking oils and light bulbs.

PDVN

John McDonnell: To ask the Chairman of the Information Select Committee what the cost was of *(a)* the introduction of the PDVN system and *(b)* subsequent upgrades to the system; and what the cost is of its annual maintenance. [35615]

Mr. Kirkwood: I have been asked to reply.

Figures are not kept in a form which allows the cost of establishing the PDVN to be identified. However, set-up costs were identified in the First Report of the Information Committee of Session 1993–94, "The Provision of a Parliamentary Data and Video Network". The cost of hardware and network software over the period 1994 to 2000 was estimated to be £1,962,000 (at 1994 prices). The hardware and network software was subject to a significant upgrade during the summer recess of 1999, at a cost of £2,100,000.

Cabling of the Parliamentary Estate is a continuing project and is necessary not just for the installation of the PDVN but also for the introduction of a new fire detection system. Identifying cabling costs specific to the installation of the PDVN is thus not possible.

The contract for maintenance of the PDVN currently costs £600,000 a year and includes the replacement of equipment and minor upgrades to the software. The cost of parliamentary staff directly involved in the day-to-day maintenance of the Network is approximately £100,000 a year.

Health and Safety Legislation

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to introduce health and safety legislation this Session; and if he will make a statement. [36596]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to introduce health and safety legislation this Session.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Priests (Compensation)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, how many priests claimed compensation under the scheme for those priests who disagreed with the ordination of women in each year since the scheme's inception. [37765]

Mr. Bell: The Ordination of Women (Financial Provisions) Measure 1993 took effect on 22 February 1994. By the end of 2001, 412 clergy had resigned and were receiving or had received payments under the Measure. A yearly breakdown is as follows:

Year of resignation	*Number of claimants*
1994	232
1995	67
1996	39
1997	20
1998	19
1999	13
2000	15
2001	7
Total	412

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, how many applications for compensation there were in the *(a)* last year and *(b)* current year from priests claiming compensation under the Ordination of Women Measure. [37764]

Mr. Bell: In 2001 seven clergy applied for and are receiving payment under the Ordination of Women (Financial Provisions) Measure 1993. So far in 2002 one minister has applied for and is receiving such payment.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what the cost of the compensation Measure has been for those leaving the priesthood over the ordination of women in each year since the compensation Measure came into effect. [37766]

Mr. Bell: By 31 December 2001, the cumulative cost of payments made to clergy who had resigned and were receiving or had received payments under the Ordination of Women (Financial Provisions) Measure 1993 was £15.8 million. The annual totals are:

£ million

Year of resignation	*Total cost*
1994	2.6
1995	3.3
1996	2.9
1997	1.0
1998	1.8
1999	1.8
2000	1.2
2001	1.2
Total	15.8

These figures include monthly payments, grants for resettlement and, where needed, retraining, pension contributions and some assistance with rental for retirement housing.

Expenditure to 31 December 2001 and budgeted provision for future expenditure in relation to the 412 claimants under the Measure is £24.2 million in total.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Royal Peculiars

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the written submissions made to him in response to the Review on the Royal Peculiars; [37767]

(2) how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations have submitted comments on the Review on the Royal Peculiars. [37727]

Mr. Wills: 38 individuals and nine organisations have submitted comments in response to the Department's consultation on the recommendations of the Review of Royal Peculiars.

A copy of these responses will be placed in the Library when they are published.

Applications for Probate

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to review the fee structure established by the Court Service for applications for probate to ensure that the fee is more closely related to the value of the net estate; and if he will make a statement. [37655]

Mr. Wills: Following a review in 1999, the fees for non-contentious probate were revised so that they more closely reflected the cost of providing the service. At present there are no plans to conduct a further review of the fees structure.

Legal Aid

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps she *(a)* has taken and *(b)* intends to take to encourage trainee solicitors to undertake legal aid practice. [36439]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A number of initiatives have been introduced in order to assist with the continuing recruitment and retention of publicly funded lawyers. In April 2000, of the £46.7 million of additional money which was allocated to the Legal Services Commission (LSC) to assist with Legal Help contracts in 2000–01:

£23 million, which was subsequently increased to £29 million, was awarded for asylum work to finance an incentive package to include training, recruitment and financial help to encourage existing contractors to expand and new organisations to enter into contracts.

£1 million was provided to fund training in immigration, mental health and community care. This was provided in order to develop training courses and help firms to expand and retrain staff in priority categories of law.

This is an area we keep under review, because our reforms to legal aid give the LSC opportunities to improve the supplier base. But I have no immediate proposals to announce.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent assessment she has made of trends in recruitment and retention of legal aid lawyers. [36438]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission (LSC) reviews trends in recruitment and the retention of publicly funded lawyers on a continuing basis to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of competent lawyers to do all categories of publicly supported legal work throughout England and Wales. The LSC reports regularly to the LCD and the evidence is that there is currently a sufficient number of lawyers to undertake publicly funded work. As at 15 February 2002, there were 4,935 solicitor offices with contracts to undertake publicly funded civil and family work. In addition to this, the LSC has also awarded contracts to 382 not-for-profit sector organisations. As at 31 January 2001, the total number of solicitor offices with General Criminal Contracts stood at 2,921. There are also four public defender offices with the fifth to open in April 2002 and the sixth shortly after.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of the total real terms expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year;

and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36162]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Total real terms costs for advertising are as listed. During this period the LCD ran an advertising campaign to support the recruiting of lay magistrates, which accounts for spending in 1998–99 and mounted a major public information campaign throughout England and Wales on behalf of the Community Legal Service and the help and advice website "Just Ask!" which accounts for almost all of the advertising spend in 2000–01.

Publicity achieved by press and public relations work is not recorded separately and costs cannot be differentiated from running costs.

	Advertising spend £
(a) 1997–98	
LCDHQ	0
PRO	4,465
PGO	0
Land Registry	13,580
Court Service	0
NICS	0
Total	18,045
(b) 1998–99	
LCDHQ	450,000
PRO	7,640
PGO	0
Land Registry	9,625
Court Service	5,345
NICS	0
Total	473,110
(c) 1999–2000	
LCDHQ	0
PRO	2,710
PGO	0
Land Registry	13,960
Court Service	18,960
NICS	0
Total	35,630
(d) 2000–01	
LCDHQ	4,283,780
PRO	8,950
PGO	0
Land Registry	2,505
Court Service	13,000
NICS	4,800
Total	4,313,035

	Advertising spend £	
	(i) to date	*(ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year (Until 31 March 2002)*
(e) 2001–02		
LCDHQ	0	0
PRO	8,640	8,640
PGO	0	0
Land Registry	2,650	3,200
Court Service	4,270	4,600
NICS	0	0
CAFCASS	6,515	7,420
Total	22,075	23,860

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total cost to the Lord Chancellor's Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34173]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department entered into a nine-year PFI contract with CSL Group Ltd. in January 1998. This contract covers a wide range of services including providing accounting systems, making payments, receipting and accounts production. The cost of accountancy services provided to the Department by CSL under the contract, and from other external firms of accountants or their management consultancy arms where the assignment was connected with financial matters, in each of the last four years was as follows:

	£ million
1998–99	3.8
1999–2000	4.5
2000–01	6.0
2001–02	5.2[1]

[1] To January 2002.

Note:

Figures include significant development work on resource accounting and budgeting.

Community Service Personnel

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases of a breach of community service penalties there were in the west midlands region to the end of 2001. [36120]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I have been asked to reply.

The available information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relating to the west midlands region, shows that 1,398 persons breached their original community punishment orders in 2000. This total includes estimated magistrates courts data for Staffordshire since Staffordshire Police were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000.

This figure includes persons breaching community punishment orders in Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Mercia and West Midlands police force areas at both magistrates courts and the Crown Court.

Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

DEFENCE

Defence Agency Staff

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Engineering and Science Group; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27813]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Engineering and Science Group is not an organisation but merely a nominated group of professional-level civil servant engineers and scientists working within the Ministry of Defence.

On 22 January 2002, records showed the Defence Engineering and Science Group to be comprised of 12,027 engineers and scientists across the UK, of whom 833 are employed in Scotland. These 833 are employed in different agencies and budget areas of the Ministry of Defence.

The personnel costs for these engineers and scientists cannot be uniquely or separately identified under the name Defence Engineering and Science Group, and could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The UK and Scotland figures given include professional-level civil servant engineers and scientists that have been previously included in answers to Warship Support Agency, UK National Codification Bureau, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, Defence clothing and Textiles Agency, and the Defence Procurement Agency.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Army Base Repair Organisation; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27820]

Dr. Moonie: As of 1 December 2001, the total number of staff employed by ABRO, formerly known as the Army Base Repair Organisation, was 2,694. Of these 132 individuals were employed at Stirling, ABRO's sole workshop facility in Scotland.

The forecast total pay cost of ABRO staff for the current financial year of 2001–02 was as of 1 December 2001, £55.934 million. This figure includes £2.281 million for Stirling.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Strategic and Combat Studies Institute; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27809]

Dr. Moonie: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (SCSI) is a defence academic forum controlled by the Defence Studies Branch of the Directorate of Development and Doctrine at Upavon. It is co-ordinated by the Director of Defence Studies (Army) and his Administrative Officer, based at Shrivenham. These two individuals are the only staff of the SCSI and there are no staff employed in Scotland. The costs of the SCSI are absorbed within the budget of the Defence Studies Branch and are restricted to publication and conference fees. The SCSI publishes a series of defence academic journals entitled "The Occasional".

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Analytical Services Agency; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27825]

Dr. Moonie: Defence Analytical Services Agency's (DASA)'s permanent full-time equivalent strength at 1 December 2001 was 135. DASA employs no staff in Scotland. The personnel cost of DASA's permanent staff for financial year 2000–01 was £3.257 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Secondary Care Agency; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27803]

Dr. Moonie: As at 1 October 2001, 2,515 permanent personnel and staff on long-term contracts worked for the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA); 10 were employed in Scotland, in the field of community psychiatry. Personnel costs for the current financial year in respect of staff in these long-term appointments are forecast to be some £83.26 million. In addition, the DSCA employs staff as and when required on short-term contracts. The associated personnel costs for the current financial year are forecast to be some £3.45 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Estates; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27849]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Estates employs 1,610 people, of whom 107 work in Scotland. The personnel costs of the agency for the financial year from 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 are £42.919 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the National Codification Bureau; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27807]

Dr. Moonie: The UK National Codification Bureau employs some 98 personnel, all in Glasgow. Personnel costs amount to about £2 million per annum.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Directorate General Commercial Organisation; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27805]

Dr. Moonie: The Director General Commercial is the Professional Head of the Ministry of Defence's Commercial Function. He is professionally responsible for all commercial posts throughout the MOD, some 2,000 staff in total. Approximately 150 of these are based in Scotland. The Director General Commercial Organisation is a term used to describe collectively the commercial staff within the MOD. It is neither an agency, nor a budgetary element within the Department and costs of commercial staff are borne by their parent organisations. No central record is kept of the personnel costs for the Commercial Function and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27808]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency ceased to exist on 1 July 2001. From its constituent parts two new organisations were created; QinetiQ, a Ministry of Defence owned commercial company; and the Defence Science and Technology laboratory (Dstl), an agency of the MOD.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the War Pensions Agency; how many employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27810]

Dr. Moonie: A total of 918.5 people work in the War Pensions Agency, 16 of who are employed in Scotland. The total staff costs forecast for the year 2001–02 is £18,804,733.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Disposal Services Agency; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27814]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the Disposal Services Agency (DSA) Annual Report and Accounts 2000–01 (pages 36–38) which was laid before the House on 18 July 2001. Copies are available in the Library of the House. There were four DSA employees in Scotland during this period.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Bills Agency; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27823]

Dr. Moonie: The number of staff who work for the Defence Bills Agency is 649, which equates to 583 full time equivalents, none of whom is employed in Scotland.

The forecast of personnel costs for 2001–02 is £11.076 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Repository; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27804]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a central records repository that is located at Hayes in west London. There are currently 100 MOD personnel directly involved in providing the main records and support services at the Hayes site, some working part-time, at an annual cost of £1.743 million. A further 12 MOD personnel working on associated tasks are based at the site, at an annual cost of £281,000. The records repository is not a defence agency and does not have any other sites associated with it, including in Scotland.

Other Government Departments also have staff at the Hayes site, associated with their records holdings there. The Hayes site and the pan-Government records storage and retrieval services it provides are currently the subject of a Public Private Partnership project.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Procurement Agency; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27800]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Procurement Agency employs approximately 4,500 civilian and military staff, of which 122 are in Scotland.

The payroll costs for financial year 2000–01 were just under £126 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Meteorological Office; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27817]

Dr. Moonie: The current number of people working for the Meteorological Office is 2,064. Of this number, 139 people are employed in Scotland. The total Meteorological Office pay bill for financial year 2001–02 is likely to be £72.771 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Scientific Advisory Council; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27802]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Scientific Advisory Council (DSAC) is an advisory body that provides independent advice to Ministers on scientific research matters related to defence issues.

DSAC consists of five standing boards, a register of independent members and the Council itself. The current register contains 185 members, drawn from industry and academia, 13 of whom have registered that they live and work in Scotland. Each member is paid a daily fee for attendance at meetings together with travel and subsistence as and when members partake in DSAC activities.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Warship Support Agency; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27811]

Dr. Moonie: As at November 2001, the latest date for which detailed figures are readily available, there were 11,105 people working for the Warship Support Agency, of which 3,666 were employed in Scotland. It is estimated that personnel costs within the agency for the financial year 2001–02 will total some £225 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Directorate of Standardisation; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27806]

Dr. Moonie: In 1999 the Directorate of Standardisation became the UK Defence Standardisation team and part of the Defence Procurement Agency's Procurement Development Group. The UK Defence Standardisation team has the equivalent of 38 people working full time of which 32 are employed in Scotland. The payroll costs for financial year 2001–02 are estimated at £1.1 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Hydrographic Office; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27815]

Dr. Moonie: As at 1 December 2001, there were 914 people employed at the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office. Currently there are five people (three full time and two part time) employed at the Chart Maintenance Unit at Faslane in Scotland. The forecast personnel costs for the agency for the financial year 2001–02 are £24,567 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the International Visits Control Office; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27816]

Dr. Moonie: The International Visits Control Office is a part of the Directorate of Defence Security, and wholly based in London; it has no staff employed in Scotland. The office has a complement of nine posts. The annual personnel cost for the office is approximately £189,000.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Export Services Organisation; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27799]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Export Services Organisation employs 589[1] service and civilian personnel, of whom three are based in Scotland. The personnel costs of the organisation for the financial year 2000–01, part of which are met from receipts, were £25.4 million.

[1] Full-time equivalent.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Ministry of Defence Police; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27818]

Dr. Moonie: As at 1 January 2002, 3,328 police officers and 263 civilian staff were employed by the Ministry of Defence Police Agency. 782 police officers and 36 civilian staff were employed in Scotland. The personnel costs of the MDP Agency for the financial year 2000–01 were some £143 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Aviation Repair Agency; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27822]

Dr. Moonie: The latest figures available show that at 1 December 2001 the number of employees working for the Defence Aviation Repair Agency is 5,020. The number of employees working in Scotland is 334. The annual personnel costs of the agency at 1 December 2001 are £120 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the British Forces Post Office; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27819]

Dr. Moonie: The British Forces Post Office (BFPO) employs 132 military and 429 civilian personnel, mainly at its sorting office and headquarters in Mill Hill, London NW7. The remaining personnel are located in 11 regional Defence Mail Centres including one in Glasgow employing nine civilian staff. These are the only BFPO staff located in Scotland.

The total annual personnel costs of BFPO are £11.838 million.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27812]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency was disestablished in October 2000. Part of the organisation was restructured and became the Defence Clothing Integrated Project Team (IPT) in April 2001. The IPT currently employs 245 staff, none of whom are employed in Scotland. The staff costs of the IPT are approximately £7.3 million per annum.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Defence Scientific and Technical Laboratory; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27801]

Dr. Moonie: At 1 January 2002, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) employed 3,037 staff. Of these, 54 were employed in Scotland. Based upon the first six months of Dstl operations, Dstl's paybill (which includes total pay, casual allowances, ERNIC and pension costs) averaged £8.56 million per month.

Winter Olympics

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* UK assets and forces and *(b)* NATO assets and forces have been used in supplying security for the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City and have replaced US forces in other theatres to allow for deployment to the US in order to undertake security for the Winter Olympics; in what roles they have been deployed; and if he will make a statement. [38322]

Mr. Ingram: As part of NATO Allies' contribution to combating terrorism, NATO has deployed Airborne Warning and Control Aircraft to help patrol American airspace including over Salt Lake City.

Legal Action

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 178W, on legal action, how many cases *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts, in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost was to his Department of litigation in each year. [38043]

Dr. Moonie: Due to the volume of information required to answer this question, I refer the hon. Member to the Ministry of Defence's Claims Annual Report, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House each year. The report sets out the numbers and costs of those cases handled centrally such as Employer's Liability, Public Liability and Employment Tribunals brought by service personnel.

RN Officers Corps

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken in regard to the job evaluation results of RN Officers Corps conducted in 2001; whether the evaluations have been published; and if he will make a statement. [38290]

Mr. Ingram: The results of the job evaluations of RN Officer posts completed in 2001 have been passed to the Office of Manpower Economics, which provides the secretariat to the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB). Job evaluation data are used by the AFPRB in carrying out its remit to ensure pay within the armed forces is comparable with that of external groups undertaking jobs of similar weight. While copies of the job descriptions generated as part of the evaluation process are made available, the final evaluation scores are not released. This is common practice in the wider evaluation industry and is followed throughout the armed forces regardless of rank or service. The evaluation system and its use are periodically scrutinised by independent consultants.

MOD Police

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sites have been provided with MOD police since September 2001; on what basis these have been provided; and if he will make a statement. [38065]

Dr. Moonie: Since 11 September, Ministry of Defence police have continued to secure key sites, and additional officers have been detached.

Royal Navy (Pay Banding)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects the Officer Corps to move to Pay 2000 pay banding in the higher and lower tiers; and if he will make a statement; [38292]

(2) when the Officer Corps of the Royal Navy is to be upgraded to Pay 2000 JE pay banding; and if he will make a statement. [38288]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently no plans to introduce differential pay banding for officers. Any changes to the current pay arrangements would firstly require the support of job evaluation data. A concerted programme to evaluate a wide sample of officer posts has recently been initiated. this is primarily to enable the Armed Forces Pay Review Body to fulfil their remit to ensure pay levels are broadly comparable with those in civilian life.

SCOTLAND

Friends of Scotland

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what expenditure has been budgeted for by the Scotland Office to support the Friends of Scotland initiative during *(a)* financial year 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [23600]

Mrs. Liddell: Expenditure relating to the Friends of Scotland initiative in 2001–02 was absorbed within the Department's budget. No budget has been set yet for 2002–03.

Clyde Shipyards Taskforce

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the work of the Clyde Shipyards Taskforce. [35315]

Mrs. Liddell: The work of the Clyde Shipyards Task Force is embodied in the published report which was handed over on 4 February. The Task Force was established in response to the announcement by BAE Systems that around 1,000 redundancies would be required to be spread between both of its yards on the Clyde. The remit was to consider the immediate and longer-term strategic issues facing the Clyde shipbuilding industry, particularly naval, and to identify the changes necessary to ensure a competitive industry and to exploit future opportunities.

Key successes include reducing the required number of redundancies to 450, the establishment of two Employee Support Centres, the planned investment by BAE Systems Marine of £75 million on Clydeside and the establishment of heating installation and engineer opportunities for redundant employees.

The report identified a total of 29 recommendations to be taken forward by Task Force Partners and for consideration by those outwith the Task Force. The report must be considered as a starting point, not an end in itself. Partners must deliver on their recommendations. Also there is the opportunity for BAE Systems to deliver a sound order book, based on the MoD contracts for Landing Craft (utility), Alternative Landing Ships Logistic and the Type 45 programme on which, for the first time in generations, the Clyde yards can plan and build for success. The work of the Task Force was part of that process.

As part of the continuing process, the redundancy sub-group will continue to meet each month to develop activity and review progress towards its targets. The Task Force Partners have also agreed to meet twice more over the next six months to maintain the momentum and focus on implementing their commitments.

A75

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has received regarding the level of speed limit in place along the A75 for heavy goods vehicles. [35738]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 12 February 2002]*: Neither I nor my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have received any representations on this matter.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36189]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date, no days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff.

Asthma

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local education authorities in Scotland are implementing an asthma policy. [36874]

Mr. Foulkes: As part of its responsibilities for health and education, this matter is devolved to the Scottish Executive.

Foot and Mouth

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Scotland Office will *(a)* co-operate with and *(b)* give evidence to the temporary committee of the European Parliament set up to look into the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Scotland in 2001. [36731]

Mrs. Liddell: The remit of the EP Temporary Committee on Foot and Mouth disease is:

> To assess EU policy and the control of meat imports from third countries in the context of the epidemic;
>
> To analyse the management and implementation of community law in relation to outbreaks of foot and mouth disease so far and to invite the Commission, Governments and public officials to attend hearings of the Committee;
>
> To analyse the total impact on Community funds of the foot and mouth epidemic so far;
>
> Based on the above, to make proposals to look into vaccination policy in particular and for political and legislative initiatives, with regard to the prevention and fighting of diseases in the agricultural sector in general.

The Committee was not set up 'to look into the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Scotland in 2001'.

The Government are ready to co-operate with the Committee but have not so far been invited to give evidence to the Committee. If and when an invitation is received, the Government will consult closely with the devolved Administrations, including the Scottish Executive, in considering their response.

Advertising

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much the Scotland Office spent on advertising in each year since 1997. [37575]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scottish Office was established in its present from on 1 July 1999. Since that date the Department has spent the following amounts on advertising:—

Amount spent on advertising

	£
July 1999-March 2000	26,861
April 2000-March 2001	317,831
March 2001 to date	231,862

Most of the expenditure related to electoral registration matters.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the cost to Scottish councils of the proposed aggregates tax. [36746]

Mrs. Liddell: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed the introduction of the aggregates levy after a considered assessment of its impact across the UK.

Electoral Publicity

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent by her Department on electoral publicity associated with the 2001 general election and if she will provide a breakdown of the sum spent by her Department on electoral publicity associated with the 2001 general election. [37092]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office spent in total £219,000 on electoral publicity for the general election in June 2001. This comprised £106,000 for producing and transmitting a television campaign aimed at encouraging people to vote, and £113,000 for creating and placing newspaper advertisements on postal voting arrangements.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which she has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37813]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The Department has had no empty properties since that date.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Capita Contracts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the contracts her Department has with Capita; and what the *(a)* value and *(b)* nature of the contracts are. [36573]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* My Department has a number of contracts with Capita for a range of different services. These are as follows:

Teachers' Pensions—Administration of the Teachers' Pensions Scheme. A contract with an estimated value in excess of £70 million over seven years.

Connexions Card—Development of the Connexions Card. A Public Private Partnership with a contract value in excess of £100 million over seven years.

Individual Learning Accounts—Administration of the ILA scheme. A contract for five years with an estimated value of around £55 million.

Consultancy Framework Contracts—Framework contract to provide general management consultancy support and consultancy support for LEA interventions. The value of these contracts is determined by their level of usage. Estimated expenditure to date has been £436,500.

Education (Stoke)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of 16-year-olds have opted to continue into *(a)* further and *(b)* higher education in the Stoke-on-Trent local education authority in each of the last four years. [37270]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The percentage of 16-year-olds participating in full-time and part-time education for Stoke-on-Trent LEA in the three years for which data are available is as follows. Prior to 1997–98 Stoke on Trent LEA was part of Staffordshire LEA.

Percentage of 16-year-olds participating in full-time and part-time education[1]: Stoke-on-Trent LEA

	Full-time education	*Part-time education*
1997–98	49	9
1998–99	52	8
1999–2000	58	7

[1] Includes participation in schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges

Corresponding data for participation in full-time higher education by the same age cohort two years later are as follows.

Percentage of 18-year-olds from Stoke-on-Trent LEA accepted for entry to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses[1]

	Number
1999–2000	11
2000–01	13
2001–02	16

[1] Defined as the number of 18-year-olds from Stoke accepted for entry to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses via UCAS, as a proportion of the 17-year-old population in Stoke the previous year

In 1999–2000 Stoke-on-Trent became one of the original 15 LEAs to be piloted for the roll-out of Education Maintenance Allowances. National evaluation of EMA shows it to have had a beneficial effect on post-16 participation.Participation rates by LEA for 16 and 17-year-olds are published in an annual statistical bulletin, "Participation in Education and Training by Young People aged 16 and 17 in Each Local Area and Region, England".

Standards Fund

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was allocated per pupil through the Standards Fund for each English education authority in 2001–02. [37771]

Mr. Timms: The following table shows allocations for the Standards Fund, shown as an amount per pupil, for 2001–02, for each local education authority in England. The figures include recurrent and capital Standards Fund grants excluding those that are specifically for under-5s education, further education and adult education. The Standards Fund includes Government grant and local authority contributions, which have both been included in the calculations.

The Standards Fund is one element of overall education funding and supports a range of national education priorities, such as the national literacy and numeracy strategies, support for Specialist Schools, measures to raise the level of achievement of pupils from ethnic minorities, the Excellence in Cities initiative and capital projects. As such the Standards Fund is not allocated on a simple per pupil basis, but in relation to the specific priorities it is designed to support. For example, the allocation a local education authority will receive to support its Specialist Schools will depend on the number of those schools in that authority. A local education authority will not necessarily receive an allocation for every Standards Fund priority. For example, not all authorities are part of the Excellence in Cities initiative, which is designed to raise performance through a targeted programme addressing the educational problems of our major cities.

Standards fund per pupil

Local education authority	*£ per pupil*
Corporation of London	1,738
Camden	682
Greenwich	665
Hackney	830
Hammersmith and Fulham	725
Islington	757
Kensington and Chelsea	708
Lambeth	701
Lewisham	624
Southwark	649
Tower Hamlets	861
Wandsworth	641
Westminster	632
Barking	466
Barnet	357
Bexley	312
Brent	492
Bromley	333
Croydon	384
Ealing	544
Enfield	406
Haringey	677
Harrow	350
Havering	331
Hillingdon	343
Hounslow	439
Kingston Upon Thames	490
Merton	547
Newham	578
Redbridge	366
Richmond Upon Thames	399
Sutton	325
Waltham Forest	602
Birmingham	519
Coventry	414
Dudley	323
Sandwell	435
Solihull	328
Walsall	425
Wolverhampton	510
Knowsley	676
Liverpool	555
St. Helens	452
Sefton	426
Wirral	451
Bolton	376
Bury	321
Manchester	639
Oldham	445
Rochdale	541
Salford	553
Stockport	373
Tameside	393
Trafford	351
Wigan	318
Barnsley	408
Doncaster	389
Rotherham	520
Sheffield	534
Bradford	559
Calderdale	358
Kirklees	462
Leeds	481
Wakefield	403
Gateshead	555
Newcastle Upon Tyne	529
North Tyneside	462
South Tyneside	506

Standards fund per pupil

Local education authority	*£ per pupil*
Sunderland	480
Isles of Scilly	1,743
Bath and North East Somerset	371
City of Bristol	481
North Somerset	346
South Gloucestershire	355
Hartlepool	493
Middlesbrough	504
Redcar and Cleveland	469
Stockton-on-Tees	536
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	498
East Riding of Yorkshire	375
North East Lincolnshire	411
North Lincolnshire	392
North Yorkshire	362
York	368
Bedfordshire	403
Luton	468
Buckinghamshire	396
Milton Keynes	392
Derbyshire	388
Derby City	420
Dorset	348
Poole	305
Bournemouth	507
Durham	430
Darlington	420
East Sussex	359
Brighton and Hove	391
Hampshire	344
Portsmouth	400
Southampton	366
Leicestershire	323
Leicester City	509
Rutland	478
Staffordshire	320
Stoke-on-Trent	538
Wiltshire	352
Swindon	352
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	348
RB of Windsor and Maidenhead	402
West Berkshire District Council	382
Reading	460
Slough Borough Council	446
Wokingham District council	362
Cambridgeshire County Council	346
Peterborough City Council	385
Cheshire County Council	319
Halton Borough Council	553
Warrington Borough Council	338
Devon County Council	342
City of Plymouth	315
Torbay Borough Council	317
Essex County Council	334
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council	341
Thurrock Council	395
Herefordshire Council	377
Worcestershire County Council	339
Kent County Council	327
Medway Council	328
Lancashire County Council	381
Blackburn with Darwen	540
Blackpool Borough Council	361
Nottinghamshire County Council	343
City of Nottingham	656
Shropshire County Council	357
Telford and Wrekin	448
Cornwall	388
Cumbria	391
Gloucestershire	356
Hertfordshire	328
Isle of Wight	387
Lincolnshire	380
Norfolk	387
Northamptonshire	372
Northumberland	362
Oxfordshire	369
Somerset	411
Suffolk	338
Surrey	315
Warwickshire	342
West Sussex	310

Note:

Figures include recurrent and capital grants.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the 10 lowest education SSAs are per *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupil for English education authorities in 2001–02. [37772]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is in the following table. The variations in SSA per pupil have two main causes: authorities in London and the South East receive an area cost adjustment, to compensate for the higher costs they face; and authorities receive funding according to their level of deprivation.

The Government acknowledge that there are disparities in SSA per pupil, which are not justified by the education needs of children. We are working up proposals, in partnership with local government and other education interests, for the introduction of a new funding system in 2003–04.

	£
Primary aged 5–10	
334 Solihull	2,340
356 Stockport	2,340
802 North Somerset	2,340
872 Wokingham	2,340
836 Poole	2,330
860 Staffordshire	2,330
877 Warrington	2,330
800 Bath and North East Somerset	2,320
855 Leicestershire	2,290
803 South Gloucestershire	2,270
Secondary aged 11–15	
875 Cheshire	3,010
885 Worcestershire	3,010
860 Staffordshire	3,000
877 Warrington	3,000
836 Poole	2,990
334 Solihull	2,980
855 Leicestershire	2,960
803 South Gloucestershire	2,940
800 Bath and North East Somerset	2,930
857 Rutland	2,910

Note:

All figures are rounded to the nearest £10.

AS-level Courses

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding arrangements are proposed for pupils taking AS-level courses before age 16; and what the implications will be for the budgets of *(a)* the local learning and skills councils and *(b)* the LEAs respectively. [37955]

Mr. Timms: Funding for pupils of compulsory school age who are not in a sixth form but are taking an AS-level a year or more early continues to be the responsibility of the LEA. In developing future funding arrangements we will take into account responses to the recent Green Paper "14–19—extending opportunities, raising standards".

Playing Fields

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list applications made to her Department in the last three years for consent to allow development on school playing fields giving in each case *(a)* the outcome of the application, *(b)* what steps were taken to ascertain whether adequate sports facilities would remain if permission were granted and *(c)* where consent was given, what assurances were secured as to how proceeds of sale would be used. [33633]

Mr. Timms *[pursuant to his reply, 25 February 2002, c. 730–34W]:* A column was omitted from the table. The corrected table follows.

Although the Department does not collect information in the form requested, the following table lists applications to dispose of areas equal to, or larger than, a sports pitch, together with their outcome.

Before October 1998, there was nothing to prevent a local authority selling a school playing field if it wanted to. Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 was introduced in October 1998 to stop the indiscriminate sale of school playing fields. Local authorities and governing bodies of all maintained schools are now required to obtain the Secretary of State's consent before disposing of playing fields or any part of a playing field.

Applications to dispose, or change the use, of school playing fields are assessed against the following criteria:

(a) schools' needs: that playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school making the disposal, and at other schools in the local area, will be met;

(b) community needs: that community use of a school's playing fields is taken into account, with alternative facilities made available if necessary;

(c) finance: that any sale proceeds are re-invested to provide new or improved sports facilities at schools, or are used to help to raise standards by providing better educational facilities.

Only those applications that meet the criteria are approved. Since July 2001, all applications have been scrutinised by the independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel to make sure that they conform to the published criteria. The Panel comprises representatives from the National Playing Fields Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the education organisation Learning through Landscapes, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Local Government Association.

Applications to dispose of school sports pitches that have been determined by the Secretary of State

LEA	*School name*	*Date applied*	*Result of application*
Barnet	Ashmole	15 December 1998	Approved
Bedfordshire	Silver Jubilee Middle	30 April 1999	Approved
Bedfordshire	Ashton St. Peter VA	29 September 2000	Approved
Birmingham	Broadway	11 June 2001	Approved
Blackpool	Collegiate High	13 December 1999	Approved
Bolton	St. James's CE	24 July 1998	Approved
Bristol	Monks Park Secondary	28 October 1998	Approved
Buckinghamshire	Bellfield First and Middle	22 February 1999	Approved
Buckinghamshire	Terriers County First	10 May 1999	Approved
Buckinghamshire	Downley Middle	12 January 2000	Approved
Buckinghamshire	Heights First	12 January 2000	Approved
Calderdale	Brooksbank	1 July 1998	Approved
Cheshire	St. James CE Junior	30 November 1998	Approved
Cheshire	Colshaw CP	30 June 1999	Approved
Cheshire	Westlands High	17 November 1999	Approved
Cheshire	Manor Park Infant	27 November 2000	Approved
Cheshire	Brookside County Infant	5 February 2001	Approved
Croydon	Haling Manor High	4 January 1999	Approved
Derbyshire	Noel Baker Community	2 November 1998	Approved
Derbyshire	Western Mere	2 February 1999	Approved
Derbyshire	Pingle	26 July 2000	Approved
Devon	Highweek Primary	17 August 1999	Approved
Dorset	Fosters	7 December 1998	Approved
Dudley	Colley Lane Primary	11 October 2001	Approved
Dudley	Summerhill Secondary	11 October 2001	Approved
Durham	The Avenue Comprehensive	19 May 1999	Approved
Durham	Westwood Primary	31 July 2000	Approved
Essex	The Stanway	17 November 1998	Approved
Essex	Moulsham High	18 January 1999	Approved
Essex	Oakview Special	10 April 2000	Approved
Essex	Tabor High	29 January 2001	Approved
Gloucestershire	Churchdown	3 December 1997	Approved
Gloucestershire	The Catholic School of St. Gregory the Great	26 July 1999	Approved
Gloucestershire	Oxstalls Community	25 November 1999	Approved
Halton	Ashley Special	6 November 1998	Approved
Hammersmith and Fulham	Gibbs Green Special	8 March 1999	Approved
Hammersmith and Fulham	Burlington Danes	16 March 1999	Approved
Havering	Frances Bardsley School for Girls	13 August 1999	Approved

Applications to dispose of school sports pitches that have been determined by the Secretary of State

LEA	*School name*	*Date applied*	*Result of application*
Kent	St. Thomas' Special	12 May 1999	Approved
Kent	St. Simon Stock	13 December 1999	Approved
Kent	Allhallows Primary	12 July 2001	Approved
Knowsley	Sylvester	12 August 1999	Approved
Lancashire	St. Richards RC High	15 December 1998	Approved
Lancashire	St. Thomas Acquinas RC High	5 February 1999	Approved
Lancashire	Baines High	15 November 2000	Approved
Leeds	Lawnswood	21 November 2000	Approved
Leeds	Oakwood Primary	21 November 2000	Approved
Leeds	Roundhay	21 November 2000	Approved
Leeds	Wetherby High	19 September 2001	Approved
Liverpool	Childwall Comprehensive	9 April 2001	Approved
Milton Keynes	Denbigh	16 November 1998	Approved
Milton Keynes	Castles First	6 August 1999	Approved
Norfolk	Redgate Middle	12 April 2000	Approved
North East Lincs	Hereford Technology College	13 November 2000	Approved
North Tyneside	St. Mary's RC	22 December 1998	Approved
North Yorkshire	Settle CE Primary	20 November 1998	Approved
Northamptonshire	John Lea Secondary	14 August 2000	Approved
Northumberland	St. Benet Biscop RC Aided High	5 February 1999	Approved
Northumberland	Gallowhill Hall Special	18 February 2000	Approved
Nottinghamshire	Manor Comprehensive	14 April 2000	Approved
Nottinghamshire	Lincoln Street Infant	14 July 2000	Approved
Oldham	Kaskenmoor Secondary	29 October 1999	Approved
Oxfordshire	Wallingford	16 June 2000	Approved
Peterborough	The King's	8 May 1998	Rejected
Peterborough	Deacons	28 July 1998	Rejected
Peterborough	The King's	27 September 2000	Approved
Rochdale	Spring Hill High	7 May 1999	Approved
Rochdale	Middleton Technology	28 March 2001	Approved
Sefton	Litherland Moss County Primary	22 March 1999	Approved
Shropshire	Lower Grove	2 February 2001	Approved
Somerset	King Arthur's Comprehensive	24 March 1999	Approved
Somerset	Ladymead Comprehensive	6 April 1999	Approved
Staffordshire	Sir Graham Balfour High	25 June 1999	Approved
Surrey	Rosebery	6 January 1998	Approved
Surrey	Okewood District CE	30 November 1998	Approved
Surrey	Merland Rise CP	8 January 1999	Approved
Surrey	Banstead County Junior School and St. Anne's RC Primary	27 May 1999	Approved
Surrey	Park Mead Junior	8 March 2000	Approved
Surrey	Boxgrove Primary	13 April 2000	Approved
Tameside	Egerton Park High	17 January 2000	Approved
Telford and Wrekin	Blessed Robert Johnson	26 March 1999	Approved
Wakefield	South Elmsall Middle	10 December 1998	Approved
Wakefield	Kinsley First	13 January 1999	Approved
Wakefield	Kinsley First	30 July 1999	Approved
Walsall	Beacon	18 December 1998	Approved
Walsall	St. Thomas More Catholic Comprehensive	18 April 2001	Approved
Warwickshire	Attleborough First	11 December 1998	Approved
Warwickshire	Exhall First	21 July 1999	Approved
Warwickshire	Binley Woods First	3 August 1999	Approved
Warwickshire	Stratford-upon-Avon High	14 August 2000	Approved
Warwickshire	Marie Corelli	21 August 2000	Approved
West Sussex	Hazelwick	7 February 2000	Approved
Wigan	Hindley Borsdane Brook Special	11 February 1999	Approved
Wigan	Rose Hill Special	11 February 1999	Approved
Wigan	Tyldesley Highfield Special	11 February 1999	Approved
Wigan	Orrell Holgate Primary	4 December 2000	Approved
Wiltshire	Castle Combe Primary	7 August 2000	Approved
Wolverhampton	St. Peters Collegiate	25 November 1998	Approved
Wolverhampton	Aldersley High	4 December 1998	Approved
Worcestershire	Callowbrook First	6 November 2000	Approved

Notes:

1. 'Sports pitch' means areas of open grassed land which are equal to, or larger than, the Football Association's recommended area for games played by under-10s, that is 2,000 m^2, and which have a configuration making them suitable for sports pitches (whether they are so laid out or not).

2. The table excludes applications withdrawn by the applicant and applications where schools would retain the same, or a better, level of access to the same sports pitch or to an equivalent sports pitch.

3. The table includes applications from grant-maintained schools, where the application was made under section 231 of the Education Act 1996 but the decision was made in accordance with the draft criteria and then the criteria published in Circular No. 3/99, The Protection of School Playing Fields. It also includes applications in respect of foundation and voluntary schools considered under Schedule 22 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 since 1 September 1999.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Audit Standards

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure UK compliance with the EU recommendation on standards for external quality assurance systems in statutory audit. [37287]

Ms Hewitt: It may help if I set the context by first explaining our plans to ensure that there is a careful review of the UK's current regulatory practices for statutory audit and financial reporting, following the collapse of Enron in the US.

The requirements in the UK are significantly different from the US in relation both to the relevant accounting standards and to the oversight and regulation of the audit profession. But it would be most unwise to conclude that problems of this sort could not arise in the UK; and it is right therefore to review arrangements carefully

I am therefore setting up a group jointly with the Treasury, and including the Financial Services Authority and other regulators such as the Accountancy Foundation, to oversee and co-ordinate the response in the UK to these issues raised by the collapse of Enron. These include:

whether the ethical standards of the professional audit bodies provide an adequate assurance on the independence of auditors, including the restrictions on the supply of non auditors, including the restrictions on the supply of non audit services

whether there should be a requirement for the mandatory rotation of audit firms; or for the mandatory re-tendering for company audit

whether current disclosures of audit and non audit fees in company accounts are adequate

the role of Audit Committees in relation to the audit engagement

the implications for accounting standards in the UK

the implications for auditing standards in the UK.

The Group will report on progress and emerging conclusions by the summer.

At the same time I am also setting up an independent review of the role and effectiveness of non-executive directors in the UK. The review will report jointly to me and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I will provide further details of who is to lead the review and the terms of reference in due course.

Together these reviews are aimed at:

Ensuring that companies can fulfil their potential and improve productivity;

Strengthening the UK's framework for how companies operate; and

Encouraging greater transparency.

The quality assurance systems for the statutory audit, both within and outside the audit firms, are an important part of the regulatory arrangements which give confidence in the audit process.

The European Commission's Recommendation C(2000) 3304 of 15 November 2000 on "quality assurance for the statutory audit in the EU: minimum requirements" recommends that all persons carrying out statutory audits should be subject to a quality assurance system. The Recommendation sets out acceptable methodologies and covers topics such as review cycles, the scope of the review and the quality of the reviewer.

The United Kingdom has an established system of monitoring of statutory company auditors, which was in place well before the Recommendation was adopted. The bodies recognised under the Companies Act 1989 to supervise registered auditors are required regularly to monitor the performance of audit firms or individual auditors registered with them. My Department asked the recognised supervisory bodies to review existing requirements against the detail of the Recommendation and to report the results. The arrangements were found to be broadly in line with the Recommendation. All audit firms and individual auditors are subject to regular review, including monitoring visits by independent reviewers, and those with public interest clients, such as listed companies, are subject to a higher frequency of coverage.

Post Offices

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the population of *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* the United Kingdom live more than (i) five miles, (ii) 10 miles and (iii) 20 miles from a Crown post office. [38040]

Mr. Alexander: I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that in the United Kingdom with regard to proximity to a main Post Office branch, 79 per cent. of the population live within five miles, 93 per cent. of the population live within ten miles and 99 per cent. of the population live within 25 miles. Figures are not available on an individual country basis.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the population of *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* the United Kingdom live more than (i) two miles, (ii) five miles and (iii) 10 miles from a sub post office. [38039]

Mr. Alexander: I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that in the United Kingdom with regard to proximity to a sub post office, 99 per cent. of the population live within two miles and 100 per cent. of the population live within five miles and, therefore, within 10 miles. Figures are not available on an individual country basis.

Energy Technologies

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action has been taken as a result of her Department's Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Department of Energy in relation to new and renewable energy technologies. [37704]

Mr. Wilson: I have nothing further to add to the answer given to the hon. Member on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 525W.

CHP

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department will take to ensure CHP is excluded from the obligation base for the Government's renewable energy obligation. [37698]

Mr. Wilson: I have nothing further to add to the answer given to the hon. Member on 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 292W.

Hairdressers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the regulations governing hairdressers in other EU countries. [35870]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None.

Car Block Exemption

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when she will lay the European Draft Regulation on the Car Block Exemption before Parliament; [37100]

(2) when she expects the draft Regulation on the Car Block Exemption to be adopted and published by the European Commission; what the length is of the consultation period to be held; who will be consulted; and what form the consultation will take. [37101]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The European Commission adopted a draft regulation on 5 February, and communicated it in confidence to member states. Following an initial discussion with member states on 7 March, the Commission will publish the draft on its website and in the "Official Journal of the European Communities". The consultation period will be not less than one month. As well as member states, the Commission will also formally consult the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, and will invite any other interested parties to submit their views.

Bogus Billing

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to take action to deal with bogus billing for entries in business directories. [36387]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Companies are already afforded protection under the Unsolicited Goods and Services Act 1971 and the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988.

Trading Standards and the Office of Fair Trading take enforcement action against bogus billing (in conjunction with their counterparts overseas, where necessary).

For example, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has investigated complaints about the European City Guide and this has led to the cancellation of some 400 contested invoices. The OFT is also pursuing complaints about the tour and travel guide with the relevant authorities in Liechtenstein.

Domestic Subsidies

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the timetable is for implementation of the commitment reached at the Doha ministerial meeting on trade of November 2001 to cut export and trade-distorting domestic subsidies. [37858]

Ms Hewitt: The reference to export and trade-distorting subsidies can be found in the section of the fourth Ministerial declaration relating to agriculture. The negotiations on agriculture form part of the single undertaking in which virtually all the linked negotiations are to end by 1 January 2005. The mandate given by the Doha declaration also includes a series of interim deadlines.

The negotiations on agriculture began in early 2000. Further key dates are 31 March 2003, when formulas and other "modalities" for countries' commitments are to be submitted, and the fifth ministerial conference in 2003, by which date countries are to have submitted comprehensive draft commitments.

Unsolicited Mail

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with her European counterparts on measures to curb the posting of offensive and unsolicited mail to the UK from other EU countries. [36571]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The Department's officials work closely with enforcement bodies, such as the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), who work with their European counterparts on unsolicited mail.

The ASA supervises the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion and works with national and international regulators. The ASA liaises with the European Advertising Standards Alliance for action with the regulatory body.

Since 1 June 2001, Stop Now Orders have provided a stronger mechanism for enforcing consumer protection legislation emanating from the European Directive. This includes laws on advertising. These Orders enable OFT and other specified UK qualified entities to act against businesses elsewhere in the EU, where their activities are harming the 'collective interests of consumers'. The OFT is working closely with counterparts in other Member States to establish the most effective means of acting against cross-border infringements within Europe.

Unsolicited mail which is indecent or obscene under the terms of the Protection of Children Act 1978 or the Obscene Publications Act 1955 is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Cashpoints

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1072W, on cashpoints, if she will list the sub-post offices where the *(a)* maintenance and *(b)* stocking of ATM machines is carried out by the sub-postmaster. [37842]

Ms Hewitt: For reasons of security, Post Office Limited do not make available this information.

Crown Post Offices

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 612W, on Crown post offices, if the Crown Office network ran at a profit in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [34916]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I understand from Post Office Limited that full independent audited accounts do not exist for that part of the overall post office network comprised of directly managed Crown offices for the years listed. However, estimates which allocate cost and income to this part of the network, such as those made by the PIU for 1998–99, would suggest that this part of the network ran at a loss over those years.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Parliamentary Questions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to the questions tabled on 4 February 2002 by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr. [36067]

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Member received a reply to his question on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 566–67W.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees in his Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36687]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, effective January 1993, require employers to provide and pay for, upon request from an employee, an eye and eyesight test. There is a requirement for further tests at regular intervals; the optometrist doing the first test can recommend when the next one should be. In addition, employers must pay the cost of special spectacles where normal ones cannot be used.

This service is advertised to all new entrants during their induction training, is posted on the FCO intranet site and is described in our Code of Management. In 2001, 216 staff in the UK were reimbursed the cost of DSE eye tests.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of popular support for the special autonomy arrangements introduced by the Indonesian Government to Aceh and Papua. [36926]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Special Autonomy legislation which came into effect for the provinces of Aceh and Papua on 1 January has received a mixed welcome. The UK Government believe the legislation offers a positive opportunity to the people of Aceh and Papua, and urges all elements of society in the two provinces to work together to implement the legislation in a constructive spirit to the benefit of all concerned.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the likely impact on human rights of the decision of the Government of Indonesia to establish a new military command in Aceh. [36925]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Indonesian Government believe the re-establishment of the Aceh military command will lead to improved accountability for the security forces and security in the province through improved communication. Any moves to increase accountability and reduce lawlessness in the province should be welcomed. We continue to impress on the Indonesian authorities the importance of upholding and promoting human rights throughout the country. On 18 February the British Ambassador in Jakarta raised our concerns about reports that the Indonesian Government intended to 'crush' the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) by military force with Co-ordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, Bambang Yudhoyono.

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations his Department has made to the Indonesian Government on loss of life and displacement of people in the Moluccan Islands and Sulawesi. [37259]

Mr. Bradshaw: We welcome the recent agreements brokered by the Indonesian Government between the warring factions in both Maluku and Sulawesi to end the fighting.

The UK's message to the Indonesian Government is clear and consistent: a long-term solution to regional conflicts can be achieved only through political negotiation and consultation with the people. Together with our European partners we are in regular, top-level dialogue with the Indonesian Government, and urge them to maintain law and order and promote reconciliation in areas of conflict. The most recent direct contact was when our Chargé d'Affaires in Jakarta called on Manuel Kaisiepo, the Minister for Eastern Indonesia, on 29 November 2001.

Gibraltar

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the next round of talks under the terms of the Brussels process will take place. [36530]

Peter Hain: A further meeting under the Brussels process will be held in due course. The date is yet to be fixed. Our aim remains to conclude a comprehensive agreement before the summer.

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional powers of self-government for the people of Gibraltar are being discussed with the Government of Spain during the Brussels process. [36531]

Peter Hain: Discussions under the Brussels process are aimed at overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis. In the context of an agreed Joint Declaration our objective is a future where Gibraltar can enjoy enhanced powers of self-government, allowing its Government and population to have a greater say in their lives.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will allow the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to attend talks under the Brussels process with the right to veto proposals. [36535]

Peter Hain: We have invited the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to participate in the Brussels process on the basis of the two flags, three voices formula, having his own and distinct voice as part of the British delegation.

We have made it clear that any proposals emerging from the Brussels process would be implemented only in the event of an affirmative vote by the people of Gibraltar in a referendum.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what rules govern the composition of the delegation of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar attending talks under the Brussels process. [36534]

Peter Hain: We have invited the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to participate in the Brussels process on the basis of the two flags, three voices formula, having his own and distinct voice as part of the British delegation.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what practical benefits for Gibraltar have been discussed during the talks under the Brussels process between the Governments of Britain and Spain. [R] [36540]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the copy of the joint communiqué from the Brussels process meeting in London on 4 February that was placed in the Library.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to invite the Governments of Spain and Gibraltar to talks under terms other than those defined under the Brussels process. [R] [36537]

Peter Hain: We continue to regard the Brussels Process as offering the best prospects for overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar, including issues of mutually beneficial co-operation, and sovereignty.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Spain about the right of the people of Gibraltar to self-determination. [R] [36541]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the Foreign Secretary's answer to him on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 738–39.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy that a bilateral agreement between Britain and Spain on the future status of Gibraltar will be *(a)* invalidated and *(b)* suspended if rejected in a referendum by the people of Gibraltar. [R] [36539]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 151WH.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 748, to which Treaty of Utrecht 1713 he referred. [36864]

Peter Hain: The treaty which provides for the cession of Gibraltar to the English Crown in its Article X was the treaty of peace and friendship between England and Spain signed at Utrecht on 13 July 1713.

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who is responsible for devising and implementing fiscal policies in Gibraltar. [36542]

Peter Hain: Under the 1969 Gibraltar Constitution, the Governor of Gibraltar retains certain powers in relation to the maintenance of financial and economic stability. Day-to-day control for the financial business of the Government of Gibraltar, including the collection of taxes, duties, licences and fees, etc., lies with the Financial and Development Secretary, who liaises closely with relevant Ministers of the Government of Gibraltar. The Assembly is responsible for the authorisation of expenditure and taxation measures.

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason Ministers from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office did not accept an invitation to attend the Government of Gibraltar's talks on their constitution. [36532]

Peter Hain: I wrote to the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, in his capacity as Chairman of the House of Assembly Select Committee for Constitutional Reform, on 30 November inviting the members of the Select Committee to London for discussions on constitutional reform. They did not take up the invitation.

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the European Commission on financial aid for Gibraltar resulting from an agreement between Britain and Spain on the future status of Gibraltar. [36543]

Peter Hain: We have kept the Commission informed in broad terms of our ongoing discussions with Spain within the Brussels process, and in that context have touched on how a possible settlement might impact on opportunities for additional funding in the region.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Spain has identified to him the practical benefits to Gibraltar of proposals on joint sovereignty. [36546]

Peter Hain: At the Brussels process meeting in London on 4 February, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Spanish Foreign Minister confirmed their shared aim of overcoming all differences over Gibraltar, including issues of mutually beneficial co-operation, and sovereignty.

I refer my hon. Friend to the copy of the joint communiqué from the 4 February meeting that was placed in the Library.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guarantees the Government of Spain has given to preserve the Gibraltar way of life during talks on the future status of Gibraltar; and how these would be implemented. [36547]

Peter Hain: The UK and Spanish Governments have confirmed that under the Brussels process our shared aim is to overcome our differences over Gibraltar and to ensure a secure future for Gibraltar in which Gibraltar can preserve its way of life and traditions, enjoy greater internal self-government, sustain and enhance its prosperity, and reap the full benefits of a harmonious and mutually beneficial co-operation in all fields together with the wider region.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is regarding the right of self-determination for the people of Gibraltar in relation to Article 1 of the United Nations Charter of Human Rights. [36588]

Peter Hain: Her Majesty's Government support the right or principle of self-determination. It must be exercised in accordance with other principles and rights in the Charter of the United Nations and with other treaty obligations. In Gibraltar's case that includes Article X of the Treaty of Utrecht.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers next plan to visit Gibraltar. [36545]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the Foreign Secretary's answer to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 28–29.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed the possibility of taking the status of Gibraltar to the International Court of Justice with representatives of the Government of Spain. [36544]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 632W.

Iran

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Iran's refusal to accept David Reddaway as Britain's new ambassador. [36589]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regret Iran's refusal to accept David Reddaway as our ambassador to Tehran. The absence of an ambassador in Tehran will obviously inhibit the extent to which we are able to engage the Iranian authorities.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's relations with Iran. [36577]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK, through critical engagement, aims to support reform in Iran while maintaining a robust dialogue on issues of concern. Iran's refusal to accept David Reddaway as our ambassador has however had an impact on the conduct of our bilateral relations.

Indo-UK Peacekeeping Seminar

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent Indo-UK peacekeeping seminar held in India. [36556]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Indo-UK seminar on peacekeeping was held at the Centre for UN peacekeeping in New Delhi on 7 to 8 February 2002. The seminar followed on from a Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre hosted seminar in Shrivenham in March 2001. Peacekeeping operations are an area in which both India and the UK have a wealth of experience to share. Both sides are keen to maintain a regular dialogue on the conceptual and operational aspects of UN peacekeeping operations.

Spain

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers next plan to visit Spain. [36533]

Peter Hain: The Foreign Secretary and I will accompany the Prime Minister to the Barcelona European Council from 15 to 16 March. My noble Friend Baroness Symons plans to attend an EU Trade Ministers meeting in Toledo on 18 March and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), will attend a conference in Granada on 28 February.

Non-Proliferation Treaty Review

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the Government are planning to put forward to the preparatory meeting of the non-proliferation treaty review in April, in respect of the management of *(a)* surplus stockpiled fissile material and *(b)* fissile material obtained from decommissioned nuclear warheads. [36468]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK continues to support the statement in the final document of the 2000 non-proliferation treaty review conference that one of the practical steps for a systematic and progressive effort to implement Article VI of the treaty is

> "... arrangements by all the nuclear weapons states to place, as soon as practicable, fissile material designated by each of them as no longer required for military purposes under IAEA and or other relevant international verification and arrangements for the disposition of such material for peaceful purposes, to ensure that such material remains permanently outside military programmes."

The UK has already placed the vast majority of the fissile material it declared under the Strategic Defence Review as no longer required for defence purposes under Euratom and IAEA safeguards. The UK has also indicated its readiness to contribute £70 million over 10 years to support the US/Russian plutonium disposition agreement, under which each side will dispose of 34 tonnes of weapons-grade plutonium.

South Pacific Islands

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* embassies, *(b)* high commissions, *(c)* consulates and *(d)* trade and investment offices his Department has in (i) the Federated States of Micronesia, (ii) the Solomon Islands, (iii) the Marshall Islands, (iv) Nauru, (v) Kiribati, (vi) Tuvalu, (vii) Vanuatu, (viii) Fiji, (ix) Tonga, (x) Palau and (xi) Samoa; what the staff numbers are for each; and if he will make a statement. [37296]

Mr. MacShane: The UK has High Commission offices in Fiji, Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, and also in Papua New Guinea. The number of staff (including both UK-based and locally engaged staff) in each is as follows.

Fiji	18
Kiribati	1
Papua New Guinea	12
Solomon Islands	6
Tonga	4
Vanuatu	9[1]

[1] Three part-time.

The Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau and Tuvalu are covered by our High Commission in Fiji, and Samoa by our High Commission in Wellington.

We value our links with the island states of the South Pacific and are committed to working with them, particularly where we have resident representation, towards enhanced economic sustainability and governance, and stronger civil society. Our opening of a High Commission office in Kiribati in January has strengthened our ability to do this.

FCO Telecommunications Network

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answers of 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 162–63W, on the FCO Telecommunications network, at how many missions the Foreign and Commonwealth Office telecommunications network has installed both telephone systems and network connections; what progress was made in the first two weeks of February 2002 towards the target for February 2002; and if he will make a statement. [37069]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office telecommunications network (FTN) provides two main services for our Diplomatic missions overseas. One is connection to a telecommunications network; the second is the provision of a telephone system (PBX). Progress with implementation of these services against the February target is as shown:

	Telephone systems	*Network connections*	*Total installation*
Target for February 2002	7	13	20
Installations achieved 1–14 February 2002	3	7	10
On target for February 2002?	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes:

1. Telephone system installed at Los Angeles Consulate-General, Doha Visa Section and Doha Embassy.

2. Network connections to posts at Tel Aviv, Bucharest, Athens, Barcelona, Alicante, Bilbao and Lisbon.

Argentina

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he has taken to protect British interests affected by the financial crisis in Argentina. [37214]

Mr. MacShane: The Government are concerned about the situation in Argentina and are in regular touch with those British companies affected. We want Argentina to deal with foreign investors transparently and without discrimination. We are pressing the Argentine Government to do this, through the IMF and the EU, as well as through our Embassy in Buenos Aires. Qualifying British investments in Argentina are protected by certain safeguards under the UK/Argentina Investment, Promotion and Protection Agreement, which provides a mechanism for companies to resolve disputes with the Argentine authorities, should the need arise.

Taliban Prisoners

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what status has been applied to UK citizens detained in Cuba for alleged Taliban and al-Qaeda activities. [37806]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is for the US as the detaining power in the first instance to take a view on status depending on the facts of each individual case. The US authorities said in their statement of 7 February that they have no doubt that the Taliban and al-Qaeda detainees are not prisoners of war, and that the Geneva Convention requires a tribunal only where there is any doubt.

They also confirmed that, notwithstanding the question of status, all detainees would continue to be treated humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva conventions.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances he will confirm the names of UK citizens as being held in *(a)* Cuba and *(b)* Afghanistan for alleged associations with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. [37711]

Mr. Bradshaw: The names of UK nationals detained in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay are confirmed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office only when we are satisfied that the information is correct and the next of kin have been informed.

LNM Group

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he was informed of the attempt by the LNM Group to acquire Sidex. [37933]

Peter Hain: The Secretary of State's Private Office were informed of LNM's bid on 19 July 2001 when routinely processing the draft letter for the Prime Minister to send to the Romanian Prime Minister. The Secretary of State learnt of it himself when being briefed for the 5–8 November 2001 visit to the UK of the Romanian Prime Minister.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he assesses the national interest in deciding whether to support attempts by companies or individuals to acquire assets overseas; which other Ministers are consulted during that assessment; and *(a)* whether and *(b)* how such an assessment was made of the attempt by the LNM Group to acquire Sidex. [37928]

Mr. MacShane: Each case is considered on its merits, in conjunction with other Departments where appropriate. Such consideration will take account of the overall potential benefit to the UK, including its effect on British commercial, economic and foreign policy interests. This approach applied to the acquisition by the LNM Group of Sidex.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent changes there have been in United Nations sanctions in relation to Sierra Leone. [39604]

Peter Hain: UN Security Council resolution 1385 (2001) was adopted on 19 December 2001.

The resolution extends for a further 11 months the mandatory UN embargo on the export of rough diamonds from Sierra Leone originally imposed for a period of 18 months by UNSCR 1306 (2000) of 5 July 2000.

Diamonds certified under the Government of Sierra Leone certification scheme continue to remain exempt from the embargo.

The UK originally played a leading role in promoting 1306 in the UN Security Council. It continues to support measures aimed at breaking the link between conflict and the illicit trade in rough diamonds.

The embargo is implemented in the UK and the Isle of Man by means of an amendment to the Open General Licence, effected on 17 July 2000, and in the Channel Islands and Overseas Territories by Orders in Council under the United Nations Act 1946 (S.I. Nos 1822/2000 and 1840/2000).

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are to change the departmental expenditure limits and administration costs limits for 2001–02. [39605]

Mr. MacShane: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Foreign and Commonwealth DEL will be increased by £32,584,000 from £1,362,704,000 to £1,395,288,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £34,335,000 from £634,598,000 to £668,933,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table:

£000

	Resources	*Capital*
Change	32,600	–16
New DEL	1,268,738	126,550
of which:		
Voted	1,100,856	103,050
Non-voted	167,882	23,500

The change in the resources element of DEL arises from:

(i) an increase of £965,000 in respect of take up of EYF;

(ii) an increase of £9,462,000 in respect of an adjustment for Overseas Price Movements;

(iii) a net increase of £10,000,000 as a result of a Reserve Claim for 11 September related activity;

(iv) a PES transfer to the Ministry of Defence of £1,154,000 in respect of British Defence Staff in Washington;

(v) an increase of £18,944,000 to reflect transfers from capital to improve budgetary flexibility;

(vi) an increase of £2,330,000 relating to a successful bid against the Reserve for funds to tackle organised crime;

(vii) a PES transfer to the Department for International Development of £8,061,000 in respect of funding arrangements on the Conflict Prevention pool;

(viii) a decrease in the FCO's Resource DEL of £5,743,000 to reflect a corresponding overspend on the FCO's Resource DEL last financial year;

(ix) a PES transfer from the Ministry of Defence of £125,000 relating to funding for Ascension Island;

(x) a PES transfer to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport of £2,000,000 towards the cost of mounting the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester;

(xi) an increase in £2,145,000 in the FCO's departmental unallocated pool for Conflict Prevention to reflect an increase in funding levels;

(xii) a PES transfer from the Department for International Development of £18,837,000 to reflect revisions to funding arrangements for Conflict Prevention;

(xiii) a PES transfer to the Ministry of Defence of £15,000,000 to reflect revisions to funding arrangements for Conflict Prevention;

(xiv) a PES transfer from the Department for International Development of £1,750,000 to reflect revisions for funding arrangements for Conflict Prevention.

The change in the capital element of DEL arises from:

(i) an increase of £1,200,000 to Capital to reflect a successful bid against the Capital Modernisation Fund;

(ii) an increase of £828,000 in respect of an adjustment for Overseas Price Movements;

(iii) an increase of £16,900,000 as a result of a Reserve Claim for September 11 related activity;

(iv) a decrease of £18,944,000 to reflect transfers from capital to resource in order to improve budgetary flexibility.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers and will not impact on the planned total of public expenditure.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sanctions the EU has imposed against Zimbabwe. [39606]

Peter Hain: On 18 February the General Affairs Council (GAC) of the European Union decided to implement targeted sanctions against the Government of Zimbabwe. The GAC expressed serious concern at continuing political violence, serious violations of human rights and restrictions on the media in Zimbabwe which call into question the prospects for a free and fair presidential election on 9–10 March 2002. The GAC noted that the Government of Zimbabwe had objected to having nationals of six EU member states accredited as observers for the forthcoming elections and refused to accredit the EU Chief Observer, Ambassador Pierre Schori.

The measures adopted are carefully targeted. They comprise:

(i) a travel ban to apply to Robert Mugabe and to 19 members of his inner circle;

(ii) an asset freeze to apply to the same individuals;

(iii) an embargo on the sale or supply of arms to Zimbabwe;

(iv) an embargo on the provisions of technical assistance and training relating to arms;

(v) an embargo on the sale or supply to Zimbabwe of equipment which might be used for internal repression.

The travel ban has been implemented by administrative means pending an order under section 8B of the Immigration Act 1971.

The UK already has an arms embargo in place against Zimbabwe imposed on 3 May 2000 in respect of all applications for new licences for the export to Zimbabwe of goods and technology listed in part III, schedule 1, of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended (commonly known as the Military List).

The asset freeze, the embargo on the provision of technical assistance and training relating to arms and the embargo on the sale or supply to Zimbabwe of equipment which might be used for internal repression fall within Community competence. These measures are implemented by an EC regulation which is directly applicable in the UK. The regulation came into force on 21 February 2002, the day of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. Regulations under the European Communities Act 1972 will be passed to impose penalties for infringements of the regulation as required.

Copies of the Common Position and regulation listing those subject to the asset freeze and travel ban can be found on the European Union website: www.europa.eu.int.

Romania

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's policy is on ministerial intervention in commercial negotiations between *(a)* large, *(b)* intermediate-sized and *(c)* small private companies and Romania. [37182]

Mr. MacShane: Each case is considered on its merits in terms of the overall potential benefit to UK business and to the UK economy. A number of factors will be relevant in considering this, including whether the company is incorporated or registered in Britain, whether the company has a UK address, whether a company is UK controlled or owned, whether it employs people in the UK, whether it has a UK-manufactured product or service, and whether there are wider benefits for the UK, eg in terms of increased access to overseas markets, increased employment or increased competitiveness.

WORK AND PENSIONS

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to improve the performance of the new deal for young people in helping participants from non-white ethnic minority groups to obtain sustained jobs. [25985]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: New deal is pro-active in the promotion of equality of opportunity and outcome for people of all ethnic groups. In November 1998, we published a Strategy for Engaging Ethnic Minorities which looked at ways to identify and overcome the barriers to ethnic minority young people, providers and businesses participating in new deal. Action plans supporting the strategy are reviewed every six months.

The National Employment Panel's Minority Ethnic Advisory Group (MEAG) advises the Department for Work and Pensions on increasing the effectiveness of the new deal for ethnic minority clients. Additionally we work with groups such as the Black Training and Enterprise Group, the Commission for Racial Equality and local Racial Equality Councils in developing tools to assist staff in engaging with ethnic minority clients.

We are investing £15 million in new outreach services for people from ethnic minorities in some of the country's most deprived urban areas. The outreach service, to be launched in April, will explore different ways jobless people from ethnic minority communities can be helped through the new deal or specialist training.

State Second Pension

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what evidence he has collated to assess the relative attractiveness of *(a)* contracting out of the state second pension scheme and *(b)* remaining within it for those with average earnings of *(a)* 75 per cent., *(b)* 100 per cent. and *(c)* 125 per cent. of national average earnings. [32878]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* In making any decision about pensions, individuals may consider both present earnings and their future prospects. In general we expect that contracting out will be the best option for most people but individuals will need to make choices that are appropriate to their current needs and aspirations for the future.

Benefit Payments (Hospital Stays)

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the value is of reductions to *(a)* pensions and *(b)* other benefits made after a patient has been in hospital for over six weeks in each of the last five years; and how many patients have been affected by reductions to (i) pensions and (ii) benefits in each of the past five years. [33002]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

£ million

	Incapacity benefit	*Retirement pension*	*Severe disablement allowance*
Reduction in benefit with six to 52 weeks hospital downrating in place			
1996–97	*5	22	2
1997–98	*5	22	3
1998–99	*5	24	3
1999–2000	*6	26	3
2000–01	*5	28	4
Reduction in benefit with over 52 weeks hospital downrating in place			
1996–97	*7	37	25
1997–98	*8	33	24
1998–99	*8	32	23
1999–2000	*8	30	23
2000–01	*9	29	21

Notes:

1. The information has been obtained from a number of administrative sources and a number of assumptions have been made, ie numbers marked * are taken from a small number of sample cases and are subject to a relatively high sampling error and should be used only as an indication of the current situation and it has been assumed that figures in a given quarter remain constant throughout the year.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest million.
3. It is not possible to provide accurate total reductions for income support, housing benefit, or council tax benefit.
4. The figures are given in cash terms.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when a substantive reply will be given to Mrs. G. Twizell's letter of 23 November 2001, concerning the bereavement allowance. [36835]

Malcolm Wicks: I replied to the hon. Member on 20 February.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will make a substantive reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Thurrock dated 29 January and 5 February, concerning his constituent, Andrew Palmer of East Tilbury. [37434]

Malcolm Wicks: I replied to my hon. Friend on 20 February.

Disability Service Teams

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase the budget for disability service teams; and if he will make a statement. [37585]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* Disability service teams will become an integral part of Jobcentre Plus from April. We are investing significantly in the development of Jobcentre Plus and its services, including services for disabled people.

Pension Credit

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether pensioner tax credit will serve as a qualifying benefit for warm front grants. [37638]

Mr. McCartney: Subject to the agreement of the devolved Administrations and parliamentary scrutiny of the State Pension Credit Bill, it is intended that Pension Credit will serve as a qualifying benefit for warm front grants.

Minimum Income Guarantee (Cleethorpes)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners he estimates are claiming the minimum income guarantee in the Cleethorpes constituency. [37754]

Mr. McCartney: As at August 2001, there are 3,000 minimum income guarantee claimants in the parliamentary constituency of Cleethorpes.

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps the Government have taken *(a)* to identify appropriate indicators for securing safe and sustainable pensions by the spring Council meeting in Barcelona and *(b)* to develop a national strategy report by September; and what plans he has to promote public participation in this process. [37761]

Mr. McCartney: Discussion on the possibility of developing pension indicators is being taken forward by the Economic Policy Committee and Social Protection Committee as part of their remit for taking work forward on objectives for safe and sustainable pension systems. The UK takes a full part in this work. We are also discussing with the Commission the best format for the national strategy reports that will outline the approaches of member states to meeting the objectives that have been agreed. The UK response will draw on the extensive public consultations on pension developments that have already taken place.

Benefit Fraud (North Lanarkshire)

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of North Lanarkshire council. [39536]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report was published today in respect of North Lanarkshire council and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

BFI Inspectors found that North Lanarkshire council is a poor performing authority that needs to make significant improvements to raise standards in almost every aspect of its benefits administration and counter fraud work. The report notes a lack of awareness of what constitutes a safe and secure benefits service at the council, despite an annual expenditure of more than £95 million on housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Inspectors noted that the council was using three different types of claim form and considered that none of them was up to standard. They recommend that North Lanarkshire introduces a single claim form based upon the national BFI model. This is seen as vital to help claimants to provide all the supporting evidence needed for a claim to be worked out accurately from the start.

The report identifies weaknesses in a number of areas including the monitoring and control of benefit periods, the renewal of claims, and the way that the council deals with changes of circumstances to prevent overpayments. The council did not have a policy covering overpayments of benefit and had no management controls to show that overpayments were being dealt with correctly.

Inspectors also express concern over the council's benefit security procedures. They found that none of the key British Safety standards on security controls were being met. Inspectors consider that North Lanarkshire's benefits service is highly vulnerable to internal fraud.

The council's counter fraud policy was not being managed effectively. The report finds that the counter fraud team did not have enough staff to cope with the volume of work. Also, training and management direction was inadequate. Weaknesses were found in the council's IT security procedures, particularly on the standards of information security. The quality of investigative work was poor and inspectors considered that the council did not do enough to prevent fraud nor to deter repeat offenders. 80 per cent. of investigations examined by inspectors were found to be incomplete. Concern was also expressed in the report that the council did not refer cases to the Procurator Fiscal for prosecution.

The report concludes that the council was not effectively managing the administration of benefit or the risks from fraud. Key benefits related policies that were needed to provide clear direction to staff and stakeholders were not in place and a management information system was inadequate.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Pension Schemes Act

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the general and compensation levies payable under the Pension Schemes Act 1993 by occupational and personal pension schemes. [39537]

Mr. McCartney: There will be no increase in the General Levy rates for 2002–03. Rates will remain at the 2000–01 level as set out in the table. Levy receipts are buoyant due to the growth in the number of members for which the levy is payable. Although Opra's costs have increased and it will have added responsibilities for regulating speeding up the winding up of pension schemes in 2002–03, there will be sufficient funding without increasing the General Levy rates.

Although some payments have been made out of the pension compensation fund, it will not be necessary to raise a Compensation Levy in 2002–03.

Scheme rates

£

Scheme size	*Basis*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*Minimum payment per scheme*[1]
Occupational pensions						
2 to 11	Scheme	11.00	12.00	12.00	12.00	—
12 to 99	Member	1.20	1.25	1.25	1.25	—
100 to 999	Member	0.85	0.90	0.90	0.90	125
1,000 to 4,999	Member	0.69	0.70	0.70	0.70	900
5,000 to 9,999	Member	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.53	3,500
10,000+	Member	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37	5,300
Personal pensions						
2 to 11	Scheme	3.75	5.20	5.20	5.20	—
12 to 99	Member	0.35	0.50	0.50	0.50	—
100 to 999	Member	0.25	0.35	0.35	0.35	50
1,000 to 4,999	Member	0.20	0.30	0.30	0.30	350
5,000 to 9,999	Member	0.15	0.20	0.20	0.20	1,500
10,000+	Member	0.10	0.15	0.15	0.15	2,000

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[1] Minimum payments ensure that schemes in the lower bands do not pay more overall than those the higher bands

Child Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the change in the average payment made in child support maintenance by the non-resident parent that will result from the April 2002 scheme for *(a)* one child, *(b)* two children and *(c)* three children. [33267]

Malcolm Wicks: It is not possible to make firm estimates of the change to the average payment of child support maintenance as a result of the introduction of the new child support scheme. While it is expected that there will be a rise in the levels of compliance, this cannot be quantified with sufficient precision.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the role and responsibilities of Alexis Cleveland in respect of the Child Support Agency. [37433]

Malcolm Wicks: Alexis Cleveland, as Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, has no responsibility for the Child Support Agency—Doug Smith is the Child Support Agency's Chief Executive.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to take into account the contribution to a stakeholder pension of the partner of a non-resident parent in calculating the assessment under the new CSA formula. [35372]

Malcolm Wicks: The income of a non-resident parent's partner will not be taken into account in the new CSA calculation. The partner's contribution to a stakeholder pension will therefore also be irrelevant.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice is given to clients who apply to the CSA before April; and if he will make a statement. [35374]

Malcolm Wicks: The CSA has written to existing clients with a live maintenance assessment in place informing them of the introduction of the new child support scheme for new cases, and of the implications for their case. The same information will be provided to new applicants when they receive notification of their maintenance assessment.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what transitional arrangements will be put in place for clients who face large adjustments in payments when transferring to the new CSA system; and if he will make a statement. [35376]

Malcolm Wicks: To give parents who have existing child support assessments time to adjust to the new amounts, child support liability will be phased over a period of five years and in stages of £2.50, £5 or £10, depending on the non-resident parent's net weekly income.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the five-year European Union action plan to encourage co-operation to combat social exclusion includes measures to help those with mental health problems. [36878]

Malcolm Wicks: The EU Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion will make 75 million euro available over a five-year period to support various transnational activities with a view to improving:

> Analysis of characteristics, processes, causes and trends in social exclusion;
>
> Policy co-operation and exchange of information and best practices; and
>
> Participation and support for EU-level networking.

The range of activities potentially eligible for support is very broad, in line with the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion. The Commission and the Member States have acknowledged that mental health is an important issue for many people experiencing social exclusion. Accordingly, support from the Action Programme may be available for partnerships with an interest in mental health issues working across several Member States to tackle social exclusion. Support will be subject to a bidding process.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36178]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table:

	Agency/body	*Staff days lost*
1998—Department of Social Security	Headquarters	Nil
	Benefits Agency	8.5
	Child Support Agency	Nil
	Information Technology Service Agency	Nil
	War Pensions Agency[1]	Nil
	Contributions Agency[2]	Nil
	Independent Tribunal Service	Nil
	Independent Statutory Bodies	Nil
1999—Department of Social Security	Headquarters	Nil
	Benefits Agency	Nil
	Child Support Agency	Nil
	Information Technology Services Agency	Nil
	Contributions Agency	Nil
	War Pensions Agency	Nil
	Independent Tribunal Service	Nil
	Independent Statutory Bodies	Nil
2000—Department of Social Security	Headquarters	Nil
	Benefits Agency	Nil
	Child Support Agency	Nil
	War Pensions Agency	Nil
	The Appeal Service	Nil
	Independent Statutory Bodies	Nil
2001—Department for Work and Pensions	Corporate Centre	Nil
	Benefits Agency/Employment Service[3]	154,928[4]
	The Appeals Service	Nil
	Independent Statutory Bodies	Nil

[1] The War Pensions Agency transferred to the Ministry of Defence June 2001.

[2] The Contributions Agency transferred to the Inland Revenue April 1999.

[3] Before 2001 the Employment Service was part of the then Department for Education and Employment. Figures for these years will form part of the response from the Department for Education and Skills.

[4] All but 37 days relate to a single dispute.

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35695]

Malcolm Wicks: Information of this kind is not readily available and could be supplied only at a disproportionate cost to this Department. Attendance at events, engagements and functions by Ministers is undertaken in line with the guidance and principles set out in the Ministerial Code.

Child Benefit

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of telephone inquiries from members of the public to child benefit centres are charged at premium telephone call rates. [35539]

Malcolm Wicks: None of the Child Benefit Centre's customers is charged at premium rate.

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will ensure that, when shared residency orders are granted by the courts, child benefit can be divided accordingly, in line with the amount of time the child spends with each parent; and if he will make a statement. [29788]

Malcolm Wicks: Child Benefit is a universal benefit paid as a contribution towards the cost of bringing up a child. It is normally awarded to the person with whom the child is living.

Only one person can be entitled to Child Benefit for a particular child. Where the care of a child is shared between two parents, and the child spends time with each, both may claim the benefit. In some cases, the parties may choose which shall be entitled to the Child Benefit. Where agreement cannot be reached, legislation allows the Secretary of State to determine who shall be entitled. His decision will take account of a wide range of factors including any residency order.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33249]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1204W.

Benefits (Overpayment)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in how many cases claimants have withheld consent to the exercise of the power to deduct overpaid *(a)* child benefit and *(b)* guardians allowance from other benefits under section 71(8) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. [35164]

Malcolm Wicks: The exercise of power under Section 71(8) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 permits recovery of overpaid benefits without consent. An overpayment of Child Benefit or Guardians Allowance may therefore be recovered from other benefits providing payment is being made to the same claimant.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in how many cases overpaid *(a)* child benefit and *(b)* guardians allowance has been deducted from other benefits in each year since 1992 under the provisions of section 71(8) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992; and what the total value is of the overpaid (i) child benefit and (ii) guardians allowance so deducted. [35163]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not available in the format requested.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HIV

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will encourage pharmaceutical companies (1) to make antiretroviral drugs for the treatment of HIV more affordable; [37843]

(2) to allow non-exclusive voluntary licences to be made available for generic antiretroviral drugs for the treatment of HIV. [37847]

Clare Short: The Working Group on Access to Medicines, which I chair and which brings together UK Government, pharmaceuticals and others is looking at options for bringing about widespread, sustainable and predictable differential pricing of medicines for the poor, including antiretrovirals. We are encouraging key partners—pharmaceutical industry, developing countries, donors, and international organisations—to play their part in bringing this about.

Officials from the Working Group are currently considering what detailed arrangements to recommend, including a consideration of non-exclusive voluntary licensing of antiretrovirals and other drugs. The Working Group will have a final meeting on this issue in May. It will give a progress report and make recommendations to the Prime Minister.

In order to protect incentives for future research and development, any new arrangements would need to be consistent with the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement and the Doha declaration on trade and public health.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Gambling Review

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects to make an announcement on her Department's preferred proposals from the Gambling Review; and if she will make a statement. [38060]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 814W.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Government plans to make sports clubs VAT exempt. [37882]

Mr. Caborn: There are already some VAT exemptions in place for sport: playing services provided by non-profit making clubs, lettings of sports and physical recreation facilities to all types of providers, and entry fees to sports and physical recreation competitions. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport received representations from the Central Council of Physical Recreation last year asking that a reduced VAT rate be introduced for the use of sporting facilities and for admission to sporting events. As with all proposals for tax reform the Government will need to consider full and detailed evidence of costs and benefits before taking any decision on additional VAT exemptions.

Athletes

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what further action she is taking to improve sports medicine facilities for athletes. [37818]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 758W.

In addition to this he will wish to note that over £180 million of lottery money is being committed to develop the UK Sports Institute (UKSI) to provide athletes with modern facilities which will include world class sports science and medicine facilities. Many of these facilities are now up and running and the UKSI is able to offer a wide range of services including biomechanics, massage, nutrition, medical consultation and screening programmes to elite athletes in the UK.

The UKSI has set up a number of programmes to ensure that elite athletes stay healthy, recover quickly and remain fit. These include the Athlete medical scheme, run in partnership with the British Olympic Committee, which provides access to medical consultations and treatments. There are currently over 1,000 athletes on the scheme.

The UKSI central services team is currently auditing the sports medicine support services in UK Sport's priority 1 and 2 sports. The findings of this audit will enable the development of a sports medicine strategy for each priority sport.

UKSI is also developing a sports medicine mentoring programme, currently being trialed by the Scottish Institute of Sport, which will provide training and development opportunities for sports medicine professionals.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37444]

Mr. Caborn: We do not hold this information in the format requested. We aim to reply to all departmental correspondence within 18 working days and our performance for the past five years is shown in the table.

	Percentage of replies issued within 18 working days of receipt
1997–98	68
1998–99	71
1999–2000	81
2000–01	85
2001–02[1]	90

[1] To date

TREASURY

Pensions (Tax Relief)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of allowing tax relief on pension contributions at the standard rate of income tax, regardless of the actual tax rate of the contributions. [27688]

Ruth Kelly: The estimated full year yield from restricting income tax relief on pension contributions by employees and the self-employed in 2001–02 is £1.7 billion, and on contributions by employers £2.6 billion. These estimates take no account of the behavioural effects which are likely to result from such changes.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33871]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Deputy Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) on 26 February 2002.

Public Service Agreements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which units in the Treasury are responsible for monitoring public service agreements; how many people they each employ; and if he will make a statement. [37067]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The 13 teams and one central team in the Treasury with responsibility for departmental expenditure policies also monitor public service agreements. There are around 180 staff in these teams, though not all the people concerned have responsibility for PSA monitoring.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department holds a record of the performance of each Government Department against their public service agreement targets; and if he will make a statement. [37068]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Yes. Departments report publicly against their PSA targets in their departmental reports.

Standing Committee on Euro Preparations

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 589W, on the Standing Committee on Euro Preparations, if he will place the membership list of the working groups working with the Standing Committee in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [38312]

Ruth Kelly: The organisation and membership of working groups working with the Chancellor's Standing Committee on Euro Preparations were listed in the second Outline National Changeover Plan, published in March 2000. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

ECOFIN (Scottish Administration)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason no devolved Administration Minister attended the 2407 European Union Council of Ministers (ECOFIN) meeting on 12 February; what suggestions and matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what information and evidence is being provided by him to permit post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [38036]

Ruth Kelly: Ministers from the devolved Administrations attend Council meetings whenever appropriate. Decisions on attendance are taken by the lead UK Minister on a case-by-case basis.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, under the Scotland Act 1998, fiscal, economic and monetary policy—in other words matters dealt with by ECOFIN Council—is reserved for Westminster. As such, parliamentary scrutiny is achieved through the Commons European Scrutiny Committee—of which the hon. Gentleman is a member—and through the House of Lords European Union Committee.

Company Cars

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many company car drivers whose employers have supplied the Inland Revenue with correct information have been issued with incorrectly calculated coding notices in the last 12 months; [37844]

(2) how many renewal coding notices the Inland Revenue plans to issue to company car drivers before 30 March. [37845]

Mr. Boateng: The recent problems which have led to some individuals' car benefit figure for 2002–03 being calculated are the only known instance where information properly submitted by employers has not been correctly used to calculate coding notices. We believe that up to 280,000 cases are affected. In all cases the Revenue will send a correct coding notice before the start of the tax year.

As at the end of December, the Inland Revenue had not received the relevant information for approximately 1.2 million company car drivers and therefore had to estimate the amount of car benefit for 2002–03. By early March all of those taxpayers will have received a leaflet asking for the necessary information to correctly calculate their tax code. The number of these revised coding notices issued before the new tax year will depend upon the rate of response to the requests.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has collated on whether the changes to company car taxation due to come into force on 6 April have influenced companies' choices of cars. [37846]

Mr. Boateng: The Inland Revenue will comprehensively evaluate the effects of the changes to company car taxation applying from 6 April. The Revenue will begin this evaluation after the changes have been introduced, and the work will include an assessment of the effects on employers' and employees' choices of cars.

Coalition Against Terrorism

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to the United Kingdom of the coalition against terrorism; and what estimate has been made of its future and continuing costs. [34818]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

Additional operating costs up to the end of December 2001 were £65.3 million.

As was announced yesterday as part of our presentation of spring Supplementary Estimates to the House, we estimate the total cost of operations in Afghanistan up to the end of March 2002 to be some £261 million. This figure includes the cost of munitions consumed and represents the additional cost of operations over and above the cost of planned activities.

We constantly review our continuing commitment and will inform Parliament of our initial estimate for 2002–03 as early in the financial year as we can. As announced yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has already agreed to provide a further £55 million for urgent operational requirements. This is in addition to the £100 million announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his pre-Budget statement on 27 November 2001.

Vehicle Seizures

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many vehicles were seized by HM Customs and Excise in the past 12 months; what the comparable figures were in each of the previous three years; and what the total value of the items seized from persons and vehicles at the borders with France in the past 12 months was. [38331]

Dawn Primarolo: For the number of vehicles seized across the whole of the UK in 1997–98, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 18 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 274. For the number of vehicles seized across the UK in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 15 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 124W. Figures for the number of vehicles seized by Customs across the UK during 2000–01 are contained in the Government's response to the independent report by John Roques into "The Collection of Excise Duties in HM Customs and Excise" (House of commons command 5329, July 2001), a copy of which was placed in the Library on 19 July 2001.

Customs do not centrally retain figures on the value of goods and vehicles seized at the borders with France.

Bankruptcy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will examine what recompense exists for those people who have recently declared bankrupt who have been offered further credit by organisations in the knowledge that they are dealing with bankrupts. [37613]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

No recompense is available to bankrupts simple as a result of being offered credit by organisations in the knowledge that they are dealing with bankrupts. A bankrupt is guilty of an offence if, either alone or jointly with any other person, he obtains credit to the extent of the prescribed amount (currently £250 or more) without informing the person from whom the credit is obtained of his bankrupt status. If credit is obtained after disclosure of the relevant information no offence is committed.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what safeguards exist to protect people in the process of being declared bankrupt from being harassed by money-lending organisations. [37612]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

At any time after a bankruptcy petition has been presented or a bankruptcy order has been made the court can impose a stay on any action or legal process against the property or person of the debtor. After a bankruptcy order has been made no creditor has any remedy against the property or person of the debtor in respect of a debt provable in the bankruptcy. There is nothing to prevent the offering of loans to people in such financial difficulty.

Finance (No. 2) Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the studies that his Department has undertaken of the efficacy of sections 42 and 48 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1997; and if he will make a statement. [38115]

Dawn Primarolo: Film production benefits comprise two accelerated tax reliefs, section 42 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1992 and section 48 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1997. The Inland Revenue is currently evaluating their efficacy in stimulating additional film production.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the Exchequer cost of sections 42 and 48 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1997 for the three fiscal years from April 2002; and if he will make a statement. [38114]

Dawn Primarolo: Film production benefits from two accelerated tax reliefs, section 42 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1992 and Section 48 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1997. The estimated tax cost of relief provided to British qualifying films under section 48 is £85 million for films produced in 1999–2000. Section 48 was extended for a period of three years in Finance Act 2001 and the tax cost of the relief for films was estimated at an average of £90 million a year to 2004–05. The tax cost of section 42 relief is estimated to be an additional £70 million a year.

Self-assessment

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2000, *Official Report*, column 412W, on tax returns and the internet, for each month since 1 July 2001 how many self-assessment tax returns were *(a)* issued, *(b)* received, *(c)* waiting to be processed and *(d)* processed; and if he will make a statement. [38308]

Dawn Primarolo: The statistical data requested are as follows:

Tax year 2000–01

	Self-assessment income tax returns			
Date	*Issued*	*Received*	*Processed*	*Waiting to be processed*
1 July 2001	8,940,513	1,323,115	864,497	458,618
29 July 2001	8,990,292	1,943,901	1,350,597	593,304
2 September 2001	8,989,043	2,798,153	1,966,795	831,358
30 September 2001	9,152,255	4,241,952	2,677,145	1,564,807
4 November 2001	8,842,560	4,682,767	3,421,658	1,261,109
2 December 2001	9,360,099	5,383,846	4,436,261	947,585
30 December 2001	9,299,623	5,745,572	4,839,285	906,287
3 February 2002	9,552,433	8,362,361	5,848,319	2,514,042

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate *(a)* HM Treasury and *(b)* Inland Revenue have made of the average time it takes to fill out a self-assessment form; and if he will make a statement. [38264]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not have information about the average time it takes to fill out a self-assessment return but we carry out usability testing as part of the development process.

Betting Taxation

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a list of the companies that responded to the consultation launched on betting taxation in the 2000 Budget; and if he will make a statement. [38118]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government publication "Our Stake in The Future", which was placed in the Library on 7 March 2001, contains a list of the respondents.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Senior Lawyers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of time was spent by senior lawyers in *(a)* administration and management and *(b)* considering cases and advocacy in the latest year for which figures are available. [35949]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The CPS does not collect data on the time individual senior lawyers spend on administrative and management functions and on file review and advocacy duties.

The CPS is implementing the recommendations of Sir Iain Glidewell in his review of the CPS published in 1998 and is well advanced in setting up a new organisational structure based on Criminal Justice Units and Trial Units. A senior lawyer supported by a business manager heads each of these operational units. This mirrors the relationship at area level between the Chief Crown Prosecutor and the Area Business Manager, and at national level between the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Chief Executive. The role of the business manager is to manage the unit's administrative and business processes, thus releasing the senior lawyer to focus on a personal portfolio of the more serious cases, leadership, criminal justice liaison and line management of the prosecutors in the unit.

CPS Staff (Training)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the training programmes available for CPS staff indicating the latest participation rates; which training providers are used; and if they are quality assured. [35945]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The range and providers of training programmes available to CPS staff and the numbers who have attended are shown in the table. The numbers trained are for the current year, from April 2001 to the date of preparation of this answer (26 February 2002).

Where external providers supply training, quality is monitored throughout the duration of the programme by means of evaluation reports and observation of the external providers by CPS Training and Development Managers or internal project managers. Regular meetings are held with the providers to discuss quality issues as they arise and all tutors are required to provide a CV and references prior to being engaged.

Training from April 2001—present

Status	*Course title*	*Duration (days)*	*Target Group*	*Provider*	*Numbers trained*
Regional					
Development	Selection Interviewing	4	Selection panellists (B1 or above)	CPS	91
Development	Business Writing Skills	1	Administrative staff	Plain Language Commission	30
Development	Completing Application Forms	0.5	All staff	CPS	43
Development	Effective Communication	—	All	CPS	52
Development	Job Holder Awareness	—	New staff	CPS	95
Development	EFQM	—	Unit heads and service centre managers	—	50
National					
Development	Diversity	1 or 2	All staff	Ionan	4,500
Development	Influencing and Negotiation Skills	2	ABMs/senior managers	JSB	30
Development	Project Management	2	ABMs/senior managers	Invicta Training	60
Regional					
Legal	Firearms	—	Lawyers	CPS	11
Legal	Advocacy	—	Lawyers	CPS	81
Legal	Homicide	2	Lawyers	CPS	23
Legal	Drafting Indictments	2	Lawyers and caseworkers	CPS	36
Legal	Handling Complaints Against the Police	—	Lawyers	CPS	16
Legal	Identification	—	Lawyers	CPS	70
Legal	RIPA	—	Lawyers	CPS	24
Legal	Misuse of Drugs	—	Lawyers	CPS	28
Legal	Disclosure	—	Lawyers	CPS	100
Legal	Fraud	—	Lawyers	CPS	19
Legal	Child Abuse	—	Lawyers	CPS	20
Legal	ECHR	—	Lawyers	CPS	84
Legal	Victim and Witness Care	1 or 0.5	Casework and administrative staff	CPS	16
National					
Legal	Legal Trainee Scheme	—	—	Compulsory courses—several providers including LPS, Inns of Court and Central Law Training	34
Legal	Youth Offenders	2	Lawyers—youth specialists	CPS Lawyer tutors	464
Legal	Higher Court Advocacy	6	Barristers/Lawyers	Assessed by Nottingham Law School (CPS Tutors)	7
Legal	Graduated Fees	2	All Lawyers and caseworkers	CPS	523
Legal	Direct Communication with Victims and Witnesses	3	Lawyers and Victim Information Bureau staff	CPS and Focus Consultancy trainers	983
Regional					
Management	Disciplinary Handling	2	All Managers	CPS	86
Management	Managing Attendance	1	All Managers	CPS	114
Management	Introductory Management	—	New Managers	CPS	72
Management	Managing Performance Indicators	—	Managers	CPS	103
Management	Handling Complaints of Discrimination	1	Managers	CPS	40
Management	Manager as Developer	—	Managers	CPS	24
Management	Case Management Plans	—	Managers	CPS	18
Management	Performance Appraisal Reporting	3	All Managers	CPS	98

Training from April 2001—present

Status	*Course title*	*Duration (days)*	*Target Group*	*Provider*	*Numbers trained*
National					
Management	Employment Law	1	Area Business Managers/Senior Managers	JSB	65
Management	Performance Management	2	Senior Managers	CPS Training	242
Management	Managing and Leading Change	3	Unit Heads	Actors in Management/Consultant	53
Management	Leadership Development Programme	5	Chief Crown Prosecutors	Ashridge Business College	47
Regional					
Vocational	Induction	—	New staff	CPS	229
Vocational	Training for Trainers	—	—	CPS	91
Vocational	Welsh Language	—	Lawyers	CPS	8
Vocational	Manual Handling	—	Facilities staff	CPS	19
National					
Vocational	Resource Accounting	—	Area Business Managers and Finance Staff	CMPS	[1]—
Vocational	Induction—Lawyers and caseworkers	—	All new Lawyers and caseworkers	CPS	400
Vocational	Certificate in Criminal Prosecution	Distance Learning	New casework staff	ILEX Tutorial College	455
Vocational	Diploma in Criminal Prosecution	Distance Learning	Experienced casework staff	ILEX Tutorial College	72
Vocational	Stress Management—Dealing with Traumatic Cases	—	Lawyers/Caseworkers	Margaret Sharp (Qualified Psychologist)	30
Vocational	Designated Caseworker	10	Internal selection	CPS Lawyer tutors; assessment by the College of Law	32
Vocational	IiP Internal Assessors Workshop	2	Training Managers and service centre staff	Crane Davies/The Development Partnership	40

[1] Figure unavailable

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how often members of the Crown Prosecution Service have met the family of someone killed as a result of a crime to explain their decision on prosecution, broken down by region, in each year since the inception of this initiative. [37071]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* One of the responsibilities of the Crown Prosecution Service under the current Victims' Charter, published 1996, is to meet on request the family of someone killed as a result of a crime, to explain decisions about prosecutions.

The figures for the number of such meetings held are collated each year and published in the Crown Prosecution Service's Annual Report. They are also submitted annually to the inter-agency Victims' Steering Group, which is charged with monitoring the Charter Standards for which the respective criminal justice agencies are responsible. Monitoring of the Charter Standards began in 1997.

In 1997–98, the Crown Prosecution Service records show that 100 per cent. of requests for meetings were granted. However, further statistics for that period are not available.

In the following year, 83 requests were received and all were granted. All meetings were held, with the exception of one which was cancelled at the request of the victim's family.

In 1999–2000, 102 requests were received and 101 granted, and meetings held in all these cases. One request was refused as the person making the request was a pivotal prosecution witness in two related cases that were ongoing, and it was not considered that a meeting would be appropriate.

In 2000–01, 118 requests were received, all of which were granted, and all meetings were held.

Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available but will be published in the forthcoming Annual Report.

A breakdown of the figures by area is as follows:

Victim's Charter monitoring—standard 9
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999

Area	*Requests for interview*	*Number granted*
Avon and Somerset	0	0
Bedfordshire	3	3
Cambridgeshire	2	2
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	2	2
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	3	3
Devon and Cornwall	1	1
Dorset	0	0
Durham	0	0
Dyfed Powys	1	1
Essex	3	3
Gloucestershire	0	0
Greater Manchester	9	9
Gwent	1	1
Hampshire	0	0
Hertfordshire	2	2
Humber	0	0
Kent	1	1
Lancashire	3	3
Leicestershire	2	2
Lincolnshire	1	1
London	11	11
Merseyside	2	2
Norfolk	3	3
Northamptonshire	0	0
North Wales	0	0
North Yorkshire	3	3
Northumbria	4	4
Nottinghamshire	0	0
South Wales	1	1
South Yorkshire	0	0
Staffordshire	See entry for West Midlands	
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0

Victim's Charter monitoring—standard 9

1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999

Area	*Requests for interview*	*Number granted*
Sussex	7	7
Thames Valley	6	6
Warwickshire	0	0
West Mercia	5	5
West Midlands	1	1
West Yorkshire	4	4
Wiltshire	1	1
Central Casework	1	1
Total	83	83

1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000

Area	*Requests for interview*	*Number granted*
Avon and Somerset	4	4
Bedfordshire	6	6
Cambridgeshire	0	1
Cheshire	4	4
Cleveland	2	2
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	1	1
Devon and Cornwall	1	1
Dorset	0	0
Durham	1	1
Dyfed Powys	3	3
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	7	7
Greater Manchester	8	8
Gwent	1	1
Hampshire	1	1
Hertfordshire	3	3
Humber	0	0
Kent	1	1
Lancashire	2	2
Leicestershire	6	6
Lincolnshire	1	1
London	9	9
Merseyside	4	4
Norfolk	1	1
Northamptonshire	3	3
North Wales	6	6
North Yorkshire	0	0
Northumbria	1	1
Nottinghamshire	1	1
South Wales	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0
Staffordshire	2	2
Suffolk	2	2
Surrey	1	1
Sussex	7	6
Thames Valley	2	2
Warwickshire	1	1
West Mercia	4	3
West Midlands	1	1
West Yorkshire	1	1
Wiltshire	1	1
Central Casework	3	3
Total	102	101

1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001

Area	*Requests for interview*	*Number granted*
Avon and Somerset	1	1
Bedfordshire	4	4
Cambridgeshire	1	1
Cheshire	3	3
Cleveland	3	3
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	1	1
Devon and Cornwall	3	3
Dorset	1	1
Durham	3	3
Dyfed Powys	2	2
Essex	2	2
Gloucestershire	3	3
Greater Manchester	2	2
Gwent	3	3
Hampshire	3	3
Hertfordshire	4	4
Humber	0	0
Kent	2	2
Lancashire	2	2
Leicestershire	4	4
Lincolnshire	2	2
London	7	7
Merseyside	6	6
Norfolk	1	1
Northamptonshire	4	4
North Wales	4	4
North Yorkshire	1	1
Northumbria	5	5
Nottinghamshire	2	2
South Wales	3	3
South Yorkshire	0	0
Staffordshire	2	2
Suffolk	4	4
Surrey	6	6
Sussex	0	0
Thames Valley	8	8
Warwickshire	0	0
West Mercia	5	5
West Midlands	0	0
West Yorkshire	5	5
Wiltshire	1	1
Central Casework	5	5
Total	118	118

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what quality standards each Crown Prosecution Service region supports; and when registration was obtained. [35951]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The CPS supports the Investment in People quality standard.

All CPS areas apart from CPS London, and HQ Directorates have been recognised as meeting the Investors in People quality standard for training and development of employees.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to the correspondence from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed dated *(a)* 2 May and 18 July relating to representations from McCreath, Simpson and Prentice Ltd., *(b)* 25 May and 17 July relating to representations from Mr. Lindsay of Anglo-Scottish Pest Control and *(c)* 23 May and 17 July relating to Mr. Walton on the loss of income from grass park letting; [7265]

(2) pursuant to the Under-Secretary's holding reply of 15 October 2001, when she will reply to the letters relating to representations from *(a)* Mr. Lindsay of Anglo-Scottish Pest Control dated 25 May and 17 July and *(b)* McCreath, Simpson and Prentice Ltd. dated 2 May and 18 July. [20204]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October and 3 December 2001]:* A response to the right hon. Member's letters of 2 May and 18 July was sent on 6 February 2002, to letters of 25 May and 17 July on 29 November 2001, and to letters of 23 May and 17 July on 1 January 2002.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 25 July, from the hon. Member for North Shropshire concerning the importing of BSE via cattle from Poland. [12636]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* A response to the hon. Member's letter of 2 (not 25) July 2001 was sent on 5 February 2002.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the statutory instruments issued by her Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36223]

Mr. Morley: In the 2001 calendar year, DEFRA/MAFF has made 526 Statutory instruments (SIs). A full list and purpose of each instrument is available through the HMSO SI registrar, which can be found at (siregistrar@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk).

Due to the very large number of SIs made, the breakdown of individual purposes and costings could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Regulatory Impact Assessments for regulations imposing a cost or benefit are published on the Department's website and are available in the Libraries of the House.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately-provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if she will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if she will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34388]

Mr. Morley: The Department has only been in existence since June 2001, so does not have such historical information. Producing figures for the current year to the level of detail required would involve disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by her Department and how much reclaimed. [34463]

Mr. Morley: The Department has only been in existence since June 2001, so does not have such historical information. Producing figures for the current year to the level of detail required would involve disproportionate cost.

Peat Extraction

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to protect lowland raised bog habitats at Thorne and Hatfield Moors in South Yorkshire and Wedholme Flow in Cumbria. [39454]

Mr. Meacher: I confirmed this morning that terms have been agreed to cease large-scale commercial peat working at Thorne Moor and Wedholme immediately and to phase it out over the next three years at Hatfield Moor. This has been achieved as a consequence of negotiations between English Nature and the major operator on the sites, Scotts Ltd. Upon satisfactory completion of contract Government will provide £17.3 million to English Nature to buy out existing peat extraction consents and to buy the sites. The arrangements include measures to safeguard employment and to re-deploy effort towards restoration of the sites and the development of peat alternatives.

Organic Farming

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many organic farms there were in each constituency in each year since 1990. [34872]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* We do not hold the information requested. However, statistics showing the growth of organic production in the UK since 1993, by land area and number of holdings and a list of individual producers, processors and importers of organic products are being made available to the Libraries of the House.

Environmental Sustainability

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps she proposes to take to improve Britain's ranking on the World Economic Forum's Environmental Sustainability Index; [37272]

(2) if she will make a statement on the recent report of the World Economic Forum on Environmental Sustainability and its findings relating to the UK. [37708]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* In its Strategy for sustainable development for the UK, 'A better quality of life' published in 1999, the Government established 15 headline indicators (and a core set of around 135 indicators) to measure progress towards sustainable development by the country as a whole. The first review, 'Achieving a better quality of life', Government annual report 2000, was published in January 2001 and the second annual review will be published shortly. Looked at as a set, the 15 headline indicators can be seen as a "Quality of life barometer".

The Government decided against aggregating indicators along the lines of the World Economic Forum's Environmental Sustainability Index. Such indices may be useful as tools to raise awareness but their choice of components, and the way in which they are weighted together, is largely subjective. A different choice of components, or of weights, would give wholly different results and hence the resulting measures are potentially misleading. This is aptly illustrated by the fact that the World Economic Forum's choice of components last year resulted in the UK being ranked 16th in the world in the same Index, as opposed to 91st this year.

The Government believe that the headline indicators established by the 1999 Strategy present an alternative, more transparent and comprehensive picture than any aggregated measure.

Job Sharing

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people are employed in her Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35359]

Mr. Morley: There are currently 83 people employed in DEFRA on job share contract. Although vacant positions are not generally advertised on such a specific basis, applications are always welcomed from those wishing to work on a part-time or job share basis. It is departmental policy, as an equal opportunity employer, to meet requests for all types of flexible working, including part-time working and job sharing, wherever the nature of the work allows.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to what extent Government Departments have achieved the target of a 1 per cent. per annum reduction in greenhouse gas emissions against the 1990–2000 levels. [36003]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have set the following target: "all departments to contribute towards the Government Estate target of a 1% p.a. on-going reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from buildings". The data for the first year to which the target applies (2000–01) are not yet available, but I will make the data available as soon as possible.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the *(a)* location and *(b)* number of CHP units operating on the Government estate, broken down by the different fuel used within these units. [36004]

Mr. Meacher: There are four combined heat and power installations on the Government Civil Estate in England, which are all gas fired. They are located at:

Whitehall District Heating Scheme, (based in MOD) Whitehall, London;

Ashdown House, London;

Eland House, London; and

Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Weybridge, Surrey.

There are also 10 gas fired CHP installations at UK RAF stations.

The Department for Education and Skills building at Moorfoot, Sheffield, is connected to the Sheffield heat and power network which uses the municipal waste incinerator as its source of energy.

Investigations are currently in progress covering the utilisation of CHP technology for a number of other buildings. This could be either by installing CHP units or joining existing heat networks. Progress is partly dependent upon the expiry date for their current energy contracts.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the estimated operational costs are for the Department's quality assessment programme for combined heat and power in financial year 2001–02; [37707]

(2) what costs were incurred in setting up her Department's quality assessment programme for combined heat and power to 31 March 2001. [37706]

Mr. Meacher: The costs incurred in setting up and running the combined heat and power quality assurance programme (CHPQA) to 31 March 2001 was around £765,000. The anticipated operational costs of the CHPQA for 2001–02 is around £625,000.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in her Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36812]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Since the creation of DEFRA on 8 June 2001, no overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries at departmental expense.

Waste

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much Greater London waste has been recycled in each of the last three years. [37114]

Mr. Meacher: Based on estimates from the Department's Municipal Waste Management Survey, the amounts of municipal waste collected for recycling or composting in Greater London are listed:

Year	*Thousand tonnes*
1997–98	237,000
1998–99	273,000
1999–2000	383,000

Note:

2000–01 data are currently being collected from local authorities.

Information, including the amounts of industrial and commercial waste, for Greater London is published in Strategic Waste Management Assessment 2000: London, Environment Agency. Data are available for one year only and based on estimates from the Environment Agency's National Waste Production Survey.

Industrial and commercial waste 1998

Waste management method	*Thousand tonnes*
Land recovery	52,000
Re-used	90,000
Recycled	2,364,000

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in the reduction of London's municipal waste by 3.7 million tonnes by 2020. [37719]

Mr. Meacher: The latest available figures; from the Department's municipal waste management survey, indicate that London produced approximately 4.4 million tonnes of municipal waste in 1999/2000. This figure was approximately 3.8 million tonnes in 1996/97, 4 million tonnes in 1997/98 and 4.1 million tonnes in 1998/99. 2000/01 data are currently being collated from local authorities.

It is of course up to individual waste authorities to promote waste minimisation and to develop minimisation schemes. However, I understand that the Mayor's municipal waste management strategy for London (currently in draft form) recognises this problem of growth in waste and emphasises the importance of reducing the amount of waste London produces.

The Government encourage all waste authorities to reduce the amount of waste produced and waste minimisation is at the top of the waste hierarchy, as set out in the Government's *Waste Strategy 2000.*

The spending review 2000 provided a ring-fenced grant of £140 million, for two years, for local authority waste management and this funding will be targeted at recycling and minimisation schemes. The Government have consulted on the method for distribution of this fund and responses to the consultation are currently being considered. I will be making an announcement on the final structure of the fund shortly.

The new opportunities fund has also set aside £49.5 million of lottery money for community sector waste minimisation, reuse and recycling programmes in the UK.

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what progress has been made towards greater self-sufficiency in dealing with London's waste; [37721]

(2) what plans are in place to minimise the transportation of waste in London. [37720]

Mr. Meacher: It is for individual waste authorities to determine how and where their waste is disposed of. At present, much of London's waste is transported outside London for disposal at landfill sites. However, I understand that the Mayor's Municipal Waste Management Strategy (currently in draft form) proposed to address this issue, by looking at the current waste disposal facilities in London, and assessing what new facilities are required, with the aim of greater self-sufficiency for London in relation to waste, and maximised recycling and composting.

Greater self-sufficiency and increased recycling and composting will mean that less waste needs to be transported outside London. Where waste does need to be transported, the Mayor's draft strategy proposes to encourage the use of environmentally friendly modes of transport, such as rail, river and canal.

The Government's Waste Strategy 2000 stressed the importance of waste being dealt with as close to its source as possible. All waste authorities are encouraged to take this 'proximity principle' into account and to reduce transportation of waste, wherever possible, when developing their municipal waste management strategies.

In March 2001 the then DETR issued Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies to all local authorities. This advised that opportunities for using forms of transport other than road haulage be considered by authorities. This guidance also made authorities aware of the Freight Grant schemes, administered by DTLR, which aim to encourage the use of inland waterways and maritime freight, as opposed to road transport.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the extent to which local recycling initiatives are affected by the expansion of the waste incineration industry. [35395]

Mr. Meacher: The department has not commissioned such research. Local authorities have a responsibility to plan waste treatment and disposal. Waste Strategy 2000 set targets for recycling and composting of household waste in England and Wales, and in March 2001 we introduced statutory performance standards for local authorities in England.

Where a local authority or company proposes a waste incineration facility, our policy is that it should be small enough that it does not act as a disincentive to increased recycling, and should not undermine the achievement of the statutory recycling targets that have been allocated.

Under the guidance we issued in September 2000 for Private Finance Initiative projects, proposals which include incineration must also demonstrate that all opportunities for recycling have been considered first, and that the arrangements proposed will not produce a barrier to the longer term development of recycling.

Veterinary Service

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase the size of the State Veterinary Service. [37476]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The Government are determined to ensure that the State Veterinary Service (SVS) has the ability to operate with maximum efficiency and be able to respond rapidly to any emergency. As from 3 December 2001 the Chief Veterinary Officer, as Director General of Animal Health and Welfare, has taken command of the Veterinary Policy Unit, together with the Animal Health Group and the TSE Directorate. The SVS Field Service has transferred to the command of the Director General of Operations and Service Delivery.

The Structure of the SVS Field Service is currently the same as in July 2001 but we are in the process of creating a new Animal Health Divisional Office at Newcastle. This will bring the total number of Animal Health Divisions to 24.

We have recently appointed 36 new permanent veterinary staff and further appointments are in the pipeline which will bring the SVS up to its full complement of veterinary staff.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much is owed by her Department to auctioneers and valuers in Scotland in respect of work undertaken in controlling and compensating FMD losses; and if she will make a statement. [36745]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* There have been no further developments since the reply I gave the hon. Member on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 146W.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those landfill sites used for *(a)* carcase disposal and *(b)* ash disposal following the foot and mouth outbreak; if she will list those sites where carcases and ash are to be removed and to where; and what the costs are of this removal and redisposal. [37621]

Mr. Morley: From our records 16 landfill sites were used during the 2001 FMD outbreak to dispose of FMD carcases. These are as follows.

1. Cwmni Gwastraf Mon Afon, Wales
2. Poplars Landfill, Staffordshire
3. Distington, Cumbria
4. Hespin Wood, Cumbria
5. Flusco, Cumbria
6. Deep Moor, Devon
7. Chapmans Well, Durham
8. Port Clarence, Middlesbrough
9. Warnham Brickworks, West Sussex
10. Shakespeare Landfill Site, Isle of Grain, Kent
11. Withnell, Lancashire
12. Biffa Waste Disposal, West Midlands
13. Viridor Waste Management, Wiltshire
14. Cory Environmental (Glos.) Ltd., Gloucestershire
15. Grundon Waste Ltd., Gloucestershire
16. Mercia Waste Management Ltd., Worcestershire

Our records indicate that seven landfill sites have been used to dispose of the ash created from the burning of carcases. These are as follows:

1. Calvert, Buckinghamshire
2. Bishops Cleeve, Gloucestershire
3. Hespin Wood, Cumbria
4. Lillyhall, Cumbria
5. Wilnecote Landfill Site, Staffordshire
6. County Environmental Services Ltd., Cornwall
7. Roseland "Group" Lean Quarry, Cornwall.

The Environment Agency has at the vast majority of burn sites given permission for the ash from pyres to be buried on site after an assessment of the risks to controlled waters. Where it is not possible to dispose of it in this way (eg because groundwater conditions are unsuitable and there is a risk of potassium or other leached salts entering surface or groundwater) the ash is being removed. DEFRA has to date removed ash from 160 sites with a further 10–12 sites programmed for removal, at a budgeted cost of £29.5 million.

According to our records, carcases have been exhumed at two sites in Wales (including the mass burial site at Eppynt). Exhumed carcases were either burnt or rendered. There are no current plans to exhume carcases at other sites.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason hon. Members have not received a communication from the Lessons Learned foot and mouth inquiry; and if she will make a statement. [36998]

Mr. Morley: I understand that the Lessons Learned inquiry has already begun writing to hon. Members whose constituencies form part of its programme of visits to areas of England, Scotland and Wales most affected by the recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The inquiry Chairman is also extending an invitation to meet these hon. Members after his programme of visits has been completed in April. In addition, I understand the inquiry has offered to meet the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance is issued by her Department to dairy farmers re-stocking livestock post-foot and mouth disease about the risks of spreading bovine tuberculosis. [37919]

Mr. Morley: The Chief Veterinary Officer wrote to all cattle keepers in England in October last year enclosing an advisory leaflet on how to minimise disease risk when restocking and replenishing cattle herds in the aftermath of foot and mouth disease. The leaflet "Golden Rules for a Healthy Herd" (www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/farmers/recovery/cattle—restock.asp) set out advice for purchasers and vendors. Among other matters the letter from the Chief Veterinary Officer drew particular attention to tuberculosis in cattle and a specific leaflet "TB in Cattle: Reducing the Risk" (www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb) was also enclosed.

A further leaflet on keeping disease out of farms, "Farm Biosecurity Protecting Herd Health", is also available on the internet (www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb).

Milk

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the quality and hygiene restrictions imposed on milk imported to this country; what proportion of the imported milk is tested to ensure it complies to these regulations; and what volume of milk has been imported to the UK in each of the last 20 years. [36426]

Mr. Morley: All milk and milk products imported into the UK from other EU member states must have been produced in accordance with Community rules. Imports from third countries must have been produced to standards at least equivalent to those. Among other things, the legislation lays down the approval, structural, handling and enforcement requirements to be applied. In line with Community rules, random spot checks at destination may be carried out.

Consignments of milk and milk products imported from third countries are subject to veterinary inspection on entering the EU to ensure that conditions of import have been complied with and that they have remained in a satisfactory condition during transport. This constitutes a documentary check on all imports from third countries, as well as physical checks on 50 per cent. of these.

The amount of milk imported into the UK for each year from 1982 is as follows:

UK imports of milk—1982–2001

Million litres

	EC	*Non-EC*
1982	15.10	0.01
1983	22.77	0.03
1984	28.00	0.02
1985	29.33	0.03
1986	34.02	0.10
1987	40.80	0.10
1988	43.17	—
1989	32.06	—
1990	34.13	—
1991	59.26	0.02
1992	121.94	0.02
1993	93.59	—
1994	164.15	0.19
1995	172.83	0.00
1996	119.42	0.03
1997	151.68	0.00
1998	187.31	—
1999	134.43	0.01
2000	122.38	—
2001[1]	85.23	—

[1] January to November

Notes:

1. Data for 1988–2001 refer to 'Milk and Cream of a fat content, by weight not exceeding 6 per cent.'
2. Data for 1982–87 refer to 'Fresh Milk and Cream (including skimmed and buttermilk, sour milk and cream, whey, kephir and yoghurt)'
3. As such, data for 1988–2001 and data for 1982–87 are not directly comparable.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the end distribution of milk produced in the UK; and what proportion of milk was sold *(a)* in supermarkets and *(b)* on the doorstep in each of the last 20 years. [36427]

Mr. Morley: The Department does not collect data for milk sales by outlet. The Dairy Council estimates that around 69 per cent. of household purchases of liquid milk are now made in supermarkets and 23 per cent. from doorstep deliveries. 10 years ago doorstep deliveries accounted for around 61 per cent.

Farms

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* farms, *(b)* dairy farms and *(c)* dairy cows there were in (i) the Ribble Valley and Fulwood constituency, ii) Lancashire, (iii) the North West of England, (iv) Wales and (v) the United Kingdom in each of the last 20 years. [36425]

Mr. Morley: Information in respect of the Ribble Valley constituency, Lancashire, the North West Government Office Region and England are contained in the table. Figures for Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are matters for the devolved authorities.

Year	*Total holdings*	*'Dairy' type holdings*	*Holdings with dairy cows*	*Total dairy cows*
(i) Ribble Valley constituency[1]				
1990	1,143	458	513	29,262
1995	1,071	405	447	27,584
2000	1,096	299	343	24,336
(ii) Lancashire				
1981	6,154	1,984	2,236	112,516
1982	6,079	1,903	2,141	113,085
1983	5,985	1,890	2,130	116,591
1984	6,074	1,890	2,121	114,443
1985	5,976	1,790	2,044	110,297
1986	6,054	1,753	1,982	109,796
1987	6,094	1,661	1,896	106,401
1988	6,117	1,571	1,811	102,237
1989	6,118	1,495	1,753	99,749
1990	5,793	1,524	1,722	100,688
1991	5,733	1,426	1,659	99,889
1992	5,732	1,367	1,613	97,429
1993	5,712	1,286	1,578	96,197
1994	5,617	1,373	1,543	97,805
1995	5,307	1,314	1,461	92,407
1996	5,226	1,286	1,430	92,603
1997	5,167	1,238	1,386	89,687
1998	5,148	1,181	1,358	88,571
1999	5,307	1,119	1,292	89,015
2000	5,432	1,025	1,182	84,595
(iii) North West Government Office Region[2]				
1981	19,393	6,721	7,527	432,341
1982	19,306	6,580	7,328	441,349
1983	19,213	6,530	7,307	454,615
1984	19,138	6,335	7,224	445,786
1985	19,117	6,055	6,999	429,715
1986	19,271	5,945	6,837	431,409
1987	19,390	5,713	6,620	421,117
1988	19,380	5,412	6,363	404,539
1989	19,443	5,246	6,175	400,285
1990	18,603	5,186	6,036	400,567
1991	18,573	4,993	5,928	396,387
1992	18,559	4,801	5,757	385,269
1993	18,721	4,294	5,624	383,544

Year	Total holdings	'Dairy' type holdings	Holdings with dairy cows	Total dairy cows
1994	18,611	4,744	5,510	391,859
1995	17,665	4,554	5,275	373,712
1996	17,533	4,449	5,144	375,212
1997	17,397	4,241	4,993	359,192
1998	17,374	4,058	4,933	354,937
1999	17,609	3,904	4,671	361,748
2000	17,944	3,630	4,315	348,192
(iv) England				
1981	155,484	31,590	38,589	2,282,799
1982	155,592	30,908	37,516	2,319,587
1983	156,036	30,361	37,037	2,368,613
1984	153,161	29,912	36,150	2,317,849
1985	153,766	28,300	34,577	2,216,073
1986	154,735	27,583	33,520	2,208,746
1987	155,785	26,138	32,010	2,134,050
1988	156,647	24,747	30,683	2,042,530
1989	157,393	23,849	29,492	2,008,202
1990	150,652	22,792	28,755	1,997,640
1991	150,966	22,701	27,963	1,936,316
1992	151,718	21,712	27,080	1,871,340
1993	153,422	18,771	26,460	1,861,421
1994	153,426	20,579	25,830	1,897,024
1995	146,112	19,632	24,678	1,809,282
1996	145,637	18,904	23,798	1,783,327
1997	144,777	18,007	22,932	1,700,250
1998	145,093	17,014	22,316	1,642,636
1999	147,220	16,313	21,326	1,659,210
2000	146,347	15,126	19,917	1,574,779

[1] Parliamentary constituency data are only available for the years 1990, 1995 and 2000.

[2] Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

Notes:

1. All data taken from the June Census Agricultural and Horticultural Census; the latest data available are from the June 2000 Census.
2. Data for England or any region/area within England do not include minor holdings.
3. A 'dairy' type holding is one where dairying is the predominant activity on the holding.

Fish Quotas

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the relationship between quota levels and fish market prices over the past five years. [37948]

Mr. Morley: The Department is contributing to an economic research project led by the Sea Fish Industry Authority which is examining the determinants of fish prices and demand at both the quayside and retail levels. This has not yet reported, although the results of the quayside phase are due to be published soon. What is clear at this stage however is that, because of the global nature of the markets for some important species, there is often no simple relationship between local catch levels and market prices.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the relevant information concerning the Shetland and Orkney fish quota leasing schemes has been submitted to the European Commission; and for what reasons there has been a delay in provision of the information. [37927]

Mr. Morley: The Commission announced an investigation into the Shetland and Orkney fish quota leasing schemes on 28 November 2001. Following an extension, granted by the Commission, of a month to the original deadline information from the Islands' Councils was provided in time to meet the 6 February deadline. Meanwhile the Commission on 12 February invited interested parties to comment within a month on the investigation.

Warm Front Scheme

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recognised training is available for those wishing to provide energy advice to householders; what level of training is provided for those giving advice under the Warm Front scheme; and what recommendations her Department makes as to appropriate training of these individuals. [36563]

Mr. Meacher: The Energy Saving Trust is an independent body grant funded by Government to promote the sustainable and efficient use of energy in the domestic and small business sectors. The trust's national network of Energy Efficient Advice Centres provides advice on domestic efficiency issues. All staff who provide advice are required to have passed either City and Guilds Energy Awareness (6176), have a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in energy efficiency or two years' relevant experience.

The Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector in England is the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES), now marketed as the Warm Front Team. Two scheme managers, Eaga Partnership and TXU Warm Front Ltd., are responsible for administering HEES.

The Department stipulates that the scheme managers' energy efficiency advisers are trained to at least City and Guilds Energy Awareness (6176). Eaga Partnership's advisers are City and Guilds trained. TXU Warm Front Ltd.'s energy advisers are certified by the independent National Home Energy Rating Assessment Board.

Animal Health

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultations she has had on the introduction of new animal health legislation; and if she will make a statement. [37489]

Mr. Morley: The Department consults with a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties on animal health legislation. For example, the rules covering the new Interim Animal Movements Regime were extensively discussed with a stakeholders group and representatives of individual organisations, prior to secondary legislation being introduced. All formal consultation exercises carried out by the Department are listed on the DEFRA website, including details of current consultations on, for example, the implementation of powers in the Animal Health Bill and a proposal for an Animal Welfare Bill.

Veterinary Practice

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce further legislation to govern veterinary practice. [37488]

Mr. Morley: The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 requires modernising; preliminary discussions have taken place, between DEFRA officials and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, on drafting a new Act to regulate the veterinary profession, but the discussions are still at a very early stage.

In the interim we are progressing with amendments to the Act which would: (i) permit certain procedures currently reserved to veterinary surgeons to be delegated to fully trained and competent para-professionals; and (ii) allow veterinary nurses, and student veterinary nurses under supervision, to carry out medical treatment and minor surgery on all species of animals.

Fisheries Agreement

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place a copy of the evaluation report on the fisheries agreement between the EU and Mauritania in the Library. [36074]

Mr. Morley: The evaluation report on the fisheries agreement between the EU and Mauritania is a European Commission paper which is not in the public domain. It is not therefore within our power to make this document public. However, I have asked the UK Permanent Representation in Brussels to make inquiries to see if it can be made public.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in her Department to *(a)* herself and *(b)* her Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36273]

Mr. Morley: Ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

Flood Defences

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on her proposals to improve flood defences. [37631]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency has asked the Government to recognise and commit to meeting the need for a significant further increase in funding on a planned basis to (a) improve flood warnings and (b) maintain and improve the overall standard and extent of flood defence. This will be considered through the Spending Review 2002 process. Current plans are for this Department's spending on flood and coastal defences for all operating authorities to increase from last year's outturn of £66 million to £114 million in 2003–04.

Representations have also been received about the methodology governing the economic appraisal of flood defence works. The current methodology will be subject to review in the light of such initiatives as on-going DEFRA research into the impact of flooding on people, the Institution of Civil Engineers' report entitled "Learning to Live with Rivers" and the agency's report on the appraisal of flood defence works which I received recently. This report was undertaken following the Lessons Learned report on the autumn 2000 floods which outlined the agency's concerns about the process for making investment decisions. We are consulting more widely on its conclusions.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the list of the 100 communities referred to on 21 December 2001 by the Chairman of the Environment Agency as not being cost effective to provide with protection against flooding; what action she has taken to communicate this information to the residents, local authorities and other bodies in those communities; and what steps her Department has taken since 21 December 2001 to urge the Environment Agency to provide flood defence schemes to those communities. [34685]

Mr. Morley: This Department has policy responsibility for flood management in England and provides grants for capital works that meet economic, technical and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score. Operational responsibility rests with the Environment Agency, local authorities and internal drainage boards who decide which works to promote and their timing. I have encouraged those operating authorities to consider action for areas of the country at highest risk from flooding and coastal erosion. Both DEFRA and the operating authorities have a responsibility to all taxpayers to ensure that value for money is obtained when funding works.

The Environment Agency in its Lessons Learned report following the autumn 2000 floods undertook to use all available information to catalogue the flooding, the local causes and how solutions or responsibility for action can be successfully attributed for the 8,554 properties that were flooded at 795 locations in England.

The agency has now assessed the locations. For many work has been included in maintenance or capital programmes resulting in the repair and improvement of damaged defences. Initially the agency identified some 700 properties (in 100 locations) where it was proving difficult to provide an early practical solution; these were primarily sites where there was flooding of less than 10 properties.

Investigations continue to identify scope for providing flood protection to the remaining properties through flood warnings, communal defences or individual property protection.

Parliamentary Questions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the questions of the hon. Member for the Vale of York of 6 February, Refs 33931 and 33933–33935. [36941]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the replies to her on 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 267–68W and 273–74W.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will calculate the change in CAP sterling payments to UK agriculture if the calculations had been based on ECU not the euro in each of the last three years. [37642]

Mr. Morley: It is not possible to calculate what CAP sterling payments to UK agriculture would have been in each of the last three years had they been based on the ecu rather than the euro. The ecu has not existed in the last three years. Eleven of the 15 currencies from which it was calculated were pegged to the euro throughout that period, and Greece joined subsequently. Since we do not know how those currencies would have fluctuated had the euro not been introduced, we cannot tell what the value of the ecu or any CAP payments linked to it would have been.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the importance of discussion of European Union enlargement to the mid-term review of Agenda 2000 on Common Agricultural Policy reform; and if she will make a statement. [37921]

Mr. Morley: Her Majesty's Government believe that CAP reform is necessary, that preparation of enlargement should proceed in parallel with discussion of reform but that enlargement should not determine that reform.

Appointments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people have been appointed by her to official bodies and NDPBs coming under the aegis of her Department in the last three years; and who they were. [33348]

Mr. Morley: Information about the numbers and remuneration of ministerial appointments to public bodies, including the names of chairpersons, is included in the annual Cabinet Office publication, "Public Bodies". Copies are available in the Libraries of the House and also published on the Cabinet Office's website at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/quango. The next edition of "Public Bodies", which will include information on appointments as at 31 March 2001, will be published shortly.

The names of all members appointed to public bodies are published annually in the departmental report. Departmental reports for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 report is also available on line at www.defra.gov.uk. Publication of the 2002 report for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is expected in late spring 2002.

A number of public bodies, which were the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), transferred to DEFRA in June 2001 as a result of the machinery of Government changes. Names of members appointed to these bodies before the changes were published in the DETR annual departmental reports, available in the Libraries of the House. The DETR reports for 1999, 2000 and April 2001 are also available on line at www.dtlr.gov.uk.

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the appointments made by her Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if she will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33884]

Mr. Morley: The information requested on chairmen of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) will be placed in the Library of the House.

The Commissions to which the Department appoints chairmen are listed among the NDPBs in the table which has been placed in the Library of the House. They are the Meat and Livestock Commission (executive NDPB), the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and the Sustainable Development Commission (advisory NDPBs). The public body, the Commons Commissioners, is an NDPB tribunal.

The agencies to which the Department appoints chairmen are listed among the NDPBs in the aforementioned table. They are the Countryside Agency and the Environment Agency (executive NDPBs).

The Department appointed the chairmen of the following Public Inquiry:

Name

The BSE Inquiry

Chairman

Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers

Term of office

Inquiry announced on 22 December 1997. Report published on 26 October 2000

Salary

No salary/fee from the inquiry.

Information on the number, remit, and membership of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information on the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000 and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. The most recent report: "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews" was issued in October 2001, and covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Meat Imports

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many port health officials were employed to check personal imports of meat and meat products on 1 January *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 1999. [36585]

Mr. Morley: Responsibility for checks on imports of meat and meat products at points of entry are the responsibility of the local or port health authority and it is for the appropriate local authority to deploy staff according to the volume and nature of products imported. Most of the staff also undertake a range of other duties so the number checking imports can vary from day to day. The total number of local authority staff employed at Border Inspection Posts as at November 2001 was 196, comprising 97 Environmental Health Officers, 48 Official

Veterinary Surgeons and 51 support staff. Figures for other years and staff not working at Border Inspection Posts are not available.

HM Customs officers also carry out checks for illegally imported meat and other animal products in passengers' baggage. In addition State Veterinary Service staff are also empowered to deal with illegally imported animal products when they are found.

Fishermen's Association Ltd.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next intends to meet the Fishermen's Association Ltd. regarding its concerns on enforcement of fisheries policy; and if she will make a statement. [36548]

Mr. Morley: We have no current plans to meet the Fishermen's Association Ltd.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that the Government's CHP target is reflected in her Department's aims and objectives. [37705]

Mr. Meacher: The Government target of 10,000 MWe of installed CHP by 2010 will make a significant contribution to DEFRA's objectives to promote sustainable management and prudent use of natural resources domestically and internationally. The CHP target will also contribute to DEFRA's future public service agreement targets.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on how applicants qualify for inclusion in the Government's quality assessment procedure for CHP; and whether this procedure requires periodic re-assessment. [37710]

Mr. Meacher: The Combined Heat and Power Quality Assurance programme (CHPQA) provides a practical, determinate method for assessing CHP schemes. Operators are required to self-assess their scheme, based on actual performance data, which are subject to validation and verification. A CHPQA certificate is then issued detailing the parameters qualifying as "Good Quality" CHP. All CHPQA certificates are valid to 31 December of the year of issue, whereupon applicants must submit a fresh self-assessment based on the previous year's data.

Dioxins

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 598W, on dioxins, what assessment she has made of where the dioxins emitted to air from an incinerator end up and how long they are likely to remain in the environment. [34575]

Mr. Meacher: Low levels of dioxins can be detected in all environmental media and, in the UK, the mean levels are currently approximately:

Air (ambient rural)—10 femtograms per cubic metre

Air (ambient urban)—100 femtograms per cubic metre

Soil (rural)—5 nanograms per kilogram

Soil (urban)—30 nanograms per kilogram

River sediments—20 nanograms per kilogram.

The critical factor for all of these is the concentration in air, which itself is controlled by emissions from primary sources and by complex exchanges/recycling of dioxins with water, soil and vegetation. Dioxin emissions to air from municipal solid waste incinerators contribute less than 1 per cent. of total dioxin emissions, so they currently make only a minor contribution to environmental concentrations.

Dioxins are persistent in the environment and commonly have half-lives in soils and sediments in the order of years, although these will vary between the different compounds and media.

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 748–49W, if there are exceptions to the policy of returning reprocessing wastes arising from contracts with foreign customers back to the country of origin. [36464]

Mr. Meacher: All BNFL's new reprocessing contracts for overseas customers since 1976 have included a provision to return the resulting wastes back to the country of origin. BNFL has proposed that it should be allowed to return an additional amount of high-level waste in substitution for a radiologically equivalent amount of intermediate and low-level waste. This proposal was referred to in the consultation paper "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" which my Department and the devolved Administrations published in September 2001. Comments were invited on the link between waste substitution and the availability of a long-term management strategy. The consultation paper noted that BNFL is permitted to engage in waste substitution for low-level waste for which an environmentally acceptable disposal route exists.

Fish Stocks (Canoeing)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which independent consultants were consulted by the Environment Agency before they reached their conclusions on the impact of canoeing on fish stocks in November 2000. [34955]

Mr. Morley: The research published in autumn 2000 was conducted on behalf of the Environment Agency by APEM Ltd., Enterprise House, Manchester Science Park.

Lloyd Street North, Manchester M15 6SE. The expert panel consulted by APEM on the impact of canoeing on fish stocks comprised:

Dr. Gordon Copp, Fish Biologist, University of Hertfordshire;

Dr. Nick Giles, Environmental consultant specialising in freshwater fisheries, aquatic ecology and conservation;

Professor Paul Giller, Freshwater and community ecologist, Department of Zoology and Animal Ecology, University College Cork, Ireland;

Dr. Anton Ibbetson, Senior Scientific Officer, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology;

Dr. Michael Ladle, Retired Head of the Fisheries Department, Institute of Freshwater Ecology;

Professor Peter Maitland, Independent freshwater ecology consultant, Fish Conservation Centre, Haddington;

Professor Richard Mann, Fish biologist, Visiting Professor at the University of Hertfordshire;

Dr. David Summers, Fisheries Manager, Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board;

Dr. Ian Winfield, Fish ecologist, Institute of Freshwater Ecology, Windermere.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when Environment Agency research document W266 on the impact of canoeing on angling and fish stocks was discussed by *(a)* the Environment Agency board and *(b)* each regional fisheries, ecology and recreation advisory committee. [34962]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency board does not routinely discuss research documents; it did not discuss research document W266.

All committees were apprised of the research and some chose to discuss it. The North East Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee discussed the document in January, April and October 2001 and South West RFERAC in january 2001. The remainder did not discuss it.

Environment Agency (Committees)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the members of each Environment Agency regional fisheries, ecology and recreation advisory committee; and whether they have an *(a)* angling, *(b)* navigation and *(c)* recreational interest. [34961]

Mr. Morley: There is no statutory requirement to have recreation and navigation interests on the RFERA Committees but the agency has determined, with the consent of Ministers, that these should be represented. Relevant details of the membership of each RFERA Committee have been placed in the Library of the House.

There are also generic rules for the balance of interests on these Committees which should have no more than 21 members:

Interest Group	*Members*
Academic/professional	1
Recreation	2
Conservation	1
Cross-membership with other committees	3 or 4
Riparian owners	1 or 2
Navigation	1 (except 4 in Thames and 3 in Anglia)
Fisheries	11

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria were used to appoint chairmen and members of the Environment Agency Regional Fisheries Ecology and Recreation Advisory committees. [34930]

f1**Mr. Morley:** This Department is responsible only for the appointment of the Chair of each of the Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committees in England and is not directly involved in the appointment of the Committee members.

Details of the criteria which DEFRA and the Environment Agency are using for the appointment of the Chairs and members of the RFERACs have been placed in the Library of the House

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if advertisements for the chairs of the Environment Agency regional fisheries, ecology and recreation advisory committees were placed in boating and canoeing magazines; and if she will make a statement. [34928]

Mr. Morley: In accordance with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) guidance, taking into account the role and remit of these posts, proportionality and available resources, advertisements were placed in *The Times*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Anglers Mail*. The advert also appeared on the Department's website.

Rural Affairs

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the views of customers of the Rural Payments Agency are being accommodated in the design of its new business processes. [35284]

Mr. Morley: The views of Rural Payments Agency's (RPA) customers are being accommodated in the design of its new processes through the involvement of an RPA Industry Forum, drawn from key industry representatives, supported by commodity/scheme expert groups. Consultation will continue to take place and develop as the Change Programme progresses. This work is being supported through the delivery of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategy and overarching European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Business Excellence and Balance Scorecard approach within RPA. This will incorporate research, targeting, performance monitoring and benchmarking against customer criteria.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place copies of the OGC Gateway one and two reports on the Rural Payments Agency project in the Library. [35278]

Mr. Morley: The RPA Programme has successfully passed both OGC Gateway one and two with the third Gateway review due in December 2002.

OPG Gateway two commented that:

RPA is currently well positioned to deliver a successful outcome, which reflects:

strong stakeholder engagement and support;

early industry participation; and

effective user involvement.

The OGC Gateway process has been welcomed by the RPA as it has helped RPA management externally to validate the progress that is being made and identify areas for improvement, while benefiting from the experience and learning from previous projects and programmes.

Arrangements have been made to place copies of the OGC Gateway one and two reports in the Library.

Brazilian Mahogany

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many shipments of Brazilian mahogany there have been to the UK since the Brazilian Environment Agency's ban on trade in October 2001; and how many shipments are en route to the UK. [37805]

Mr. Meacher: No shipments of Brazilian mahogany to the UK have taken place since October 2001. We are aware of one shipment anticipated to arrive in the UK during the last week in February.

Brazilian mahogany is listed in CITES Appendix III and as such does not require an import permit. For these species a self-completed report notification form must be presented to HM Customs prior to the arrival of the specimens, together with the relevant export permit(s) or certificate(s) of origin issued by the Management Authority in the exporting country.

Essex Estuaries European Marine Site

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the Habitats Directive on boating activities within the Essex Estuaries European Marine Site. [36702]

Mr. Meacher: No assessment has yet been made. However, English Nature's advice for the Essex Estuaries given under Regulation 33 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994 identifies boat wash and mooring chain abrasion of the sea bed as issues which will require further investigation. In addition, the draft management scheme, established under the 1994 regulations, contains an action point to develop strategic plans for leisure boating development for each estuary system within the site.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in drawing up the Essex Estuaries European Marine Site management scheme; and if she will make a statement. [36701]

Mr. Meacher: The management group for the Essex Estuaries European Marine Site are considering the final draft of the management scheme at the moment. It is hoped to launch the management scheme later this year.

MV Mari Geni

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the options available to the owners of the MV Mari Geni, if they accept decommissioning, for the disposal of the fishing vessel's track record. [37925]

Mr. Morley: Under the 2001 fishing vessel decommissioning scheme for England the fixed quota allocation (FQA) units and track record of decommissioned vessels may be transferred to:

other over 10 metre licensed vessels (whether in the same ownership or not);

over 10 metre licence entitlements (whether held by the owner(s) of the decommissioned vessel or not);

producer organisations.

It is possible to split the FQA units from a single decommissioned vessel and to transfer them to two or more licensed vessels, licence entitlements or producer organisations. However, the track record from a decommissioned vessel cannot be split in this way and must be transferred in its entirety to a single recipient which need not be the same as the recipient of the FQA units.

Meat Exports

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the resumption of exports of United Kingdom-produced meat to *(a)* non-European Union countries and *(b)* European Union countries. [33383]

Mr. Morley: Exports of UK-produced biungulate meat to EU countries have been possible throughout the foot and mouth disease outbreak, provided the meat was produced in accordance with the conditions set out in Commission Decision 2001/172/EC which introduced export controls on animal products in response to the outbreak. Exports to non-EU countries required the agreement of the importing country in addition to the conditions established under Community law. The requirements set out in the above Decision were in practice very demanding and only very few exports took place under those provisions.

On 7 June 2001, Community restrictions on exports of meat from Northern Ireland were lifted. Thereafter meat produced in Northern Ireland could be exported to other EU Member States without restriction.

Progressively exports from areas of Great Britain recommenced as counties met the criteria for classification as "FMD free" as required by the Decision.

The UK has now been recognised as FMD free by both the EU and the Office International des Epizooties, the international animal health organisation. On 5 February the European Commission's Standing Veterinary Committee agreed to lift all trade restrictions on the UK related to the FMD outbreak, including the need for export certification. As soon as this change to Community law has been formally adopted, we will reflect it in UK domestic law. This should be very soon. Trade in biungulate meat to EU countries can then resume under pre-FMD conditions. At that point trade with non-EU countries will solely take place on the basis of those countries' own important requirements. The Chief Veterinary Officer has written to non-EU countries informing them of the change to our official status and asking them to remove any conditions or restrictions that they applied because of our FMD outbreak.

Specific restrictions remain in place in respect of exports of beef because of BSE.

Dolphins

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will establish an investigation into a possible connection between the sonar signals sent out by Royal Naval vessels and the increasing number of dolphins found in UK coastal waters. [37926]

Mr. Morley: I have no knowledge of any research that indicates that sonar signals from Royal Naval vessels should increase the number of dolphins occurring in UK coastal waters. Currently, neither the Department nor the Ministry of Defence plan to carry out such an investigation.

Goats (Scrapie)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the status of goats with regard to the national scrapie plan; how many goats have been reported to the authorities as having contracted scrapie in each year since 1993; and what assessment she has made of the significance of the incidence of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy in the national goat herd. [37923]

Mr. Morley: Goats are known to be liable to scrapie infection. They do not possess genotypes which would allow breeding for resistance to scrapie, and it would not be appropriate to broaden the scope of the national scrapie plan to include goats as well as sheep.

Since the disease became notifiable in 1993, eight cases of scrapie have been confirmed in goats in Great Britain of which three were confirmed in 1993, one each in 1994 and 1995 and three in 1996.

In recognition of the limited data available on the true incidence of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in sheep and goats, a testing programme was introduced this year across the European Union. As part of an expanded programme coming into effect in April, the United Kingdom will be testing 66,000 sheep and goats.

Rio+10 Conference

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to involve *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* hon. Members in the (i) preparations for and (ii) attendance at Rio+10 Conference in Johannesburg. [36502]

Mr. Meacher: A dedicated team within DEFRA has been established to co-ordinate domestic preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). They are working closely with colleagues from other Government Departments to raise awareness of the summit across civil society, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as other organisations and the public more generally. We are working with NGOs by: supporting key umbrella organisations such as UNED-UK and the Environment and Development Group of the BOND Network (British Overseas NGOs for Development) working in partnership with NGOs, for example WWF on the "Our World Project"; including NGOs in the official UK delegation to the UN preparatory meetings; and establishing a wide stakeholder group to share information on preparations for WSSD.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all MPs in January informing them of the summit and suggesting how they might get involved. The Environmental Audit Committee are also conducting an inquiry into the UK preparations for the summit, at which the Secretary of State will give evidence on 20 March.

The decision on who will be part of the UK delegation for the summit will rest with the Prime Minister and no decisions have yet been made. But as with previous events of this type we will want a balance of interests represented.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Identity Cards

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what work is being undertaken to study the introduction of identity cards; when the work is likely to be completed; if it will be published; and if he will make a statement. [32627]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) on the entitlement card on 5 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 872W.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the publications issued by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34194]

Mr. Leslie: This information is not held centrally, nor in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on publications issued by my Department since May 1997 to December 2000 has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

I have asked my officials to collate the information on publications issued by my Department from 1 December 2000 to 31 January 2002. I will write to the hon. Member with this information as soon as practically possible, and place a copy of this information in the Libraries of the House.

Information on the circulation and purpose of each publication is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34394]

Mr. Leslie: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Task Forces

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what mechanisms have been set in place to enhance the openness of task forces; and what requirements there are for the publication of *(a)* details of meetings, *(b)* papers produced for meetings and *(c)* remuneration for task force members. [36465]

Mr. Leslie: Individual Ministers are responsible for agreeing the programme of work of the task forces for which they are responsible; that would include whether they publish details of their meetings or papers produced.

The Cabinet Office has on a regular basis published information on the number, remit and membership of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews since 1997. The most recent report covering 2000–01 was published in October 2001. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

The 2000–01 report sets out details of the full title; the date established; the date wound up (if appropriate); number of members and information on the sectors they are drawn; the name and background of the chair; and details of reporting arrangements (including any reports published).

Task force members who are not civil servants do not generally receive remuneration for their work, but they are compensated for travel and subsistence ("out of pocket expenses").

Central Office of Information

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list (1) the campaigns managed by the Central Office of Information in the last 12 months; and what the *(a)* costs and *(b)* advertising agencies that received contracts for each campaign were; [37962]

(2) the marketing campaigns undertaken in the last 12 months by the Central Office of Information, broken down by the Government Departments that were responsible for initiating the campaigns. [37961]

Mr. Leslie: I have placed copies of the lists in the Library of the House.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the publicity campaigns undertaken by the Central Office of Information in each year since 1997, broken down by whether they were carried out through *(a)* television adverts, *(b)* newspaper adverts, *(c)* internet advertising, *(d)* private polling and *(e)* focus groups. [37957]

Mr. Leslie: The information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what criteria advertising contracts are awarded to external agencies through the Central Office of Information; and what changes to the criteria are planned. [37958]

Mr. Leslie: Contracts are awarded following a competition between suitable companies. Companies are selected following a rigorous analysis of past performance and the independent Advisory Committee on Advertising also provides guidance on the selection of suitable agencies.

No changes to the criteria are planned following the changes in responsibilities.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research is undertaken by the Central Office of Information to monitor the effectiveness of Government marketing communications; and what the findings were for the advertising campaigns carried out on behalf of the Government in the last 12 months. [37960]

Mr. Leslie: A wide range of research techniques are used to monitor effectiveness.

All research through COI is commissioned through independent research specialists.

Findings on advertising campaigns can be released only by the commissioning department and not by COI.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the funding of the Central Office of Information was in each year since 1997. [37963]

Mr. Leslie: Central Office of Information (COI) is funded in two ways. The great majority of its expenditure is recovered as a trading fund by recharging costs incurred to its clients who are all publicly funded bodies. A small element of funding is also received as central vote funding under class xvii vote 4.

Both amounts can be seen in the annual report and accounts published by COI and laid before Parliament each year. The vote funding is shown in an extract of the appropriation account and the funding from charges is represented by the income shown in the income and expenditure account.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what basis it was decided that the Chief Executive of the Central Office of Information should report directly to the Prime Minister's Director of Communications; and whether the Central Office of Information will continue to report to Cabinet Office Ministers. [37965]

Mr. Leslie: The new role of the Chief Executive of the Central Office of Information (COI) as the Government's chief adviser on marketing communications and information campaigns was, as I reported to the House on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 862W, a recommendation from a quinquennial review of the COI which was carried out by the Cabinet Office. The Chief Executive remains fully accountable to Cabinet Office Ministers for the work of the Central Office of Information, and they are accountable to Parliament. Individual Departments remain responsible for individual campaigns.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

National Rail Summit

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W, on the National Rail Summit, if he will list the commitments agreed to by the industry in 1999 and place in the Library the related documentation; if he will place in the Library a copy of the summary of progress against the 1999 commitments produced for the 2000 Summit; and if he will state what further reviews of progress *(a)* have taken place and *(b)* are planned to take place and place any copies of related documentation in the Library. [33839]

Mr. Jamieson: Copies of the relevant press notices have been placed in the Library. The SRA reviews the delivery of train operators' franchise commitments and reports on them in its annual report—copies of which are available in the Library.

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contracts his Department has had since 1997 with *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture for (i) accountancy, (ii) audit and (iii) consultancy work; and what staff have been seconded (A) to his Department from and (B) from his Department to these firms. [32423]

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total cost to his Department has been of services provided by *(a)* Andersen and *(b)* Accenture, Andersen Consulting for (i) accountancy services, (ii) consultancy work and (iii) other work in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [32106]

Dr. Whitehead: Individual Government Departments are responsible for taking decisions on the goods and services they acquire, whether through the private finance initiative (PFI) or other procurement routes, taking into account the Government's policy of seeking value for money for the taxpayer. The public sector as a whole has signed hundreds of contracts, covering the delivery of a range of services.

For details of contracts with Andersen, I refer to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1097W, and 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 829W. The cost to date on all contracts is £402,157.78.

Central Railways

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to publish the SRA report on Central Railways. [34880]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The SRA's view on Central Railway's proposals is currently being considered by Ministers.

Concessionary Travel

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners benefiting from concessionary bus fare schemes in London in the last two years. [37517]

Ms Keeble: I have been informed by the Association of Local Government that the number of pensioners benefiting from concessionary bus fare schemes in London in the last two years is as follows:

September 1998 to September 1999—879,000

September 1999 to September 2000—866,000.

Road Building (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the major road-building programmes for the Greater London area for which his Department is responsible. [37264]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the establishment of the Greater London Authority in July 2000, the only roads in the Greater London area for which the Secretary of State is responsible are the M1, M4 and M11. There are no plans for major building programmes on any of these roads in the area.

Housing

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for each of the past three years the investment by each English housing authority; and how much of this expenditure was from *(a)* central and *(b)* local government sources. [36621]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has for each London borough over the past year of *(a)* local authority houses sold under right to buy, *(b)* the number built by registered social landlords for rent, *(c)* the number built by registered social landlords for part rent/purchase and *(d)* the number built by the private sector for sale. [36619]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The available information is as follows.

Right to Buy sales and housebuilding completions, London: 2000–01

	Local authority dwellings sold under RTB[1] in 2000–01		Number of housebuilding completions during 2001 by: Registered social landlords[2] for:		Private enterprise[3]	
	Number	Months reported	Rent	Sale	Number	Months reported
Barking and Dagenham	527	9	22	0	185	9
Barnet	252	12	157	14	334	12
Bexley	0	12	28	0	97	11
Brent	156	9	161	12	n/a	0
Bromley	0	12	59	15	n/a	0
Camden	760	12	22	0	283	12
City of London	50	12	0	0	73	12

Right to Buy sales and housebuilding completions, London: 2000–01

	Local authority dwellings sold under RTB[1] in 2000–01		*Number of housebuilding completions during 2001 by: Registered social landlords[2] for:*		*Private enterprise[3]*	
	Number	*Months reported*	*Rent*	*Sale*	*Number*	*Months reported*
Croydon	249	12	81	12	135	12
Ealing	330	12	36	8	n/a	0
Enfield	216	12	151	43	1,911	12
Greenwich	518	12	139	0	910	12
Hackney	764	12	165	98	668	10
Hammersmith and Fulham	283	9	21	2	25	11
Haringey	239	6	110	4	51	12
Harrow	88	12	30	7	79	12
Havering	273	12	114	0	238	12
Hillingdon	231	12	102	19	199	11
Hounslow	283	12	30	12	250	10
Islington	n/a	0	111	19	196	12
Kensington and Chelsea	108	12	11	2	71	12
Kingston upon Thames	51	12	83	0	165	12
Lambeth	669	9	144	32	n/a	0
Lewisham	n/a	0	118	25	19	12
Merton	164	9	42	0	401	12
Newham	272	6	62	36	498	11
Redbridge	129	12	122	0	184	12
Richmond upon Thames	33	6	0	0	147	12
Southwark	809	12	130	50	343	7
Sutton	146	12	177	36	120	12
Tower Hamlets	1,074	12	87	55	1,271	12
Waltham Forest	244	12	33	15	126	12
Wandsworth	323	12	40	21	252	12
Westminster	440	12	296	79	197	12

Note:

1. Data shown are for April 2000 to March 2001, and include a small number of Rent to Mortgage sales.
2. RSL newbuild includes "off the shelf" purchases of properties built by private developers. RSL completions are recorded when the final tranche payment for the scheme is made.
3. Private enterprise completions do not distinguish properties which may be intended for rental.

Sources:

DTLR P1(B) quarterly and P2 (monthly) housing activity returns

Housing Corporation ADP completion statistics

Railways

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 589W, on railway policy, if he will list the specific responsibilities of staff working in the *(a)* Rail Delivery Directorate and *(b)* Railways Restructuring Directorate; and how many staff work in each directorate. [37566]

Mr. Jamieson: There are now 51 people working in the Rail Delivery Directorate and 32 people in the Railways Restructuring Directorate. It is neither customary nor practicable to publish individual civil servants' job descriptions.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what proportion of the £26 billion programme of public sector support for sustaining the rail network and delivery of existing commitments, as referred to on page 25 of the Strategic Rail Authority Strategic Plan published on 14 January is *(a)* public investment, *(b)* public resource expenditure and *(c)* revenue support for private investment, subdivided for each year of the 10-Year Plan 2001–02 to 2011–12; [37522]

(2) what proportion of the public sector funding used to lever in the new commitments, as referred to on page 25 of the Strategic Rail Authority Strategic Plan published on 14 January, is *(a)* public investment, *(b)* public resource expenditure and *(c)* revenue support for private investment for each year of the 10-Year Plan 2001–02 to 2011–12. [37525]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on Wednesday 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 871–72W, and for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) on Tuesday 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 177–178W, for the classification of total public sector funding.

No classification has been made for the figures published in the SRA strategic plan. While some expenditure can be generally classified—such as capital expenditure on CTRL and resource expenditure through franchise support payments—funding is allocated by purpose (i.e. existing or enhanced railway) rather than public expenditure classification.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money has been spent on the bid costs of the company limited by guarantee team and their advisers; and what the estimated monthly budget going forward is. [37541]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is funding the bid costs of the CLG team and their advisers. Expenditure will depend on the claims submitted to the SRA.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the underspend in his Department for each year since 1997–98 for *(a)* total expenditure and *(b)* rail expenditure in each case providing details of the (i) amount and (ii) financial year to which any underspend has been re-allocated. [37223]

Dr. Whitehead: Provisional outturn against cash limits and against cash departmental expenditure limits, which replaced cash limits from 1 April 1999, is published in the relevant editions of the Public Expenditure Provisional Outturn White Paper. Amounts taken up under end year flexibility arrangements are announced in written answers preceding supplementary estimates and at the end of each financial year. It is not possible to provide separate figures in respect of rail expenditure on a comparable basis.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the figures originally forecast for *(a)* passenger volumes, *(b)* revenue raised and *(c)* frequency of trains per hour on the Jubilee Line for each financial year since 1997–98. [37253]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for London Underground Ltd., who have provided the following information, which indicates forecast Jubilee line passenger volumes (by the number of journeys), revenues (in the form of cash receipts) and services (as trains per peak hour):

A forecast of journeys is available only for the opening year of the Jubilee Line Extension: 1999–2000—119 M journeys.

Only forecast receipts from cash sales at underground ticket offices on the Jubilee Line are shown, rather than total revenue. This is because data on receipts are available by line. (Total revenue would include apportionment of travelcard income between different operators—including buses, national rail etc.—but these figures are available only at network level.)

Forecast receipts

	£ million
1997–98	47.3
1998–99	51.0
1999–2000[1]	69.5
2000–01	[2]106.8

[1] Jubilee Line Extension fully open November 1999

[2] Forecast

Forecast service levels were altered as the project evolved to reflect changes to the signalling system proposed for use on the extension. The final forecast was in line with the service actually delivered. Service levels are expressed as trains per hour (tph) on the busiest section of line at peak hours at year end. The busiest section for the first two years quoted was Charing Cross-Willesden Green and, thereafter, North Greenwich-Willesden Green. The latter two years' data are for peak direction as well as peak hour services:

	Tph
1997–98	20
1998–99	20
1999–2000	24
2000–01	24

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the *(a)* passenger volumes of, *(b)* revenues of and *(c)* services on the Jubilee Line for each financial year since 1997–98. [37246]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for London Underground Ltd., who have provided the following information, which sets out Jubilee Line passenger volumes (by the number of journeys actually made), revenues (in the form of cash receipts) and services (as trains per peak hour):

Passenger journeys

	Million
1997–98	62
1998–99	65
1999–2000[1]	92
2000–01	139

[1] Jubilee Line Extension fully open November 1999

Only receipts from actual cash sales at underground ticket offices on the Jubilee Line are shown in the table, rather than total revenue. This is because data on receipts are available by line. (Total revenue would include apportionment of travelcard income between different operators—bus, national rail etc.—but these figures are available only at network level.)

Receipts

	£ million
1997–98	47.4
1998–99	51.3
1999–2000[1]	70.6
2000–01	107.5

[1] Jubilee Line Extension fully open November 1999

Service levels are expressed as trains per hour (tph) on the busiest section of line at peak hours at year end. The busiest section for the first two years quoted was Charing Cross-Willesden Green and, thereafter, North Greenwich-Willesden Green. The latter two years data are for peak direction as well as peak hour services:

Service levels

	tph
1997–98	20
1998–99	20
1999–2000[1]	24
2000–01	24

[1] Jubilee Line Extension fully open November 1999

Rail Services (South-west)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he has taken to persuade the Strategic Rail Authority to provide for a three hour journey time from London to Plymouth in its 10-year plan. [37294]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is currently considering how journey times from London to the south-west could be improved.

London Underground

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the loss of revenue because of fare evasion on London underground in each of the last 10 years. [37244]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground (LU) who have provided the following information.

Estimated loss of revenue due to fare evasion on London underground

Year	*Estimated loss of revenue (percentage)*	*Total revenue for the year (£ million, cash)*	*Estimated loss of revenue (£ million, cash)*
1992	2.37	703	16.7
1993	2.28	749	17.1
1994	1.19	824	9.8
1995	1.44	849	12.2
1996	1.50	864	13.0
1997	2.00	945	18.9
1998	2.30	993	22.8
1999	2.41	1,059	25.5
2000	2.37	1,131	26.8
2001	2.54	1,150	29.2

LU have identified particular revenue loss hotspots, and these areas have been targeted in liaison with the British Transport Police (BTP) and where appropriate the train operating companies. They are also engaged in initiatives with the BTP to mitigate the effects of ticket touting, for example, by making announcements to customers to ask them not to give their tickets to touts and asking them to report touts to LU staff. Steps have been taken to make ticket purchase far simpler, by introducing phone and internet ticketing facilities and the installation of "Queuebuster" ticket machines at the busiest stations. The development of smartcard technology, being introduced under the Prestige project, should help to make fare evasion more difficult in the future.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 571W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37887]

Dr. Whitehead: The cost of refurbishment works in ministerial accommodation since May 1997 is as follows:

Year	£ *Approximate cost (exclusive of VAT)*
1997–98	138,000
1998–99	12,300
1999–2000	6,200
2000–01	2,100

Fire Authority Funding

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government will make a decision on funding to fire authorities in England and Wales for the additional costs of emergency planning following the events of 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [37886]

Dr. Whitehead: We are providing £53 million funding for the fire service to give further protection to the public and emergency services in the event of a major chemical, biological or radiological attack. The funding would provide new equipment, including decontamination facilities for members of the public and personal protective equipment for firefighters.

In view of the heightened levels of threat following the events of 11 September, we want to ensure that the fire service has the necessary equipment to protect the public and the emergency services should an attack occur. Detailed contingency plans are already in place and responses to a range of different threats, including chemical, biological and radiological, are tested regularly in exercises. This new equipment will further increase the level of preparedness.

Political Parties and Elections

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals his Department has to introduce legislation relating to the regulation of *(a)* political parties and *(b)* elections in the next 12 months. [37851]

Dr. Whitehead: When parliamentary time permits, we intend to introduce legislation to adjust the numbers of UK MEPs consequent upon enlargement of the European Union and to enfranchise Gibraltar for the European parliamentary elections. Current plans for secondary legislation this session include regulations about the sale of the electoral register under section 9 of the Representation of the People Act 2000 and regulations to re-commence section 143 of, and paragraph 14 of Schedule 18 to, the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 relating to election publications.

Railtrack

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been undertaken by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the HSE of (i) the work undertaken by Global Crossing within the railway industry, (ii) the safety critical functions of Global Crossing within the railway industry, (iii) the nature of the contract between Global Crossing and Railtrack and (iv) progress towards meeting a timetable for the implementation of safety improvement in the railway industry by Global Crossing. [34977]

Mr. Jamieson: Racal Telecom (now Global Crossing) have a contractual arrangement with Railtrack, which is a commercial matter between the companies. There are no agreements between Racal Telcom/Global Crossing and either the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or my Department. Global Crossing supplies telecom and associated services to the British rail industry. Railtrack as infrastructure manager retains overall responsibility for safety. HSE advise that there have been no prosecutions against Racal Telecom or Global Crossing since 1 April

1999, or enforcement notices since 1 April 2001. HSE data from before this date are not available without incurring disproportionate cost.

Level Crossing, East Tilbury

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will request the appropriate safety agencies to investigate the frequency of failures to the level crossing gates at East Tilbury on the LTS line, and the consequent ability of vehicles of the emergency services to gain access to East Tilbury; and if he will make a statement. [36852]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Railway Inspectorate is aware of the recent problems experienced with equipment at the East Tilbury Level Crossing. The HSE advise that technicians have always arrived on site immediately to rectify these problems and that provision has been made for the emergency services to be able to communicate directly with Railtrack regarding any emergency issues.

M25

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy not to widen the M25 between junctions 12 and 15 within the vicinity of terminal 5. [36853]

Mr. Jamieson: The decision to widen the M25 between Junctions 12 and 15 was made as part of the Roads Review announced in July 1998. This section of road was already severely congested and widening within the existing motorway boundary was considered to be and remains the most appropriate solution. The more recent decision to approve the construction of Terminal 5 at Heathrow Airport will necessitate the construction of a new access road (T5 Spur Road) from T5 to the M25 between Junctions 14 and 15. Both sets of improvements can now be designed and constructed at the same time to limit the delays during construction.

Electronic Voting

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the proportion of the population in each 10-year age band that has sufficient *(a)* access to equipment and *(b)* training to be able to vote from home this year. [38042]

Dr. Whitehead: We have given approval to 31 local authorities to run electoral modernisation pilot schemes in this May's local and mayoral elections. We have been careful to ensure that all sectors of the electorate—young and old, and those with physical disabilities including the visually impaired—are not disadvantaged by the new arrangements. Where authorities pilot internet or other online voting techniques, these will be run alongside traditional methods of voting so that a person can choose to vote at the polling station or by postal vote on demand.

We will be asking authorities piloting all postal ballots to provide for those visually impaired electors who wish to use the voting device allowing them to vote in secret. Pilot authorities are working closely with disability groups and others in the run-up to the elections, and will provide information and advice on how the different ways of voting work. Following these elections, the Electoral Commission will carry out an extensive evaluation of the pilot programme which will provide more information on specific voting patterns and how we go about establishing modern voting methods.

Deeside Park Junction Study

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has considered the recommendations of the North West Regional Assembly following completion of the A550/A5117 Deeside Park Junction Study; and if he will make a statement. [39373]

Mr. Spellar: I have today written to the Leader of the North West Regional Assembly and a copy of this letter has been placed in the House of Commons Library, together with a copy of the Department's Press Notice.

The Deeside Park Junction Study was commissioned by the Government as part of their 10-year Plan for Transport. The study looked at ways to improve safety and congestion on this strategic section of route between the M56 and the Welsh Border.

In my letter to the Assembly I outline my support for the recommendations made by the study. I am pleased to say that the scheme for on line improvements to the route, which includes the grade separation of the three junctions, is to be added to the Targeted Programme of Improvements with immediate effect. I am also encouraging the local authorities to take forward the other study recommendations.

This is good news for motorists in Deeside and North Wales and the improvements will reduce not only congestion and delays but also accidents. This route serves the expanding Deeside Industrial Park and is the main route into North Wales and the Port of Holyhead and these improvements will help the further economic regeneration of the region.

Decontamination Facilities

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the provision of funding for mass decontamination facilities. [39514]

Dr. Whitehead: We are providing £53 million funding for the fire service to give further protection to the public and emergency services in the event of a major chemical, biological or radiological attack. The funding would provide new equipment, including decontamination facilities for members of the public and personal protective equipment for firefighters.

In view of the heightened levels of threat following the events of 11 September, we want to ensure that the fire service has the necessary equipment to protect the public and the emergency services should an attack occur. Detailed contingency plans are already in place and responses to a range of different threats, including chemical, biological and radiological, are tested regularly in exercises. This new equipment will further increase the level of preparedness.

Strategic Employment Sites (North-East)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what further changes he is intending to make to draft regional planning guidance for the North East about the two proposed strategic employment sites in the broad location of north Sunderland and west of Stockton. [39607]

Ms Keeble: Over 1,000 comments have been received in response to the proposed changes to draft Regional Planning Guidance for the North East (RPG1) which were published in April 2001. In his letter to the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) announcing the publication of the proposed changes, my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Housing and Planning specifically invited views on the proposal to reduce the number of new greenfield strategic employment sites from four to one.

This proposal raised significant objections from the Regional Planning Body, the local authorities, and the Regional Development Agency (One NorthEast). In the light of all the comments received we are proposing to reinstate the proposal for a strategic employment site in the broad location of North of Nissan, Sunderland. There will be strict control of the development of the site which would be promoted as a high quality site to assist in the creation of new business clusters, rather than as originally envisaged to provide a long term reserve solely for large single users. The re-instatement of the site is on the basis that ANEC will progress the proposed employment land review, and re-allocate or de-allocate unsustainable sites as part of the early review to be undertaken in 2002–03.

To ensure appropriate development of the site it is proposed that after the precise location of the site has been defined a development brief be prepared. A joint brief may be needed given that the area of search straddles three local planning authorities: Sunderland City Council, Gateshead Council and South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council. This should safeguard the site for prestige development of national or regional significance, and ensure that public transport accessibility is maximised. The site boundaries will need to be defined in the relevant unitary development plans.

Whilst the principle of the need for an additional strategic employment site in the Tees Valley is accepted, further work is required to identify more precisely where this should be in the broad area West of Stockton. This proposal should be carried forward as part of the early review of RPG1 in 2002–03.

Comments on the proposed further change are being invited over a twelve week period. These will be considered, along with all the representations already received, before RPG1 is finalised later in the year.

Departmental Resignations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if payments in excess of salary were *(a)* owing to and *(b)* negotiated with (i) Jo Moore and (ii) Martin Sixsmith following their resignations. [38326]

Mr. Byers: Jo Moore will be paid in accordance with her contract. Details are a confidential matter between the individuals and the Department.

With regard to Martin Sixsmith, I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by Sir Richard Mottram on 25 February, a copy of which is available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he was first informed of the decisions of *(a)* Jo Moore and *(b)* Martin Sixsmith to resign; and by whom. [38325]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement I made on Tuesday 26 February to this House and that of Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my Department, made on Monday 25 February, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the organisations which were subsumed into the South West Regional Development Agency. [37295]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The five organisations which either were subsumed into the RDA or from which the RDA took staff were:

Rural Development Commission (RDC)
English Partnerships
Devon and Cornwall Development International (DCDI)
West of England Development Agency (WEDA)
Government Office for the South West.

The RDA was established on 1 April 1999. WEDA and DCDI ceased to exist operationally from that date; both these organisations and the RDC were wound up by April 2000.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment the Government made of *(a)* the role of, *(b)* the effectiveness of and *(c)* the projects undertaken by the regional development agencies; how often these reviews take place; and if he will make a statement. [37260]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

We regularly assess the role and effectiveness of the regional development agencies. Under the Single Programme Budget arrangements, which take effect on 1 April 2002, the Government will be reviewing annually RDAs' effectiveness in achieving progress towards the realisation of their Regional Economic Strategies, and in contributing towards the regional achievement of the national targets the Government have set.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the costs that have been incurred by each individual regional development agency in each year since their establishment. [37258]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

Since their inception the RDAs have been given an annual administration budget to cover the running costs of each agency. The budgets are as follows.

Administration Budget (running costs)

£000

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
One North East	8,791	10,513	12,853
North West Development Agency	11,837	13,876	14,956
Yorkshire Forward	8,659	8,284	9,989
East Midlands Development Agency	5,013	7,377	7,528
Advantage West Midlands	7,421	8,352	8,793
East of England Development Agency	4,570	4,849	5,836
South East Development Agency	6,416	6,343	7,143
South West Development Agency	7,086	8,380	9,099
London Development Agency	n/a	6,009	9,470
Total	59,793	73,983	85,667

Airport Security

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what health and safety assessments have taken place on the eye scanning techniques on trial at Heathrow Airport. [36720]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

The iris recognition trial at Heathrow is being run in conjunction with the United Kingdom (UK) Immigration Service, British Airports Authority, British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and the technology supplier EyeTicket Corporation of the United States of America. All organisations are members of the Simplifying Passenger Travel Interest Group whose focus is on streamlining the various processes involved in a passenger's air journey. Participants are selected airline frequent flyer visitors to the United Kingdom approved by the Immigration Service for entry into the voluntary scheme.

The technology used in this trial involves a camera which takes a black and white picture of a passenger's eye to analyse the iris pattern. This is then recorded as a digital code on a secure database. Once registered, passengers glance into a separate camera at an iris recognition station and have their identity verified before being granted automated entry to the United Kingdom.

Eyeticket advise that the cameras in the trial are video cameras. No lasers or any other potentially harmful light sources are used. The optical subsystem manufacture has certified that the camera systems and illumination are in compliance with the latest worldwide standards for eye safety.

Health and Safety Officers from the Immigration Service and British Airport Authority (BAA) have carried out environmental risk assessments within the area where the iris registration and recognition systems are located. Both have reported that the risk to staff and passengers posed by the presence of the systems is insignificant.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police SSAs

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the standard spending assessment per head of population in each police authority area in England and Wales and the average figure for these authorities. [28664]

Mr. Denham: The Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for each police authority in England and Wales per head of population in 2001–02 and 2002–03 is given in the table.

The average SSA per head for 2001–02 is £147.63 and for 2002–03 is £147.92

£

Police force	*SSA per head 2001–02*	*SSA per head 2002–03*
Avon and Somerset	120.85	120.89
Bedfordshire	120.92	121.34
Cambridgeshire	112.15	111.70
Cheshire	120.70	121.30
City of London	9,560.60	9,324.58
Cleveland	159.66	160.94
Cumbria	131.77	133.44
Derbyshire	114.02	115.90
Devon and Cornwall	119.69	119.36
Dorset	108.32	108.18
Durham	144.18	145.16
Dyfed Powys	117.22	118.10
Essex	114.54	113.53
Gloucestershire	119.21	119.26
Greater Manchester	156.96	157.57
Gwent	134.94	136.75
Hampshire	120.11	121.20
Hertfordshire	117.79	117.29
Humberside	137.35	137.46
Kent	128.73	128.25
Lancashire	135.37	136.41
Leicestershire	118.49	118.87
Lincolnshire	109.15	108.51
Merseyside	179.97	180.34
Metropolitan police	250.42	249.92
Norfolk	114.85	115.29
North Wales	125.06	124.36
North Yorkshire	112.38	111.80
Northamptonshire	114.17	113.55
Northumbria	160.46	160.92
Nottinghamshire	131.79	132.22
South Wales	141.76	143.85
South Yorkshire	141.85	141.91
Staffordshire	114.68	115.43
Suffolk	111.15	110.71
Surrey	102.95	101.96
Sussex	119.99	120.01
Thames Valley	115.83	115.37
Warwickshire	112.27	111.15
West Mercia	109.00	108.44
West Midlands	155.99	157.59
West Yorkshire	146.85	147.32
Wiltshire	113.78	112.86
England and Wales	147.63	147.92

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will reply to the letter of 29 November 2001 from the hon. Member for Aylesbury about case reference ISB/100049. [29371]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The hon. Member's letter was transferred to the Joint Entry Clearance Unit (JECU) on 30 January 2002, and I understand that their officials will reply to him shortly. I apologise for the delay in transferring the hon. Member's correspondence.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter of 23 October 2001 from the hon. Member for Torbay, regarding Mr. Elias Masif Bousaley of Torquay and his visa renewal application. [36755]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to the hon. Member on 27 February 2002. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Dorset

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the financial resources and initiatives sponsored by his Department in the last 12 months for Dorset, which are additional to the Government SSA grants. [29892]

Angela Eagle: Following is a list of financial resources and initiatives sponsored by the Home Department in Dorset.

Details relate to the period 1 February 2001 to 31 January 2002 unless otherwise stated.

Initiative	*Resources (£)*
Communities Against Drugs	470,800
Active Community Grant Bournemouth Council for voluntary service	31,500
Mentoring Fund Grant	12,250
Unaccompanied asylum seeking children	71,101
Adult and family asylum seekers grant	1,605,364
Drug Action Teams	113,964
Arrest Referral Scheme	56,476
Youth Offending Schemes	483,431
Partnership Development Fund	89,556
Reducing Burglary Initiative[1]	85,149
Closed Circuit Television[1]	2,512,936
Capital Modernisation Fund—security for small retailers	6,477

[1] The figures shown represent the amount that has been allocated to projects in Dorset for the full term of the Crime Reduction Programme (financial years 1999–2000 to 2002–03). Project management arrangements mean that it is not possible to confirm actual payments made in the specific time frame.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30069]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office's estimate of the annual cost and total value of empty properties on its estate and the estates of its agencies and non-departmental public bodies for each of the financial years requested is as follows:

£000

	Total cost	*Total value*
1997–98	254	4,480
1998–99	609	9,953
1999–2000	6,634	13,723
2000–01	8,594	13,323

These figures include costs of properties vacated for the purposes of refurbishment. Cost information on empty homes is not kept and a meaningful estimate of the figures could be made only at disproportionate cost. Progress in reducing the number of empty homes is reported annually in the Greening Government annual reports.

The largest single currently vacant property is No 2 Marsham street, London SW1 which is due to be redeveloped by means of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Annual costs include rent, rates, utilities and security. The figures relating to the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 take account of the fact that Lunar House, Croydon was also vacant pending refurbishment.The increase in the total estimated value of empty properties for years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is largely accounted for by the acquisition of property for the purposes of secure training centres by the Youth Justice Board and detention centres by the Immigration Nationality Directorate.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he *(a)* received a notice of appeal in respect of case IMM/G6193 and *(b)* referred the appeal to the Independent Appellate Authority. [32308]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The appeal was received in the Home Office on 7 February 2002 and received by the Immigration Appellate Authority on 8 February 2002.

Fair Trade

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33542]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office to coincide with Fair Trade Fortnight will be publishing an article on fair trade in the next edition of "Purchasing Matters", an internal periodical for all procurement staff. In the near future the Home Office will be holding a purchasing symposium on the issue of fair trade.

The Department for International Development will be supporting the Fairtrade Foundation over the next three years by providing £120,000 in its effort to target new groups through the Fair Trade Fortnight campaigns. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development will be attending the campaign launch on 4 March 2002.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34158]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The available information relates to the cost of accountancy services from external providers in support of the following particular projects.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) in the core Home Office	0	0	75,177	269,701
Prison Service RAB Training and Development	0	0	67,920	1,165
Accounting advice on treatment of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts	32,205	10,711	0	0
Assistance with the Prison Service Quantum project	0	53,000	0	0
Forensic Science Service Audit Fees	55,000	55,000	55,000	58,000
Total	87,205	118,711	198,097	328,867

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has sought from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the possible locations of the proposed asylum accommodation centres and their proximity to foot and mouth disease burial sites. [34480]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), on 5 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 897W.

Local Language Groups (Lincolnshire)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the proportion of the population of *(a)* North Lincolnshire and *(b)* North-east Lincolnshire who speak (i) Arabic, (ii) Hindi, (iii) Urdu, (iv) Farsi/Dari and (v) Pashtu. [34578]

Angela Eagle: I assume my hon. Friend's question relates to the potential site for an asylum seeker accommodation centre that has been identified in her constituency. Given the broad range of facilities which will be provided within the accommodation centres and the self-contained nature of the centres, there is not the same need to inquire into local language groups that existed with dispersal to cluster regions as the risk of asylum seekers becoming isolated is greatly reduced.

Information exists on the ethnic make-up of North Lincolnshire and North-east Lincolnshire from the last available census. It has been used previously to obtain information on ethnic communities within cluster areas and potential cluster areas within the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) regions.

Police Precept

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the cost of each police force was met by precept on local authorities in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [34774]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The figures are set out in the table.

Proportion of net funding requirement met from council tax

	1997–98	*2001–02*
Avon and Somerset	16.2	19.6
Bedfordshire	16.3	18.8
Cambridgeshire	17.2	19.6
Cheshire	17.1	18.6
Cleveland	11.3	12.1
Cumbria	15.6	21.2
Derbyshire	16.0	19.7
Devon and Cornwall	16.9	17.9
Dorset	23.8	29.1
Durham	12.3	11.4
Dyfed-Powys	16.2	25.5
Essex	18.9	22.1
Gloucestershire	17.0	23.1
GMP	11.4	12.0
Gwent	13.4	19.1
Hampshire	17.8	17.5
Hertfordshire	19.3	23.6
Humberside	12.8	17.2
Kent	16.9	16.7
Lancashire	13.6	15.0
Leicestershire	15.0	18.7
Lincolnshire	20.8	24.8
Merseyside	11.7	13.5
MPS	9.3	15.9
Norfolk	17.1	22.4
North Wales	15.7	22.4
North Yorkshire	18.4	20.1
Northamptonshire	21.4	22.1
Northumbria	11.2	10.2
Nottinghamshire	12.6	15.3
South Wales	12.5	18.4
South Yorkshire	12.1	12.2
Staffordshire	15.8	23.3
Suffolk	17.8	19.8
Surrey	16.6	31.9
Sussex	18.8	18.9
Thames Valley	19.5	20.5
Warwickshire	18.2	24.8
West Mercia	18.7	23.7
West Midlands	11.2	10.6
West Yorkshire	12.1	12.2
Wiltshire	18.6	24.6

Immigration and Nationality Department

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average response time is of Her Majesty's Immigration and Nationality Departments in Croydon to messages left through the hotline telephone service by hon. Members and their staff. [35793]

Angela Eagle: Statistics are not maintained, but the aim of the unit is to respond substantively to callers within seven days.

The hotline is reliant upon a wide range of Government offices and agencies, including British diplomatic posts abroad, for information and documents. Where there is likely to be delay, the hotline will endeavour to contact the caller to let them know of this and when a full response is likely to be available.

Next month will see the introduction of a new and much improved telephone system, which will allow the hotline to hold calls in a queue and provide callers with information while they wait for the call to be taken. The system will also enable calls to be voice recorded and will provide reports on performance which can be used as a means of on-going assessment and determining staff numbers.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the hotline telephone service available to hon. Members from Her Majesty's Immigration and Nationality Department in Croydon. [35794]

Angela Eagle: The performance and working methods of the hotline are kept under regular review. Last autumn, the number of operators was increased from eight to 10 and their central function was more sharply defined as responding to calls promptly and offering general immigration advice.

Next month will see the introduction of a new and much improved telephone system, which will allow the Hotline to hold calls in a queue and provide callers with information while they wait for the call to be taken. The system will also enable calls to be voice recorded and will provide reports on performance which can be used as a means of ongoing assessment and determining staff numbers.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks are made on the response times of Her Majesty's Immigration and Nationality Department in Croydon to *(a)* messages and *(b)* queries made through their hotline telephone service by hon. Members and their staff. [35795]

Angela Eagle: There is currently no system for leaving voice messages for members of the hotline. The unit's fax machine is switched on permanently and faxed messages are allocated to operators upon receipt during normal working hours.

All telephone calls and faxes to the hotline are logged on an electronic file and all hotline operators have access to that file. The information logged will include a date, agreed with the caller, for the operator to ring back with a substantive response or an interim progress report.

The manager of the unit checks the electronic file at least once a week and any outstanding matters are identified and addressed without avoidable delay.

Next month will see the introduction of a new and much improved telephone system, which will allow the hotline to hold calls in a queue and provide callers with information while they wait for the call to be taken. The system will also enable calls to be voice recorded and will provide reports on performance which can be used as a means of ongoing assessment and determining staff numbers.

Drivers (Violent Acts)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reported cases involving violent acts by drivers there were in England and Wales in each of the last three years; how many of those convicted in the courts of such offences were *(a)* men and *(b)* women; how many were (i) sent to prison and (ii) fined; and if he will make a statement. [36290]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested is not available. "Road rage" is not an offence covered by specific legislation and motorists involved in consequential criminal behaviour are likely to be charged with an offence appropriate to the circumstances (such as criminal damage, common assault or dangerous driving). The details of the circumstances of offences are not collected centrally.

People Trafficking

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted in courts in England and Wales with the smuggling of (i) adults and (ii) children under the age of 18 years into this country in each of the last three years; and how many of those convicted were (A) sent to prison and (B) fined. [36292]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The available information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relating to England and Wales for the years 1998 to 2000 is shown in the table. These data cover proceedings under the Immigration Act 1971 Sec.25(1) (a) and (b) as amended by the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 Sec.5. No other offences connected with people smuggling can be separately identified in the statistics collected centrally, nor can the figures given be broken down according to the age of the people being smuggled.

Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already indicated his intention to increase the maximum penalty for these offences to 14 years, and a range of further measures are under consideration.

Persons proceeded against[1], convicted and sentenced at all courts for offences under the Immigration Act 1974 Sec.25(1)(a) and (b). England and Wales 1998 to 2000

		Proceeded against			Found guilty		
Offence description	*Statute*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000[2]*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000[2]*
Knowingly concerned in making or carrying out arrangements for securing or facilitating the entry into the UK of anyone whom he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to be an illegal entrant	Immigration Act 1974 Sec.25(1)(a) as amended by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 Sec.5	193	233	199	115	150	145
Knowingly concerned in making or carrying out arrangements for securing or facilitating the entry into the UK of anyone whom he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to be an asylum claimant	Immigration Act 1974 Sec.25(1)(b) as added by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 Sec.5	4	20	11	3	6	3
	Total	197	253	210	118	156	148

Offence description	*Statute*	*Sentenced* 1998 *Custody*[3]	1998 *Fine*	1999 *Custody*[3]	1999 *Fine*	2000[2] *Custody*[3]	2000[2] *Fine*
Knowingly concerned in making or carrying out arrangements for securing or facilitating the entry into the UK of anyone whom he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to be an illegal entrant	Immigration Act 1974 Sec.25(1)(a) as amended by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 Sec.5	137	—	146	—	146	—
Knowingly concerned in making or carrying out arrangements for securing or facilitating the entry into the UK of anyone whom he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to be an asylum claimant	Immigration Act 1974 Sec.25(1)(b) as added by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 Sec.5	3	—	3	—	3	—
	Total	140	—	149	—	149	—

[1] Figures provided are on the principal immigration offence basis

[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

[3] The numbers sentenced to custody may exceed those found guilty as they may include those committed for sentence from the magistrates courts in the previous year.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women have been trafficked into the UK from other European countries in each of the last three years. [37199]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Forming an accurate estimate of the levels of trafficking in people is problematic due to the hidden nature of the act. There are currently no accurate, reliable data in existence within the United Kingdom or the European Union. A Home Office research study "Stopping Traffic" (Police Research Series 125) published in 2000 indicated that although there was intelligence to suggest that some women and children are trafficked into the United Kingdom for the purposes of sexual exploitation, it was impossible to make an accurate assessment of numbers, but that it was likely to be in the range of 140 to 1,400 per annum.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department has taken with other European countries to stop the trafficking of women from those countries into the UK. [37198]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Effective action against an organised crime, which does not respect borders, requires close co-operation with other countries, particularly with our European Union (EU) partners. The European Council at Tampere set out an agenda for tackling illegal immigration, especially human trafficking. We welcome the progress already made there, including the directive on smuggling and two framework decisions on smuggling and trafficking. We intend to legislate to give effect to the EU directive and framework decision on the facilitation of unauthorised entry, movement and residence when a suitable opportunity arises.

All EU member states have established a formal network of Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs) following guidelines adopted at the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 29 May 2001. They work alongside other United Kingdom (UK) liaison officers as part of the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) overseas network. UK-based law enforcement agencies work closely with Europol and ILOs.

The UK is contributing to the EU STOP programme, which was set up by a joint action of the European Council in 1996 to support member state organisations responsible for action against the trade in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children. A European Council decision of 28 June 2001 established a second phase of this programme (STOP II). Of the projects submitted in the year 2001 funding round, 15 had UK involvement. Of these, 12 organisations were successful and the UK takes the lead with five projects through NCIS and other agencies and organisations.

The UK is also working with EU "Candidate Countries" on twinning projects to assist them in combating organised crime, including organised immigration crime. In close co-operation with the member states and the applicant countries, the Belgian Presidency organised a High Impact Operation at the future eastern borders of the EU in September-October 2001. The UK and Ireland were paired with the Czech Republic. This co-operation also comprised technical assistance, exchange of expertise and the development of intelligence.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities exist to help women who have been trafficked into the UK to return to their homes; and if he will make a statement. [37200]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: As announced in the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven", we are currently preparing a pilot programme to support victims of exploitation escape their circumstances. Working with the voluntary sector, we will assist people to return home, and ensure that they have the support necessary to ensure that their return is safe and dignified. We envisage that the programme under development will provide initial counselling, and suitable accommodation for victims to return to, which will help them reintegrate into the community and find employment.

We intend to develop a best practice 'toolkit' to help those who deal with illegal immigrants and trafficking victims to distinguish victims in genuine need and to deal with them appropriately. This toolkit will be important for practitioners, chiefly police and immigration officers, who will use it to identify victims and ensure that the right procedures are followed to provide victims with the support and help they need. It will be a comprehensive summary of best practice based on 'what works'.

Student Visas

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many man hours on average it has taken to process a student visa application in the last 12 months. [36990]

Angela Eagle: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only by scrutiny of individual case files at a disproportionate cost. The length of time to process an application varies from case to case.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for student visas were received in each of the last six months. [36993]

Angela Eagle: The available information is given in the following table.

The information relates to decisions on applications for leave to remain in the United Kingdom as a student. The latest available data are for the period July to December 2000. Data for 2001 are due to be published later this year.

Grants and refusals of extensions of leave to remain[1] in the United Kingdom as a student, July to September 2000

Number of decisions

	Grants	*Refusals*	*Total*
July	5,200	430	5,630
August	6,130	340	6,470
September	8,070	280	8,350
October	10,150	140	10,290
November	8,600	450	9,050
December	5,480	220	5,700
Total	43,620	1,860	45,490

[1] Excludes dependants of principal applicants, the outcome of appeals and withdrawn applications.

Notes:

Data rounded to the nearest 10; because of this the sum of constituent items may not agree with the total as shown.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his target of three weeks' average for the processing of student visa applications starts on the day of receipt and not the day of being entered on the computer. [36996]

Angela Eagle: The target of processing all straightforward applications within three weeks has been measured from the date of receipt until now. As a result of the business process changes recently introduced, this will in future be measured from the date on which the application is posted by the applicant.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many clerical staff were engaged in processing student visas in each of the years *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01; [36992]

(2) how many clerical staff have been engaged in processing student visas in each of the last six months. [36991]

Angela Eagle: There are no staff dealing only with applications for leave to remain in the United Kingdom for the purpose of following a course of study. The average number of staff involved in the initial processing of new postal immigration applications in each of these years was as follows: 60 in 1998–99; 115 in 1999–2000; and 160 in 2000–01, but over the last six months this has increased to 190 staff.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it clear on the appropriate form and on his Department's website that applications for student visas sent by unregistered post cannot thereafter be traced until the visa is finally granted. [36989]

Angela Eagle: This now is not the case; as a result of the business process changes introduced over recent months, all new applications are opened and entered on to a case information database within a very few days of receipt and updated at each stage of the process. This has brought about a significant improvement in our ability to trace all individual applications as they are processed.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how applications for student visas sent by *(a)* registered and *(b)* unregistered post are treated. [36994]

Angela Eagle: All applications are processed in the same way irrespective of the method of posting. The only advantage of registered mail is that the barcode on the package allows it to be registered on to a database as soon as it is received.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time from receipt of an application for a student visa to its entry on the computer was in the last 12 months. [36995]

Angela Eagle: This information is not currently available. We are introducing a Casework Information Database which, when fully operational, will enable us to monitor our performance on general immigration casework more effectively.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for independent bench marking of the Student Visa Service. [36988]

Angela Eagle: Although not specifically aimed at students the Integrated Casework Directorate is conducting a self-assessment of its general casework process using the European Foundation of Quality Management, with a view to independent assessment of benchmarking in due course.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employees in his Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36686]

Angela Eagle: The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, effective January 1993, require employers to provide and pay for, upon request from an employee designated as a user, an eye and eyesight test. There is a requirement for further tests at regular intervals; the optometrist doing the first test can recommend when the next one should be. In addition, employers must pay the cost of special spectacles required where normal ones cannot be used.

Comprehensive figures are not held centrally, but the available information shows that in the period 1 April 2001 to 14 February this year 782 staff in the core Home Office and Prison Service Headquarters had a free eye and eyesight test.

This free provision is advertised throughout the Department by various means. A revised Home Office Notice was issued in August last year. In addition other means of drawing the provision to the attention of staff include information notices to staff, global e-mails, health and safety notice boards, Prison Service Orders, handbooks, and induction course material.

Victims of Crime

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members of the Victims Steering Group; how often the group meet; and whether minutes of the meetings are available to the public. [37002]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Victims Steering Group, formed in 1985, meets twice a year and its membership is comprised of representatives from the following:

Home Office Justice and Victims Unit
Home Office National Probation Directorate
Home Office Research and Statistics Unit
Prison Service
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Association of Chief Police Officers
Association of Chief Officers of Probation
Crown Prosecution Service
Lord Chancellor's Department
Justices' Clerk's Society
Magistrates Association
Judiciary
Victim Support.

The minutes of meetings are not published. The Victims Steering Group was formally disbanded at a meeting in November 2001, as it was recognised that the new services for victims in recent years, together with planned developments, required a more proactive, delivery focused national group. Consideration is being given currently to the terms of reference and membership of this replacement body.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how victims are classified for the purposes of the Victims' Charter; and how many victims have utilised the service since its inception, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* type. [36999]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Victims' Charter applies to all individual victims of theft, burglary, criminal damage, arson, assault, domestic violence, racial harassment, sexual crimes and homicide. It also applies to the parents or carers of child victims of any of these offences, and to the relatives or close friends of homicide victims.

The second version of the Charter, published in 1996 sets out 27 standards of service which victims should expect to receive from individual criminal justice agencies—the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts, the National Probation Service, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, the Prison Service, and Victim Support.

No central record is kept of the number of victims who have made use of the services provided by each agency since the first Charter was introduced in 1990.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what extra help victims of serious crime have received; how many victims have received extra help *(a)* per year and *(b)* broken down by region; and how serious crime is defined in this respect. [37004]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Victim Support offer help and support to all victims of crime, and will gauge how much help a victim needs according to the seriousness of the offence and the effect it has had on the victim. Most victims of crime will be automatically referred to Victim Support by the police, unless the victim specifically states he/she does not want this to happen. Victims of serious crimes will only have their details passed to Victim Support with their expressed consent. In this context, serious crimes are defined as sexual offences, domestic violence or homicide.

Information is not collected centrally which lists how many victims have received extra help *(a)* per year and *(b)* broken down by region.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which agencies have consulted victims since 1977; what the subject of the consultation was; and whether the reports are available to the public. [37003]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information is not collected centrally on which agencies have consulted victims; what the subject of the consultation was; or whether the reports are available to the public.

The most significant recent consultation involving victims was a review of the Victims' Charter. A consultation paper was issued on 28 February 2001 seeking views on issues such as a bill of rights for victims, the establishment of a Victims' Ombudsman, and whether victims of road traffic incidents should receive the services provided to victims of crime. The consultation period ended on 15 June 2001, and 120 responses were received, including 49 from individual victims. A summary of responses was placed in the Library and on the Home Office website in July 2001.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how victims are informed of the *(a)* Victims' Charter and *(b)* Victims' Support Group. [37000]

Mr. Keith Bradley: After reporting a crime, all victims will be given the opportunity, by the police, to be contacted by Victim Support if they so wish. At or about the same time, the "Victims of Crime" leaflet is also issued by the police, and it outlines how Victim Support can be contacted directly. Victims are also made aware of Victim Support through television programmes such as "Crimewatch UK".

The Victims' Charter is available at police stations, at Victim Support Schemes, and from some public libraries and is published on the Home Office website.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how criminals in prison are informed of the victim support service; and how many visits have been undertaken by the victim support service to prisoners who have alleged that they have been sexually abused, broken down by prison since inception of the service. [37074]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Victim Support is an independent charitable organisation which receives grant aid from the Home Office (£25 million in 2001–02) to provide support to victims of crime and to witnesses.

There is no requirement for Prison Service staff to inform prisoners who allege that they have become victims of crime about the services of Victim Support. However, if a prisoner had a need for such information and sought it from a member of staff, such as his personal officer, probation officer or a health care worker, the information would be provided.

Victim Support advise that they work from a non-judgmental position, and accept that a prisoner can become a victim and thus qualify for their support. Victim Support schemes are accordingly willing to visit prisoners on request and with permission from the prison authorities. They do not collate data on how many prison visits have taken place.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminals in prison who are victims of crime *(a)* have been taken to visit courts before their case is started and *(b)* have had seats reserved for a friend or relative, broken down by area since inception of the service; and what recent research he has undertaken to examine the link between abused children and their potential to become abusive adults. [37073]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Witness Service, run by the voluntary organisation Victim Support, can arrange pre-trial visits to familiarise victims of crime with the layout of the court and the courtroom. No statistics are collected on how many victims, including those serving prison sentences, take advantage of this opportunity, nor how often seats are reserved for a friend or relative during the trial itself.

The Home Department has not conducted any recent research to examine the link between abused children and their potential to become abusive adults.

Northumbria Police

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answers given to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 231–36W, and the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 242W, if he will clarify the numbers of *(a)* uniformed and *(b)* civilian staff employed by Northumbria police in September 2001. [37579]

Mr. Denham: I regret that the information set out in the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 242W, contained a transcription error. The table recorded police strength of 3,908 at August 2001 as the figure for September 2001.

Northumbria police strength on 30 September 2001 was 3,893. This is 75 more than in September 2000 and 216 more than in March 1997. The force had 1,346 civilian support staff at the end of September 2001.

Prison Population (Wales)

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners there were in Wales *(a)* at the last available date and *(b)* in each of the last five years broken down by the offence committed. [37163]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 26 February 2002]*: Data showing the total number of persons in prisons in Wales is provided in the table. These persons are held in Cardiff, Swansea, Parc and Usk (including Prescoed) prisons. They would not necessarily have lived in Wales before they were imprisoned.

Number of persons[1] in prison in Wales on the 30 of each year broken down by year and offence groups

Offence group	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*[2]
Affray	29	22	23	33	24	19
Arson	11	20	23	18	18	36
Assaults	11	11	16	17	22	39
Blackmail	1	2	1	5	1	2
Breach of court order	8	24	20	21	19	19
Buggery and indecency between males	27	25	26	27	19	26
Burglary	237	350	373	315	291	332
Criminal damage	53	55	54	32	43	56
Cruelty to children	2	2	4	1	2	7
Drug offences	124	206	206	186	248	280
Drunkenness	2	1	3	1	8	—
Forgery	2	3	2	—	4	2
Frauds	25	29	24	21	30	29
Gross indecency with children	37	44	35	42	44	42
Handling stolen goods	33	31	40	21	24	34
Immigration Act 1971	3	4	—	—	47	2
In charge or driving drink/drugs	13	31	27	23	30	22
Kidnapping	5	3	12	6	11	6
Manslaughter	2	5	5	11	9	16
Murder	28	27	23	27	33	33
Not recorded	—	—	—	—	1	1
Offence not recorded	19	18	53	46	35	41
Other criminal offences	15	41	42	38	38	32
Other homicide and attempted homicide	28	49	47	43	33	51
Other motoring offences	92	97	115	134	135	138
Other non-criminal offences	4	2	3	—	—	2
Other offences of VATP	25	37	26	37	30	35

Number of persons[1] *in prison in Wales on the 30 of each year broken down by year and offence groups*

Offence group	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*[2]
Other sexual offences	65	74	100	92	89	97
Other thefts	90	145	159	127	148	157
Perjury/libel/pervert the course of justice	18	19	29	17	17	22
Rape	95	124	134	121	125	125
Robbery	93	107	127	118	122	128
Taking and driving away	56	62	60	56	59	50
Threat/disorderly behaviour	10	13	11	7	9	11
Violent disorder	2	14	7	12	7	17
Wounding	172	242	267	251	268	282
Total	1,437	1,939	2,097	1,906	2,043	2,191

[1] Includes persons held on remand

[2] Data for 31 January

Overseas Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* working holiday and *(b)* other visas were granted to overseas teachers to work (i) for employment agencies and (ii) as teachers in the academic year 2000–01. [37151]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* I regret that the information on working holiday makers admitted to the United Kingdom does not separately identify those who are teachers.

Work permits are not normally issued to employment agencies. However since October 2000 under a temporary variation to the work permit arrangements, work permits have been issued to teacher agencies. The number of work permits issued to teaching agencies during the academic year 2000–01 was 743.

The number of work permits granted for teachers in the 2000–01 academic year was 3,444.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many overseas teachers, having been granted a visa related to a post in a particular maintained school, have applied to transfer that visa to allow them to work in a different school; and how many of these transfers were granted, in each of the terms of the 2000–01 school year. [37150]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The number of applications received and approved for overseas teachers already holding work permits and moving from one post to another during the 2000–01 academic year was:

Term	*Number*
Autumn	12
Spring	27
Summer	139

Prisoners

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mentoring services are available to *(a)* children and *(b)* adults in prisons in England and Wales. [37792]

Beverley Hughes: The main mentoring service available to prisoners aged 18 and over is the "Listener" scheme, which operates in 112 prisons in England and Wales. The Samaritans train selected prisoners to offer help and support to prisoners who are feeling distressed, providing a "listening ear" to their peers from someone who understands the situation they are in. Listeners are available 24 hours a day to any prisoner who requests to see one, anywhere in the prison.

The Prison Service is working with the Youth Justice Board, the Samaritans, and other voluntary organisations to establish and develop appropriate mentoring arrangements for juveniles in custody. The Young Men's Christian Association already offers support to juveniles in three establishments.

Other mentoring schemes operate locally and many are linked to drug rehabilitation programmes. Such programmes use 'graduates' to provide peer support for those currently working through the course. These mentors often run support groups as well as providing one to one help.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average distance from home is for *(a)* adult male prisoners, *(b)* women prisoners and *(c)* juvenile prisoners. [37793]

Beverley Hughes: The latest figures, as at 30 September 2001, are set out in the table.

Population Group	*Miles* *Average distance from home*[1]
Adult male prisoners	
18 to 20-year-olds	49
Over 20-year-olds	53
Women prisoners (all ages)	66
Juvenile prisoners (males and females)	53

[1] Where a home address is not recorded a prisoner's committal court town has been used in the average distance from home calculation. Evidence suggests that in most cases the court and home towns are the same.

Prison Service

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the Prison Service key performance target for cost per prisoner is £37,509 in this financial year; and what the cost per prisoner was in 2000–01. [37794]

Beverley Hughes: The cost per prisoner target of £37,509 in 2001–02 is generated by dividing the full resource cost of the Prison Service, reflecting the move to resource accounting, by the projected average prisoner population. The full resource cost takes into account factors such as the depreciation of assets and the cost of capital charge.

The cost per prisoner outturn for 2000–01 was £27,636. This was based upon cash costs only and therefore did not take account of the factors such as depreciation and the cost of capital that are now appropriate under resource accounting.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the Prison Service key performance target for the cost of an uncrowded prison place is £36,323 in this financial year; and what the cost of a prison place was in 2000–01. [37791]

Beverley Hughes: The cost of the uncrowded prison place target of £36,323 in 2001–02 is generated by dividing the full resource cost of the Prison Service, reflecting the move to resource accounting, by the projected average certified normal accommodation. The full resource cost takes into account factors such as the depreciation of assets and the cost of capital charge.

The cost per uncrowded prison place outturn for 2000–01 was £27,090. This was based upon cash costs only and therefore did not take account of the factors such as depreciation and the cost of capital that are now appropriate under resource accounting.

Prison Conditions

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances prisoners are permitted to be held more than two to a cell. [37787]

Beverley Hughes: Prisoners are permitted to be held more than two to a cell when the accommodation has been certified by the area manager, in accordance with the 1952 Prison Act and the Prison/Young Offender Institution Rules, as being suitable for holding more than two prisoners.

Female Imprisonment

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases involving women were heard at *(a)* magistrates courts and *(b)* crown courts in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion of these cases resulted in a sentence of immediate imprisonment. [37789]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The available information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, is set out in the table.

Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

Women proceeded against at court and those sentenced to immediate custody, by month, England and Wales, 2000—Magistrates courts

			of which:	
Month	*Women proceeded against*[1]	*Sentenced*[2]	*Given immediate custody*	*Percentage given immediate custody*[4]
January	23,250	18,125	425	2.3
February	26,822	20,854	562	2.7
March	29,753	23,247	563	2.4
April	23,634	18,571	425	2.3
May	27,294	21,482	457	2.1
June	27,319	21,334	611	2.9
July	27,144	21,174	538	2.5
August	26,498	20,744	497	2.4
September	26,871	21,150	463	2.2
October	27,489	21,786	438	2.0
November	31,565	24,700	448	1.8
December	21,901	17,317	351	2.0
Total	319,540	250,484	5,778	2.3

Women proceeded against at court and those sentenced to immediate custody, by month, England and Wales, 2000—The Crown Court

			of which:	
Month	*Women tried*[3]	*Sentenced*[3]	*Given immediate custody*	*Percentage given immediate custody*[4]
January	467	435	145	33.3
February	515	478	195	40.8
March	654	613	214	34.9
April	452	428	152	35.5
May	546	501	195	38.9
June	555	526	197	37.5
July	526	473	179	37.8
August	365	366	149	40.7
September	547	514	200	38.9
October	500	448	177	39.5
November	548	450	172	38.2
December	398	374	147	39.3
Total	6,073	5,606	2,122	37.9

[1] Includes only prosecutions against women completed in magistrates courts including those committed for sentence to the Crown Court.

[2] Includes those sentenced in the magistrates courts and committed for sentence in the Crown Court.

[3] Excludes women committed for sentence.

[4] Expressed as a percentage of those sentenced.

Crime Statistics

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of people who have been convicted of *(a)* violent crime, *(b)* sex abuse and *(c)* domestic violence since 1997 were subject to any of these offences as children. [37779]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested is not available centrally, as the Home Office Court Proceedings Database contains no information on the circumstances of individual cases nor the histories of those appearing before the courts.

Sex Offenders

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminals who have been convicted of sex abuse have refused to attend sex offenders treatment programmes in each year since 1997. [37776]

Beverley Hughes: There are no figures kept centrally about the number of prisoners convicted of sex abuse who have refused to take part in the sex offenders treatment programme and this information could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reimburse local authorities for their expenditure on supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children. [39480]

Mr. Blunkett: I have laid before Parliament today a Special Grant Report which sets out the arrangements for reimbursing local authorities in England for the costs of supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) as a result of their duties under the Children Act 1989.

The Special Grant Report explains the areas of expenditure which will be eligible for the grant and the time scales for local authorities to make their claims.

As I outlined in the White Paper we will continue to offer appropriate levels of care to UASC and the Home Office leads the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children's Stakeholder Group. One key element of this is to ensure that we can sift out adults posing as children and deter those seeking to abuse the system. Home Office staff are already taking steps to challenge older applicants and divert them to the adult asylum process.

We are exploring opportunities for better sharing of costs across the country and in particular the joint commissioning of accommodation for unaccompanied minors who are 16 or 17 on arrival. We are already doing more to support local authorities by improving information exchange and UASC will be included as part of the asylum audit. It is important that financial support to local authorities provides fairly for essential needs and encourages good value for money.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department into which languages the information leaflets for asylum seekers in induction centres are translated; and if he will place a copy of the English language leaflet, and the document asylum seekers are required to sign, in the Library. [36431]

Angela Eagle: It is intended to produce a comprehensive briefing package [illegible] 31 languages. These are:

Albanian
Amharic
Arabic
Bengali
Chinese Simplified
Croat
Czech
Dari
Farsi
French
Gujurati
Kurmanji
Kurdish soorani
Lingala
Lithuanian
Ndebele
Nepali
Pashto
Polish
Portuguese
Punjabi
Romanian
Russian
Serbian
Shoria
Spanish
Swahili
Tamil
Turkish
Ukranian
Urdu.

The induction system is an evolving process and as such literature is still subject to change better to reflect the whole end to end asylum process. National Asylum Support Service (NASS), in conjunction with voluntary sector organisations, is in the process of refining and producing a raft of material for issue to those asylum seekers going through the induction process. This includes the 'client diary' which asylum seekers are asked to sign. When the material is finalised I shall arrange for an English language copy to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of race-related crimes have been reported involving asylum seekers since the introduction of the Government's dispersal policy; and if he will make a statement. [35443]

Angela Eagle: Detailed statistics are not collected centrally on race-related crimes involving asylum seekers. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) records the numbers of allegations of racial harassment made by asylum seekers and their dependants in receipt of NASS support. Between May 2000 to December 2001 NASS investigations team recorded 1,159 allegations of racial harassment.

When NASS first learns of such incidents it always ensures that they have been reported to the relevant local police, who have prime responsibility for investigating the allegation. If, following police advice, it is decided that safety or wellbeing of an asylum seeker, who is receiving NASS support, is in any doubt NASS would arrange to move that person to alternative accommodation while the case is under investigation.

If an asylum seeker does not wish to report allegations of harassment to the police, they can do so through their solicitor who can make a report on their behalf, or an asylum seeker can report the incident to their landlord. Alternatively, there are voluntary organisations with whom an asylum seeker can report and discuss their concerns. The voluntary organisation would then liaise with NASS as regards further action.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when final decisions regarding the sites of accommodation centres for asylum seekers within the UK will be taken. [32516]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 461W.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 302W, if he will place in the Library the two recent letters received from Merseyside police in relation to the use of Landmark and Inn on the Park to house asylum seekers. [33598]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* I am making arrangements for copies of these letters to be placed in the Library.

Police Station Cells

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cells there were in police stations in England and Wales in 1999. [R] [34852]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of cells in police stations is not held centrally.

Firearms

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many reported offences involving the use of *(a)* firearms and *(b)* hand guns there were in each of the last six years for which figures are available; [36115]

(2) how many *(a)* killings and *(b)* crimes causing personal injury involving all types of firearms there were in each of the last six years for which records exist; [36152]

(3) how many *(a)* killings and *(b)* crimes causing personal injury involving the use of hand guns there were in each of the last six years for which records exist. [36151]

Mr. Denham: The requested details for homicides and injuries caused by use of firearms, injuries caused by the use of handguns, and offences involving handguns and firearms in general in England and Wales are given in tables 3.1, 3.3 and 3.7 of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2000", which was published in December 2001 and is available in the Library. The numbers of homicides in which a handgun was used are as follows:

Number of homicides using a handgun in England and Wales

	Number
1995[1]	39
1996[1]	30
1997[1]	39
1998–99[2]	32
1999–2000[2]	42
2000–01[2]	47

[1] Calendar years

[2] Years ending March

HEALTH

MRSA

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of Quat Phen in combating MRSA. [8723]

Yvette Cooper: We are not aware of Quat Phen being used within installed ventilation systems used in NHS hospitals with respect to combating MRSA.

However antiseptics and antibiotics are used to treat people who are carriers of MRSA, are colonised with MRSA, or have local or systemic MRSA infections. The treatment used depends on the condition to be treated, and on the strain of MRSA.

Organ Donation

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent initiatives his Department has implemented to encourage people to become organ donors. [23972]

Jacqui Smith: There have been numerous wide-ranging initiatives in England to raise the public's awareness of the shortage of organs for transplantation. The Department runs a public information campaign with a current annual budget of £900,000. A public information leaflet incorporating the organ donor card is widely distributed, and is also available through the Organ Donor Literature line. The campaign is further enhanced by securing free TV airtime for short public information films, a campaign website and partnerships and arrangements with the DVLA, the Passport Agency, rotarian clubs, Boots the Chemist and some banks who have chosen organ donation as a cause to support.

The Department runs a special campaign to raise awareness among members of the Asian Community. This includes short TV films featuring well known Asian personalities and leaflets in various languages. Awareness is also raised by maintaining a presence at cultural and religious events, and by facilitation of debate on this issue at forums set up within Asian communities. Phase three of this campaign was launched in September this year.

A similar campaign targeting the African and African-Caribbean communities is planned for launch in spring 2002. The campaign will feature a public information leaflet, targeting advertising and public relations.

The Department funds the work of the voluntary organisations through the Section 64 Grant Scheme, including a major initiative to raise awareness by the National Kidney Research Fund. We are also helping to promote the Transplant Partnership's 2001 Christmas initiative "sign one more card this Christmas" by using the specially designed franking stamp and encouraging other organisations to do the same.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under which circumstances the NHS might pay a retainer for the nursing costs to a nursing home during a time a person is in hospital. [26580]

Jacqui Smith: The circumstances in which the National Health Service will pay a retainer should be set out in the contract which the NHS agrees with the nursing home.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities and primary care trusts have completed their determinations of the banding of nursing care for those who were resident in nursing homes at 1 October 2001 and were paying for their own fees; for those health authorities and primary care trusts which have not yet completed the determinations, how many each authority has outstanding; how many health authorities and primary care trusts have not yet begun their determinations; if the Government plan to pay interest to those people whose determinations of the banding of nursing care have not been completed by the end of December 2001; and for each health authority and primary care trust that has completed the determinations, what percentage of residents has been placed in *(a)* the lowest band, *(b)* the middle band, *(c)* the highest band, *(d)* a higher level based on individual need and *(e)* the percentage found to require fully funded NHS care. [26579]

Jacqui Smith: Preliminary information available from regions of the position at the end of December, indicates that around 80 per cent. of the nursing homes with residents eligible for National Health Service funded nursing care had had their residents' needs for care determined by a registered nurse. The majority of the remaining assessments were completed by the end of January.

Around 99 per cent. of people in nursing homes whose needs have been determined have been found to be eligible. Of those whose needs have been determined, around 19 per cent. have been allocated to the low band; 58 per cent. to the middle band; and 22 per cent. to the high band. The information collected did not include those found to require fully funded NHS care, but the Department is aware that this has occurred in a significant number of cases.

The NHS is funding care from a registered nurse, which is being provided by the nursing home and payments are made to the home for that care from October 2001.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether Welsh residents who move to a nursing home in England will receive NHS funding under *(a)* the Welsh or *(b)* the English scheme; [26582]

(2) whether English residents who move to a nursing home in Wales will receive NHS funding under *(a)* the Welsh or *(b)* the English scheme. [26638]

Jacqui Smith: Residents will receive funding for their nursing care from the authority that is responsible for their health care. In general, this means that residents will receive funding under the scheme of the country in which the nursing home is situated.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Government are taking to ensure that additional administration costs incurred by a home as a result of the implementation of free nursing care are not passed on to the resident. [26581]

Jacqui Smith: The national health service is working at a local level to minimise the administrative burdens on both the NHS and nursing homes. Local agreements should ensure that administration costs are not passed on as a separate charge to individuals.

In-patients (Hertfordshire)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the percentage was of patients waiting for in-patient treatment in the Hertfordshire Health Authority on *(a)* 1 January 2001 and *(b)* 1 January 2002. [25989]

Mr. Hutton: Hertfordshire Health Authority in-patients as a percentage of total waiting for treatment on 1 January 2001 is 49.3 per cent. Figures for 2002 are not yet available.

These data are nationally published data taken from regional offices data systems.

Migraine Treatment

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance he has issued on treatment available to migraine and chronic headache sufferers. [26081]

Jacqui Smith: We have issued no recent guidance on treatment for either migraine or chronic headache sufferers.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* digital and *(b)* analogue hearing aids are fitted in the NHS. [32092]

Jacqui Smith: Figures on total numbers of hearing aids purchased by the national health service are not collected centrally. However, figures are collected in respect of the modernising hearing aid services project. To the end of January 2002, 22,346 digital and 1,243 analogue aids were fitted to adults by the 20 hospitals involved in the project.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts will provide digital hearing aids following the Government announcement on 24 December 2001; and if he will make a statement. [36388]

Jacqui Smith: We have invited expressions of interest by 1 March 2002 from all health communities not yet involved in the modernising hearing aid services project. We will make decisions shortly about which sites will be included.

Care Homes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest estimate he has available is of the *(a)* cost of implementing physical changes to residential and nursing homes and *(b)* annual cost of staffing implication resulting from the Care Standards Act 2000. [32699]

Jacqui Smith: The latest estimate of the cost of compliance with the new standards and regulations for care homes was published in the regulatory impact assessment, which was placed in the Library in December 2001.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* average and *(b)* longest times waited by patients assessed as needing a care home whilst on an acute assessment ward before leaving the ward for a care home were in the last 12 months (i) in the UK and (ii) in North Yorkshire. [36916]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally in the form requested.

Ageism

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how the £12 million dedicated to countering ageism in the NHS has been allocated. [34404]

Jacqui Smith: No such allocation of dedicated funding has been made. The programme of action provided by the National Service Framework for Older People to address the issues of age discrimination is centred on giving older people fair access to all services. This is regardless of age, on the basis of clinical need in the national health service, and in social care services by ending the use of age in eligibility criteria to restrict access to available services. Older people as the major users of health and social care services will benefit from increased levels of funding over the coming years, building on the announcements in the NHS Plan.

Fertility Treatment

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the NICE guidelines for fertility treatment will be published. [34617]

Ms Blears: I understand that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has not yet published a timetable for development of these guidelines.

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34988]

Ms Blears: The Department does not centrally hold a record of individual contracts. However our financial records show the following total payments made by the Department (excluding its agencies) to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (iii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers by fiscal year since April 1997:

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
(i) Andersen	51,547	7,226	0.00	1,774	0.00
(ii) Deloitte Touche	72,350	45,445	11,083	55,604	342,730
(iii) Ernst and Young	26,229	18,211	23.00	30,918	66,676
(iv) KPMG	331,712	166,943	222,802	33,054	1,147,785
(v) PricewaterhouseCoopers	143,710	196,890	244,699	1,039,566	308,364

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35361]

Ms Blears: Employees working on job-share contracts are recorded as "part-time" workers. It is therefore not possible to identify the number of staff employed on a job-share contract, as the figures do not differentiate between those actually employed part-time and those employed specifically on a job-share contract.

The policy of the Department is to assume that all jobs are capable of being carried out on a part-time basis and, therefore, no specific reference is made in advertisements to the fact that the post is suitable for part-time working. Recruiting managers are expected to make reasonable adjustments to job descriptions or other aspects of the job to meet the needs of applicants with non-standard working hours or working patterns.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35926]

Ms Blears: The Department does not hold any data specifically on the number of reported cases of work related stress. While the Department collects data on sickness absence, which includes stress, it is not possible to identify if the cause of the 'stress related illness' was work related. It is not possible, therefore, to identify costs.

The Department's settlement/compensation payments are made to address a number of circumstances, of which work-related stress is only one element. Central records giving compensation payments on the grounds of work-related stress are not recorded separately.

The Department has a number of procedures in place to help managers and staff to be aware of and to reduce work-related stress. The Department has:

issued guidance for managers and staff in line with health and safety legislation on 'Working Time Regulations'.

Has a mental health policy that recognises that stress at work is a significant contributor to mental health problems.

Issued guidance to managers and staff on the causes of stress and how to reduce this.

Provides staff with a free confidential counselling service, "Care First", and

encourages its staff to attend relevant training or discuss any concerns with their line managers.

These are established procedures and there is no on-going cost to the Department, with the exception of the "Care First" providers, which are contracted by the Department at an annual cost of £77,000.

As part of the 'revitalising health & safety' initiative aspects of the above will be reviewed in relation to stress in the workplace.

St. George's Hospital, Tooting

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial allocation has been made to St George's Hospital, Tooting in each of the last 10 years. [35322]

Mr. Hutton: St George's Healthcare National Health Service trust does not receive a financial allocation but receives income for the services it provides to other NHS organisations. The Trust also receives income from other sources including overseas and private patients as well as funding for education, training, research and development.

St George's was established on April 1 1993. The total income of the Trust since its establishment is as follows:

Year	*Income*
1993–94	139,109
1994–95	143,092
1995–96	152,098
1996–97	161,793
1997–98	173,135
1998–99	185,927
1999–2000	227,622
2000–01	223,195

Note:

The Trust received additional one off funds in 1999–2000 to offset impairments to fixed assets (£21 million).

Thrombolysis Treatment

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at which hospital A and E departments thrombolysis treatment is not available. [35982]

Ms Blears: All Accident and Emergency Departments have the capability to provide thrombolysis for patients suffering from heart attacks and the vast majority provides this treatment. In a very small number of trusts, arrangements for the management of patients with heart attacks include rapid admission to Coronary Care Units for thrombolysis rather than treatment in the Accident and Emergency Department.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at which hospital with coronary care units thrombolysis treatment is not available. [35983]

Yvette Cooper: Thrombolysis treatment is available at all coronary care units. Providing thrombolysis for heart attack patients as quickly as possible is the subject of one of the standards set out in the National Service Framework, our ten-year programme for improving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of coronary heart disease.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when thrombolysis treatment will be made available at Hull Royal Infirmary. [35984]

Jacqui Smith: Thrombolysis treatment has been administered at Hull Royal Infirmary since 1987.

Hospital Waiting Times

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long waiting times are and how many people are waiting for referral to cancer specialists in the Hull and East Riding over the last 12 months. [35980]

Jacqui Smith: In Hull and East Riding patients waiting to see a cancer specialist, with few exceptions, are seen in outpatients within a week and inpatients within two to three days.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long waiting times are and how many people are waiting for examinations for cancer in Hull and the East Riding. [35978]

Jacqui Smith: Patients in Hull and East Riding, who are referred by their general practitioner with suspected cancer, should be seen within two weeks in accordance with the NHS cancer plan targets.

From January to December 2001, of the 2,413 patients referred via the two week wait process only 15 waited longer than two weeks and all of these were seen within 42 days of urgent GP referral.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many have waited longer than eight weeks to see a cancer specialist after being referred by their GP in Hull and the East Riding in the past 12 months. [35979]

Jacqui Smith: Health authority records show that, in Hull and East Riding, 2,413 patients were referred via the two week wait process from January to December 2001. Of these only 15 waited longer than two weeks and all of these were seen within 42 days of urgent general practitioner referral.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients admitted to A and E departments in Hull and East Riding have waited more than 12 hours before being treated in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [35985]

Jacqui Smith: All patients waiting in Accident and Emergency at Hull Royal Infirmary are treated within 12 hours. During the year 2001, there were no 12-hour inappropriate waits in Accident and Emergency at Hull Royal Infirmary.

Smear Tests

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are waiting and for how long for smear test results in Hull and East Riding. [35977]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not available in the form requested. Data on waiting times for smear test results for East Riding health authority in 2000–01 are shown in the table. In about 1 per cent. of cases the information was not available.

Time from receipt of smear to authorisation of report	*Percentage of reports*
Up to 4 weeks	82
More than 4 weeks up to 6 weeks	13
More than 6 weeks up to 8 weeks	4
Over 8 weeks	1

Sources:

KC53 part E

Statistics Division 2B

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36139]

Ms Blears: The cost of the Department of Health's website is as follows:

£000

Financial year	*Hosting and maintenance*	*Website development*	*Estimated staff costs*	*Total costs*
1998–99	29.4	20	178.9	228.3
1999–00	62.8	30	229.4	322.2
2000–01	57.8	130.7	277.1	465.6
2001–02[1]	69.6	[2]245.9	339.7	655.2

[1] To 1 February 2002.

[2] This figure includes £532,000 spent on user research.

The Department uses page impressions rather than hits as a measure of usage. The figures for the last four years are as follows:

Calendar year	*Page impressions*
1998	4,533,775
1999	16,485,398
2000	37,504,218
2001	48,337,144

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36200]

Ms Blears: The Department, including its agencies, has 10 accredited full-time union representatives (100 per cent. of their duties) who may receive paid leave to undertake union activities.

In addition to facility time, a reasonable amount of paid time off for accredited representatives, to enable them to carry out trade union activities, may be given within a limit of 15 days per annum. An additional 10 days may be given to those elected or appointed to national union bodies such as group and national executive committees.

As all annual leave taken by staff is recorded and checked locally by business areas within the Department, there is no centrally held information available on the cost of paid leave taken by accredited representatives for trade union activities.

The Department does not hold any details of union duties undertaken by non-departmental public bodies staff.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36179]

Ms Blears: There have been no days lost owing to industrial action by staff in the Department or its agencies in the last four years.

The Department does not hold any details of union activities undertaken by non-departmental public bodies staff.

Medicines

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what levels of access there are to medicines *(a)* over-the-counter and *(b)* through the NHS itself. [36293]

Ms Blears: There are two levels of access to over the counter medicines. General sale list medicines are available from a range of retail outlets. Pharmacy medicines are available from pharmacies. As part of national health service arrangements medicines may be administered or supplied by a range of professional staff or prescribed by doctors, dentists and some nurses. Depending on the circumstances, prescribed medicines can be dispensed by hospital or community pharmacies or by dispensing doctors. There are restrictions on the types of medicines which most professional staff may administer, supply or prescribe, some of which arise from legislation under the Medicines Act, and some of which are specific to the NHS.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that a change to the procedures for the reclassification of medicines from prescription-only to pharmacy sale will not remove availability by way of the NHS medicines reclassified for over-the-counter availability. [36294]

Ms Blears: The NHS Plan committed the Government to making more medicines available over the counter and therefore giving people a greater choice in their treatment and empowering patients to manage their care with the help of skilled health care staff. However, before a medicine is made more widely available, it is assessed against strict criteria relating to its safety in the circumstances in which it will be used. The policy is to improve access to a range of medicines without affecting their availability on the national health service, unless there are existing restrictions on NHS availability.

Cruse Bereavement Care

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of Cruse Bereavement Care; what financial assistance he is providing for Cruse Bereavement Care; what assessment he has made of the contribution Cruse makes to reducing long-term mental health problems; and if he will make a statement. [R] [36935]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met with representatives from Cruse Bereavement Care on 2 June 2000. On 12 February 2002 civil servants from the Department met with the new chief executive of Cruse to discuss the work of Cruse and its role in the delivery of modern mental health services.

The Department has provided Cruse Bereavement Care with funding over a number of years under the Section 64 General Scheme under the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968. Details of current projects and funding are:

	£
Quality Care in Bereavement	[1]180,000
Bereavement Care—Improving Access	[2]176,000
Promoting Bereavement Awareness	[3]90,000

[1] Over 3 years from 1999

[2] Over 3 years from 2000

[3] Over 3 years from 2001

We recognise that to deliver a modern, dependable health and social care service, the voluntary sector has a crucial role to play in helping service users cope with their mental health problems and we appreciate and value the very good work being done by voluntary organisations such as Cruse.

Dentistry

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists, broken down by health authority, have taken NHS patients in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* 2001 or the most recent available date. [36390]

Ms Blears: Table 1 shows the number of General Dental Service (GDS) dentists on the dental list in each family health service authority (FHSA) at the end of *(a)* September 1979 and *(b)* September 1992.

In April 1996, FHSA's were replaced by health authorities.

Table 2 shows the number of GDS dentists on the dental list of each HA at the end of *(c)* September 1997 and *(d)* September 2001.

Dentists working in more than one FHSA or HA are counted only once in their main health authority.

GDS dentists cover principals and their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

Table 1: general dental service: number of dentists by family health service authority at 30 September 1979 and 1992, England

FHSA	*1979*	*1992*
England	12,146	15,411
Avon	309	360
Barking and Havering	90	99
Barnet	143	139
Barnsley	40	62
Bedfordshire	90	140
Berkshire	184	251
Birmingham	257	300
Bolton	53	74
Bradford	115	144
Brent and Harrow	178	192
Bromley	109	123
Buckinghamshire	146	243
Bury	43	55
Calderdale	39	56
Cambridgeshire	118	179
Camden and Islington	185	175
Cheshire	241	331
City and East London	149	175
Cleveland	93	166
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	114	141
Coventry	73	82
Croydon	135	125
Cumbria	111	143
Derbyshire	164	257
Devon	295	366
Doncaster	46	85
Dorset	183	229
Dudley	55	74
Durham	95	142
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	254	259
East Sussex	219	273
Enfield and Haringey	150	168
Essex	319	438
Gateshead	37	64
Gloucestershire	145	204
Greenwich and Bexley	110	150
Hampshire	398	512
Hereford and Worcester	143	207
Hertfordshire	307	381
Hillingdon	69	80
Humberside	132	205
Isle of Wight	30	46
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminister	345	209
Kent	376	495
Kingston and Richmond	114	128
Kirklees	70	116
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	236	268
Lancashire	284	421
Leeds	213	258
Leicestershire	169	238
Lincolnshire	95	123
Liverpool	123	146
Manchester	136	177
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	202	246
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	84	96
Norfolk	154	223
North Tyneside	50	59
North Yorkshire	186	235
Northamptonshire	102	140
Northumberland	56	83
Nottinghamshire	200	272
Oldham	42	69
Oxfordshire	144	191
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	133	147
Rochdale	45	57
Rotherham	46	62
Salford	49	62
Salop	96	123
Sandwell	63	71
Sefton	77	90
Sheffield	131	165
Solihull	42	53
Somerset	123	149
South Tyneside	22	45
St. Helens and Knowsley	75	89
Staffordshire	180	237
Stockport	91	107
Suffolk	151	196
Sunderland	47	70
Surrey	380	455
Tameside	46	66
Trafford	62	85
Wakefield	59	87
Walsall	44	59
Warwickshire	99	131
West Sussex	227	283
Wigan	55	85
Wiltshire	117	173
Wirral	89	112
Wolverhampton	50	64

Note:

Some dentists have contracts in more than one family health service authority. These dentists have been counted only once, in the HA in which they hold their main contract.

Table 2: General dental service: number of dentists by health authority at 30 September 1997 and 2001 England

Health Authority	*1997*	*2001*
England	16,728	18,354
Avon	397	441
Barking and Havering	109	131
Barnet Enfield and Haringey	340	377
Barnsley	63	66
Bedfordshire	152	189
Berkshire	281	313
Bexley Bromley and Greenwich	273	294
Birmingham	314	320
Bradford	153	144
Brent and Harrow	188	221
Buckinghamshire	262	294
Bury and Rochdale	128	120
Calderdale and Kirklees	186	199
Cambridge[1]	—	248
Cambridge and Huntingdon[1]	132	—
Camden and Islington	203	225
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	153	178
County Durham	153	167
Coventry	82	94
Croydon	148	151
Doncaster	93	99
Dorset	244	279
Dudley	82	91
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	333	352
East Kent	188	210
East Lancashire	159	165
East London and The City	186	204
East Norfolk[1]	222	—
East Riding	140	155
East Surrey	190	199
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	294	324
Gateshead and South Tyneside	121	125
Gloucestershire	206	225
Herefordshire	65	74
Hertfordshire	421	512
Hillingdon	91	104
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire	202	238
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	216	217
Kingston and Richmond	146	159
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	276	272
Leeds	258	284
Leicestershire	263	282
Lincolnshire	135	157
Liverpool	157	154
Manchester	167	171
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	260	298
Morecambe Bay	105	117
Newcastle and North Tyneside	163	170
Norfolk[1]	—	284
North and East Devon	175	204
North and Mid Hampshire	181	206
North Cheshire	89	95
North Cumbria	104	107
North Derbyshire	98	117
North Essex	285	319
North Nottinghamshire	103	120
North Staffordshire	108	126
North West Anglia[1]	111	—
North West Lancashire	162	172
North Yorkshire	267	304
Northamptonshire	159	171
Northumberland	100	101
Nottingham	212	225
Oxfordshire	201	257
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	163	185
Rotherham	67	76
Salford and Trafford	151	158
Sandwell	92	93
Sefton	96	96
Sheffield	189	199
Shropshire	130	143
Solihull	54	68
Somerset	163	176
South and West Devon	216	254
South Cheshire	260	256
South Derbyshire	166	180
South Essex	212	247
South Humber	74	81
South Lancashire	87	97
South Staffordshire	154	178
Southampton and South West Hampshire	186	200
St. Helens and Knowsley	94	104
Stockport	113	119
Suffolk	206	228
Sunderland	77	95
Tees	188	208
Wakefield	90	108
Walsall	57	57
Warwickshire	146	170
West Kent	378	367
West Pennine	147	151
West Surrey	271	307
West Sussex	300	349
Wigan and Bolton	172	182
Wiltshire	190	215
Wirral	135	136
Wolverhampton	69	71
Worcestershire	180	183

[1] Three HAs: Cambridge and Huntingdon, East Norfolk and North-west Anglia were replaced by two HAs: Cambridge and Norfolk in April 2000

Note:

Some dentists have contracts in more than one health authority. These dentists have been counted only once, in the HA in which they hold their main contract

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding streams are available to help set up new NHS dental practices; and if he will make a statement. [36397]

Ms Blears: All health authorities have in place dentistry action plans aimed at meeting the Government's dental access pledge. These action plans identify local issues and develop solutions. Over the last two financial years the Government have allocated £10 million from the Dental Care Development Fund and the Dentistry Action Plan Fund to support local plans to improve access. This money enables health authorities to assist dentists seeking to set up new practices and to expand and modernise existing ones. For the future dentistry will be included in the local improvement finance trust scheme. This will provide locally focused support for the establishment of new national health service practice facilities.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a substantive reply will be given to Sarah Markham's letter of 28 November 2001, concerning payments to nursing students. [36834]

Mr. Hutton: A reply was sent on 21 February.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham dated 24 August and 21 September 2001 concerning a constituent and enzyme potentiated desensitisation treatment. [34846]

Yvette Cooper: A reply was sent on 13 February.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many drug misusers were receiving treatment by type of service in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 1997. [37572]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of drug misusers in treatment in England in 2000–01 is given in table 1; comparable information is not available for earlier years. Information on the numbers of drug misusers who presented for treatment for the first time or for the first time after a gap of six months, for both 1997 and 2000 is given in table 2. Both tables exclude treatment in prisons.

Table 1: Numbers of drug misusers in treatment by type of service, 2000–01

Type of service	*Number*
England	118,522
Inpatient	2,424
Community: specialist services	103,094
Community: general practitioners	8,180
Structured day programmes	706
Residential rehabilitation	1,902
Others	2,216

Source:
DH, Regional Drug Misuse Databases

Table 2: Number of drug misusers who presented for treatment during the periods 1 April to 30 September 1997 and 1 April to 30 September 2000, by type of service

Type of service	*1 April to 30 September 1997*	*1 April to 30 September 2000*
England	21,996	33,093
Inpatient	455	428
Community: specialist services	18,647	28,624
Community: general practitioners	1,571	1,429
Structured day programmes	11	175
Residential rehabilitation	516	759
Others	795	1,678

Source:
Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000–01

Psychiatric Extra-contractual Referrals

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost has been of psychiatric extra-contractual referrals (1) of offenders since 1997; [37220]

(2) to the private sector since 1997. [37219]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Child Poverty

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children between the ages of 10 and 14 are living in persistent poverty in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 1991–92; and if he will make a statement. [35682]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have for the introduction of licensing for food businesses. [37310]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that there are no current plans to introduce new licensing provisions for food businesses.

The immediate priority for the Food Standards Agency, which has responsibility for food safety matters, is to improve standards generally among food businesses. It is doing this through initiatives to increase the uptake of food safety management systems designed to enable food businesses to identify and control food hazards and the recently launched campaign to increase hygiene awareness among caterers.

The Board of the Food Standards Agency has indicated that it will keep the issue of wider licensing under review in the light of progress with these initiatives.

Overseas Treatment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients from the West Sussex Health Authority area have received treatment in continental European hospitals under the NHS scheme; where; for what conditions; when he will be able to give the cost; what other establishments in the other country were assessed; what cost comparisons were made; and for what reason the hospital used was selected. [37768]

Mr. Hutton: As of 26 February, seven patients had undergone knee replacement surgery in the Lutherhaus Hospital in Essen and the Eduardus Krankenhaus in Cologne under a contract between West Sussex Health authority and Germedic. Of these, four come from the West Sussex Health Authority Area and three from East Sussex. The latter group were all on a waiting list at a trust in West Sussex.

The costs of these procedures are commercially confidential. They are comparable to the cost of purchasing individual procedures in the United Kingdom private sector.

These patients have travelled under the auspices of Germedic, a company which facilitates treatment in German hospitals for non-German patients. Germedic proposed the use of these hospitals to West Sussex, who then satisfied themselves that the hospitals were suitable for their patients.

Patients are travelling to Germany from West Sussex as part of a pilot scheme. Subject to evaluation of the pilot, arrangements will be put in place for securing overseas treatment for National Health Service patients on an ongoing basis. Decisions about the choice of hospital will be based on quality, convenience and choice.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have been treated in continental hospitals since 1 January; and through which health authorities. [37314]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* Between 1 January and 15 February a total of 50 national health service patients travelled overseas to receive treatment in continental hospitals under the current pilot scheme. Forty two of these patients have come from the East Kent Health Authority area; West Sussex Health Authority has sent seven patients and the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority so far has sent one patient.

Anaesthetic Breathing Systems

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reporting regime exists for incidents where the anaesthetic breathing system is believed to have *(a)* been blocked and *(b)* malfunctioned. [36263]

Ms Blears: The Medical Devices Agency (MDA), an executive agency of the Department, currently operates two systems for reporting adverse incidents involving medical devices.

Incidents involving blocked or malfunctioning breathing system components should be reported to the MDA by health care professionals or the National Health Service through the user reporting system or, if the report comes from a manufacturer, through the agency's vigilance reporting system.

At the beginning of each year, the MDA publishes advice in the form of a safety notice to health care professionals to encourage them to report adverse incidents and to outline how to do so. MDA's website also provides advice on reporting incidents involving medical equipment, together with reporting forms and an online reporting facility.

MDA liaison officers have been appointed for each health authority, NHS trust and social services department in England (also for the majority of primary care trusts) with a dual role of raising awareness of the need for incident reporting and secondly to ensure that any safety advice issued by MDA is disseminated within their organisation to those who need to know.

The mandatory scheme for reporting adverse incidents relating to medical devices, often termed vigilance reporting, is an obligation laid upon all European Member States via the Medical Devices Directives. These Directives have been implemented in United Kingdom law via the Consumer Protection Act which places statutory obligations on manufacturers to report incidents which led to, or could have led to, death or serious injury.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the police investigation into blockages discovered in anaesthetic breathing systems, as part of Operation Orcadian; and when he expects these will be concluded. [36264]

Ms Blears: After discussion with the Essex police I am able to make the following statement.

A police investigation commenced with the tragic death of Tony Clowes at Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford on 18 July 2001. Further incidents involving blocked anaesthetic breathing equipment components came to light and a linked enquiry was launched headed by Essex Police under the name Orcadian.

The basis of the enquiry and the linking process was to look for a common factor. As the enquiry progressed a number of other incidents were reported from a number of sources, including patients who felt they may have been involved in an incident in the past. Some manufacturing faults were also reported.

In many cases the information available is, or was, very scant. There have been difficulties in obtaining accurate accounts and records for incidents that are historic and which may not have been considered significant at the time. Some of the incidents involved date back to the late 1980s.

During the course of the investigation, experiments were carried out which showed that a blockage could be replicated whilst the items were in storage. This finding changed the focus of the enquiry from 'whom' to 'how'.

To date no common factor has been found although the enquiry is still ongoing.

Orcadian has been a joint enquiry involving nine police forces and the close co-operation of the National Health Service, Health and Safety Executive and the Department of Health.

The Medical Devices Agency (MDA) has assisted the police by providing Orcadian with advice on breathing systems and their use. Since the enquiry began, the MDA has published three Hazard Notices to advise and alert users to related safety issues as they have emerged from the police enquiry.

It is difficult to predict at this stage when Orcadian will be concluded.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents relating to the blockage of anaesthetic breathing systems are believed to have occurred within the NHS in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement. [36265]

Ms Blears: The Medical Devices Agency (MDA) report that there are three main ways in which anaesthetic breathing system components can become blocked. These are: manufacturing problems; user error; and possible tampering.

The MDA adverse incident database holds the following information for each type of blockage over the past three years:

	Manufacturing problem	*User error*	*Possible tampering*
1999	1	1	[1]—
2000	2	1	[1]—
2001	4	9	7

[1] None reported

The increase in reports for 2001 may be attributed to the publication, by MDA, of three hazard notices raising the awareness of the possibility of blockages, together with the raised profile brought about by media coverage of the police Operation Orcadian.

Some of the reports relating to possible tampering are historical events that were reported following MDA's action and the police investigation. All seven incidents are subject to ongoing investigation within Operation Orcadian.

Those reports categorised as manufacturing problems were investigated by MDA and appropriate corrective action has been taken by the manufacturer to reduce the likelihood of re-occurrence. In some cases the product was recalled.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources have been made available for counselling unaccompanied asylum seeking children suspected to be at risk of being victims of trafficking. [36640]

Jacqui Smith: No specific resources have been made available for counselling accompanied asylum seeking children suspected to be at risk of being victims of trafficking. However, eligible unaccompanied asylum seeking children will have access to the full range of local services.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many places are available in safe houses in the United Kingdom for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children suspected to be at risk of being victims of trafficking. [36641]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has undertaken into the disappearance of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from social services, care for the suspected purpose of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation; and what resources have been made available for this research. [36642]

Jacqui Smith: No specific research has been undertaken into the disappearance of unaccompanied asylum seeking children from social services' care for the purposes of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. We are aware that a number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in care in West Sussex have in the past gone missing, and that West Sussex Social Services Department and Sussex police have put in place protocols and procedures to help tackle this problem.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* monitoring and *(b)* evaluation of private hospitals his Department undertakes. [31128]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Currently, private hospitals are regulated under the Registered Homes Act 1984 by health authorities, rather than the Department, which carries out no monitoring or evaluation centrally. On 1 April this year, responsibility for regulating private hospitals will be taken over by the National Care Standards Commission under the Care Standards Act 2000. Information collected by the Commission about the services and facilities they inspect will be published.

Dementia

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to commission research into the incidence of dementia. [35083]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The Department of Health has a research programme underpinning the National Service Framework for Older People. Dementia will be one of the topics to be considered in the research attached to the NSF underpinning strategy.

Bids for policy-related research projects will be sought in the near future. The successful projects, and their research findings, will be included on the National Research Register *www.doh.gov.uk/research* when available.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his written answer of 26 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 717W, on additional health services, whether the number of *(a)* early intervention teams and *(b)* crisis resolution teams are known; and what the figures are. [35570]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* A service mapping exercise was completed by Local Implementation Teams (LITs) and submitted on the 31 October 2001.

Based on the details supplied at that time which are now becoming ready for report following validation and assessment:

(a) There were 16 early intervention teams in place;

(b) There were 52 crisis resolution teams in place.

It is worth noting that these services are undergoing rapid development as part of 2004 NHS Plan target and these figures will rise over the coming months.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 376W, on mental health, if he will provide a breakdown of how the revenue expenditure in 2002–03 and 2003–04 will be spent in respect of *(a)* crisis resolution, *(b)* assertive outreach, *(c)* early intervention, *(d)* primary care workers and *(e)* services for women and carers. [35482]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* In 2002–03 additional £93.5 million revenue has been allocated to mental health services. £75 million of this will go out with health authority allocations as shown in the table and is earmarked for mental health. Breakdown of allocations is not yet available for 2003–04.

	2002–03
Crisis resolution	30
Assertive outreach	10
Early intervention	15
Gateway to specialist services	10
Women services	0
Carers	10
Primary care workers	0
Total	75

In addition to the health authority allocations, some budgets will be held centrally to support specific schemes. Of this £2.5 million has been allocated to support training projects for primary care workers.

Although health authority allocations are calculated on the basis above, expenditure data will not be collected for specific areas of mental health. Local investment plans will dictate the proportion of allocation spent in each area and performance against targets set out in local implementation plans will be measured.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new entrants to the civil service were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 and over. [36488]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Cabinet Office on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 875–80W.

Delayed Discharges

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table of delayed discharge times for each hospital trust in England and Wales, grouped by health authority area. [37129]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The information is not available centrally in the format requested.

Information on lengths of delayed discharge at national, regional and health authority level in September 2001 (quarter 2 2001–02) is in the table.

Annexe A: length of delayed discharge—patients of all ages—quarter 2 2001–02

National and regional summary

	Total delayed				*Percentage delays*				
Area	*Less than 8 days*	*Between 8–14 days*	*14–28 days*	*More than 28 days*	*Less than 8 days*[1]	*Between 8–14 days*[1]	*Between 14–28 days*[1]	*Greater than 28 days*[1]	*Percentage HAs included in analysis*
England	1,607	1,268	1,401	2,789	22.7	17.9	19.8	39.5	96.8
Northern and Yorkshire	165	145	164	355	19.9	17.5	19.8	42.8	100.0
Trent	144	95	65	88	36.7	24.2	16.6	22.4	100.0
West Midlands	278	169	202	371	27.3	16.6	19.8	36.4	100.0
North West	164	107	122	214	27.0	17.6	20.1	35.3	93.8
Eastern	108	105	90	332	17.0	16.5	14.2	52.3	85.7
London	136	244	191	406	13.9	25.0	19.5	41.6	92.9
South East	387	242	402	812	21.0	13.1	21.8	44.1	100.0
South West	225	161	165	211	29.5	21.1	21.7	27.7	100.0

Health authority summary

	Total delayed				*Percentage delays*				
Health authority	*Less than 8 days*	*Between 8–14 days*	*14–28 days*	*More than 28 days*	*Less than 8 days*[1]	*Between 8–14 days*[1]	*Between 14–28 days*[1]	*More than 28 days*[1]	*HA included*
Bradford	11	0	1	0	91.7	0.0	8.3	0.0	Yes
County Durham and Darlington	24	7	13	38	29.3	8.5	15.9	46.3	Yes
East Riding and Hull	4	20	2	1	14.8	74.1	7.4	3.7	Yes
Gateshead and South Tyneside	1	6	12	23	2.4	14.3	28.6	54.8	Yes
Leeds	11	16	27	92	7.5	11.0	18.5	63.0	Yes
Newcastle and North Tyneside	45	13	16	17	49.5	14.3	17.6	18.7	Yes
North Cumbria	14	15	29	75	10.5	11.3	21.8	56.4	Yes
Northumberland	2	0	0	0	11.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Yes
Sunderland	10	5	11	28	18.5	9.3	20.4	51.9	Yes
Tees	19	25	28	11	22.9	30.1	33.7	13.3	Yes
Wakefield	17	3	4	10	50.0	8.8	11.8	29.4	Yes
North Yorkshire	9	13	15	55	9.8	14.1	16.3	59.8	Yes
Calderdale and Kirklees	–2	22	6	5	–6.5	71.0	19.4	16.1	Yes
Barnsley	2	3	1	0	33.3	50.0	16.7	0.0	Yes
North Derbyshire	3	3	0	0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	Yes
Southern Derbyshire	3	1	0	0	75.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	Yes
Doncaster	2	2	4	9	11.8	11.8	23.5	52.9	Yes
Leicestershire	27	19	8	6	45.0	31.7	13.3	10.0	Yes
Lincolnshire	6	15	11	11	14.0	34.9	25.6	25.6	Yes
North Nottinghamshire	7	11	12	20	14.0	22.0	24.0	40.0	Yes
Nottingham	22	4	3	4	66.7	12.1	9.1	12.1	Yes
Rotherham	9	12	3	17	22.0	29.3	7.3	41.5	Yes
Sheffield	59	16	6	3	70.2	19.0	7.1	3.6	Yes
South Humber	4	9	17	18	8.3	18.8	35.4	37.5	Yes
Birmingham	86	35	52	157	26.1	10.6	15.8	47.6	Yes
Coventry	8	10	6	25	16.3	20.4	12.2	51.0	Yes
Dudley	31	12	13	8	48.4	18.8	20.3	12.5	Yes
Herefordshire	13	2	4	2	61.9	9.5	19.0	9.5	Yes
Sandwell	9	0	8	17	26.5	0.0	23.5	50.0	Yes
Shropshire	4	13	5	4	15.4	50.0	19.2	15.4	Yes
Solihull	10	3	9	21	23.3	7.0	20.9	48.8	Yes
North Staffordshire	17	23	20	26	19.8	26.7	23.3	30.2	Yes
South Staffordshire	2	25	38	49	1.8	21.9	33.3	43.0	Yes
Walsall	10	3	10	19	23.8	7.1	23.8	45.2	Yes
Warwickshire	57	27	14	11	52.3	24.8	12.8	10.1	Yes
Wolverhampton	29	1	1	0	93.5	3.2	3.2	0.0	Yes
Worcestershire	2	15	22	32	2.8	21.1	31.0	45.1	Yes
South Lancashire	8	3	1	1	61.5	23.1	7.7	7.7	Yes
Liverpool	5	22	10	39	6.6	28.9	13.2	51.3	Yes
Manchester	12	0	6	20	31.6	0.0	15.8	52.6	Yes
Morecambe Bay	4	6	17	47	5.4	8.1	23.0	63.5	Yes
St. Helens and Knowsley	10	3	9	40	16.1	4.8	14.5	64.5	Yes

Health authority summary

Health authority	*Total delayed* *Less than 8 days*	*Between 8–14 days*	*14–28 days*	*More than 28 days*	*Percentage delays* *Less than 8 days*[1]	*Between 8–14 days*[1]	*Between 14–28 days*[1]	*More than 28 days*[1]	*HA included*
Salford and Trafford	27	11	19	13	38.6	15.7	27.1	18.6	Yes
Sefton	—	11	5	13	—	—	—	—	No
Stockport	0	5	0	4	0.0	55.6	0.0	44.4	Yes
West Pennine	12	5	15	4	33.3	13.9	41.7	11.1	Yes
Bury and Rochdale	5	0	6	2	38.5	0.0	46.2	15.4	Yes
North Cheshire	16	13	18	13	26.7	21.7	30.0	21.7	Yes
South Cheshire	4	2	4	6	25.0	12.5	25.0	37.5	Yes
East Lancashire	10	2	0	4	62.5	12.5	0.0	25.0	Yes
North West Lancashire	37	8	6	1	71.2	15.4	11.5	1.9	Yes
Wigan and Bolton	14	5	2	2	60.9	21.7	8.7	8.7	Yes
Wirral	0	22	9	18	0.0	44.9	18.4	36.7	Yes
Bedfordshire	16	8	14	48	18.6	9.3	16.3	55.8	Yes
North Essex	—	25	28	34	—	—	—	—	No
South Essex	4	25	32	67	3.1	19.5	25.0	52.3	Yes
Suffolk	61	16	6	106	32.3	8.5	3.2	56.1	Yes
Cambridgeshire	9	11	25	86	6.9	8.4	19.1	65.6	Yes
Norfolk	12	25	7	12	21.4	44.6	12.5	21.4	Yes
Hertfordshire	6	20	6	13	13.3	44.4	13.3	28.9	Yes
Hillingdon	34	6	11	11	54.8	9.7	17.7	17.7	Yes
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	7	9	10	8	20.6	26.5	29.4	23.5	Yes
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	9	24	16	31	11.3	30.0	20.0	38.8	Yes
Croydon	3	8	9	10	10.0	26.7	30.0	33.3	Yes
Kingston and Richmond	7	10	6	49	9.7	13.9	8.3	68.1	Yes
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	–67	72	17	37	–113.6	122.0	28.8	62.7	Yes
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	28	32	44	0.0	26.9	30.8	42.3	Yes
Barking and Havering	–6	30	24	78	–4.8	23.8	19.0	61.9	Yes
Brent and Harrow	32	6	14	8	53.3	10.0	23.3	13.3	Yes
Camden and Islington	10	12	8	26	17.9	21.4	14.3	46.4	Yes
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	29	9	11	52	28.7	8.9	10.9	51.5	Yes
East London and City	12	11	8	30	19.7	18.0	13.1	49.2	Yes
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	66	19	25	22	50.0	14.4	18.9	16.7	Yes
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	—	16	24	35	—	—	—	—	No
Berkshire	35	7	23	116	19.3	3.9	12.7	64.1	Yes
Buckinghamshire	24	1	25	42	26.1	1.1	27.2	45.7	Yes
East Kent	22	11	6	52	24.2	12.1	6.6	57.1	Yes
West Kent	37	26	18	33	32.5	22.8	15.8	28.9	Yes
East Surrey	9	4	14	24	17.6	7.8	27.5	47.1	Yes
West Surrey	14	29	36	97	8.0	16.5	20.5	55.1	Yes
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	85	25	86	0	43.4	12.8	43.9	0.0	Yes
West Sussex	63	40	52	85	26.3	16.7	21.7	35.4	Yes
Northamptonshire	–21	14	26	75	–22.3	14.9	27.7	79.8	Yes
Oxfordshire	11	27	5	14	19.3	47.4	8.8	24.6	Yes
North and Mid Hampshire	41	17	48	119	18.2	7.6	21.3	52.9	Yes
Southampton and SW Hampshire	27	26	36	114	13.3	12.8	17.7	56.2	Yes
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	40	15	27	41	32.5	12.2	22.0	33.3	Yes
Somerset	16	8	12	4	40.0	20.0	30.0	10.0	Yes
South and West Devon	17	6	0	1	70.8	25.0	0.0	4.2	Yes
Wiltshire	18	15	17	37	20.7	17.2	19.5	42.5	Yes
Avon	29	52	48	76	14.1	25.4	23.4	37.1	Yes
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	46	20	11	5	56.1	24.4	13.4	6.1	Yes
Dorset	57	18	9	4	64.8	20.5	10.2	4.5	Yes
North and East Devon	32	27	36	16	28.8	24.3	32.4	14.4	Yes
Gloucestershire	10	15	32	68	8.0	12.0	25.6	54.4	Yes

[1] All ages

Glutaraldehyde

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to stop the use of glutaraldehyde in hospitals in England and Wales. [35030]

Ms Blears: There are currently no plans to stop the use of glutaraldehyde in hospitals in England. National Health Service employers are already to give priority to preventing their employees being exposed to glutaraldehyde by inhalation, ingestion or skin contact under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994.

Date Rape Drugs

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued to young women with regards to the dangers of date rape drugs. [35629]

Ms Blears: The Department funds the National Drugs Helpline to provide information, advice and support to anyone concerned about substance misuse. The helpline provides a range of information about date rape drugs, including their effects, risks and referral to local agencies that offer support. This service is free and confidential, and is open 24 hours a day.

The Department also funds Drugscope, an organisation that provides information on all aspects of drug policies and problems, including information on prevention and safety issues for people who feel that they may be affected by date rape drugs.

Child Protection

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Minister is responsible for the area child protection committees. [37775]

Jacqui Smith: Area child protection committees are inter-agency forums for agreeing how the different services and professional groups should co-operate to safeguard children in their area. They are not statutory bodies, but are accountable for their work to their main constituent agencies. They are therefore not accountable to any Secretary of State. Each local authority with social services responsibility should take lead responsibility for the establishment and effective working of ACPCs. Local authorities are ultimately accountable to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health in respect of their social services functions.

Ambulance Staff (Physical Assaults)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list, by regional ambulance service, the number of days off sick taken by ambulance staff following physical assaults by members of the public while on duty in *(a)* Q4 2000–01, *(b)* Q1 2001–02, *(c)* Q2 2001–02, *(d)* Q3 2001–02 and in *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 1999–2000, and *(g)* 1998–99; [35864]

(2) if he will list, by regional ambulance service, the number of physical assaults by members of the public against ambulance staff while on duty in *(a)* Q4 2000–01, *(b)* Q1 2001–02, *(c)* Q2 2001–02, *(d)* Q3 2001–02 and in *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 1999–2000, and *(g)* 1998–99. [35863]

Ms Blears: The Department conducted a survey of sickness absence, accidents and violence in national health service trusts in England in 1998–99. The survey found that there were approximately 65,000 violent incidents against NHS trust staff recorded each year. Figures for each individual NHS ambulance trust are shown in the table. A further survey of recorded violent incidents in 2000–01 has been conducted, and the figures are currently being analysed by the Department.

Information on levels of sickness absence resulting from violence at work is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by individual national health service employers. The average sickness absence rate for staff directly employed by NHS ambulance trusts in 1999 was 6.6 per cent.

Violent incidents in ambulance trusts—reported 1998–99

Region	*Trust name*	*Number of violent incidents standardised to a year*	*Rate of incidents per 1,000 staff (WTE)*
Northern and Yorkshire	Cleveland Ambulance NHS Trust	15	54
Northern and Yorkshire	Cumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—
Northern and Yorkshire	Durham County Ambulance Service NHS Trust	32	100
Northern and Yorkshire	Humberside Ambulance Service NHS Trust	23	66
Northern and Yorkshire	North Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	7	21
Northern and Yorkshire	Northumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust	52	70
Northern and Yorkshire	West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Services NHS Trust	28	27
Trent	Derbyshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	25	57
Trent	Leicestershire Ambulance and Paramedic Services NHS Trust	34	79
Trent	Lincolnshire Ambulance NHS Trust	56	101
Trent	Nottinghamshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	120	221
Trent	South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service NHS Trust	57	99
Eastern	Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance and Paramedic NHS Trust	22	38
Eastern	East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—
Eastern	Essex Ambulance Service NHS Trust	12	16
London	London Ambulance Service	464	153
South East	Hampshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	26	60
South East	Kent Ambulance NHS Trust	96	152
South East	Oxfordshire Ambulance NHS Trust	0	0
South East	Royal Berkshire Ambulance NHS Trust	36	101
South East	Surrey Ambulance Service NHS Trust	12	24
South East	Sussex Ambulance Services NHS Trust	105	144
South East	Two Shires Ambulance NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—
South West	Avon Ambulance Service NHS Trust	30	85
South West	Dorset Ambulance NHS Trust	93	290
South West	Gloucestershire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	[2]—	[2]—
South West	West Country Ambulance Services NHS Trust	43	47
South West	Wiltshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—
West Midlands	Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service NHS Trust	[2]—	[2]—
West Midlands	Staffordshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0	0
West Midlands	Warwickshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	[2]—	[2]—
West Midlands	West Midlands Ambulance Services NHS Trust	63	60
North West	Greater Manchester Ambulance Service NHS Trust	71	71
North West	Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	56	88
North West	Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS Trust	56	58

[1] Indicates that there were less than five violent incidents, when standardised to a year.

[2] Indicates that the trust either submitted no data or the data was not comparable with other trusts.

Notes:

1. Data reported covered different time periods and have been standardised to an annual equivalent to allow comparison.
2. The figures represent all violent incidents to any staff in each ambulance trust. No figures are available for only physical assaults or for only ambulance staff on duty.
3. At the time of this collection national definitions had not yet been published. Definitions and reporting thresholds varied between trusts.

Source:

Department of Health's 1998–99 Survey of Sickness Absence, Accidents and Violence in NHS trusts

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 28 February 2002

TREASURY

Euro

11. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the tourism industry on the impact of the level of the pound against the euro since 1997. [35752]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers receive regular representations from across the business community on many issues and we value their insights. The Government fully appreciate that the weakness of the euro, together with a sharp slowdown in the world economy last year, has made conditions difficult for tourism and other exporting industries.

The Government's commitment to helping the tourism industry has been underlined by Monday's announcement of the unique package of match funding with the industry for promotion of the UK overseas. This £20 million package means than an extra £38 million has now been granted from the reserve, in support of tourism promotion, since the start of foot and mouth. This is at a time of great economic pressure.

18. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the performance of the euro since 1 January. [35761]

Ruth Kelly: It is not appropriate for the Government to comment on day-to-day developments in the foreign exchange market. The Government are pleased that the euro area is experiencing a broadly smooth changeover.

29. **Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with his German counterpart on the European single currency. [35774]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor has frequent discussions on a wide range of issues with his European counterparts.

Working Families Tax Credit

12. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in the north-west are receiving working family tax credit. [35753]

Dawn Primarolo: There are currently more than 181,000 families in the north-west benefiting from WFTC.

Voluntary and Community Sectors

13. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to support the voluntary and community sectors. [35754]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We value greatly the contribution of the voluntary and community sectors and have provided extensive support through a variety of fiscal and other measures.

Competitiveness

14. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on policy measures he intends to take by way of taxation to improve the competitiveness of the UK economy. [35756]

21. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal measures he is taking in relation to the productivity gap between Britain and her main European competitors. [35765]

Dawn Primarolo: This Government have made significant progress in creating a modern corporate tax regime, providing long-term stability and the best possible environment for investment. The UK now has its lowest ever corporation tax rate, and the lowest rate of any major industrialised nation.

The Pre-Budget Report announced new measures to further encourage growth and improve competitiveness, including: further reduction in the CGT rate for business assets; an R&D tax credit for large companies; and a doubling of the size limit for the Enterprise Management Incentives employee share option scheme.

15. **Sir Michael Spicer:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of productivity on the UK's competitiveness. [35757]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government recognise the importance of productivity for competitiveness and is raising the sustainable rate of productivity growth through both macroeconomic stability and measures to promote competition, enterprise, skills and investment.

22. **Mr. Barker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact that changes in regulation have had on the competitiveness of UK industry since 1997. [35766]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have not made an aggregated assessment of the impact of regulation since 1997. Establishing such an assessment would undoubtedly involve significant practical difficulties.

The impact of changes to a single regulation is considered at the policy development stage. A Regulatory Impact Assessment is completed for regulatory proposals unless the regulation has no or negligible costs. A RIA sets out the impact, in terms of costs, benefits and risks of the proposed regulation which could affect businesses, charities or the voluntary sector. This process helps policy makers to think through the consequences of proposals, improving the quality of advice to Ministers and encouraging informed public debate.

Where Ministers choose a regulatory option, they must be satisfied that the benefits justify the costs.

Debt Relief

16. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the heavily indebted poor countries' debt relief process in delivering a sustainable exit from debt for eligible countries. [35759]

Ruth Kelly: The UK continues to work hard to ensure that the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative delivers an exit from unsustainable debt for eligible countries. We also call on other countries to follow our leads on bilateral policies, such as 100 per cent. relief at decision point, and in holding payments in trust for those countries yet to receive debt relief. Already 25 countries have qualified for debt relief, and they will benefit from over $60 billion in debt reduction, which will bring their debts to below the developing countries average.

Indeed, just last week Ghana reached decision point qualifying for $3.7 billion of debt relief from the international community, and the UK is playing its part writing off over £200 million of debt owed by Ghana.

At their meetings in November last year, both the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) and the IMF and Development Committee of the World Bank and the IMF, recognised that lower global growth prospects and declining terms of trade are likely to adversely affect many low-income countries. The IMFC, chaired by the Chancellor, called on the IMF, in close collaboration with the World Bank, to respond flexibly and proactively to the needs of Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs), including through additional concessional financing and debt relief where appropriate.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to discuss the reform of the HIPC initiative to ensure that debt sustainability is consistent with achieving the 2015 development goals at the Financing for Development Conference in Mexico in March. [39254]

Ruth Kelly: The UK Government continue to work hard to ensure that the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative is a success and that it delivers a robust exit from unsustainable debt for eligible countries. The UK has been pushing to ensure that both donor countries and the international financial institutions respond flexibly and proactively to the needs of HIPCs in the current economic climate, and help those HIPCs that have yet to benefit from debt relief (such as those in conflict). In addition, the UK has pressed for all countries participating in the Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey, Mexico in March, to agree that future reviews of debt sustainability should also bear in mind the impact of debt relief on progress towards the achievement of the development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration (as can be seen from the draft Monterrey Consensus outcomes document, available at http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/).

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to discuss greater and faster debt relief with *(a)* the International Monetary Fund, *(b)* the World Bank and *(c)* the regional development banks. [39253]

Ruth Kelly: The UK Government have consistently been at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief issues, and have repeatedly pushed for the process to be speeded up.

Out of 42 HIPCs in total, the UK Government are pleased that 25 have already reached decision point. However, most of the remaining countries are in conflict or have governance problems. For this reason the UK Government argued strongly last year for the creation of an International Monetary Fund post-conflict assistance account, and the UK is the first country to make a contribution.

This account will help these countries to make progress towards peace, good governance and a sound economic framework so that they can secure the full benefits of debt relief under the HIPC initiative.

Moreover, in November last year, in his role as chair to the International Monetary and Financial Committee of the International Monetary Fund, the Chancellor urged the World Bank and IMF to update their debt sustainability analyses in light of the global economic slowdown and declines in terms of trade. We should be proactive and flexible in order to supply additional debt relief at completion point for HIPCs, to ensure that the initiative delivers a robust exit from unsustainable debt.

The United Nations Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey, Mexico in March and the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in April will provide an opportunity for the UK Government to discuss greater and faster debt relief with international financial institutions.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to discuss his proposal to hold the debt repayments of those countries without agreed poverty reduction strategy papers in a trust until a PRSP is agreed with other donor countries at the Financing for Development Conference in Mexico in March. [39255]

Ruth Kelly: The UK Government continue to use international meetings to push other donor countries to follow the UK's lead on its "hold in trust" policy, and hold all debt payments in trust for the day they can be returned to fund poverty reduction for all countries still to secure debt relief under the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative because of civil wars, external conflict or the absence of a poverty reduction programme. We also urge other countries to continue to help those heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs) that have yet to benefit from debt relief by providing them both technical and financial assistance on concessional terms and this year, we have spent £130 million on technical advice and capacity building, to support the PRSP process.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to discuss the reform of poverty reduction strategy papers to take account of the financial resources required to achieve the 2015 development goals at the Financing for Development Conference in Mexico in March. [39256]

Ruth Kelly: The UK Government have been at the forefront of pressing for the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers as a key element of the HIPC debt relief process. PRSPs already provide an excellent framework for countries to set out their own spending priorities and needs, in order to achieve country owned goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

However, so far only 10 full PRSPs have been prepared although more than another 30 are under preparation. At the Financing for Development Conference the UK Government will continue to press for the development of well designed and costed PRSPs in all eligible countries. The UK Government will also continue to be calling for a substantial increase in development assistance in order to provide the financing required to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Polarisation (Financial Advice)

17. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has made to the Financial Services Authority's proposals to end polarisation in financial advice. [35760]

Ruth Kelly: I am pleased that the FSA have been able to take forward work on the polarisation regime by publishing consultation paper 121, setting out the options for reform. And I am sure there will be a lively debate about the FSA's proposals.

In principle, these proposals could represent a significant move in the direction of deregulation while maintaining and enhancing consumer protection. But they are of course subject to consultation and I would encourage all those with views to look at the consultation paper and supporting research reports, and let the FSA have their views by 19 April.

Low Pay

19. **Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to increase the take-home pay of those in low paid work. [35763]

Dawn Primarolo: Over the last Parliament this Government introduced the following measures to make work pay: national minimum wage; working families tax credit and childcare tax credit; the 10 pence and 22 pence rates of income tax; and reforms to national insurance contributions.

As a result of these measures families with children in the poorest fifth of the population are on average £1,700 a year better off in real terms.

From April 2003, the working tax credit will extend the principles of WFTC to low paid people without children.

Public Debt

20. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the additional public debt would be as a percentage of GDP if all capital expenditure agreed under private finance and private partnership initiatives were included. [35764]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In my answer to my hon Friend the Member for Eccles (Ian Stewart) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1144–46W, I set out the estimated level of capital spend by the private sector in projects taken forward under the private finance initiative.

It is not possible to calculate accurately the increased level of public debt that would be created if these projects were funded instead by the public sector. That would depend on the way in which the project was taken forward. Since the abolition of universal testing, public authorities choose the method of procurement which is best suited to individual projects.

Families

23. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the measures he announced in the pre-Budget report to support families. [35768]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have received a number of representations regarding measures announced in the PBR to support families and have held discussions with a wide range of organisations both within and outside of Government. These are being considered ahead of Budget and Spending Review 2002.

Productivity

25. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his forecasts are for the impact of productivity on UK economic growth over the next three years. [35770]

Ruth Kelly: Table A4 of the November 2001 pre-Budget Report (Cm 5318) shows the assumed contribution of trend labour productivity growth to trend output growth in the Government's latest economic forecast. In the neutral case, growth of trend labour productivity is assumed to contribute 1.9 percentage points to annual trend output growth during the pre-Budget report forecast period.

Investment

26. **Mr. Beard:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal steps he is taking to encourage investment by British business: [35771]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today to the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) at column 1424W.

Public Services

27. **Roger Casale:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans for investment in public services in London. [35772]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Plans for expenditure on public services across the UK for the next three years will be set out in the summer, following the Spending Review.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he intends to fund improvements in local authority public services; and if he will make a statement. [35769]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government are making additional investment in public services. Local authorities are no exception. Government grant increased by 7.5 per cent. in the 2002–03 local government finance settlement, with provision for spending on education up 8.8 per cent. and social services up 6.2 per cent.

Renewable Energy

28. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will allocate additional resources for renewable energy in the comprehensive spending review. [35773]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Spending plans and outcome targets for Departments will be set as part of the 2002 spending review. The aim of the review will be to determine how best Departments' programmes can contribute to the Government's priorities.

The 2002 spending review will roll forward existing spending plans and set budgets and outcome targets for Departments up to 2005–06. The aim of the review will be to determine how best Departments' programmes can contribute to the Government's priorities.

The review, which will conclude by the summer of 2002, will take a thorough look at all programmes to ensure that the new plans fully reflect the Government's priorities and the scope for greater efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Each Department has been asked to produce a sustainable development report, which will assist in the consideration of the social, economic and environmental implications of their plans.

Combined Heat and Power

30. **Gillian Merron:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the climate change levy on the combined heat and power industry. [35775]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy package has delivered significant benefits to the combined heat and power (CHP) industry.

Fuel used by CHP, heat produced by CHP and electricity sold direct from CHP are all free of the levy. CHP plant can also benefit from 100 per cent. Capital Allowances. Nevertheless, as announced in the Pre-Budget Report, the Government will consider the environmental case for providing even more favourable treatment for CHP.

Employment Levels

31. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on recent measures he has taken to improve levels of employment. [35776]

Ruth Kelly: Figures recently announced show that the employment level is at 28,232 million, and the claimant unemployment level stands at 951,000. Claimant unemployment in Ealing, Southall is down by 27 per cent. since 1997. The new deal has been a contributing factor to these levels of unemployment.

In particular new deal for young people has been successful in its four years of operation; it has placed over 340,000 18–24-year-olds into work. The new deal for 25 plus and the enhanced programme (since April 2001) has also helped over 92,000 long-term unemployed people into work.

To build on this performance, the Government have introduced further measures to increase the effectiveness of the new deal and other employment programmes, including: piloting greater flexibility in the Options section of NDYP from November 2001 to give personal advisers more freedom to tailor the provision of support to meet the needs of the individuals, local employers and local labour markets; establishing a pilot mentoring scheme from January 2002 to assess how mentoring can best be used to improve employment chances and job retention under the new deal; step-up a new programme of transitional employment pilots will target our hardest to help clients who have not been able to find a job through the new deal. People who take up these jobs will receive individual support so that they can eventually make the transition to unsupported jobs in the open labour market; the Government are allocating additional resources to strengthen the Job Transition Service over the next two years, this is to support those communities affected by large-scale redundancies; and the working families' tax credit (WFTC) helps to make work pay for low to middle income families with children. Nearly 1.3 million families with children are currently receiving the WFTC, around 400,000 more than received its predecessor, Family Credit. On average these families are receiving £35 a week more on WFTC than under Family Credit.

Office for National Statistics

32. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the operations of the Office for National Statistics. [35777]

Ruth Kelly: The Office for National Statistics operates in accordance with its three year business plan and reports performance in its annual report and accounts. Copies of these documents are available in the House of Commons Library and on the National Statistics website.

Tax Credits

33. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on how the new integrated tax credits will affect families with children in Lancashire. [35778]

Dawn Primarolo: The new child tax credit, to be introduced in April 2003, will be a single, seamless system of support for families with children. It will build on the foundation of universal child benefit, bringing together all income related payments for children into a single strand of support paid to the main carer.

The child tax credit will be complemented by the new working tax credit and rates and thresholds for these two new tax credits will be set in Budget 2002. As decisions on rates and thresholds have not yet been taken, it is not possible to assess the impact of the tax credits on particular families.

Labour Statistics

34. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the estimate his Department has made of the proportion of the work force who are unemployed and economically inactive, broken down by region. [35779]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's aim is employment opportunity for all, moving towards our long-term ambition that, by the end of the decade, there will be a higher proportion of people in work than ever before.

The number of jobs has increased by over 1.25 million since the 1997 election, with employment rising and unemployment falling in every region and country of the UK.

The monthly National Statistics First Release "Labour Market Statistics" reports labour market data for the regions and countries of the UK. The regional labour market summary in Table 18(1) includes figures on unemployment and economic activity on the basis requested. This publication is available in the Library of the House of Commons.

Private Finance Initiative

35. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the aggregate debt is authorised through PFI projects by the Government sine 1997. [35780]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The annual Financial Statement and Budget Report sets out the estimated level of payments under PFI contracts for the next 25 years. In my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Ian Stewart) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1144–46W, I updated this table.

These figures represent expected payments for services delivered under PFI contracts. Such payments are conditional on the delivery of services to the agreed standard and may be terminated or abated in the event of failure to do so.

World Poverty

36. **Mr. Ross:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress in international efforts to relieve world poverty. [35781]

Ruth Kelly: In recent decades, global development progress has taken place at historically unprecedented rates. Over the last 40 years life expectancy at birth in developing countries has increased by a remarkable 20 years. Over the past 30 years, the illiteracy rate in the developing world has been cut by nearly half, from 47 per cent. to 25 per cent. of all adults. The number of people subsisting on less than $1 per day rose steadily for nearly two centuries, but over the past 20 years it has begun to fall. Thanks to better economic policies in many countries—most importantly in China and India—the number of poor people worldwide has fallen by up to 200 million, even as the world's population rose by 1.6 billion since 1980.

But progress has not been even. Sub-Saharan Africa saw no increase in its per capita incomes between 1965 and 1999, even with improved performance in the late 1990s. Despite progress in education and health indicators, the AIDS epidemic has sharply reversed progress on life expectancy in this region. Many of the transition economics of Eastern Europe and Central Asia suffered deep declines in living standards and sharp rises in inequality during the 1990s.

The UK fully supports the Millennium Development Goals agreed by the United Nations, including that by 2015: instead of 110 million children denied primary education, every child will have the chance of schooling; instead of seven million avoidable deaths each year from preventable diseases, child mortality will be reduced by two thirds; and instead of one billion living in absolute poverty, the proportion of people living in poverty will be halved by 2015.

These are challenging targets. But with the right policies in developing countries and developed countries, supported by the right amount and effective use of resources, most of the goals are achievable. For globalisation to be managed well, we need effective and transparent global institutions which address the challenges in the poorest countries. Trade, investment and development assistance are essential building blocks for poverty reduction.

The Government have increased the budget of the Department for International Development (DfID) to £3.6 billion—a 45 per cent. increase in real terms between 1997–98 and 2003–04. We will significantly raise the amount of our development aid, and also raise its share in national income, in our next spending round covering the years up to 2005–06. The Government are also promoting a significant increase in development aid from all donor countries and international institutions to build capacity and address the long-term causes of poverty in the poorest countries. The Government have proposed an International Development Trust Fund to pool contributions and build on the work of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the regional development banks.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed; [38728]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new

contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and (b) won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years; [38727]

(3) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years. [38726]

Ruth Kelly: This information could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Office of National Savings

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1037W, if he will place a copy of the strategic marketing review in the Library. [39035]

Ruth Kelly: It would not be appropriate to place the strategic marketing review in the Library as it contains material that is commercially sensitive.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1037W, what action the Office of National Savings has taken, pursuant to the conclusion of the strategic marketing review that it should develop the relationship with Post Office. [39034]

Ruth Kelly: We have set up a governance structure at a strategic and tactical level between National Savings and Investments and Post Office Limited, working jointly on projects to achieve positive outcomes and increased value for both organisations. This has led to a deeper understanding of each organisation's primary objectives and business environment, and consequently a much greater degree of commercial and operational alignment.

Payroll Systems

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many small businesses have accepted the offer of a detailed health check of their payroll systems. [38515]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is as follows:

Year ended 31 March 2001*—1,075

1 April 2001 to 31 January 2002—627

* First year health check service offered.

Income Tax

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the trends in the number of income tax payers between *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [38518]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to "Inland Revenue Statistics" table 2.1, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income—tax/it—t01—1.htm.

UK Poverty

Mike Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans to reduce poverty in the United Kingdom. [35758]

Dawn Primarolo: This Government are committed to abolishing child poverty within a generation and halving it by 2010. A strategy document entitled "Tackling child poverty: giving every child the best possible start in life" was published in December 2001. This document will inform the Budget and Spending Review 2002.

As a result of personal tax and benefit changes announced in the last Parliament, there are now 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there would otherwise have been. A new tax credit for families with children—the child tax credit—will be introduced for children from April 2003 building on the foundation of universal child benefit. But child poverty is not only about incomes, it is also about inadequate service provision. The Government have made substantial new investments in this area. From 2000–01—2003–04, average real-terms annual growth in spending on education and training in England will be over 5.5 per cent. In addition, extra funds have been made available for SureStart, Neighbourhood Renewal and the Children's Fund.

Afghanistan

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been allocated from the contingency fund to finance the military action in Afghanistan. [35767]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Contingencies Fund is not part of the Government's budgetary arrangements. It allows for cash advances to departments for expenditure on urgent services in anticipation of parliamentary approval.

MOD are seeking an advance pending Spring Supplementary Estimates approval for £1.6 billion, to be repaid once the Estimate is approved. This relates to a range of additional resources for MOD, including Afghanistan.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answers given by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1133–34W, which set out the level of MOD spending on Afghanistan.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason he selected Arthur Andersen to take the lead role in his value for money report on PFI; and how many PFI contracts have been given to *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture since that report was completed. [33283]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Through a competition under established procurement procedures, a report on Value for Money Drivers in the Private Finance Initiative was commissioned in 1999 by the Treasury Taskforce. Three firms bid for the work including Arthur Andersen, which was selected because it offered best value for money.

The report was delivered to the Taskforce and made available publicly in January 2000. Information on contracts for advisory services to departments on PFI projects is not recorded centrally.

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33840]

Ruth Kelly: The following information and tables provide the information required in the form in which the Chancellor's Departments and agencies have been able to compile it, without having to incur disproportionate costs.

HM Treasury including DMO

Spend £	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Andersen	nil	nil	nil	£49,350	£15,275
Deloitte & Touche	nil	£411	nil	nil	£91,473
Ernst & Young	£9,928	£156,144	£122,800	nil	nil
KPMG	£52,876	£5,875	£268,775	£41,125	nil
PricewaterhouseCoopers	£46,903	£87,773	£356,513	£462,251	£19,892

Office of Government Commerce including OGC Buying Solutions

Spend £	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Andersen Consulting	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Deloitte & Touche	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Ernst & Young	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
KPMG	£138,000	£117,000	£110,000	261,000	£85,000
PricewaterhouseCoopers	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil

HM Customs & Excise

Spend £	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Accenture plc				£57,479	£6,181,215
Andersen Consulting				£245,340	
Deloitte & Touche	£161,301	£248,503	£231,791	£876,061	£38,748
Ernst & Young	£357,450	£397,528	£108,256	£253,153	£215,748
KPMG	£37,167	£282,528	£255,856	£214,190	£1,237,316
PricewaterhouseCoopers		£153,204	£207,495	£243,254	£111,356

Inland Revenue

Spend £	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Andersen	Information for these years can only be provided at disproportionate cost.			nil	nil
Deloitte & Touche				nil	£2,115
Ernst & Young/Cap Gemini				£1,937,237	£1,673,971
KPMG				£92,500	nil
PricewaterhouseCoopers				£141,101	£190,372

The Valuation Office—Executive Agency of the Inland Revenue

No contracts have been let by this agency during the period in question

The Royal Mint including Audit Work

Spend £	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Andersen	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Deloitte & Touche	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Ernst & Young	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
KPMG	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
PricewaterhouseCoopers	£99,000	£58,000	£57,000	£137,000	£51,000

Office of National Statistics

Spend £	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Andersen Consulting	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Deloitte & Touche	£14,687	nil	nil	£699	£15
Ernst & Young	nil	nil	nil	£50	nil
KPMG	£44,325	£472,769	£44,325	£251,876	£191,296
PricewaterhouseCoopers	nil	£581	nil	£2,198	nil

National Savings

Spend £	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Andersen Consulting	nil	£14,000	nil	nil	nil
Deloitte & Touche	nil	£56,000	£799,000	£570,000	£420,000
Ernst & Young	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
KPMG	£518,000	£999,000	nil	nil	nil
PricewaterhouseCoopers	£15,000	£310,000	£32,000	£43,000	nil

Government Actuaries Department

Have not dealt with any of the companies in question for the years mentioned.

Royal Mint Shareholder Panel

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the process by which members of the Royal Mint shareholder panel were chosen; and if he will place the terms of reference for the posts in the Library. [38258]

Ruth Kelly: In addition to civil servants, the shareholder panel's three private sector members were appointed using the principles set out in the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. This involved seeking nominations from approximately 130 private and public sector bodies, selection by a panel including an independent assessor and public announcement of the appointments.

The terms of reference for the posts have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

War Debts

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what outstanding liabilities there are to the United Kingdom of lend-lease loan facilities arranged during the Second World War; [38441]

(2) what total payments have been made to meet World War II debts owed to the United Kingdom by other countries; what debts remain unpaid; and what the schedule is of future payments to the UK; [38425]

(3) what the level is of First World War debt owed by the United Kingdom to the United States of America; in what year repayments were last made to the USA; and what plans he has to *(a)* pay off the debt and *(b)* cancel liability to this debt; [38427]

(4) what outstanding schedule of payments the United Kingdom Government will make to the USA in respect of World War II debt; and what the date is of the final payment; [38424]

(5) what loans and other financial liabilities incurred by the United Kingdom with the United States of America for World War II *(a)* have been paid and *(b)* are outstanding; [38426]

(6) what recent representations the United Kingdom Government have made to the USA for the cancellation of *(a)* World War I and *(b)* World War II debts and lend-lease loans. [38440]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows.

First World War debt

At the end of the First World War the United Kingdom debt to the United States amounted to around £850 million. Repayments of the debt were made between 1923 and 1931. In 1931, President Hoover of the United States proposed a one-year moratorium on all War debts, which allowed extensive international discussions on the general problems of debt repayment to be held. However, no satisfactory agreement was reached. In the absence of such an agreement no payments have been made to, or received from, other nations since 1934.

At the time of the moratorium the United Kingdom was owed more by other nations (£2,269 billion) than the outstanding principal it owed the United States ($4,368 billion—at 1934 exchange rates this was around £866 million).

Second World War debt

Under a 1945 Agreement the United States Government lent the United Kingdom a total of $4,336 million (around £1,075 million at 1945 exchange rates) in war loans. These loans were taken out under two facilities: (i) a Line of Credit of $3,750 million (around £930 million at 1945 exchange rates); and (ii) a Lend-Lease loan facility of $586 million (around £145 million at 1945 exchange rates), which represented the settlement with the United States for Lend-Lease and Reciprocal Aid and for the final settlement of the financial claims of each government against the other arising out of the conduct of the Second World War.

Under the Agreement the loans would be repaid in 50 annual instalments commencing in 1950. However the Agreement allowed deferral of annual payments of both principal and interest if necessary because of prevailing international exchange rate conditions and the level of the United Kingdom's foreign currency and gold reserves. The United Kingdom has deferred payments on six occasions. Repayment of the war loans to the United States Government should therefore be completed on 31 December 2006, subject to the United Kingdom not choosing to exercise its option to defer payment.

As at 31 March 2001 principal of $346,287,953 (£243,573,154 at the exchange rate on that day) was outstanding on the loans provided by the United States Government in 1945. The Government intend to meet its obligations under the 1945 Agreement by repaying the United States Government in full the amounts lend in 1945.

All World War II debts owed to the United Kingdom by other countries have either been repaid or settlements have been agreed with the countries concerned. Details are provided in the Finance Accounts of the United Kingdom and their successor the Supplementary Statements to the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts for the financial years 1945–46 to 1987–88 and the following Command Papers:

China CM 198;

Czechoslovakia Cmd 7798 and Cmnds 55, 56 and 2280;

France Cmnd 6988;

Netherlands Cmd 7358;

Poland Cmd 6864 and 7148 and Cmnd 1057;

Turkey Cmds 6165 and 9120; and

USSR Cmd 7297.

Overseas Education

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for increasing Britain's contributions towards education in foreign countries in the next three years. [38815]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are strongly committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education (UPE) in all countries by the year 2015 and gender equity in primary and secondary schooling by 2005.

Since May 1997 the Department for International Development has committed over £600 million to education. In addition, we will be launching the Commonwealth Education Fund on 12 March. The Fund will support the achievement of universal primary education (UPE) in the poorest Commonwealth countries. The Government have pledged £10 million to kickstart the Fund, and will match donations from business and individuals pound for pound including tax relief.

Education will continue to be given high priority under our development assistance programme because it is a precondition of development and poverty reduction.

The UK's International Development budget has risen by 45 per cent. in real terms since 1997 and is now at the highest level ever. The ratio of Official Development Assistance to Gross National Product is on course to rise from 0.26 per cent. to 0.33 per cent. by 2003–04. We will significantly raise the amount of our development aid, and also raise its share in national income, in our next spending round covering the years up to 2005–06.

Debt Relief

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects all countries eligible for assistance with debt relief under the HIPC initiative to receive debt relief; and what plans he has to raise this at the Financing for Development Conference in Mexico in March. [39252]

Ruth Kelly: The UK Government have consistently been at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief issues, and have repeatedly pushed for the process to be speeded up.

To be eligible for assistance with debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative countries must show a commitment to poverty reduction and have an interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Out of 42 HIPCs in total, the UK Government are pleased that 25 have already reached decision point.

However, of the remaining countries most are in conflict or have governance problems. For this reason the UK Government argued strongly last year for the creation of an International Monetary Fund post-conflict assistance account. This account will help these countries to make progress towards peace, good governance and a sound economic framework so that they can secure the full benefits of debt relief under the HIPC initiative.

The UK raised these issues at the annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank last year, and will continue to do so in all appropriate international forums, including the Financing for Development Conference in Mexico in March.

Devolved Administrations (Spending)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the mathematical formula he uses to decide net change to spending for devolved administrations. [38822]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The formula was published by the Treasury in the Statement of Funding Policy in July 2000.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 700W, on special advisers, if he will state the purpose of advising departmental heads of information of contacts with the media; and if he will make a statement. [39109]

Ruth Kelly: The purpose is set out in clause 9 of the code of conduct on special advisers.

Small Enterprises (Allowances)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 579W, on small enterprise allowances, what use has been made of these allowances. [38660]

Dawn Primarolo: While the Inland Revenue are looking at how businesses use the scheme, it is not currently possible to draw any conclusions.

Computer Software

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what computer software complies with the Inland Revenue's payroll software standards. [38516]

Dawn Primarolo: There are currently 13 software packages which have been tested and proven to comply with the Inland Revenue payroll standard.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the changes in Inland Revenue staff numbers between 1 January 2000 and 1 January 2002. [38519]

Dawn Primarolo: The changes in Inland Revenue staff numbers between 1 January 2000 and 1 January 2002—given in the *Official Report*, 4 February 2002, column 695W—are due to the net effect of various new initiatives including support for new businesses, the extension of child tax credit and the collection of student loans and in response to the Grabiner report into the informal economy. They are consistent with figures of planned annual staff usage published in the Government's Expenditure Plans, 2001–04, a copy of which is held in the Library.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the work of the Inland Revenue Business Support Team. [38514]

Dawn Primarolo: The published Inland Revenue Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 2000 (pages 12 to 13) contains full details of the work of Inland Revenue Business Support Teams.

Enterprise Scheme[illegible]

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the economic impact of the Enterprise Investment Scheme and Venture Capital Trust schemes. [38512]

Dawn Primarolo: An independent contractor is currently undertaking research, for the Inland Revenue, into the economic effects of the EIS and VCT schemes. This work is expected to be completed in the summer.

Enterprise Management Incentives

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies with fewer than *(a)* 16 and *(b)* seven employees took advantage of enterprise management incentives in 2000–01. [38517]

Dawn Primarolo: Enterprise management incentives (EMI) were introduced in Finance Act 2000 as part of the Government's productivity and enterprise agenda. They are targeted, tax-advantaged share option incentives to help small companies recruit and retain the staff they need to grow. Until Finance Act 2001 there was a limit of 15 on the number of employees in a company that could be granted EMI options. In Finance Act 2001 that limit was removed and replaced with an overall limit on the value of options granted of £3 million per company.

In January 2002 the gross asset limit, which defines the size of company that can qualify for EMI, was doubled from £15 million to £30 million. The number of people employed by a company is not relevant to the decision on whether it qualifies to grant EMI options and the information requested is not available. However, between 6 April 2000 and 5 April 2001 4,540 options were granted by 807 companies, an average of 5.6 options per company.

PRIME MINISTER

Senior Salaries

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the report and recommendations of the Review Body on Senior Salaries. [40338]

The Prime Minister: The 2002 report of the Review Body on Senior Salaries, which makes recommendations about the pay of the senior civil service, senior military personnel and the judiciary, together with the annual uprating of Parliamentary salaries, is being published today. Copies are in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. I am grateful to the Chairman and members of the Review Body for their work.

The main recommendations of the Review Body are: Senior Civil Service (SCS): an increase from 1 April 2002 of 2.5 per cent. to the Government's final indicative rates for the minima, target rates and maxima for each pay band and a new band for Permanent Secretaries; a minimum bonus payment of 3 per cent. or £2,000, whichever is the higher, for those making the greatest contribution; and a sum equivalent to 0.4 per cent. of the total SCS pay bill to be made available for use by departments to address anomalies; Senior military: an increase from 1 April 2002 of 2.5 per cent. in the value of all points on the new incremental pay scales; and Judiciary: an increase from 1 April 2002 of 8 per cent.

The Government have decided to accept these recommendations in full for the senior civil service and senior military. The award for the judiciary will be staged, with 3.6 per cent. payable from 1 April 2002, and the remaining 4.4 per cent. payable from 1 April 2003.

The cost of all the awards will be met within existing departmental expenditure limits.

Pay increases for Members of Parliament and Ministers are linked automatically to the increase in pay bands for the senior civil service. Their pay entitlement will therefore increase from 1 April 2002 by 2.5 per cent. In addition they will receive the second and final instalment of £2,000 recommended by the Review Body on Senior Salaries in its forty eighth report of March 2001.

Government Properties

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister in respect of *(a)* the flat above No. 10 Downing Street, *(b)* the flat above No. 11 Downing Street, *(c)* the flat in 1 Carlton Gardens, *(d)* Flat 1 in Admiralty House, *(e)* Flat 2 in Admiralty House, *(f)* Flat 3 in Admiralty House and *(g)* Government House in Pimlico (i) who the present occupants are, (ii) how much has been spent on (A) routine maintenance and (B) other building works in each year since 1995 and (iii) which have their council tax liabilities met by the inhabitants. [34369]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 February 2002.]:* The flats above numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street have traditionally been the residences of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The flat in 1 Carlton Gardens is currently occupied by the President of the Council. The flats in Admiralty House and the Government House in Pimlico, which in the past have been assigned to a variety of Ministers, are currently occupied by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Home Secretary. One flat in Admiralty House is currently unoccupied.

Payment for routine maintenance and other building works is the responsibility of the occupying Minister's department. Expenditure on work to the flat above No. 11 Downing Street is as follows:

1997–98: £16,471;

1998–99: £48,336;

1999–00: £32,189;

2000–01: £37,501.

Figures for 1995 to 1997 are not available in this form.

The level and responsibility for payment of council tax is determined on whether the property is the Minister's main or secondary residence. If a main residence, the responsibility for payment of the tax falls to the Minister. I am responsible for meeting the full cost of the council tax on the flat above number 11 Downing Street.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister how many receptions have been held at No. 10 Downing Street since 1 May 1997; and if he will list *(a)* the date, *(b)* the purpose, *(c)* the host, *(d)* the estimated number in attendance and *(e)* the cost to public funds of each reception. [34439]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The programme of events at No. 10 is designed to give access to as many people as possible and includes regular children's tea parties and receptions for a wide cross-section of the community.

Over 280 official and charity receptions have been held at 10 Downing Street since 1 May 1997. I have placed a list in the Library.

Total costs are not available in the form requested. However, the total cost to my office for all official entertainment at 10 Downing Street and Chequers was as follows:

1997–98: £43,777;

1998–99: £53,639;

1999–00: £60,652;

2000–01: £72,790.

The costs of the charity receptions are funded by the charities involved.

As was the practice under previous administrations, I have hosted a number of political events at Downing Street. The costs of these were met by the Labour Party.

Official and charity receptions hosted by the Prime Minister and Mrs. Blair

Date			
1997			
13 May	Prime Minister	Reception—Eve of Session	120
14 June	Prime Minister	Reception—Trooping the Colour	100
26 June	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	40
2 July	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
15 July	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
22 July	Prime Minister	Reception—Design Industry	150
30 July	Prime Minister	Reception—General	200
8 October	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
15 October	Prime Minister	Reception—General	200
30 October	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
27 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
10 December	Prime Minister	Reception—General	200
18 December	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
1998			
29 January	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/ Children	40
11 February	Prime Minister	Reception—New Deal	n/a
9 March	Prime Minister	Reception—New Designers' Competition	n/a
26 March	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
26 March	Prime Minister	Reception—Voluntary Sector	200
1 April	Prime Minister	Tea—Women's Magazine Editors	n/a
6 April	Prime Minister	Reception—Eur Football Leaders	n/a
23 April	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Child[illegible]	70
27 April	Prime Minister	Reception—Cri[illegible]d Drugs	200
1 May	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
13 May	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
21 May	Prime Minister	Reception—Education	200
2 June	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
10 June	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
13 June	Prime Minister	Trooping the Colour	120
18 June	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
1 July	Prime Minister	Reception—Health	200
2 July	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
23 July	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
8 September	Mrs. Blair	Reception—Women Magazine Editors	n/a
17 September	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
6 October	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
21 October	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
27 October	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
17 November	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
18 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
23 November	Prime Minister	Reception—Eve of Session	120
30 November	Prime Minister	Reception—Development	n/a
2 December	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
8 December	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
14 December	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40

Official and charity receptions hosted by the Prime Minister and Mrs. Blair

Date			
1999			
27 January	Prime Minister	Reception—Work & Leisure	100
28 January	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
28 January	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
9 February	Prime Minister	Reception—Education	200
15 February	Prime Minister	Technology College Trusts	n/a
18 February	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
24 February	Mrs. Blair	Tea—Readers of Women's Weekly	30
23 February	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
29 February	Mrs. Blair	Tea—Gold Start Awards	n/a
10 March	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
11 March	Prime Minister	Reception—Millennium Lecture on Science	100
11 April	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
15 April	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
15 April	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
19 April	Prime Minister	Reception—Regional Press Association	80
11 May	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
13 May	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
20 May	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
27 May	Prime Minister	Reception—Wealth Creation	100
12 June	Prime Minister	Trooping the Colour	120
14 June	Prime Minister	Reception—Older People	100
15 June	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
23 June	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
5 July	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
7 July	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
15 July	Prime Minister	Reception—Education	100
19 July	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
14 September	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
20 September	Prime Minister	Reception—British Fashion Council	500
13 October	Prime Minister	Reception—Arts & Culture	100
27 October	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
4 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
8 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
16 November	Prime Minister	Reception—Eve of Session	100
18 November	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
25 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
18 November	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
8 December	Prime Minister	Reception—Britishness	100
13 December	Prime Minister	Reception—Armed Forces	350
15 December	Mrs. Blair	Tea—Women's Own Children of Courage	30
16 December	Mrs. Blair	Tea MP's/Children	70
2000			
17 January	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
22 January	Prime Minister	Reception—Emergency Services	200
25 January	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
2 February	Prime Minister	Reception—Rural Community	200
7 February	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
24 February	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
28 February	Prime Minister	Reception—NHS Doctors	200
29 February	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
1 March	Mrs. Blair	Charity	27
2 March	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
6 March	Prime Minister	Reception—Health	100
14 March	Prime Minister	Reception—Top 50 Schools	80
15 March	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
22 March	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
27 March	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
29 March	Prime Minister	Tea—Daily Star Awards	20
30 March	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
10 April	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
12 April	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
17 April	Prime Minister	Reception—Press Lobby	100
10 May	Prime Minister	Reception—UK/ Caribbean	200
15 June	Prime Minister	Tea—Police Bravery Awards	110
17 June	Prime Minister	Trooping the Colour	130
28 June	Prime Minister	Reception—Primary Care Sector	200
25 July	Prime Minister	Tea—Football Foundation Launch	40
13 September	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
3 October	Prime Minister	Reception—Student Press	30
4 October	Prime Minister	Reception—Better Buildings	200
17 October	Prime Minister	Reception—Museum of TV & Radio	100
1 November	Prime Minister	Reception—Ethnic Press	75
8 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
9 November	Prime Minister	Charity	30
14 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
23 November	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
4 December	Prime Minister	Reception—Environment	100
5 December	Prime Minister	Reception—Eve of Session	105
12 December	Mrs. Blair	Tea—Women's Own Children of Courage	28
14 December	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	?
2001			
9 January	Prime Minister	Reception—Regional Editors	100
11 January	Prime Minister	Reception—Olympic Games	100
22 January	Prime Minister	Reception—Floods	200
25 January	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	40
6 February	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
15 February	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
26 February	Prime Minister	Reception—NHS Doctors	200
27 February	Prime Minister	Reception—Radio Academy's News	175
28 February	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
8 March	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
12 March	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
14 March	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
26 March	Prime Minister	Reception—Childcare	150
28 March	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
4 April	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
5 April	Mrs. Blair	Tea—1951 Women European Tour	17
20 April	Mrs. Blair	Tea—World Travel Leaders	65
22 May	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
13 June	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
16 June	Prime Minister	Trooping the Colour	120
19 June	Prime Minister	Reception—Eve of Session	100
25 June	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
26 June	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
27 June	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
3 July	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
5 July	Prime Minister	Tea—Police Bravery Awards	120
9 July	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
23 July	Prime Minister	Reception—NHS	200
10 September	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
17 September	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
19 September	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
24 September	Prime Minister	Reception—Policing	200
24 October	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
29 October	Prime Minister	Reception—Higher Education	200
31 October	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
1 November	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	56
8 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40

Official and charity receptions hosted by the Prime Minister and Mrs. Blair

Date			
8 November	Prime Minister	Reception—President of Pakistan	40
14 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
19 November	Prime Minister	Reception—Women's Media	70
20 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
27 November	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
4 December	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
6 December	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	40
7 December	Mrs. Blair	Tea—MP's/Children	70
10 December	Mrs. Blair	Tea—Women in Public Services	30
12 December	Mrs. Blair	Tea—Children of Courage	30
17 December	Prime Minister	Reception—Africa	100
18 December	Mrs. Blair	Charity	50
2002			
9 January	Prime Minister	Reception—Regional Newspaper Editors	80
17 January	Prime Minister	Reception—Faith Community	180
21 January	Prime Minister	Reception—Communications Industry	200
22 January	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
30 January	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
4 February	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40
5 February	Mrs. Blair	Charity	40

Mr. Alastair Campbell

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish *(a)* the latest functions and *(b)* the salary of Mr. Alastair Campbell; and what changes have been made to them following the announcement of his new role relating to the Central Office of Information. [37158]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* Alastair Campbell is appointed under Article 3(3) of the Civil Service Order in Council. He is responsible for Communication and Strategy and in that role covers the work of the Press Office, the Strategic Communications Unit and the Research and Information Unit.

The Cabinet Office have already announced that following the quinquennial review of the Central Office of Information the Chief Executive of the COI will have an additional role as the Government's chief adviser on marketing communications and information campaigns and works with the Director of Communications and Strategy at No. 10. This will strengthen the co-ordination and planning of departmental publicity strategies across Whitehall and changes should be in place by 1 April 2002. The Chief Executive of the COI remains fully accountable to Cabinet Office Ministers for the work of the COI, and they remain accountable to Parliament. Individual departments remain responsible for individual campaigns.

Under the terms of the Order in Council Alastair Campbell is not restricted to an advisory role and is allowed to direct and manage permanent civil servants. On pay, I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 850W.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the official visits within the UK outside London he made in 2001 giving for each trip *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance was used on the choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38160]

The Prime Minister: In 2001, I have undertaken the following official visits within the UK outside of London.

Date	*Destination*
9 January	Bristol
25–26 January	Teeside
1–2 February	Kettering, Birmingham
18 February	Glasgow
1–2 March	Gloucester, Swansea
7–9 March	Aldergrove, Inverness
14–15 March	Teeside
22–24 March	Carlisle, Exeter
27 March	Worcester
30 March	Carlisle, Newcastle
3 April	Colchester
3 April	Cardiff
6 April	Leeds/Bradford
11 April	Exeter/Torquay
18–19 April	Teeside
26 April	Carlisle, Cumbria, East Midlands
4 May	Teeside
22 June	Teeside
26–27 July	Carlisle, Penrith, Keswick, Hull
1–2 September	Edinburgh, Aberdeen
7–8 September	Teeside
11 September	Brighton
30 October	Bristol, Cardiff
5 November	Birmingham
22–23 November	Birmingham, Teeside
6 December	Reading
10 December	Essex
20–21 December	Teeside

My visits covered a range of matters including health, education, foot and mouth disease and tourism.

I travel making the most efficient and cost-effective arrangements. My travel arrangements are in accordance with the arrangements for official travel set out in chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code, and the accompanying guidance document, Travel by Ministers.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by him in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance was used on the choice of mode of travel for such visits. [38161]

The Prime Minister: Lists of overseas visits undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing more than £500 during the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 were placed in the Library of the House and published in the *Official Report* on 20 July 2001, column 467W. The list for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

I travel making the most efficient and cost-effective arrangements. My travel arrangements are in accordance with the arrangements for official travel set out in chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code, and the accompanying guidance document, Travel by Ministers.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his office in each of the last four years. [38925]

The Prime Minister: My office does not have an in-house canteen.

For the total cost to my Office for all official entertainment at 10 Downing Street and Chequers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) today at column 1444W.

Mr. Martin Sixsmith

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Prime Minister if he will initiate an inquiry into the conduct of Sir Richard Mottram in relation to Mr. Martin Sixsmith. [38447]

The Prime Minister: No. Sir Richard Mottram has already provided a detailed account of his involvement in matters relating to Mr. Martin Sixsmith.

United Nations

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Prime Minister which Minister has responsibility for UK relations with the United Nations. [38500]

The Prime Minister: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane).

No. 10 Delivery Unit

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the names of those in the No. 10 Delivery Unit, who are responsible for overseeing the work in the areas of *(a)* transport, *(b)* health, *(c)* crime and asylum and *(d)* education. [38405]

The Prime Minister: The Delivery Unit reports to me under the day to day supervision of the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Lord Macdonald, and is headed by Michael Barber. The unit is working closely with the Treasury and other Departments to ensure that the Government achieve their delivery priorities during this Parliament across the key areas of public service: health, education, crime, asylum and transport. At 1 January 2002, 17 full-time and three part-time civil servants were employed in the Delivery Unit, and no special advisers.

Business Contracts

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister, (1) pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, Ref 36802, *Official Report*, column 701W, under what provision of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information he has declined to say on how many occasions in the past two years he has written to foreign Governments about the award of contracts to companies with British interests. [39032]

(2) on how many occasions in the past two years he has written to the Prime Minister of Romania about the award of contracts to companies with British interests. [39039]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer for the reasons I explained. It is not normal practice to release letters from the Prime Minister to another Head of Government under exemption 1(b) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Exemption 13 of the Code also applies with regard to commercial confidentiality.

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will name the person or persons responsible for drafting the letter to the Romanian Prime Minister regarding LNM-Ispat International's contract for the SIDEX steel plant; [39041]

(2) how many drafts were made of the letter to the Romanian Prime Minister, Adrian Nastasi, regarding LNM-Ispat International's contract for the SIDEX steel plant; [39042]

(3) on whose advice and authority the letter to the Romanian Prime Minister regarding LNM-Ispat International's contract for the SIDEX steel plant was *(a)* drafted, *(b)* signed and *(c)* sent. [39040]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister on behalf of how many companies *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* on the Isle of Wight and *(c)* in Leicestershire he has written to overseas leaders seeking support for investment contracts since 1997. [39333]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him and the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on Thursday 14 February, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Hammond Inquiry

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister for what reason he decided to re-open Sir Anthony Hammond's inquiry into the Hinduja passport affair; how many representations, and from whom, he received to do so; and when the first such representation was received. [39334]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on Tuesday 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 864W.

DEFENCE

Joint Force Harrier

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his future plans are for Joint Force Harrier; and if he will make a statement. [40173]

Mr. Ingram: I have agreed an investment plan to take forward Joint Force Harrier (JFH) into the era of Future Joint Combat Aircraft (FJCA) and Future Carriers.

The Strategic Defence Review (SDR) included a commitment to establish JFH, building on the success of Royal Navy and RAF Harrier aircraft operations in joint carrier air groups. This was a radical initiative to form a truly joint, flexible and deployable force optimised for the demands of the new strategic environment. JFH currently operates two aircraft types—Sea Harrier FA2, an air defence aircraft flown by RN personnel, and Harrier GR7, a ground attack/reconnaissance aircraft flown by RAF personnel. The plan has been for both the Sea Harrier FA2 and Harrier GR7 to be replaced by a common aircraft type. This is currently designated the FJCA with an In Service Date of 2012.

Work has been taking place on a migration plan to take forward JFH into the era of the FJCA and the future aircraft carrier. We have concluded that Joint Force Harrier should migrate to an all Harrier GR force, maximising investment in one aircraft type. It is planned to upgrade the GR7 to GR9 standard to ensure a credible expeditionary offensive capability until the aircraft leaves service. To achieve this, aircraft systems will be enhanced to extend their lives and give the Harrier the capability to operate with smart weapons.

Given the Harrier GR9's ability in future to employ smart weapons world-wide by day and night from land and sea and the increased emphasis on carrier based offensive air-power in the SDR and confirmed by the emerging conclusions of our post-11 September work, the Sea Harrier FA2 will be withdrawn earlier than planned, by 2006. The Sea Harrier entered service in 1979, and will start to become obsolescent as this decade progresses.

As a consequence of its earlier withdrawal from service, the planned relocation of Sea Harrier FA2 aircraft from RNAS Yeovilton to RAF Cottesmore and RAF Wittering in 2003 will not now proceed. The relocation of RN personnel will go ahead but slightly later than currently planned, over the period 2004 to 2006. By 1 April 2007, JFH will have migrated to an all Harrier GR9 force by roughly equal numbers of RN and RAF personnel. These proposals will be subject to consultation with the Trade Unions in the normal way.

This plan will significantly enhance the offensive strike capability of our aircraft carriers pending introduction to service of the FJCA.

Nimrod MRA4

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has changed his procurement plans for the Nimrod MRA4. [40174]

Dr. Moonie: The Nimrod MRA4 will replace the Nimrod MR2 as the RAF's new maritime patrol aircraft Recent work on future maritime reconnaissance capabilities has shown that the operational tasks of the Nimrod MRA4 aircraft can be carried out with a smaller fleet than originally envisaged. This will allow us to reduce the number of aircraft on order from 21 to 18. This revised approach will allow the RAF to meet all the tasks for which the aircraft is being procured while delivering better value for money.

This judgment reflects a number of factors. The submarine threat, while still prevalent worldwide, has not developed as expected when the production contract was signed in 1996. Moreover, the Nimrod MRA4 will also offer a markedly greater capability compared to the MR2 it succeeds, through improved aircraft and sensor performance. Finally, discussions with BAE Systems, the prime contractor, have identified potential in-service support options to maximise aircraft availability for operational tasking.

The Defence Procurement Agency is working with BAE Systems on an incremental approach to delivery for Nimrod MRA4. This includes the acceptance of aircraft in two steps. An initial capability will be provided by the time of first contracted aircraft delivery in August 2004 with the full specification being met by the time of the seventh aircraft delivery and entry into service which is contracted for March 2005. The reduced order will affect only the last three aircraft of the previously planned production run.

In accordance with the partnership principle of Smart Acquisition, agreement has been reached with BAE. Systems to maximise the financial benefits to the Ministry of Defence of this reduced order while incentivising the company appropriately. The reduction in procurement costs will be agreed in detail with the company. On the basis of current assumptions, the smaller fleet is expected to reduce support costs alone by some £360 million.

AWE

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British universities have research contracts with AWE; and if he will list them. [32714]

Dr. Moonie: AWE plc currently have research contracts with a total of 24 British universities. Confidentiality clauses in these contracts make it necessary for AWE to seek confirmation from each university that they are willing to have their names released. 21 of the universities have so consented and are listed below:

University of Birmingham
University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
Cardiff University
University of Dundee
University of Glasgow
Herriot-Watt University
Royal Holloway University of London
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine
University of Kent at Canterbury
University of Liverpool
University College of London
Loughborough University Consultants Ltd
Manchester Metropolitan University
University of Nottingham
University of Reading
University of Southampton
University of Surrey
University of Warwick
University of Bangor Wales
University of York

Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of the publications issued by the Central Corporate Communications Division in each of the last four years, what was *(a)* the circulation, *(b)* the cost and *(c)* the purpose of each. [34434]

Dr. Lewis Moonie: The information requested for the main publications produced by our central corporate communication division, and its predecessors, where known, is shown in the following tables.

Financial year 1998–99

Publication	*Cost (£)*[1]	*Circulation (numbers)*[2]	*Purpose*
Strategic Defence Review	71,880[1]	10,000	Published outcome of the Strategic Defence Review
Defence Booklets	55,988	122,000	Information booklets on a variety of defence subjects
Annual Report of Defence Activity 1997–98	19,051	75,000	Reports defence activity
"Sanctuary"	24,194	24,000	Annual publication describing MoD conservation activity
Defence Factsheets	11,991	120,000 (total)	A series of folded A4-leaflets giving general information on a specific defence issue
Ministry of Defence Performance Report 1997–98	4,227[3]	510	Reports on MoD performance in the previous year
"Focus"	167,791[4]	55,000 (per month)	Monthly in-house newspaper, for MoD staff

Financial year 1999–2000

Publication	*Cost (£)*[1]	*Circulation (numbers)*[2]	*Purpose*
Defence White Paper 1999	26,052[1]	5,000	To inform Parliament and the public of defence activity and policies
Defence Annual Report and Mission Booklets	17,514	70,000	Describe defence mission, and reports defence activity
Defence Booklets	25,373	15,000 (total)	Information booklets on a variety of defence subjects
Defence Factsheets	47,868	436,700 (total)	A series of folded A4-leaflets giving general information on a specific defence issue
Factsheets (in Welsh language)	8,439	28,000 (total)	As above, in Welsh language
Large text/braille/audio material	24,155	2,100 large print booklets 400 audio cassettes 1,200 braille booklets (totals)	Provision of defence information to people who are visually impaired
"Sanctuary"	21,920	24,000	Annual publication describing MoD conservation activity
"Focus"	174,329[4]	55,000 (per month)	Monthly in-house newspaper, for MoD staff
Ministry of Defence Performance Report 1998–99	7,104[5]	600	Reports on MoD performance in the previous year

Financial year 2000–01

Publication	*Cost (£)*[1]	*Circulation (numbers)*[2]	*Purpose*
Defence Factsheets	32,832	390,500 (total)	A series of folded A4-leaflets giving general information on a specific defence issue
Factsheets (in Welsh language)	10,480	32,000	As above, in Welsh language
Defence Booklets	38,983	35,900	Information booklets on a variety of defence subjects
Kosovo Lessons from the Crisis	2,500[3]	5,000	Command paper on Kosovo campaign
Ministry of Defence Performance Report 1999–2000	6,803.40[3]	800	Reports on MoD performance in the previous year
"Focus"	161,950[4]	55,000 (per month)	Monthly in-house newspaper, for MoD staff
"Sanctuary"	19,092	24,000	Annual publication describing MoD conservation activity

Financial year 2001–02[5]

Publication	*Cost (£)*[1]	*Circulation (numbers)*[2]	*Purpose*
"Defence Matters"	15,626	8,000	Colour brochure explaining range of defence activities
Defence booklets	21,723	10,500 (total)	Information booklets on a variety of defence subjects
Defence Factsheets	32,170	153,700 (total)	A series of folded A4-leaflets giving general information on a specific defence issue
"Blue Book"	5,588	2,100	Describes organisation and management of defence in the UK
"Sanctuary"	26,200	24,000	Annual publication describing MoD conservation activity
"Focus"	105,269[4]	55,000 (per month)	Monthly in-house newspaper, for MoD staff
Ministry of Defence Performance Report 2000–01	12,610[3]	650	Report to Parliament of MoD performance in the previous year
SDR New Chapter Public Discussion paper, & leaflet	21,800 (estimated)	10.500 Discussion papers 139,000 leaflets	Discussion paper on the New Chapter on terrorism.

Notes:

[1] Cost figures consist of printing and, where appropriate, an element of design costs and/or distribution.

[2] Exact circulation numbers are difficult to obtain without incurring disproportionate costs. Figures shown (other than for "Command" publications) are numbers printed.

[3] Costs shown for "Command" publications are only for the copies required by the MoD, and represent a discount on the normal Stationery Office price.

[4] Costs shown for "Focus" do not include the substantial income generated from advertising revenue.

[5] Figures for the 2001–02 Financial Year show spend as at 15 February 2002.

MOD Sites (Security)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase the budget of department bodies to meet security needs following 11 September. [35610]

Mr Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role is played by *(a)* the armed forces and *(b)* MDP in protecting MoD sites; and if he will make a statement. [38070]

Dr. Moonie: The role of the armed services and the Ministry of Defence police in protecting MoD sites is to protect life, to protect MoD property, assets and interests, and to provide an appropriate interface with the public.

The decision as to which form of guard force is required (armed or unarmed, military or civilian, and with or without constabulary powers) is determined at local level, to best match the prevailing requirements, following central regulations and guidance.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what powers have been given to the MDP for guarding MoD sites; and if he will make a statement. [38069]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence Police derive their constabulary powers from the MOD Police Act 1987 which they use in policing MOD sites. A number of limited extensions, to MDP powers, were included within the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001.

Cluster Bomb

Fiona Mctaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment of ground conditions is undertaken before deployment of cluster bombs; and what alternative weapon is deployed where ground conditions might result in an unacceptably higher failure rate. [37534]

Mr. Ingram: Decisions on the most appropriate weapon for use in attack take into account a wide variety of factors, consistent with our obligations under international law. These factors include the nature of the target, the weapons available to engage the target, and the conditions prevailing at the time of the attack. Specific ground conditions in the location of an attack, the effect of those conditions on failure rates, and the potential impact of a particular failure rate are factors that cannot normally be known by those making the decisions. Using weapons that are not the most appropriate for a target would reduce the likelihood of achieving the military objective and increase the risk of collateral damage. There are often no alternative weapons to cluster bombs that would avoid these negative consequences.

Royal Ordnance Factories and Naval Dockyards (Security)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes in security have been made at the Royal Ordnance factories and naval dockyards following 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [38061]

Mr. Ingram: Security arrangements at Royal Ordnance sites are a matter for Royal Ordnance, which is a private company subject to licensing by the Health and Safety Executive and local Home Department police forces. Those Royal Ordnance sites that hold Ministry of Defence classified information are required to protect it in accordance with regulations set out in the Manual of Protective Security produced by the Cabinet Office. Their compliance with these standards is monitored by Government Security Advisers from the Security Service. It is for the Home Secretary to comment on the security of the Royal Ordnance sites in relation to the terrorist threat and to the protection of classified information.

The security of the commercial operations at the naval dockyards is similarly primarily the responsibility of the companies concerned. In the case of Devonport and Portsmouth the commercial operations are conducted inside the perimeters of the two naval bases, and the operators therefore benefit indirectly from the physical security measures against the terrorist and other threats put in place by the Defence Logistic Organisation. The situation at Rosyth is different, in that the commercial site is outside the naval base; however, under the terms of an MOU with the contractor the MOD retains the right to insist on such additional security measures as it considers necessary to protect MOD assets and personnel. This includes the provision of armed security guarding to protect the lives of Service personnel accommodated temporarily on the commercial site. Security at naval bases has been reviewed as part of an overall survey of security of the Defence Logistic Organisation estate. While it is MOD policy not to comment on detailed matters of security, I can confirm that the level of security at naval bases is considered appropriate.

Integrated Biological Detention System

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the trials of the new Integrated Biological Detection System will cost; and if he will make a statement. [38284]

Dr. Moonie: The estimated cost of the trials at Dstl of the new Integrated Biological Detection System is about £1 million.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what companies are involved in the initial concept of trials being run for a maritime version of the new integrated Biological Detection System; and if he will make a statement. [38283]

Dr. Moonie: The trials, which were held in October last year, evaluated the potential technology options for the Maritime Biological Detection System.

The main industrial participants were: Graseby Dynamics Ltd of Watford, together with BIRAL of Portishead; Jasmin Simtech of Nottingham, together with Bruker Daltronics, Leipzig; General Dynamics Canada.

Fast Jet Technology

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to obtain laser and missile approach warners part of the Fast Jet Directed Infrared Countermeasures Laser System Technology; and if he will make a statement. [38229]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is currently funding a Technology Demonstration Programme into Directed Infrared Counter Measures for fast jets. This involves risk reduction work on technology to enable the acquisition and tracking of approaching missiles and the deployment of appropriate laser jamming measures. The programme does not include work on a laser beam illumination warning sensor.

US Bases (Security)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the security risk to US bases in the UK since 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [38064]

Dr. Moonie: Security at Ministry of Defence bases is kept under constant review. It is MOD policy not to discuss detailed matters of security, or to disclose details of threat assessments.

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the need for a carrier-based medium altitude/endurance unmanned air vehicle; and if he will make a statement. [38285]

Dr. Moonie: No decisions have yet been taken on the utility and cost effectiveness of unmanned air vehicles as part of the future carrier air group, but they remain under consideration to meet a number of requirements.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what training is given to MDP reserves; and if he will make a statement; [38067]

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on its police reserves. [38066]

Dr. Moonie: There are no Ministry of Defence Police reserves, although there is an MDP Operational Support Unit (OSU) of fifty police officers based at MDP Headquarters at Wethersfield in Essex. In addition to receiving normal police training OSU officers are trained to provide teams for rope access, Incendiary Explosive Device searches, confined space search, chemical, biological radiological and nuclear response, personal protection for VIPs and public order duties.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the chain of command for MOD police deployed on US bases in the UK since 11 September 2001 is; and if he will make a statement. [38062]

Dr. Moonie: The Senior Ministry of Defence Police Officer at a US base remains responsible to the Chief Constable in respect of his units' constabulary duties, through the Operational Common Unit Commander. The US Station Commander is responsible for the Security of the site, and exercises day-to-day operational control over the MDP under delegated authority from the Chief Constable, MDP.

Foreign Military Staff (UK Training)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military staff from *(a)* Macedonia, *(b)* Bulgaria, *(c)* Slovakia, *(d)* Slovenia, *(e)* Albania, *(f)* Romania, *(g)* Estonia, *(h)* Latvia and *(i)* Lithuania have been involved in training in the UK in the last five years; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [38055]

Mr. Ingram: Approximate numbers of personnel involved in training in the UK through the Outreach programme during the last three years are given below (figures are not held centrally prior 1999). These figures may include some civilian personnel working for the Defence Ministries of the countries referred to, as it is not possible in all cases to differentiate them.

Personnel from countries covered by the Outreach programme come to the UK for a wide variety of training, ranging from Staff courses lasting up to one year, to seminars and short educational visits for as little as three days. Included in these figures is Arms Control training, which in some cases ("Open Skies") involves the use of an aircraft, at high cost.

Indicative costs are shown for 2001 only as detailed costings are not held for previous years. Places on year-long courses, which by their nature are expensive, are allocated between countries on rotation and those countries shown below with higher costs are likely to have benefited from at least one such course and in some cases from "Open Skies" training during 2001. Not all costs involved in the activities covered in this answer fall to centrally controlled funds (i.e. support to individuals while visiting units), and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	1999	*2000*	*2001*	
	Numbers	*Numbers*	*Numbers*	*Cost £K*
Macedonia	20	27	17	126
Bulgaria	57	51	52	300
Slovakia	70	73	46	250
Slovenia	50	37	29	131
Albania	10	27	14	43
Romania	66	85	56	475
Estonia	36	18	24	55
Latvia	28	17	20	190
Lithuania	31	20	19	94

These activities form part of the Outreach programme in central and eastern Europe which, in turn, is part of the wider Defence Diplomacy mission. Outreach contributes to international stability by assisting countries in the region to establish democratically accountable, cost-effective armed forces capable of contributing both to national and regional security and, increasingly, to international security through participation in peace support operations.

Smart Procurement

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been saved by Smart Procurement since its inception in 1998; how much it is projected to save over the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [38280]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 72W.

Deployments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's staff have been involved in deployments to *(a)* Slovakia, *(b)* Macedonia and *(c)* Bulgaria in the last five years; at what costs; and if he will make a statement. [38059]

Mr. Ingram: Numbers of military and civilian Ministry of Defence personnel deployed through the Outreach programme to Slovakia, Macedonia and Bulgaria during the last three years are given below (figures are not held centrally prior to this date). The figures for 1999–00 and 2000–01 were previously published in MOD Performance Reports (Cm 5000 Annex G and Cm5920 Annex H). They include members of visiting training and advisory teams and resident in-country advisers. The costs shown are approximate.

	1999–2000		*2000–01*		*2001–02*	
	Numbers	*Cost £K*	*Numbers*	*Cost £K*	*Numbers*	*Cost £K*
Slovakia	2	75	1	120	5	154
Macedonia	—	—	3	200	1	125
Bulgaria	4	63	1	78	2	164

These deployments form part of the Outreach programme in central and eastern Europe which, in turn, is part of the wider Defence Diplomacy mission. Outreach contributes to international stability by assisting countries in the region to establish democratically accountable, cost-effective armed forces capable of contributing both to national and regional security and, increasingly, to international security through participation in peace support operations.

Not all personnel taking part in Outreach activities are captured in the annually published figures. The inclusion of personnel engaged in one-off, short duration activities would distort the overall picture.

There are Defence Attachés in the British Embassies in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Slovakia, all of whom have support staff. They are also not included.

In addition to Outreach deployments, the UK contributed some 2,000 personnel to NATO's Task Force Harvest, which was deployed to Macedonia between 23 August and 25 September 2001. The projected cost for operations in Macedonia for the Financial Year 2001–02 is £8.7 million.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the British Armed Forces are deployed as at 1 February. [38508]

Mr. Ingram: The latest available figures are for deployment of UK Regular Forces as at 1 January 2002.

	All Services	*Naval Service*	*Army*	*RAF*
United Kingdom	165,206	37,948	79,874	47,384
Continental Europe	25,132	372	23,041	1,719
Cyprus	3,301	7	2,149	1,145
Gibraltar	402	229	71	102
Other Mediterranean, Near East and Gulf	3,679	1,257	697	1,725
Far East	290	54	212	24
Other locations	6,045	1,817	3,177	1,051
Global Total	204,055	41,684	109,221	53,150

Figures are for UK Regular Forces (including both Trained and Untrained personnel), and therefore exclude Gurkhas, Full Time Reserve personnel, the Home Service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment, mobilised reservists and Naval Activated Reservists.

C-17 Globemasters

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many C-17 Globemasters the armed forces own; whether Globemasters are deployed in Afghanistan; what plans he has for further purchase of the Globemaster; and if he will make a statement. [38281]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 72W, and on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1088W, to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

Framework Agreement

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what projects, if any have been designated Co-operative Armaments Programmes under the Six-Nation Framework Agreement. [38991]

Dr. Moonie: None. Whilst the harmonisation of military requirements is a specific part of the Framework Agreement, the work in this area is designed to examine the scope for meeting military requirements jointly. The intention is that this work should act as a foundation for the establishment of potential co-operative armaments programmes, but it is too early to expect the Framework Agreement to have generated any such programmes at this stage of its implementation. However, it is also the intention that existing co-operative armaments programmes might benefit from work on the implementation of the Framework Agreement. An example of this is the proposed creation of a Global Export Licence to simplify the licensing process on co-operative programmes.

Correspondence

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 343W, ref. 24020, when he intends to write to the hon. Member; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [38821]

Mr. Ingram: I have written to the hon. Member today to explain the delay. My officials are continuing to compile the information requested and I will provide a substantive reply as quickly as possible. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Bases (Commercial Operations)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Civil Aviation Authority about the suitability of RAF Lyneham for commercial airline operations. [38527]

Mr. Ingram: No discussions have taken place to date between the Civil Aviation Authority and the Ministry of Defence about the suitability of RAF Lyneham for commercial airline operations, although such discussions will be part of the overall assessment process.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with Richard Branson and executives of Virgin about the commercial future of RAF Brize Norton. [38526]

Mr. Ingram: No discussions have taken place between the Ministry of Defence and Mr. Richard Branson or other executives of Virgin about the commercial future of RAF Brize Norton.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the physical contours of RAF Lyneham conform to the CAA's safety requirements for commercial airline operations. [38528]

Mr. Ingram: RAF Lyneham is regulated by Ministry of Defence safety guidelines and not guidelines set out by the Civil Aviation Authority, which is responsible for civil airfields. However, the hon. Member will wish to be aware that I have directed that the issue of Civil Aviation Authority licensing of the three stations will be addressed as part on the on-going Strategic Review of RAF Lyneham, RAF St Mawgan and RAF Brize Norton.

Army HQ

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 340W, when the final assessment of the costs of moving the Army's northern headquarters from York to Edinburgh will have been made; what increase there has been in the number of people working at Craigiehall and York; and what military reason there was for the move from York to Craigiehall. [38872]

Mr. Ingram: The final assessment of the costs of locating the Army's northern headquarters in Edinburgh should be completed in the early summer of this year. This work will also confirm manpower numbers but initial indications are that there has been an increase of some 170 at Craigiehall and of some 14 at York resulting from the move of headquarters, and the relocation of other organisations. The military judgements that led to the location of the headquarters in Edinburgh took into account a number of issues and were finely balanced. The conclusion was that the role of divisional headquarters could be discharged from either York or Edinburgh.

Tours of Duty

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the units in the Army that have had an average interval between operational tours of *(a)* over 24 months and *(b)* under 24 months in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [38346]

Mr. Ingram: The following table shows the average interval between operational tours by individual arms/corps covering the years 1996–97 to 2000–01.

Average tour intervals

Year (April to March)	*Royal Armoured Corps*	*Royal Artillery*	*Royal Engineers*	*Royal Signals*	*Infantry*	*Royal Logistic Corps*[1]
1966–97	25	21	12	19	21	—
1997–98	19	36	17	21	22	—
1998–99	30	19	24	21	27	—
1999–2000	14	25	13	10	15	30
2000–01	26	42	34	24	22	30

[1] Not calculated until 1999–2000.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the report written by Colonel Curran Snagge entitled "The Command Structure in the UK" examining the move of the Army's northern headquarters from York to Edinburgh. [38529]

Mr. Ingram: No.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

LNM Holdings

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the Government's policy is on support for a further application to the EBRD by LNM Holdings for support for the takeover of Sidex Steel. [38845]

Hilary Benn: The EBRD exists to help restructure the economies of former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. We support all responsible projects that serve this purpose.

The EBRD Board has not been approached with a specific proposal for a further loan to Ispat-Sidex. If a proposal is received we will consider it on its merits.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions took place between her Department and other departments regarding the Government's support for the loan application to the EBRD by LNM Holdings. [38846]

Hilary Benn: As is routine, DFID officials invited comments from other interested departments in preparing briefing. There were no discussions.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will set out the reasons for the Government's support for the loan application to the EBRD by LNM Holdings. [38847]

Hilary Benn: The EBRD exists to help restructure the economies of former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. We support all responsible projects that serve this purpose.

EBRD's loan to Ispat-Sidex is providing important support for Romania's economic reform and progress towards EC accession. The World Bank identified the privatisation of the company as a key requirement for economic reform in Romania.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* her Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years. [38738]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the value of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38740]

Hilary Benn: The information has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Sudan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the attack on a food aid distribution site in the village of Bien, Western Upper Nile region of Southern Sudan, on the distribution of food aid in that region. [38695]

Hilary Benn: The attack should not affect distribution of food aid in the region. The parties to the conflict in Sudan have agreed that they will not target humanitarian operations and they are, in any case, obliged under the Geneva Conventions not to target civilians. Something clearly went wrong in Bien on 20 February, and we have demanded an explanation from the Government of Sudan. In the meantime we expect that the World Food Programme will take extra care not to attempt to distribute food near areas where fighting is ongoing.

Burkina Faso

Mrs. Caroline Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what action she is taking to improve human rights in Burkina Faso. [34652]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

We have no resident representation in Burkina Faso, but our Embassy in Abidjan maintains regular contact with government, opposition and NGO representatives on human rights issues and raises our concerns with the government about the human rights situation. The UN Expert Panel Report on Liberia, published in October 2001, contained evidence that Burkina Faso was involved in arms shipments to Liberia in breach of UN sanctions. We have made clear to the Government of Burkina Faso that it should cease undermining UN sanctions by providing support for the regime of Charles Taylor in Liberia.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) representing the House of Commons Commission, how many complaints are under investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [38502]

Mr. Kirkwood: This is a matter for the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Long-term Sick Leave

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidelines he has published regarding the treatment of employees returning to work after long-term sick leave. [26916]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

We do not publish guidelines for all employers regarding the treatment of employees returning after long-term sick leave.

However, current policy is to encourage rehabilitation and/or redeployment of staff who have been long-term sick, and to initiate action to rehabilitate them back to work as early as possible. To this end, we are working with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Health and Safety Executive on job retention and rehabilitation pilots to test different health and employment strategies to help people with long-term sickness or disability to remain in their jobs.

We have commissioned guidance for health and social services on promoting employment opportunities for people with mental health problems to meet the requirement of Standard One of the National Service Framework for mental health.

As far as health and social services employees are concerned, guidance on treatment of staff returning from long-term sickness is part of "The Management of Health, Safety and Welfare Issues for NHS Staff" issued under the cover of HSC(98) 064 and also in "Managing Sickness Absence in the NHS" published through the Strategic HR Intelligence Networks in July 2000 and re-issued in November 2001.

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Torbay Borough Council. [40020]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report was published today in respect of Torbay Borough Council and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The report identifies both strengths and weaknesses in the benefits services at Torbay. The Council is commended for good customer service. There are three offices that claimants can visit, telephone calls to the office are answered promptly and Torbay is currently revising its claim form in line with the BFI Model Claim Form.

Inspectors found that backlogs of work were not being addressed and the time taken to process claims was very poor with only 45 per cent. being cleared within the 14-day target. These backlogs were also reducing the ability of the council to ensure that renewal claims were being assessed without a break in payment.

The report finds that changes in circumstances which could lead to overpayment of benefit were not given sufficient priority by the benefits section. An experimental scheme for the sharing of information between the council, the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency on changes of clients' circumstances was identified as an excellent initiative.

Inspectors considered there were weaknesses in all stages of dealing with overpayments and the report makes recommendations on tackling this issue. Since 1997 the debt owed to the council has increased by nearly £1 million.

The council's clear progress in developing a counter-fraud strategy, fully supported by members, was also recognised. Its process of verifying of claims for benefit was found to be up to the required standard. The report concludes that the fraud section would benefit from additional resources to build on the effective work that has already been undertaken.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of the London Borough of Southwark. [40021]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report was published today in respect of the London Borough of Southwark and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

This follow-up inspection and report shows that the council has responded very positively to the findings of the first BFI report of June 1999 and that many recommendations have been implemented in full. Southwark also have ongoing projects to address many of the remaining recommendations. Inspectors found significant improvements in the quality of anti-fraud work and a reduction in the previous weaknesses in benefits administration.

The report commends the work done to improve the verification of claims; on the process of making payments on account; and on procedural guidance for fraud and overpayment staff.

At the time of the second inspection some problems remained to be addressed. These included the use of more than one type of claim form. Since the inspection, however, the council has introduced a new single form based on the BFI Model Claim Form.

Inspectors found that there had been an improvement in the clearance time for claims. In 1999 only 20 per cent. of claims were cleared within the 14-day target. At the second inspection this was found to have improved to 52 per cent. Southwark should do more to ensure that all information is available when claims are first received.

The report also found that the service to customers needed to be improved, in particular long delays for telephone callers. Southwark had recognised this poor level of service and has introduced a new telephone system.

The large backlog of work, which in 1999 stood at 19,000 claims, had been reduced but at the time of the second inspection the council estimated that a backlog of 5,000 claims was outstanding. This is believed to have fallen further but the council did not have a formal plan to clear the remaining arrears.

The report notes that a comprehensive approach was being taken to training. It also recognises that the council has improved the liaison between benefits and fraud as well as with the Housing Department.

Inspectors found that progress against BFI's recommendations in relation to overpayments of benefit had been slow. Further recommendations to improve effectiveness are made in this report.

Significant improvement is noted in the quality of Southwark's fraud investigations. Preparation, record keeping and general file maintenance was found to be of a good standard and this was supported by a high standard of staff training. The 1999 BFI recommendation that the council review its anti-fraud strategy had been successfully implemented.

The London Borough of Southwark is an excellent example of an authority responding positively and effectively to weaknesses identified by the BFI and thus providing a more secure and accurate benefits service to its community.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address the remaining weaknesses and to further improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Pickering Review

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the original scope was of the inquiry into pensions which he asked Mr. Alan Pickering to conduct for his Department; and whether and to what extent that scope has been modified. [38453]

Mr. McCartney: The Pickering simplification review is a comprehensive review of private pensions legislation. It will propose a package of options for simplifying the regulatory framework, consistent with the maintenance of proper protection for pension members. A consultation document for the review was published on 19 October 2001 and is available in the Library. This included the terms of reference of the review, which have not been changed.

Pensions

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure that growth in pensions is linked to growth in the economy. [35755]

Mr. McCartney: The basic state pension remains the foundation for income in retirement. Increases announced for last April and next in the basic state pension have given single pensioners £2.10 more than an earnings link would have given them and £3.35 more for couples. We have given a guarantee that the basic state pension will be increased by at least £100 a year for single pensioners and £160 for couples in 2003–04, and in future years by 2.5 per cent. or the increase in the September Retail Prices Index, whichever is the higher.

We are also committed to increasing the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) in line with earnings. Around 2 million less-well-off pensioners benefit from this. The income guarantee element of Pension Credit will replace MIG from October 2003 and this will be uprated in line with earnings throughout this Parliament. Around half of all pensioner households will be entitled to it and will be better off because they will gain, year-on-year, a larger increase in their state support than they would receive from an earnings link in the basic state pension.

By April 2002, as a result of this Government's policies compared with the 1997 system, an average pensioner household will be £840 a year better off and around 1.8 million of the poorest pensioner households will be over £1000 a year better off.

Doctors' Handwriting

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what delays were caused in the hearings of appeals of disability claims to the tribunal service owing to the illegibility of doctors' handwriting in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1997; and what the most recent available figures are for each health authority in England. [38335]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34160]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department's information systems do not allow the cost of accountancy services to be isolated separately. These costs are contained within a wider Professional Services heading and could not be isolated without incurring disproportionate cost.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 145W, on Fair Trade goods, if he will review during Fair Trade Fortnight the amount of fairly traded goods used in his Department. [35452]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department obtains the majority of fair trade goods it uses from outsourced services, for example catering. It is our policy to consider ethical factors throughout our supply chain and we will review the use of Fair Trade goods with our suppliers during Fair Trade Fortnight.

Lone Parents

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the research his Department has conducted on the impact of the New Deal for Lone Parents on the employment rate for lone parents; and if he will place copies of this research in the Library. [34889]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: "NDLP Evaluation: A Quantitative Survey of Lone Parents on Income Support" was published in November 2001 and is available in the Library. For earlier research reports I refer my right hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 23 November 2001, Official Report, column 537W.

Employment Zone (South Tyneside)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the employment zone in South Tyneside in reducing unemployment. [34560]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Action Team for Jobs in South Tyneside is helping tackle joblessness in the area. The Team is performing well. In its first full year of operation, the Team worked with 688 disadvantaged jobless people, helping 333 (48 per cent.) of them into jobs.

Source: Department for Work and Pensions Management Information.

Disability Employment Advisers

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the number of Jobcentres for which each disability employment adviser is responsible, and the procedures that are in place for dealing with cover during times of *(a)* sickness and *(b)* agreed absence; and if he will make a statement. [37584]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Employment Service aims to provide a high quality service to disabled people and their employers. In order to deliver this service we have in place a network of around 650 specialist disability employment advisers.

Information on which Jobcentres each disability employment adviser has responsibility for is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The procedure to cover both unplanned and agreed absences is normally that another member of disability service staff will carry out pre-arranged, priority work such as interviews with clients. If a disability service team member of staff is not available, procedures are in place to ensure that urgent advice can be sought from an experienced adviser where necessary.

Industrial Action (Jobcentre Plus)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many days will have been lost to industrial action since September 2001 as a result of the action taken by members of the Public and Commercial Services Union. [32648]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Some 217,000 days have been lost to strike action by members of the Public and Commercial Services Union in the Department since September 2001 up to and including 31 January 2002.

Three quarters of the combined staff of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service remained at work during the second two days of national strike action on 28 and 29 January.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit claimants have had personal adviser consultations postponed as a result of industrial action undertaken by Jobcentre Plus staff. [32640]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: This information is not available.

Assaults (Benefits Staff)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his Department's policy is for dealing with claimants who *(a)* verbally and *(b)* physically attack staff in Benefits Agency, Employment Service and Jobcentre Plus offices. [32650]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Ministers and Senior Management have made clear that we will not tolerate threats, abuse, actual or attempted assaults on our staff in the Benefits Agency, the Employment Service and Jobcentre Plus. Our staff are public servants who strive to give a quality service.

The overwhelming majority of people who use our offices behave well, but we are not prepared to allow a small minority of violent or abusive people to deflect us from achieving the outstanding service levels for which we are aiming.

Our clear policy is not to tolerate abusive or violent behaviour. People who act in this way will be asked to leave our offices. We will not hesitate to involve the Police; to deny abusive and violent people future access to our offices; and, where appropriate, to prosecute.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many physical assaults there have been in the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder Clusters since their establishment in September 2001; how many assaults there have been in offices with screened areas; and if he will make a statement. [32758]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Benefits Agency staff receive training for the specific roles they undertake and will continue to do so in the organisations that succeed it. Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service will come into being from April 2002.

During the design and development of the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders, the safety of staff has been of paramount importance. All staff have received training for the specific roles they undertake and staff dealing with the public have been trained in preventing and calming difficult situations.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide additional training for Benefits Agency staff to help them deal with individual threats. [32970]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Benefits Agency staff receive training for the specific roles they undertake and will continue to do so in the organisations that succeed it. Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service will come into being from April 2002.

During the design and development of the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders, the safety of staff has been of paramount importance. All staff have received training for the specific roles they undertake and staff dealing with the public have been trained in preventing and calming difficult situations.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps are taken to assess the number of entrants to the New Deal for Young People who are functionally *(a)* illiterate and *(b)* innumerate on (i) entering and (ii) leaving the Gateway Period of the New Deal; and how many such people are on the New Deal. [25987]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: New Deal personal advisers follow a clear screening and assessment process to ensure young people requiring help with basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, are offered assistance to meet their needs.

As part of the initial interview with people entering the New Deal, personal advisors ask questions designed to establish whether the young person has any potential basic skills needs. If a possible need is identified, the young person is referred for independent assessment through a Basic Skills Agency test. Young people are then offered basic skills help in line with the assessment outcome. Following the basic skills provision, personal advisers keep track of the young person's improvements and discuss with them the most appropriate method of meeting any further needs.

Information on those requiring help with basic skills has been collected since April 2001. It does not differentiate between literacy and numeracy. Between April and November 2001, 4,410 young people attended provision designed to address their basic skills needs. 2,854 of these were within the New Deal gateway. Information on the outcomes of basic skills provision is not available.

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Harwich constituency are in the New Deal programme; and how many were placed in employment following their participation in the scheme. [30980]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information at constituency level is not available for the New Deal for Disabled People and the New Deal for Partners. The available information is in the table:

New Deal	*Participating as at end November 2001*	*Placed into employment*
Young People	55	586
25 plus	55	68
Lone Parents	177	201
50 plus*	71	143

* Figures are to the end of December 2001.
Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time is that the Head of his Department has recommended since May 1997 between a special adviser leaving his Department and taking up outside employment; and if he will make a statement. [28913]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to him on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 594W.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list his Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997-98. [32803]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Monthly figures for all Departments would be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the Treasury has published full, financial outturns for the years 1997-98 to 1999-2000 in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (Cm 5101). Provisional financial year outturns for 2000-01 have been published in Public Expenditure 2000-01 Provisional Outturn (Cm5243).

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23799]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer to the reply given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 256W.

IT Costs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the costs of RFR4 Modernising Welfare Delivery are in respect of information technology, computerisation and on-line technology; and how much of these costs are outsourced. [31522]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The costs contained in RFR4 Modernising Welfare Delivery are all considered to be for information technology computerisation and on-line technology; in as much they cover all modernisation projects funded from the welfare modernisation fund. The costs contained in RFR4 for the financial year 2001–02 are:

	£ million
Running Costs	467
Capital	88
Total	555

The portion of these costs that has been outsourced (based on current project forecasts of costs of external suppliers for this financial year), are:

	£ million
Running Costs	252
Capital	88
Total	340

Unemployment (St. Helens, South)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of the unemployed in St. Helens, South have been unemployed for a year or more *(a)* this year, *(b)* in 1997 and *(c)* in 1992. [38268]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward, dated 28 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking for the percentage of the unemployed in St. Helens South who have been unemployed for a year or more *(a)* this year, *(b)* in 1997 and *(c)* in 1992. [38268]

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles statistics for unemployment from surveys following the international standard International Labour Organisation definition. However, for the St. Helens South parliamentary constituency the survey sample size is too small to provide estimates.

ONS also compiles statistics of claimants of unemployment-related benefits. The claimant count consists of all people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or National Insurance credits at Employment Service local offices. They must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which the claim is made.

The table below shows numbers of claimants with duration over one year or more calculated as a percentage of the total number of claimants in the St. Helens South parliamentary constituency for each January 1992, 1997 and 2002.

St. Helens South parliamentary constituency: Claimants for over one year (computerised claims only)*

	Level	*Per cent.*
January 1992	1,704	34.5
January 1997	1,300	37.9
January 2002	454	20.2

* Computerised claims include around 99 per cent. of all claims.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Rail Infrastructure Company

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the involvement her Department has had in the proposed structure of the successor company to Railtrack. [35302]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has had no involvement in this issue.

Energy (Environmental Guidelines)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department intends to issue the statutory social and environmental guidelines to the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority. [35384]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to answer given on 26 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 1127w.

Universal Bank

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if funds will be made available to self-employed sub-postmasters and mistresses to cover the costs of training staff in the use of the Universal Bank. [36116]

Mr. Alexander: The training of self-employed sub-postmasters in the use and delivery of Universal Banking Services is a commercial and operational matter for Post Office Limited.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of sub-post offices in which the Universal Bank will operate. [36050]

Mr. Alexander: The delivery of Universal Banking services is a commercial and operational matter for Post Office Limited. My understanding is that Universal Banking Services will be available at all post offices.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the sums allocated by each of the major clearing banks for investment in the Universal Bank. [36053]

Mr. Alexander: The major high street banks and the Nationwide Building Society have agreed to contribute £180 million to the costs of the Post Office Card Account. They have also agreed that they will make their own basic bank accounts accessible through post offices. How much each institution is allocating to the latter is a commercial matter for each organisation.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what charges will be operated by the Universal Bank for accounts that go into overdraft. [36119]

Mr. Alexander: Universal Banking Services have two elements. Under the first element the banks will make their basic bank accounts accessible at post offices. Implementation of that agreement is now a commercial matter between Post Office Limited and the banks. The detailed features of these accounts are not part of the agreement on Universal Banking Services. However, the Government have announced their intention to establish a benchmark CAT standard—covering charges, access and terms—for a basic bank account, and are still in discussion with the banks about these. The second element of Universal Banking Services is the Post Office Card Account. This account will allow benefits claimants to access their benefits in cash at post offices using a Post Office based card instead of an order book or giro. It will not be possible for the account to be overdrawn.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the costs of training staff in sub-post offices in the use of the Universal Bank, and what sums are allocated in her Department's budget for training sub-post office staff in the use of the Universal Bank. [36054]

Mr. Alexander: The staff training involved in the delivery of Universal Banking Services through post offices is a commercial matter for the Post Office Limited.

Postal Services (Blind People)

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government will ensure that postal service for the registered blind will remain free of charge; and if she will make a statement. [36111]

Mr. Alexander: Consignia plc currently provides certain postal services free to blind and partially sighted people under the Articles for the Blind service. This service permits blind and partially sighted people to send a letter or parcel of any weight up to 7 kilograms free of charge to any place in the world within the terms and conditions of the service.

In order to ensure that this service is not eroded at any time in the future, on 14 March 2001, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, issued to the postal regulator the Postal Services Commission (Postcomm) a Directive under Section 41 of the Postal Services Act 2000 under which Postcomm was instructed to include in the licence of all universal postal service providers a condition requiring them to provide certain services free of charge to the blind and partially sighted. In accordance with section 41 (2) of the Act, the requirement would not come into force before a further direction was made by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. To date this Department has not needed to issue such a further direction.

In addition, Postcomm requires Consignia plc, in the licence, to publish and submit a statement of the arrangements it has established or intends to establish to ensure that users of postal services who have significant difficulty in reaching the post office letter boxes and access points provided because they are, amongst other things, blind or partially sighted are able to post letters and postal packets regularly and as far as possible without significant cost to those users attributable to their difficulties. Such a statement was submitted to Postcomm and Postwatch on 3 August 2001 and is available on the Royal Mail's website.

Copies of the Direction, the Consignia licence and Consignia's statement on Access and Social Obligations have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will require *(a)* Consignia and *(b)* other future postal operators to provide a free mail service for the blind. [36376]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given above to PQ No. 36111.

Post Offices

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices there were in *(a)* the constituency of the Ribble Valley and Fulwood, *(b)* Lancashire, *(c)* the North West of England, *(d)* Wales and *(e)* the United Kingdom, in each year since 1997. [36420]

Mr. Alexander: Post Office Limited started to analyse post offices numbers by Government Office region in England in March 2001 when total outlets in the North West numbered 1,853. I understand from Post Office Limited that data on post office network are not held on a parliamentary constituency or county basis.

I am informed by Post Office Limited that data by country are not available before 1998. The numbers of post offices operating in Wales in the last three financial years are as follows:

Wales

	Number
End March 1998	1,513
End March 1999	1,501
End March 2000	1,470
End March 2001	1,402

I am also informed by Post Office Limited that an on-going revision of data has affected individual country totals.

In the UK, the numbers of post offices operating since 1997 are as follows:

	Number
End March 1997	19,251
End March 1998	19,008
End March 1999	18,775
End March 2000	18,393
End March 2001	17,846

Postal Services Commission

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the annual budget was of the Postal Services Commission and its predecessor body for the financial years *(a)* 1999-2000 and *(b)* 2000-01; what the agreed budget is for 2001-02; and what the estimated budget is for 2002-03. [36260]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The Postal Services Commission was initially created within DTI by administrative action in January 2000 and became an independent non-Ministerial Government Department on the coming into force of the Postal Services Act on 6 November 2000.

No specific budget was fixed for financial year 1999-2000 with the initial staff and administrative costs incurred from January 2000 being covered by DTI. The agreed budgets for the following years are as follows:

2000-01: £3.701 million

2001-02: £6.101 million

2002-03 estimated budget: £6.001 million

National Manufacturing Summit

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the manufacturers who attended the December National Manufacturing Summit; how many SME manufacturers were invited; and which manufacturers from the North East were invited to attend. [36783]

Ms Hewitt: The list of manufacturers who attended the Manufacturing Summit is as follows:

BAE Systems
Alstom UK
LandRover
Perkins Engines
Nissan UK
Benteler Automotive UK
Signet Group plc

A number of manufacturers were invited with the help of the Government Offices and the devolved Administrations with the intention of achieving a good spread of manufacturing interests. Nissan UK attended from the North East region.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 60W, if she will list *(a)* those attending and *(b)* the subjects discussed at the business dinner with Arthur Andersen on 22 January. [37576]

Mr. Hewitt: The dinner was attended by a number of senior business people and representatives from Arthur Anderson. A wide range of issues were discussed. It is not normal practice to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many contracts Arthur Andersen received from HM Government in each year since 1987; and what the aggregate value of those contracts was *(a)* before and *(b)* since 1997. [38388]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not held centrally.

For my own Department, since May 1997 seven contracts with an aggregate value of £4.9 million have been awarded. Information for the period 1987-97 cannot be accessed except at disproportionate cost.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 11 February 2002, to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), *Official Report*, column 60W, on Arthur Andersen, if she will place interim reports from the contracts in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [37687]

Ms Hewitt: The position on publication of reports on the ongoing contracts with Arthur Andersen referred to in my answer of 11 February is as follows:

Framework arrangement for the Work-life Balance Challenge Fund projects: as the projects involve information provided on a confidential basis by companies there will be no published report.

Study of UK competitive position: the project involves researching and updating manuals for investment officers in the UK and abroad and regional partners. As these documents are for internal training use only there will be no published report.

Research and updating of information sheets: this information is available on the Invest UK website www.invest.uk.com.

Unlicensed Radio Stations

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many prosecutions there were of unlicensed radio stations in each of the last available five years; [37250]

(2) how many prosecutions of unlicensed radio stations in the Greater London area there were in each of the last available five years; [37252]

(3) how many complaints the relevant department received in each of the last five years about the broadcast of unlicensed radio stations; [37251]

(4) if she will list the average fine imposed on unlicensed radio stations for unauthorised broadcasting in each of the last five years. [37249]

Mr. Alexander: The number of convictions secured by the Radiocommunications Agency against pesons for unlicensed broadcasting in the last five years is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1997	41
1998	53
1999	47
2000	41
2001	20

Unlicensed radio stations go to great lengths to avoid detection of studio sites but the Agency also puts consideration effort into the removal of transmitters (1,438 raids in 2001).

Postal Services

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 968W, on Consignia, what proportion of the £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas has been spent to date; of that sum, what proportion has been spent in Scotland; and what proportion of the £480 million invested by the UK Government in the Horizon programme to automate the post office network has been spent in Scotland. [37091]

Mr. Alexander: I refer to the reply to the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 67W. Six applications for support under the £2 million rural fund have been received from initiatives in Scotland; Post Office Limited are currently evaluating them.

To date POL have despatched 139 application forms of which 29 have been completed and returned. Of those 29, seven applications have been agreed and three have not met the criteria for the scheme, the remainder are at various states of examination.

The Horizon programme was a national project and information is available only on the UK wide basis.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the latest posting time was to achieve next-day delivery of post to the Isle of Wight from *(a)* Belfast, *(b)* Cardiff, *(c)* Edinburgh, *(d)* Liverpool, *(e)* Manchester, *(f)* Newcastle, *(g)* Leeds, *(h)* London South-Western District and *(i)* Birmingham in (i) 2001, (ii) 1991 and (iii) 1981. [37602]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* I understand from Consignia that to achieve next day delivery from major city centre boxes across the UK to the Isle of Wight, the last posting times were generally as follows:

1981: 17.30

1991: 17.30

2001: 19.30

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the latest posting time was to achieve next-day delivery of post from the Isle of Wight to *(a)* Belfast, *(b)* Cardiff, *(c)* Edinburgh, *(d)* Liverpool, *(e)* Manchester, *(f)* Newcastle, *(g)* Leeds, *(h)* London South-Western District and *(i)* Birmingham in (i) 2001, (ii) 1991 and (iii) 1981. [37603]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* I understand from Consignia that the latest posting times to achieve next day delivery from the Isle of Wight to major city centres across the UK were as follows:

Newport 18.45 at box in Newport town

Ryde 18.30 at box in Union Street

Sandown 18.00 at box outside Sorting Office

Freshwater 17.30 at box outside office

Ventnor 17.30 at box outside office

The latest posting times from other boxes vary according to location. In 1981 and 1991, the last collection from the Isle of Wight was 17.30.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of addresses in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* the United Kingdom receive a second daily delivery of mail. [38041]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* I understand from Consignia that it currently categorises delivery points as either "Town" which receive a second delivery where mail is available or "Rural" which receive a single delivery.

The proportion of addresses covered by a second daily delivery of mail is as follows:

	Per cent
England	88.9
Scotland	85.2
Wales	81.9
Northern Ireland	72.2
United Kingdom	87.7

On a UK wide basis, on average 95 per cent. of mail by volume is delivered on first delivery.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the population of *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* the United Kingdom live more than (i) one mile, (ii) two miles and (iii) five miles from a postbox. [38038]

Mr. Alexander: I understand from Consignia that of the 27 million UK delivery addresses, 0.9 per cent. are more than one mile from a post box and 0.001 per cent. are more than five miles from a post box or posting facility.

Information is availably only on a UK basis at distances of one and five miles.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the annual revenues that would be generated if the Export Credits Guarantee Department were required to generate a return to the Government on capital of six per cent. in real terms; and if she will make a statement. [38262]

Ms Hewitt: I announced to the House on 7th February 2002 that the original target date for the establishment of an ECGD Trading Fund was no longer appropriate. Pending the further announcement which I have undertaken to make in due course it would not be appropriate for me to provide such an estimate.

LNM Holdings

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings have taken place since 1997 between ministers and officials of her Department and Mr. Lakshmi Mittal and executives of the LNM Group; on what dates the meetings occurred; and who attended from her Department. [37929]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the 'Ministerial Code', the 'Civil Service Code' and 'Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists'. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release specific details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department was informed of the attempt by the LNM Group to acquire Sidex. [37932]

Ms Hewitt: In accordance with previous Administration it is not our practice to disclose internal advice to Ministers which is exempt under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on access to Government information.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions on which meetings have taken place between ministers or officials and representatives of LNM Holdings in the last five years. [38853]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the 'Ministerial Code', the 'Civil Service Code' and 'Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists'. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release specific details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations were made by her Department to the European Commission regarding the takeover of Irish Steel by LNM Holdings. [38852]

Ms Hewitt: The takeover of Irish Steel by LNM Holdings was dealt with under a previous administration.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department was informed of the support given by LNM Holdings for the imposition of US tariffs against overseas steel imports. [38843]

Ms Hewitt: My Department was not directly informed, but became aware through the media, of this support.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received against the takeover of Sidex Steel by LNM Holdings. [38848]

Ms Hewitt: I receive representations from many groups eager to press their case.

London Congestion Charge

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact the proposed London congestion charge will have on Consignia's operations in the charging zone. [37817]

Mr. Alexander: The proposed central London congestion charging scheme is a matter for the Mayor of London. This Department has not made an assessment of the impact the proposed charge would have on Consignia plc.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will increase the number of places for business people on RDA boards. [38479]

Alan Johnson: The RDAs are business-led organisations and all the RDA Chairs have strong business backgrounds. I announced the new appointments to the Regional Development Agency boards on 7 December 2001. Board members with current business experience now make up 50 per cent. of boards overall. This is a ten per cent. increase from the last round of appointments. Some RDA boards have even higher percentages of current business representation, including the East of England Development Agency and the South West Regional Development Agency with 57 per cent.

Trade unions, local government, voluntary organisations and other bodies will also continue to be represented on RDA boards, with the majority of boards now at their statutory maximum of 15 members.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will increase regional development agency support for national parks. [38478]

Alan Johnson: From 1 April, funding for Regional Development Agencies will be through new single programme budget arrangements. RDAs will be able to decide on their priorities for spending according to their regional economic strategies. Funding for RDAs will increase significantly in 2002–03 over 2001–02, from £1.2 billion to £1.5 billion, but it is for individual RDA to decide on the basis of their dialogue with local stakeholders how these resources should be used.

Business Contacts

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has made to foreign Governments on behalf of individual companies since 7 June 2001; and which they were. [37966]

Ms Hewitt: I regularly make representations to foreign Governments on behalf of British business when it is in the UK's interest to do so. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in his answer on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 611W, Ministers in successive Governments have worked for British interest abroad and as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry I regard this as an important part of my job.

Government Chemist

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has received the 2001 Review of the Government Chemist. [40168]

Ms Hewitt: I have just received the fifth Annual Review of the Government Chemist and copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

External Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* her Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years. [38718]

Ms Hewitt: On the basis that every purchase order constitutes a contract, Companies House is unable to respond with the requested information on the grounds of disproportionate cost.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans there are to change the departmental expenditure limit and administration cost limits for her Department and the Office of Fair Trading. [40167]

Ms Hewitt: A technical revision has been made to the Department of Trade and Industry DEL, which has no impact on either the total DEL or the Administration Costs limit.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table.

	Resources (£000)				*Capital (£000)*		
Change	**New DEL**	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*	**Change**	**New DEL**	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*
7,043	4,029,188	*895,145*	*3,134,043*	-7,043	806,285	*-148,330*	954,615

The change in the resource and capital DEL arises from a revision of the classification as between resource and capital of an agreed increase in DEL for the Science research councils of £43,270,000 which was included in the Winter Supplementary.

Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the Office of Fair Trading DEL will be increased by £3,000,000 from £40,536,000 to £43,536,000 and the Administration Costs limit will be increased by £3,000,000 from £40,536,000 to £43,536,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table:

	Resources (£000)				*Capital (£000)*		
Change	**New DEL**	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*	**Change**	**New DEL**	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*
3,000	41,308	39,008	2,300	0	2,228	2,228	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the following:

(i) to provide additional resources of £700,000 in Administration to enable the Office of Fair Trading to meet the costs of all liability to third parties for litigation and redress;

(ii) to provide additional resources of £1,112,000 in Administration in relation to the recharge of rental income for the Office of Fair Trading Minor Occupiers. This is offset by a corresponding increase in Appropriations in Aid;

(iii) utilise the provision of £2,300,000 in meeting the costs of liability to third parties for litigation and redress.

The increase will be charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Shipbuilders

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans her Department has for the future of British Shipbuilders. [40166]

Brian Wilson: British Shipbuilders still exists, under Statute, as a Nationalised Industry, although it is some years since it built ships or manufactured equipment. The only significant remaining liability of the Corporation is Employer Liability. It is intended that an official of the Department of Trade and Industry will be appointed Chairman as from 4 March, following expiry of the tenure of the current Chairman on 3 March.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the regional assistance grants to industry expressed *(a)* as a percentage and *(b)* in cash terms was given to the parliamentary constituency of South East Cornwall in each year since 1992; what the most recent available 12 month figures are; and if she will make a statement. [38339]

Alan Johnson: Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) is a demand-led capital investment grant linked to the creation or safeguarding of jobs in designated areas of need (the Assisted Areas). The number of RSA grant offers this Department made to companies in the South East Cornwall parliamentary constituency *(a)* as a percentage of the total number of offers made in England and *(b)* in cash terms for each of the years from 1992 to 2001, is set out in the table.

Since 1 January 2000, the RSA scheme has been restricted to projects involving capital investment of £500,000 or more. In April 2000 this Department introduced a new, simplified scheme, the Enterprise Grants Scheme (EGS), to help small firms undertake fixed capital investment projects below the £500,000 threshold for RSA. One EGS offer of £75,000 was made, in the year 2001, to a company in South East Cornwall parliamentary constituency. A total of 666 EGS offers were made in England in the year 2001 and 479 offers were made in the year 2000.

Offers of Regional Selective Assistance Grant in South East Cornwall parliamentary constituency

Year	*Number of offers in South East Cornwall parliamentary constituency*	*Number of offers in South East Cornwall parliamentary constituency as per cent of total offers in England (per cent rounded to 1 decimal place)*	*Total value of offers in South East Cornwall parliamentary constituency in cash (£ millions)*
2001	1	0.5	0.160
2000	1	0.5	0.165
1999	2	0.2	0.185
1998	3	0.3	1.125
1997	2	0.2	0.116
1996	3	0.2	0.175
1995	6	0.4	0.465
1994	5	0.4	0.929
1993	10	1.0	0.271
1992	4	0.5	0.056

Management Board

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will list the names and present occupations of the non-executive members of her Department's Management Board. [32835]

Patricia Hewitt: There is one independent member on the Department Board. Her name if Mair Barnes and she is a non-executive director on a number of boards.

SCOTLAND

Disease Control

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what representations she has made to the Department of Health in respect of the paper, Getting Ahead of the Curve-A Strategy for Combating Infectious Diseases; [30694]

(2) what discussions she has had with the Department of Health on the impact on Scotland of its proposals to disband the National Radiological Protection Board. [30693]

Mr. Foulkes: Discussions are taking place between the Department of Health and the Scottish Executive about how the proposals will affect Scotland. These discussions include consideration of how the arrangements for the functions currently exercised in Scotland by the National Radiological Protection Board might be affected by the proposed creation of the National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency.

National Lottery

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which Scottish areas will benefit from the Fair Share National Lottery Initiative. [40171]

Mr. Foulkes: This initiative is designed to ensure that disadvantaged areas which have received lower levels up until now of lottery funding will receive a fair share of future funding. Under the initiative, two of the National Lottery distributing bodies, the New Opportunities Fund and the Community Fund, will target £169 million of resources. Sixty-two disadvantaged areas across Great Britain will benefit. In Scotland, six Scottish local authority areas will be targeted, making available a total of £14.95 million over the next three years.

The Scottish local authority areas included in Fair Share are: City of Glasgow, City of Dundee, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and South Ayrshire. The six areas were selected by the lottery distributors on the basis of disadvantage combined with low levels of lottery funding. The distributors referred to the Scottish Area Deprivation Index and recent analysis for the Better Neighbourhood Services Fund initiative.

In considering lottery awards in the Fair Share areas, NOF and the Community Fund will work with a range of partners engaged in community regeneration and development, including Social Inclusion Partnerships, local authorities and Councils for Voluntary Service.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is making an announcement today about the areas in England that will benefit from Fair Share. The areas in Wales and Northern Ireland will be announced in due course.

Rail Access (Airports)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she expects to publish the joint study with the Strategic Rail Authority and the Scottish Executive into the potential improvements in rail access to Scottish airports. [38868]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scottish Executive, in association with other parties, have commissioned consultants to undertake a detailed economic and engineering study of rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh Airports. I understand that the study is expected to be concluded by the Autumn. Publication of the report will be a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Nuclear Energy

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what responsibility she has for the development of nuclear energy policy in Scotland. [39329]

Mrs. Liddell: I am responsible for ensuring that the Scottish interest in reserved matters, including those relating to energy policy, receives proper consideration.

Tourism

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met representatives of *(a)* the British Tourist Board and *(b)* VisitScotland. [39331]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular contact with the British Tourist Authority and with VisitScotland to ensure that Scotland is promoted as a world class tourist destination.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what responsibilities she has for the promotion of Scottish tourism by *(a)* Scottish and *(b)* United Kingdom-wide Government bodies. [39332]

Mrs. Liddell: As Secretary of State for Scotland I continue to promote Scottish interests in the UK and overseas. In implementing my Friends of Scotland initiative, my Department works in consultation with VisitScotland and the British Tourist Authority.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Ministerial Functions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General which provisions of the Scotland Act 1998 she has relied upon with respect to the development of the role of Advocate-General that she has embarked upon. [37516]

The Advocate-General The Scotland Act deals only with my statutory functions but the provisions which to date have been most relevant are *(a)* section 33, which enables the Advocate-General, Lord Advocate or Attorney-General to refer the question of whether a Bill or any provision of a Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council for decision. In my answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1127W on legislation I explained my approach to Scottish Parliament Bills under section 33 and *(b)* paragraph 6 of Schedule 6, which provides that where intimation of a devolution issue is given to the Advocate-General or Lord Advocate under paragraph 5 the Advocate-General or Lord Advocate may take part as a party to the proceedings, so far as they relate to a devolution issue. In my answer of 25 January, I explained my approach to intervention in devolution issue cases.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Human Rights Commission

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will decide whether to reappoint Christine Bell to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. [39861]

Mr. Browne: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has this week signed the warrant to reappoint Professor Bell for a further two years as a member of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. The reappointment is effective from 1 March 2002.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Pakistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's involvement has been regarding the arrest in Pakistan of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh; and if he will make a statement. [38992]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office had no involvement in the arrest of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh. However, we are continuing to monitor the situation.

Sudan

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the prospects for peace in Sudan. [38647]

Mr. MacShane: We believe that 2002 offers a real window of opportunity for peace in Sudan and that the UK has a major role to play in ensuring that this opportunity is seized. On 12 February the Foreign Secretary announced the appointment of Alan Goulty as the new UK Special Representative for Sudan. Mr. Goulty will be supported by a dedicated Sudan Unit, which will be staffed by officers from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development. In co-ordination with partners interested in bringing peace to Sudan, Mr. Goulty will be engaging with all parties to the conflict in an effort to promote the case for peace.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the US Administration regarding their decision to suspend peace negotiations with the Government of Sudan. [38696]

Mr. MacShane: We are working closely with the US Administration over Sudan, and have encouraged them to continue to engage with the Sudanese Government. What matters most is an end to suffering caused by the civil war. The only way to achieve this is through strong pressure from the international community on all parties to the conflict.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Sudan regarding attacks on a food aid distribution site in the Western Upper Nile region of Southern Sudan. [38697]

Mr. MacShane: We have expressed concern at a high level of the Sudanese Government, both in Khartoum and London, about reports that a Sudanese Government helicopter gunship fired on civilians. We condemn all such attacks.

This attack is particularly distressing at a time when hopes for peace in Sudan have been growing. We shall intensify our efforts to press all parties to the conflict on the need for swift negotiated settlement in order to end the suffering caused by so many years of civil war.

Arab Summit (Lebanon)

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government to allow Yasser Arafat to leave Ramallah to attend the Arab summit in Lebanon between 25 and 26 March. [38506]

Mr. Bradshaw: I expressed my serious concern about President Arafat's continued detention in Ramallah to Israeli leaders during my visit to Israel between 14 and 17 January. We have repeatedly called on the Israeli Government to end its policy of restricting Palestinians' freedom of movement. The closures contribute to a feeling of hopelessness among Palestinians, and make a comprehensive settlement more difficult to achieve.

In this context, we hope that there can be early progress so that efforts to achieve a positive outcome from the Arab League Summit in Beirut on 27 March are not distracted by doubt over President Arafat's attendance. Restoration of a positive momentum to the peace process is in the interests of both parties.

NRZ Pensions

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to meet the assurances given by the British Government at the Lancaster House agreement in 1979 to NRZ employees to safeguard their pensions; and if he will compensate the NRZ employees for the failure of the Zimbabwe Government to fulfil promises made in the Lancaster House agreement. [39257]

Mr. MacShane: The 1979 Lancaster House Agreement stipulated that the Zimbabwe Constitution should contain provisions entitling public servants to state pensions, and that pension benefits should continue to be paid to former public employees no longer resident in Zimbabwe. The Agreement contained no such guarantee for employees of parastatal organisations, such as the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ). Nor did the Agreement contain any undertaking by the British Government to assume responsibility for the payment of pensions to those eligible, should the Zimbabwean authorities fail to maintain payments. Despite this, the British High Commission in Harare regularly reminds the Zimbabwean authorities of their obligations to pensioners under the terms of the Lancaster House Agreement.

Middle East

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to Chairman Arafat to encourage a halt in violence by the Fatah faction and Hezbollah. [37456]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to urge President Arafat to exert every effort to constrain the violence and bring those responsible for violent acts to justice. The Foreign Secretary most recently raised this with President Arafat when he called on him on 13 February.

Empty Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which he has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37815]

Mr. MacShane: It is not possible to answer this question without incurring disproportionate cost.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 415W, what the cost of refurbishing each Ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37889]

Mr. MacShane: The total cost of refurbishment works carried out to Ministerial offices within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is £47,795.32 since May 1997.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Funding

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the funding available per 1,000 population for each police authority area in order of spending. [28668]

Mr. Denham: The amount of grant funding available per 1,000 of population for each police authority area in 2001/02 and provisional grant funding for 2002/03 are given in the table in order of spending. Grant allocation includes Home Office police grant, revenue support grant (from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR)), national non-domestic rates, Crime Fighting Fund allocations and, where applicable, rural policing fund grants.

Resident population is one of a number of indicators used in the calculation of the police funding formula. Details of the indicators and their relative value in determining the allocation for individual forces are set out in the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2001/02 and the provisional Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2002/03, a copy of each has been placed in the Library.

Police Authority	*Funding per 1,000 population 2001–02 (£k)*
Merseyside	162.9
Northumbria	143.1
Cleveland	141.3
West Midlands	139.6
Greater Manchester	139.4
West Yorkshire	128.8
Durham	127.1
South Yorkshire	125.1
South Wales	122.5
Humberside	120.7
Lancashire	117.0
Gwent	116.7
Cumbria	115.0
Nottinghamshire	114.2
Kent	107.9
North Wales	106.9
Dyfed-Powys	102.5
Bedfordshire	101.3
Avon and Somerset	100.6
Leicestershire	100.5
Devon and Cornwall	100.2
Cheshire	99.7
Gloucestershire	98.9
Hampshire	98.5
Norfolk	97.0
Sussex	96.9
Staffordshire	96.6
Derbyshire	96.3
Northamptonshire	96.0
Thames Valley	93.9
Wiltshire	93.8
Cambridgeshire	93.8
Suffolk	92.7
Lincolnshire	92.5
Hertfordshire	92.3
Warwickshire	92.2
Essex	92.1
North Yorkshire	91.8
West Mercia	90.1
Dorset	85.8
Surrey	77.0

Police Authority	*Funding per 1,000 population 2002–03 (£k)*
Merseyside	168.3
Northumbria	147.7
Cleveland	147.0
Greater Manchester	145.8
West Midlands	144.6
West Yorkshire	133.4
Durham	132.0
South Yorkshire	129.2
South Wales	128.6
Humberside	124.3
Lancashire	121.9
Gwent	121.9

Police Authority	*Funding per 1,000 population 2002–03 (£k)*
Cumbria	119.2
Nottinghamshire	117.9
Kent	112.1
North Wales	111.0
Dyfed-Powys	107.2
Bedfordshire	106.2
Devon and Cornwall	105.3
Leicestershire	105.0
Cheshire	104.2
Hampshire	103.8
Gloucestershire	103.3
Norfolk	102.3
Derbyshire	101.6
Sussex	101.4
Staffordshire	100.1
Northamptonshire	99.7
Thames Valley	98.5
Wiltshire	97.4
Cambridgeshire	97.3
Hertfordshire	97.0
Suffolk	96.5
Essex	96.5
Lincolnshire	96.2
NorthYorkshire	95.9
Warwickshire	95.4
West Mercia	93.7
Dorset	89.5
Surrey	79.6

Funding for the Metropolitan and City police is included in provision for the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Corporation of the City of London respectively; both of which include funding for functions other than police. The principal police grant is given in the Provisional Police Grant Report.

The population data are the resident population figures used in the police funding settlement for each year.

Human Rights Legislation

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what monitoring has been done to ascertain the effect of human rights legislation on the efficiency of police investigations into criminal activity; and if he will make a statement. [29747]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office has neither commissioned nor undertaken any such monitoring.

Crime Detection

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the detection rate was for crimes in each police force in England and Wales in the last year for which figures are available. [30169]

Mr. Denham: The latest available information on detection rates for total crime in police force areas, for the year ended March 2001, has been published in table 2.10 of The Stationery Office publication "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2000", and is given below.

Overall detection rate for recorded crime by police force area

England and Wales 2000–01

Police force area	*Overall Detection Rate*
Avon and Somerset	22
Bedfordshire	27
Cambridgeshire	24
Cheshire	30
Cleveland	21
Cumbria	34
Derbyshire	26
Devon and Cornwall	34
Dorset	25
Durham	34
Essex	26
Gloucestershire	31
Greater Manchester	22
Hampshire	29
Hertfordshire	24
Humberside	21
Kent	28
Lancashire	27
Leicestershire	28
Lincolnshire	25
London, City of	27
Merseyside	28
Metropolitan Police	15
Norfolk	26
Northamptonshire	33
Northumbria	31
North Yorkshire	30
Nottinghamshire	20
South Yorkshire	25
Staffordshire	23
Suffolk	35
Surrey	28
Sussex	23
Thames Valley	22
Warwickshire	22
West Mercia	27
West Midlands	28
West Yorkshire	23
Wiltshire	30
Dyfed-Powys	63
Gwent	57
North Wales	31
South Wales	32
England and Wales	24

Immigration Service Personnel

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Immigration Service personnel have been disciplined over their treatment of visa applicants since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [31226]

Angela Eagle: Accurate centralised records of disciplinary action taken against members of staff in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate have been held only since 1998. From that date, a total of 77 members of staff working within the United Kingdom Immigration Service have had disciplinary action taken against them, for various types of misconduct. One Immigration officer has been issued with a formal written reprimand after the inappropriate treatment of a visa applicant and inappropriate behaviour towards others.

Police Authorities (Efficiency Savings)

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and which police authorities have met the Government target of 2 per cent. efficiency savings each year in the last three financial years. [32542]

Mr. Denham: According to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), all 43 police forces in England and Wales achieved at least 2 per cent. efficiency savings in 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Under the public service agreement, forces are required to use efficiency gains for the benefit of front line policing.

Copies of the relevant HMIC reports are in the Library.

Raves

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the discussions between his Department and the Association of Chief Police Officers regarding the issue of illegal rave gatherings on private property. [33186]

Mr. Denham: As a result of recent and justified public concerns about this problem, we are discussing the issue of illegal raves with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to determine how existing legislation can be used more effectively and whether any legislative changes are required.

Association of Chief Police Officers

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the President of the Association of Chief Police Officers. [29786]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary last met Sir David Phillips, the President of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), on 12 February 2002. This was the latest in an ongoing programme of monthly bi-lateral meetings between the Home Secretary and the ACPO President.

Porton Down

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost has been of the Wiltshire Constabulary investigation into allegations of past criminal activity at DSTL Porton Down; and if he will make a statement. [36309]

Mr. Denham: The Chief Constable informs me that the cost to Wiltshire Constabulary to the end of January 2002 was £1.62 million.

A special grant in relation to the additional policing costs of the Porton Down investigation was made by the Home Office to Wiltshire Constabulary in August 2000 for £870,000.

Police Sick Leave

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State (1) for the Home Department what the average number of days sickness absence per year was for *(a)* police officers and *(b)* support staff in the Cheshire Constabulary in each of the past five years; [36508]

(2) what the average number of days sickness absence was in each of the past five years for police officers in *(a)* Cheshire and *(b)* other forces in the North West. [36507]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The average number of days' sickness absence per police officer is shown in the table:

Police Force	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Cheshire	13	14	13	12	14
Cumbria	9	10	10	12	13
Greater Manchester	15	15	14	14	15
Lancashire	12	11	12	12	13
Merseyside	19	12	11	12	13

The average number of days' sickness absence per member of Cheshire Constabulary's support staff was:

1996–97: 16
1997–98: 16
1998–99: 16
1999–2000: 14
2000–01: 16

Victim Support

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when criminals in prison who are victims of a crime are informed of the criminal injuries compensation scheme; what the eligibility criteria are which are used by the CICS to determine if an application is acceptable; how many *(a)* ex-prisoners and *(b)* prisoners who have been victims of serious crime have received compensation from the CICS in each of the last five years; how much compensation such people have received; and what the basis was of each award. [37075]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme provides compensation to victims of violent crime. Victims of non-violent crime must look elsewhere for compensation or redress.

Legal services officers in each prison establishment are able to provide information to prisoners about the scheme and how to apply for compensation if they have been the victim of a violent crime.

The eligibility criteria are set out in the scheme itself, and the accompanying "Guide to Applicants" explains how applications are assessed against them. The scheme includes a provision enabling awards to be reduced or withheld on account of the applicant's record of criminal convictions.

The scheme is administered by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA). They have no means of determining whether an applicant is an "ex-prisoner". Their only means of identifying current prisoners is by a computer search of applicants' addresses for the words "Her Majesty's (HM) Prison", and then excluding those who are prison officers. In the last five years the following awards have been made to those so identified as prisoners.

1996–97: £5,000, £3,120, £3,750.

1997–98: £1,260, £1,350*, £1,000*, £5,000.

1998–99: £500, £500, £1,000.

1999–2000: £3,500, £500, £5,375, £1,000, £8,700

2000–01: £375.

All but two of these awards (starred) were reduced awards. Thirty-seven applications remain outstanding.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether criminals in prison who are victims of crime receive the support of the witness service at the Crown Court. [37072]

Beverley Hughes: The Witness Service, at both the Crown Court and magistrates' courts, is provided through the organisation Victim Support, whose grant from the Home Office in 2001–02 is £25 million.

Victim Support advise that the Witness Service does offer support to those in custody at court buildings where they are appearing as witnesses in a trial, but not if they are appearing as defendants. Those supported may fall into one of the following categories: they are serving a sentence and the alleged crime took place in prison: they are on remand; or they have been brought in on a bench warrant.

Where witness support is to be offered, the visit must be cleared with the police and prosecuting authority. Visits can only be made in the presence of one of those authorities for legal reasons.

Police Authority Performance Indicators

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the best value performance indicators for police authorities for 2002–03; and which indicators have been *(a)* deleted and *(b)* added since 2001–02. [36807]

Mr. Denham: Proposed Best Value Performance Indicators went out for consultation on 16 January 2002; the consultation document set out changes to the previous suite of Performance Indicators. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary expects shortly to be in a position to make his decision in the light of comments received and to make an Order under Section 4(1) of the Local Government Act 1999. The results will be published.

Police Secondments

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are seconded from police authorities to *(a)* the National Criminal Intelligence Service, *(b)* the Police Staff College, *(c)* police training centres, *(d)* the International Police Task Force in Bosnia and *(e)* Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. [36806]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The information is set out in the table:

Organisation	*Number of Police Officers*[1]
National Criminal Intelligence Service	271
National Police Training—Bramshill	101
Police Training Centres	447
International Task Force in Bosnia	66
Her Majesty's (HM) Inspectorate of Constabulary	52

[1] National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) strength as at 30 September 2001 (as per Home Office Statistical Bulletin 23/01). All other figures are as at 15 February 2002.

Youth Offender Panels

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action has been taken to launch youth offender panels; and what further action is planned; [38328]

(2) in which newspapers and on which radio stations membership of youth offender panels has been advertised. [38327]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Youth offending teams (Yots) throughout England and Wales are currently recruiting members of their local community to sit on youth offender panels. As this is a locally based initiative, action has been taken mainly on a local and regional basis. This has been boosted by national advertising targeted at specific groups who were under-represented in the pilot areas.

The campaign has been supported by the Youth Justice Board which has provided Yots with press releases, posters, leaflets and a standard advertisement for use in local media. The Board has also set up a dedicated website and issued a promotional video.

Some Yots have been very proactive launching their own radio advertising. Examples include radio stations in Berkshire, Bristol, Merseyside, Sheffield and Anglia TV.

A press release was issued to the national media, which was reported in *The Independent* newspaper. National advertising has concentrated on the ethnic press, student magazines and *The Big Issue.*

There will be further action in the run up to referral orders/youth offender panels going live on 1 April 2002 with a feature being offered to national magazines, trade journals, newspapers and broadcasters and the Youth Justice Board will again be asking Yots to promote panels to their local press.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether sex offenders whose offences are deemed spent after the completion of youth offender panel orders must remain on the Sex Offenders' Register. [38330]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The Sex Offenders Act 1997 imposes requirements on offenders cautioned, convicted, or found not guilty by reason of insanity in respect of an offence specified in Schedule 1 to the Act for a specified period. The minimum duration specified is five years. However, the Act also provides that determinate periods will be halved when the offender in question is under the age of

18. Whether a conviction is spent, in the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, has no impact on the requirements of the Sex Offenders Act.

The review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997, which we published in July last year, contains a chapter on its application to children and young people who sexually abuse. The consultation period on the review ended on 19 October 2001 and we are currently considering responses to consultation.

Female Convictions

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of women under sentence in prisons in England and Wales have been convicted of *(a)* violence against the person, *(b)* sexual offences, *(c)* robbery and *(d)* other offences. [37788]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2002]*: Provisional data show that around 15 per cent. of all sentenced female prisoners in prisons in England and Wales on 31 January 2002 were convicted of violence against the person. Approximately 9 per cent. were convicted of robbery, and around 1 per cent. of sexual offences. The remaining 75 per cent. were convicted of other criminal offences.

Police Authority Priorities

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the reasons underlying the changes in ministerial priorities for police authorities for 2002–03 since 2001–02. [36808]

Mr. Denham: Proposed changes to ministerial priorities went out for consultation on 16 January 2002. The consultation period is now over and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary expects shortly to be in a position to make his decision in the light of comments received, and to make an Order under Section 37(1) of the Police Act 1996.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 Special Advisers in his Department have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if he will give the total cost, including *(a)* travel, *(b)* accommodation and *(c)* subsistence allowance for each occasion. [37972]

Mr. Leslie: Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, Special Advisers in the Cabinet Office travelled abroad on eight occasions, at an average cost of £1,706.46 per trip. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by Special Advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the *Ministerial Code*, and the *Civil Service Management Code*.

Civil Defence Grant

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which minister is responsible for making civil defence grants under the Civil Defence Act 1948 as amended by the Civil Defence (Grants) Act 2002. [40019]

Mr. Leslie: The power to make civil defence grants rests in law with the Secretary of State and responsibility has been allocated to the First Secretary of State. An announcement will be made shortly on the formula to be used to determine the grant for eligible local authorities for the next financial year.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37821]

Mr. Leslie: All works carried out during the period covered by the Question were undertaken as part of a 5 year rolling programme of maintenance and repair work necessary in order to maintain the fabric and content of the buildings to an acceptable level. Within such costs, to try to separately identify work undertaken on Ministerial Private Offices would incur disproportionate costs.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Divisions

Pete Wishart: To ask the President of the Council how many divisions in the House of Commons this session have been on legislation for *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Great Britain only, *(c)* England and Wales only, *(d)* England only, *(e)* Northern Ireland only and *(f)* Scotland only. [37046]

Mr. Robin Cook: Discounting divisions on Programme Motions, the numbers are as follows:

Total divisions on Government bills to date: 73 (leaving aside 22 on programme motions), broker down as follows.

(a) UK legislation: 12 bills divided upon 43 divisions

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill:	21
Employment Bill:	4
European Communities (Amendment) Bill:	6
Export Control Bill:	2
Human Reproductive Cloning Bill:	1
NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill:	6
Tax Credits Bill:	3

(b) Legislation extending to Great Britain only: 1 bill divided upon 4 divisions

Civil Defence (Grant) Bill:	4

(c) Legislation extending to England and Wales only: 5 bills divided upon 20 divisions

Animal Health Bill:	6
Education Bill:	11
Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill:	2
Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill:	1

(d) Legislation extending to England only: Nil

(e) Legislation extending to Northern Ireland only: 3 bills divided upon 6 divisions

Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill:	1
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill:	1
Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Bill:	4

(f) Legislation extending to Scotland only: Nil

Parliamentary Questions

Jim Dobbin: To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to change the rota for oral questions. [39507]

Mr. Robin Cook: Following my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) on Wednesday 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 311W, the slot for Church Commissioners, Public Accounts Commission and Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission will be increased by 5 minutes and questions to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will correspondingly be reduced. This is for a trial period and will be reviewed again in the Summer.

WALES

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans there are to amend the Wales Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2001–02. [39374]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £79,129,000 from £8,534,916,000 to £8,614,357,000. The increase is a result of:

(i) the take up of end year flexibility entitlement of £70,330,000.

(ii) additional provision of:

£430,000 for extended match funding for Foot and Mouth charities;

£5,879,000 consequentials resulting from the Capital Modernisation Fund Round 3.

(iii) net transfers from other government departments of £2,802,000.

These transfers are as follows:

(i) £40,000 from DEFRA to cover Pig Industry Restructuring - Outgoers Scheme.

(ii) £57,000 to the Cabinet Office for Fast Stream Recruitment in 2001–2002.

(iii) £200,000 from the Home Office for Crime Reduction.

(iv) £80,000 from the Office of Government Commerce for e-procurement pilot.

(v) £105,000 from the Home Office for Confiscated Assets Fund.

(vi) £250,000 from the Forestry Commission for accruals adjustments.

(vii) £18,000 from Department of Health Northern Ireland, for Out of Area Treatments.

(viii) £1,786,000 from Department of Health for Out of Area Treatments.

(ix) £163,000 from Department of Health for High Security Psychiatric Services.

(x) £11,000 from Department of Health for Dental SIFT.

(xi) £1,723,000 from Department of Health for Cross Border Flows.

(xii) £1,097,000 to the Department of Health for Recostings.

(xiii) £73,000 from the Scottish Parliament for Out of Area Treatments.

(xiv) £400,000 to DEFRA for Carbon Trust EEBP Programme.

(xv) £93,000 to Department of Health for contributions to Royal Colleges.

The increase in DEL will be offset by transfers from other Departments, from the Reserve or take up of end-year flexibility and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Working Conditions and Practice

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35353]

Mr. P Murphy: Job sharing is only one of a number of alternative and flexible working patterns that staff at the Wales Office are welcome to take up. The flexibility of the pattern is decided in consultation with appropriate Branch management to suit an individual's need and the needs of their work.

At the present time the Wales Office does not have any job share staff, but every position that is advertised at the Wales Office is open to alternative and flexible working patterns including job share. Currently, out of the 40 staff at the Wales Office 8 enjoy alternative and flexible working patterns.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35892]

Mr. P Murphy: The Wales Office has a duty to ensure the health and safety of its staff. Hence no member of staff at the Wales Office is asked to work hours in excess of the Working Time Directive (an average of 48 hours a week over a 17-week period).

One member of staff has voluntarily opted out of this directive.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by his Department and how much reclaimed. [34454]

Mr. P Murphy: This information is not available in the form requested.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Litter Offences

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* attempted and *(b)* successful prosecutions of those accused of litter offences, broken down by offence for London boroughs in each year since 1995. [34334]

Mr. Meacher: This detailed data are not held centrally. However, information that is available for England and Wales in 1999 showed that there were 501 attempted prosecutions and 390 successful prosecution in a magistrates court.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many employees in *(a)* her Department and *(b)* her Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if she will make a statement. [32318]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Department follows the guidance in paragraph 7.1.7 of the Civil Service Management Code which prohibits Departments and agencies from providing staff with private medical insurance.

Non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are not bound by the Management Code and have provided the following benefits:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Number of Employees	275	286	298	307
Total Cost	£147k	£148k	£131k	£157k

Ozone Depleting Substances

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the UK standards on the recovery of ozone depleting substances will be published; and if she will make a statement. [34602]

Mr. Meacher: The Department published draft standards for the recovery of controlled ozone depleting substances from fridges and freezers in December 2001. The Environment Agency are now finalising these standards and a draft of the final version will be issued this month.

Biosafety Protocol

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to ratify the biosafety protocol. [34545]

Margaret Beckett: Ratification of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety by the United Kingdom is partly dependent on legislative action at the European Community level. The European Commission is shortly due to issue proposals for such legislation. The UK will press for early progress in negotiations on these proposals, so that we may be in a position to ratify the Protocol before the end of this year.

Kyoto Protocol

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to ratify the Kyoto protocol. [34546]

Margaret Beckett: For legal and presentational reasons, the UK will ratify the Kyoto protocol at the same time as the European Community and other Member States. At the European Council on 31 October 2001, the EU stressed

> "the Community's and its Member States' resolve to complete their ratification procedures in time for timely ratification with a view to entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol by the World Summit on Sustainable Development" in 2002.

The first step in the process is for the EC to ratify the protocol through the adoption of a Council Decision that will include further clarification on the arrangements for implementing the agreement between the EC and its Member States in 1998 on sharing out the EC's −8 per cent target. A Council Decision dealing with these issues is currently under discussion and is expected to be adopted at the next Environment Council on 4 March 2002.

Nitrates

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the annual cost to individual farmers of the proposed implementation of the 1991 Nitrate Vulnerable Zones Directive; and what system of monitoring her Department proposes to establish for policing the use of nitrogen in nitrate vulnerable zones. [35879]

Mr. Meacher: The annual cost of complying with the record keeping requirements of the Nitrates Directive is estimated at an average of £200 per farm. Where farmers need to take further action to comply with the Directive, the total costs of such additional action is estimated as up to £12.5m per annum across England in total. However, these extra costs would not be meaningful expressed as an average per farmer because they will vary considerably between individual farms depending on their individual circumstances.

It is intended to extend the Farm Waste Grant Scheme to the new areas where farmers will be required to take action to tackle nitrate pollution. This will make financial assistance available to those farmers who face the greatest costs, for example because they need to construct new slurry storage to comply with closed periods for spreading manure on vulnerable soils. The grant rate is currently 40 per cent (the EU State Aid Rules maximum) for construction or upgrade of storage facilities up to an investment ceiling of £85,000. We are currently considering offering 50 per cent in Less Favoured Areas, as permitted by the EU State Aid Rules. From experience in current NVZs, the average cost of new slurry storage construction to comply with Action Programme measures is between £[illegible]0,000 and £40,000.

The Environment Agency will be responsible for enforcing compliance in the new areas where farmers are required to take action to reduce nitrate pollution, as well as in existing Nitrate Vulnerable Zones. The Agency propose to develop a risk based approach to enforcement, for instance by relating the frequency and nature of inspection to the risk of pollution.

Flood Defences

Mr. Beard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the tidal surge which hit the Thames Estuary and the North Kent Coast on 29 January, with special reference to the adequacy of the flood defences along the Erith, Crayford and Dartford stretch of the river bank and the risk of the River Thames flooding in this area. [35440]

Mr. Morley: A tidal surge occurred on the morning tide of 29 January 2002, which was below the level where the Thames barrier is activated though some of the other estuary barriers were closed. There was no danger to life or property in this event.

The tidal flood defences between Erith and Dartford, along the north Kent coast are inspected and maintained regularly. These defences form part of the overall flood protection system on the tidal Thames, which, with the barriers closed, are designed to provide a high standard of protection against events with a current annual probability of less then 0.1 per cent. ("1 in 1,000 year").

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason it was necessary for veterinarians to wait in excess of 24 hours before obtaining permission to slaughter animals identified as suffering from foot and mouth disease. [38210]

Mr. Morley: It is not the case that veterinarians had to wait more than 24 hours for permission to slaughter animals infected with foot and mouth disease. The National Disease Control Centre (NDCC) was responsible for the confirmation of disease based on telephone reports from field staff. On 21 March, the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food agreed that field staff could slaughter animals that they believed were infected with foot and mouth disease, without authority, if they were unable to contact the NDCC within two hours.

In a survey of Temporary Veterinary Inspectors, the British Veterinary Association found that it took TVI's on average, 14.5 minutes to get through to the NDCC and that the longest wait was 2 hours. The average response time by the NDCC was 10 minutes and the longest wait for a response was 4 hours.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the incubation period for the foot and mouth disease is in *(a)* cattle and *(b)* sheep. [38523]

Mr. Morley: The incubation period for foot and mouth varies according to the infecting dose, the strain of the virus and the susceptibility of the infected animal. The most likely incubation period for all species is 5 days. The common range of incubation is accepted at between 3 to 8 days, although the maximum range is between 2 and 14 days.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the foot and mouth compensation payments were made by the *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU; and if she will make a statement. [39258]

Mr. Morley: All compensation payments related to foot and mouth disease have been made by the UK Government. EU Member States may claim up to 60 per cent of eligible costs incurred during the control of foot and mouth disease from the European Commission. In June 2001, my Department submitted a claim to the Commission based on estimated costs of £1,153 million. An updated claim based on costs of £1,663 million was submitted in October.

In accordance with Commission Decision 2001/654/EC of 16 August 2001, detailed initial information has been submitted to the Commission in support of the UK's claim and we are in regular contact with Commission officials in furtherance of the claim.

Gas Emissions

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total UK *(a)* carbon dioxide emissions and *(b)* other greenhouse gas emissions were; and what the percentage change was in each of the last 10 years. [37819]

Mr. Meacher: The table shows the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (methane, nitrous oxide, HFCs, PFCs and SF6) emitted during the years 1990 to 1999. (Records for 2000 are not yet complete.) The percentage change in emissions for each year compared to the previous year, and for each year compared to 1990 is also shown for each gas.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
CO_2(Mt)	602.8	606.7	591.9	576.3	572.4	563.4	583.0	558.0	560.3	547.8
%		0.64	−2.43	−2.63	−0.68	−1.57	3.47	−4.28	0.40	−2.22
% (1990)		0.64	−1.81	−4.39	−5.04	−6.54	−3.29	−7.43	−7.06	−9.13
CH4(Mt)	3.67	3.62	3.53	3.38	3.07	3.05	2.98	2.89	2.76	2.63
%		−1.36	−2.49	−4.25	−9.17	−0.65	−2.30	−3.02	−4.50	−4.71
% (1990)		−1.36	−3.81	−7.90	−16.35	−16.89	−18.80	−21.25	−24.80	−28.34
N_2O(Mt)	0.22	0.21	0.19	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.14
%		−4.55	−9.52	−5.26	5.56	−5.26	5.56	0.00	0.00	−26.32
% (1990)		−4.55	−13.64	−18.18	−13.64	−18.18	−13.64	−13.64	−13.64	−36.36
HFC(kt)	0.973	1.025	1.074	1.162	1.451	1.956	2.472	3.067	3.660	2.749
%		5.34	4.78	8.19	24.87	34.80	26.38	24.07	19.33	−24.89
% (1990)		5.34	10.38	19.42	49.13	101.03	154.06	215.21	276.16	182.53
PFC(kt)	0.331	0.259	0.137	0.115	0.140	0.157	0.130	0.095	0.094	0.098
%		−21.75	−47.10	−16.06	21.74	12.14	−17.20	−26.92	−1.05	4.26
% (1990)		−21.75	−58.61	−65.26	−57.70	−52.57	−60.73	−71.30	−71.60	−70.39
SF6(kt)	0.030	0.032	0.035	0.037	0.044	0.047	0.053	0.053	0.054	0.055
%		6.67	9.38	5.71	18.92	6.82	12.77	0.00	1.89	1.85
% (1990)		6.67	16.67	23.33	46.67	56.67	76.67	76.67	80.00	83.33

Precautionary Principle

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy regarding the precautionary principle. [38273]

Mr. Morley: The precautionary principle holds that the absence of scientific proof should not delay or prevent proportionate measures to remove or reduce threats of serious harm. Where there is scientific uncertainty DEFRA will adopt a precautionary approach where it is considered appropriate. In doing this, we are mindful of the EU Council resolution on the precautionary principle and of the Government's response to the report of the BSE Inquiry.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 1161W, what the cost of refurbishing each Ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37899]

Mr. Morley: MAFF Ministers' private offices moved from Whitehall Place West to Nobel House, Smith Square, in 1997/98. The cost of the move was £38,000. In addition, alterations to prepare the accommodation for Ministers and senior officials cost £240,000 and £54,000 was spent on new furniture. The offices vacated in Whitehall Place West were subsequently occupied by MAFF officials at no additional cost.

No further refurbishment work has been undertaken on Ministers' private offices since 1997–98.

Fisheries (Prosecutions)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many successful prosecutions were brought against fishing vessels during the last five years for *(a)* catching of undersized fish, *(b)* landing of undersized fish, *(c)* using illegal nets and trawls, *(d)* irregularities in log book, *(e)* having a catch in excess of quote and *(f)* other reasons. [37945]

Mr. Morley: Information on the total number of successful prosecutions involving fishing vessels during the period 1997 to 2001 for the following types of offences is set out in the table below.

Type of offence	*Number of successful prosecutions*
Retaining on board or landing undersized fish	26
Use/carriage of illegal nets	44
Logbook offences	77
Retaining on board or landing over quota species	57
Other	110

For the purpose of the table prosecutions involving both the owner and master have been treated as a single case. Some cases may involve more than one offence under one or more of the above headings.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) on how many occasions successful prosecutions have been brought against fishing vessels in the past five years for which records are available; and how many were (a) UK-registered, British-crewed vessels, (b) UK-registered flag of convenience vessels and (c) non-UK registered vessels; [37944]

(2) on how many occasions enforcement action has been taken against fishing vessels by her Department in the last five years for which records are available. [37987]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The number of successful prosecutions in respect of UK and non UK registered vessels by this Department during the period 1997 to 2001 were:

239 UK registered vessels

75 non-UK registered vessels

The totals above include vessels which have been prosecuted on more than one occasion. Our prosecution records do not distinguish whether UK registered vessels were crewed by UK or foreign nationals.

Fisheries

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what budget has been employed by her Department to manage the fisheries enforcement operation in England for each year for the past five years. [37874]

Mr. Morley: Information about the financial resources devoted to fisheries control and enforcement by this Department is set out in the following table:

	£ million
1996–97	12.6
1997–98	12.6
1998–99	11.8
1999–2000	11.1
2000–01	11.8

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how much of the fines paid by fishing owners and skippers following their prosecution is paid to her Department; and who else receives income from these fines; [37947]

(2) how much her Department has recovered from fishing vessel owners and skippers following successful prosecutions for each year for the past five years for which records are available. [37946]

Mr. Morley: Responsibility for collecting fines imposed following a successful prosecution rests with the Courts concerned. No fines are paid to this Department.

IACS Payments

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of farmers who were under Form D restrictions qualify for IACS payments; and if she will make a statement. [39279]

Mr. Morley: This information is not readily available and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. However, it is likely that most of the farmers concerned would have been claimants under schemes covered by IACS.

Badgers

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many badgers there were in *(a)* Gloucestershire and *(b)* the UK in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [39269]

Mr. Morley: No annual data on the number of badgers exist either at county or national level.

Based upon two surveys the number of badgers in Great Britain is estimated to be between 300,000 and 400,000. The latest survey which was conducted in the mid-1990s revealed an increase in badger numbers of around seventy per cent compared with the first survey which was undertaken in the mid-1980s. These surveys indicated that the badger population in the south-west region as a whole increased approximately in line with the national trend.

Bovine TB

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking on the preliminary results of the trials being conducted on tuberculosis in cattle; and if she will make a statement. [39267]

Mr. Morley: On the basis of advice from the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB, results from the badger field trial, which is part of the Government's wide ranging strategy to tackle TB in cattle, are expected by the end of 2004. The Government liaise closely with the group and any preliminary findings that may emerge in the interim will be considered in the light of advice from the group.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on recent changes in the rate of tuberculosis in cattle in *(a)* Gloucestershire and *(b)* the UK. [39270]

Mr. Morley: TB in cattle is continuing to give considerable concern particularly in counties such as Gloucestershire which has persistently had a higher incidence of the disease than most other areas of the country. Incidence of bovine TB is increasing in England and Wales, and the Government have in place an extensive research programme so that control strategies can be developed on the basis of sound science, and on the basis of advice from independent scientific and veterinary experts.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many herds have been tested for tuberculosis and how many were found positive in *(a)* Gloucestershire and *(b)* England in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [39266]

Mr. Morley: Provisional data indicate that in the 12 months to December 2001 8,211 tuberculin tests on cattle herds were undertaken in England of which 523 were in Gloucestershire. From these tests a total of 337 new confirmed bovine tuberculosis incidents were recorded for England of which 35 were in Gloucestershire.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many herds are under restriction through tuberculosis *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Gloucestershire; and if she will make a statement. [39265]

Mr. Morley: Provisional data as at 31 January 2002 indicate that there were 767 herds under movement restrictions in England as a result of tuberculosis breakdown, of which 113 were in Gloucestershire. On the same data and on the basis of veterinary risk assessment further control measures were introduced, resulting in an additional 631 herds being placed under restriction in England of which 120 were in Gloucestershire.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigations she has made of the experience in the Republic of Ireland of tuberculosis in cattle; and if she will make a statement. [39268]

Mr. Morley: In implementing its wide ranging research and control strategy the Department is advised by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB. It also has a TB animal vaccine programme adviser. The group, the Vaccine Programme adviser and Departmental officials visited Ireland last autumn to investigate the work being undertaken in that country.

Plastic Recycling

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what she estimates the cost will be of starting a scheme for plastic sheet recycling for farmers; [37988]

(2) what the estimated weight is of unrecycled plastic in the countryside; and what its environmental impact is. [37989]

Mr. Meacher: An estimated 43,000 tonnes a year of non-packaging plastic waste is produced on farms. In addition, it is estimated that there is about 45,000 tonnes a year of plastic packaging waste on farms. Currently, there are only a small number of local voluntary schemes in operation to collect farm plastics for recycling.

We are at present developing a Regulatory Impact Assessment to assess the various costs and benefits of the options for introducing a scheme to collect and recycle farm plastics. This RIA will be included in the forthcoming consultation document on the application to agricultural waste of the Waste Framework Directive.

Refrigerators

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what receipts there have been for *(a)* each county and *(b)* other waste disposal authorities of the additional moneys made available for the disposal of old refrigerators and freezers. [38865]

Mr. Meacher: In early December 2001, I announced a payment of £6 million to cover local authority costs from January to March 2002. This payment will be made through the Revenue Support Grant for 2002–2003 and will be distributed to waste disposal authorities according to the Standard Spending Assessment Formula. We are monitoring the impact of the Regulation to assess what further action is required.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to question 3689; and if she will make a statement. [38342]

(2) when she will reply to question 3690; and if she will make a statement. [38344]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 88W.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to question 3534; and if she will make a statement. [38343]

(2) When she will reply to question 3537; and if she will make a statement. [38345]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1169-70W.

Hunting With Dogs

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the government's policy on hunting with dogs. [40339]

Alun Michael: The Government intend to provide an opportunity for each House to debate a motion which will allow Members to vote for and against each of the three options which were presented to the House during the last Parliament. This will fulfil the first part of our promise by giving the House an early opportunity to express its view. We will then consider, in the light of the votes and the views expressed during the debates in both Houses, how to deliver the second part of that commitment, to

> "enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on this issue".

The Government will make a statement on the way forward before Easter in response to the debate and vote in both Houses.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Rail Safety

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what proportions of slam shut carriages have been converted to the cone and cup safety mechanism; [28660]

(2) if the removal from the rail network of those slam shut carriages not converted to the cone and cup safety mechanism will be achieved by December; [28645]

(3) if slam shut carriages will be converted to the cone and cup safety mechanism by December 2002. [28659]

Mr. Spellar: This issue is dealt with by Railway Safety Regulations 1999.

Rail Passengers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 18W, on rail passengers, what is the frequency of the regular surveys and, in relation to the action plans *(a)* which train operating companies have been required to implement such a plan since 1995, *(b)* when these have taken place, *(c)* what these action plans have required from each train operating company, *(d)* what outcomes have resulted from any action plans and *(e)* how progress towards the action plans is measured and *(f)* what steps he plans to take to improve the co-ordination and standard of customer satisfaction surveys and national passenger surveys. [32696]

Mr. Spellar: Train Operating Companies (TOCs) have a contractual commitment to carry out customer satisfaction surveys at least every six months. Following the results of the surveys a number of TOCs have been required to undertake a variety of action plans. These action plans become contractual commitments and are monitored continuously by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) to ensure they are fulfilled.

Details of improvement to services for passengers being implemented by each TOC, including those derived from surveys and action plans are listed in the regular SRA On Track publication, which also summarises National Passenger Survey results. It is the SRA's aim that all TOCs will be measured and monitored by the National Passenger Survey under the Franchise Agreement rather their own customer satisfaction surveys.

Enron

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* his senior departmental officials have had with Enron and its subsidiaries in the last two years. [32433]

Dr. Whitehead: It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Accounting Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33848]

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (iii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34994]

Dr. Whitehead: Individual Government Departments are responsible for taking decisions on the goods and services they acquire, whether through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or other procurement routes,taking into account the Government's policy of seeking value for money for the taxpayer. The public sector as a whole has signed hundreds of contracts, covering the delivery of a range of services.

Detail of contracts and payments made by my Department to the firms listed are set out in the tables. The information is based on that held in DTLR's central records and that held centrally by agencies.

Number of Contracts

	PWC	*Ernst & Young*	*Deloitte & Touche*	*KPMG*	*Andersen*
1997–98	5	1	0	2	1
1998–99	3	0	0	2	0
1999–2000	6	1	1	3	1
2000–01	10	0	3	2	0
2001–02	2	6	1	3	2

Value of Payments Made to Contractors

	PWC £	*Ernst & Young* £	*Deloitte & Touche* £	*KPMG* £	*Andersen* £
1997–98	800,000.00	65,082.10	0	705,111.00	0
1998–99	11,572.08	0	0	75,206.00	0
1999–2000	1,208,054.89	95.00	963,395.80	1,557,707.27	71,351,88
2000–01	973,897.00	179,638.37	3,950,854.35	1,695,751.26	5,052.50
2001–02	9,393,379.87	7,970,711.15	1,646,438.61	2,329,430.39	325,753.40

Note: The value of certain contracts is not divisible between years and so payments have been accorded to the first year of the contract.

Special Purpose Vehicles

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will define a special purpose vehicle in the context of the railways. [34829]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* The concept of a special purpose vehicle is a separate joint venture company set up to finance and manage one or more rail infrastructure projects. Parties in the company might include any combination of the Strategic Rail Authority, Railtrack, train operators, construction and project management firms and third-party investors.

London Underground

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which journalists, and from which publications, were invited to the briefing given on the future of the London Underground on 6 February. [35558]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* There was no briefing given on 6 February. DTLR officials gave technical briefings on Monday 4 February and Tuesday 5 February to broadcast media and transport correspondents respectively.

These briefings were on the technical detail of the bidding process including value for money issues and the public sector comparator. Obviously, prior to the London Transport Board meeting on Thursday 7 February, these briefings did not cover London Transport's "minded" decision on way ahead for the Tube PPP, which was not taken until that meeting.

10-Year Plan

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answers of 7 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1108W, refs 33767 and 33769, on the transport 10-year financial envelope, if he will set out the changes to the planned expenditure envelope which result in the overall increase and the amount of the increase attributable to each change. [35741]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The latest 10-Year Plan total of £181.9 billion announced by the Secretary of State in an oral and written answer on 29 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 149-152 and 175W, took account of a number of changes to the 10-Year Plan expenditure numbers. The main changes were the following:

1. The fact that the public expenditure numbers for 2001/02 reflect actual spending between April and December 2001 (the first nine months of the Plan) and take account of the latest outturn projection for that year;
2. reductions of £38/118/183 million for the years 2001/02 to 2003/04 as a result of internal DETR reallocations immediately following SR2000.
3. a transfer of £2.3 billion from the 10 Year Plan Unallocated Fund to Railways;
4. £1.5 billion of additional provision for Railways;
5. £462 million of additional provision for Railways to cover a shortfall in Railtrack's freight income;
6. a transfer of £77 million from London to Railways to cover he SRA's contribution to CrossRail development costs;
7. the inclusion of £290 million of unused provision for Railways carried forward as end-year flexibility from 2000–01 to 2001–02;
8. no changes have been made to the private investment numbers.

The effect of these changes is summarised in the revised version of Table A3 from *'Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan'* that I referred to in my answer to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 785W, and which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Social Services Spending

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for shire counties (1) the social services SSA for child protection, divided by the number of children under the age of 18, adjusted for inflation at current values, in the years 1990–91 to 2001–02 and projected for 2002-03. [36762]

(2) the social services divided by total population, adjusted for inflation at current values, for the years 1990–91 to 2001–02 and projected for 2002–03. [36761]

(3) the total SSA, divided by the population financed by that county, adjusted for inflation at current values *(a)* of the years 1990–91 to 2001–02 and *(b)* projected or 2002-03. [36756]

Dr. Whitehead: A table has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The figures are quoted as they were announced each year. It has not been possible to construct a run of figures over the period that are adjusted for changes in function or financing arrangements. Some year on year changes shown in the table are, therefore, not on a like for like basis.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the standard spending assessments per *(a)* pensioner and *(b)* young person under the age of 18 by county council for England and Wales in each year from 1990–91 to 2001–02, and projected for the financial year 2002–03, adjusted for inflation at current values. [36760]

Dr Whitehead: The Department does not keep data on people of pensionable age covering the entire period, nor on standard spending assessments for local authorities in Wales. A table showing, for each English county council, the total standard spending assessment per person aged 65 or over, adjusted for inflation at current values has been placed in Libraries of the House, together with a table showing the total standard spending assessment per person aged 0 to 17, adjusted for inflation at current values.

The figures are quoted as they were announced each year. It has not been possible to construct a run of figures over the period that are adjusted for changes in function or financing arrangements. Some year on year changes shown in the table are, therefore, not on a like for like basis.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to the public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39104]

Dr. Whitehead: For details of the publicity and advertising campaigns run by my Department in each of the last 4 years, together with purpose, cost and how we evaluate campaigns. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1037W, and to the replies by the then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 20 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 168–69W, and to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 57W–59W.

DTLR currently employs seventeen paid publicity specialists who work on a range of public information services including advertising campaigns.

Asset Transfers

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* research, *(b)* consultation and *(c)* discussions his Department has carried out since 1997 on the legal definition and status of asset transfers. [38976]

Dr. Whitehead: Assets are defined in the Accounting Standards Board's Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 5 as "rights or other access to future economic benefits controlled by an entity as a result of past transactions or events". Future economic benefits, in this context, means that the asset will contribute in some way to the provision of services or other outputs by Departments. Control, in this context, means the ability to obtain those benefits in fulfilment of aims and objectives of the entity and to restrict the access of others.

In accounting for asset transfers we follow the guidance of HM Treasury's "Resource Accounting Manual" (TRAM) and "Government Accounting". TRAM states at paragraph 3.2.36 that "Where tangible fixed assets are transferred between Government Departments, other than in connection with either a transfer of functions from one Department to another or a merger of Departments, the transfer price should be calculated in accordance with an assessment of the fair values on an equivalent basis to that required by FRS 7 for the attribution of fair values to tangible fixed assets acquired on a business combination". Government Accounting, at paragraph 24.4.2, states that: "Transfers of assets (including assignments of leases) at less than full market value should be accounted for as gifts. The value of the gift will be the difference between the open market value and the price at which it is transferred".

Our accounting actions are based upon the decisions and requests of the asset owners upon whom fall the legal responsibilities of asset management.

Railway Network Grants

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the network grants for railways to which his Department is contractually committed. [39163]

Mr. Jamieson: The profile of network grant payments is set out in Appendix D of the Rail Regulator's October 2000 Periodic Review and, reflecting the April 2001 agreement between Government and Railtrack, in the appendices to the Regulator's published letter to Railtrack of 9 April 2001.

Road Maintenance (Scotland)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive about road maintenance contracts. [39136]

Mr. Jamieson: Road maintenance contracts in Scotland are a matter for the Scottish Executive.

DTLR officials regularly meet Scottish Executive officials in the fora of the Roads Liaison Group and its associated boards, which were set up last year to bring together representatives of all highway authorities in the UK to discuss and advise on issues relating to the construction and maintenance of highways.

Traffic Calming

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives to groups of residents where the Local Government Ombudsman rules against a local authority over the validity of a consultation prior to the introduction of a traffic calming scheme, but decides to take no further action. [38450]

Ms Keeble: It is for individual local authorities to consider what action to take following a recommendation from the Local Government Ombudsman.

Rough Sleepers

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many rough sleepers were counted in market towns in the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [37799]

Ms Keeble: On 3 December 2001 the Prime Minister announced that the Rough Sleepers Unit had achieved its target of reducing rough sleeping by at least two-thirds by 2002.

Local authorities and voluntary agencies conduct rough sleeping counts and collate the information. Tables showing all the local authority estimates and street count results for 1998, 1999, 2000 and the latest figures for 2001 were placed in the Libraries of the House on 11 December 2001. Local authorities not listed in the tables for those years submitted either an estimate of 0–10 or no estimate in their HIP returns.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information was provided to him by the administrator about the total level of *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term indebtedness of Railtrack at the point of implementation of the administration order. [39428]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the extension of the reduced rate of vehicle excise duty to cars with engines up to 1200cc. [38522]

Mr. Jamieson: We have not yet undertaken any formal analysis of the raising of the threshold for the reduced rate of vehicle excise duty to cars with engines up to 1200cc. We intend to assess in due course the impact of the range of reforms to vehicle excise duty for cars introduced between 1999 and 2001.

Shoreham Port Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what means the current vacancies on the Board of Shoreham Port Authority have been publicised. [39238]

Mr. Jamieson: The current vacancies on the Shoreham Port Authority were advertised in the local and regional press, including:

The Evening Argus
The Brighton & Hove Leader
The South Coast Leader
The Mid-Sussex Leader
Scoop
Fishersgate job website
Appointments South East (Argus and Kent Messenger)
The Worthing Herald
The Shoreham Herald
The Lancing Gazette
The West Sussex Gazette
The Chichester Observer
The Bognor Observer
The Littlehampton Observer
The Eastbourne Herald
The Eastbourne Advertiser
and the free press in Worthing, Shoreham, Lancing and Littlehampton.

The Trades Union Congress were also invited to nominate candidates for one of the advertised posts.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what opportunities constituents of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham living in the vicinity of Shoreham Harbour have to be considered as recruits to the Board of the Shoreham Port Authority. [39239]

Mr. Jamieson: Currently, three appointments to the Shoreham Port Authority are made directly by the Secretary of State. These three appointments are publicly advertised and it is open to all who meet the criteria as set in the advertisement to apply for those posts.

Six other appointments are made by the Secretary of State following consultation with various stakeholder groups. The practice is for those groups to nominate appropriate candidates based on a criteria set by the Shoreham Port Authority.

Planning Applications

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under what conditions he will call in planning applications in an area of outstanding natural beauty. [39247]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State's general approach is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of local planning authorities unless it is necessary to do so. Parliament has entrusted them with responsibility for day-to-day planning control in their areas. Local planning authorities are normally best placed to make decisions relating to their areas and it is right that, in general, they should be free to carry out their duties responsibly, with the minimum of interference.

There will be occasions, however, when the Secretary of State may consider it necessary to call in a planning application to determine himself instead of leaving it to the local planning authority. His policy is to be very selective about calling in planning applications. He will, in general, only take this step if planning issues of more than local importance are involved and if those issues need to be decided by the Secretary of State rather than at local level. Each case is, however, considered on its own facts.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the conditions for granting industrial planning permission in an area designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. [39248]

Ms Keeble: Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) note 7 sets out national planning guidance for the Countryside including areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs). It states that planning policies and development control decisions affecting AONBs should favour conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape, and that the environmental effects of new proposals will be a major consideration, though it will also be appropriate to have regard to the economic and social well-being of the area. PPG7 also states that major projects should be demonstrated to be in the public interest before being allowed to proceed.

Road Accidents

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* injuries have occurred involving buses and (i) other buses, (ii) other road vehicles and (iii) pedestrians in each year since 1997. [38840]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is shown in the tables which follow. Figures for 2001 are not yet available. The figures shown relate to accidents on public roads in Great Britain.

(i) Occupant casualties in two-vehicle accidents involving a bus or coach with another bus or coach

	Fatalities	*Injuries*
1997	0	339
1998	0	347
1999	0	321
2000	0	424

(ii) Occupant casualties in two-vehicle accidents involving a bus or coach and another type of vehicle[1]

	Fatalities	*Injuries*
1997	46	6,733
1998	40	7,384
1999	41	7,409
2000	48	7,322

[1] Includes casualties in both vehicles involved but excludes pedestrian casualties.

(iii) Pedestrian casualties hit by a bus or coach: Great Britain

	Fatalities	*Injuries*
1997	55	1,706
1998	62	1,723
1999	69	1,906
2000	608	1,963

In addition to those casualties shown in tables (i), (ii) and (iii) there were some bus or coach occupants casualties in single-vehicle accidents and additional vehicle occupant casualties in accidents which involved a bus or coach and more than one other vehicle. All of those have been included in the following table which shows all casualties in accidents which involved at least one bus or coach.

All casualties[1] *in accidents involving at least one bus or coach*

	Fatalities	*Injuries*
1997	129	15,485
1998	152	16,081
1999	145	16,567
2000	149	16,412

[1] Includes pedestrians, bus and coach occupants and the occupants of other vehicles.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate revenues from council tax and business rates *(a)* for the United Kingdom as a whole and *(b)* for each constituent nation of the UK in (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03. [39327]

Dr Whitehead: The table gives the estimated net yield from business rates for 2001–02 and 2002–03 for England. In addition the estimated council tax net yield in England for 2001–02 is shown. This information is based on returns provided by English local authorities to the Department. No estimate of the council tax yield for 2002–03 is yet available.

	2001–02 *£ billion*	*2002–03* *£ billion*
Business Rates (a)	14.223	14.857
Council Tax (b)	15.245	n/a

(a) Net of reliefs but including allowances for losses in collection and cost of collection.

(b) Including council tax funded by benefit.

Figures are not available for the United Kingdom as a whole. Information on business rates and council tax in Wales and Scotland are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Executive respectively. Information on rates in Northern Ireland is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority

Peter Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what directions have been given to Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority regarding security measures since 11 September 2001; by whom; and why such directions were given. [38673]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials from the Transport Security Division are responsible for interfacing with the railways industry on security requirements. These requirements are contained in the National Railways Security Programme. Further guidance is issued to the industry, including Strathclyde Passenger Transport, on a regular basis. This system establishes appropriate security standards for industry.

Further advice is issued in the format of Railway Security Circulars which provide a mechanism to update the National Railways Security Programme. These are sent to a nominated security contact within each railway-affiliated company, and are then disseminated internally to relevant parties.

Railway Security Circulars are usually issued on a monthly basis. However, since the attacks on the United States of America on 11 September, my officials have issued eight such Circulars to the industry. The content of the Circulars is restricted for obvious reasons but has included advice on issues as divergent as Driver Cab Security and Station Searches. The Circulars have been issued to advise the railways industry on the measures required to safeguard members of the travelling public, staff and the UK's rail infrastructure itself, from terrorist attack.

Local Strategic Partnerships

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the outcome is of the accreditation of local strategic partnerships in the areas due to receive neighbourhood renewal funds for 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [40165]

Ms Keeble: I am pleased to announce that 87 out of 88 Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in England's most deprived areas will today be accredited. LSPs bring together local authorities, public sector agencies, local people, the voluntary sector and business, to identify local priorities and implement strategies to meet them. They lead efforts to close the gap in living standards and opportunities between the most deprived neighbourhoods and other areas, and are key to delivery of the Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

Accreditation follows a process of self-assessment by LSPs and close working with Government Offices. It is only the first stage on the way to better local delivery and a number of partnerships have further work to do to ensure they are fully effective, inclusive and able to deliver better services on the ground. Government Offices will be writing to those LSPs setting out the areas of concern. They will continue to work with all LSPs to secure ongoing improvement, and we will monitor progress closely.

Walsall LSP has not yet made sufficient progress against the criteria and is therefore not recommended for accreditation at this stage. This will be subject to review on 28 March. Where accreditation has been deferred, Neighbourhood Renewal Funds (NRF) will be maintained at 67 per cent. of the 2002–03 NRF rate (the same level as funding for 2001–02). As soon as the LSP has undergone a successful review with the relevant Government Office the remaining amounts will be released. Details of NRF allocations for every LSP for 2002/03 are attached.[1]

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Allocations[2]

Local Authority Name	*NRF Allocation 2001–02 (£m)*	*NRF Allocation 2002–03 (£m)*	*NRF Allocation 2003–04 (£m)*	*NRF Total Over 3 years (£m)*
Allerdale	0.428	0.642	0.855	1.925
Ashfield	0.482	0.723	0.964	2.168
Barking and Dagenham	0.816	1.225	1.633	3.673
Barnsley	2.722	4.083	5.444	12.249
Barrow-in-Furness	0.92	1.379	1.838	4.137
Birmingham	11.022	16.533	22.043	49.598
Blackburn with Darwen	2.168	3.251	4.335	9.754
Blackpool	1.504	2.256	3.008	6.768
Bolsover	0.734	1.102	1.469	3.305
Bolton	2.712	4.069	5.426	12.207
Bradford	4.906	7.359	9.812	22.077
Brent	1.14	1.709	2.279	5.128
Brighton & Hove	0.684	1.027	1.369	3.08
Bristol	1.782	2.674	3.565	8.022
Burnley	0.636	0.955	1.273	2.865
Camden	2.11	3.164	4.219	9.492
Coventry	2.644	3.967	5.290	11.901
Croydon	0.29	0.436	0.581	1.307
Derby	1.626	2.438	3.250	7.314
Derwentside	0.742	1.112	1.482	3.336
Doncaster	4.394	6.592	8.790	19.777
Dudley	0.76	1.140	1.521	3.421
Ealing	0.458	0.688	0.917	2.063
Easington	2.216	3.325	4.433	9.975
Enfield	0.93	1.395	1.860	4.184
Gateshead	2.322	3.482	4.643	10.447
Great Yarmouth	0.994	1.490	1.987	4.471
Greenwich	1.94	2.911	3.881	8.733
Hackney	5.882	8.824	11.765	26.472
Halton	1.964	2.946	3.928	8.839
Hammersmith and Fulham	0.516	0.775	1.033	2.325
Haringey	2.668	4.001	5.335	12.004
Hartlepool	1.568	2.353	3.138	7.059
Hastings	0.688	1.031	1.375	3.094
Hyndburn	0.646	0.970	1.294	2.91
Islington	3.136	4.703	6.270	14.108
Kensington and Chelsea	0.54	0.811	1.081	2.431
Kerrier	0.806	1.208	1.610	3.624
Kingston upon Hull	3.754	5.630	7.507	16.892
Kirklees	1.496	2.244	2.992	6.732
Knowsley	3.696	5.543	7.391	16.63
Lambeth	1.21	1.816	2.422	5.448
Leeds	4.198	6.297	8.396	18.89
Leicester	4.188	6.283	8.377	18.848
Lewisham	1.226	1.839	2.453	5.518
Lincoln	0.2	0.300	0.400	0.9
Liverpool	10.066	15.100	20.133	45.298
Luton	0.754	1.132	1.510	3.397
Manchester	10.298	15.446	20.595	46.339
Mansfield	1.15	1.724	2.299	5.172
Middlesbrough	2.624	3.937	5.249	11.811
Newcastle upon Tyne	3.422	5.132	6.843	15.397
Newham	6.666	9.999	13.332	29.997
North Tyneside	1.536	2.305	3.074	6.915
Nottingham	4.622	6.934	9.246	20.803
Oldham	2.336	3.505	4.674	10.516
Pendle	0.98	1.471	1.961	4.412
Penwith	0.414	0.622	0.829	1.865
Plymouth	1.058	1.586	2.114	4.757
Portsmouth	0.478	0.717	0.957	2.152
Preston	1.26	1.890	2.520	5.671
Redcar and Cleveland	1.736	2.604	3.472	7.812
Rochdale	2.438	3.658	4.878	10.975
Rotherham	1.834	2.751	3.669	8.254
Salford	2.72	4.081	5.441	12.242
Sandwell	4.026	6.038	8.051	18.114
Sedgefield	0.57	0.854	1.139	2.563
Sefton	2.816	4.223	5.631	12.671
Sheffield	4.79	7.186	9.581	2.557
South Tyneside	2.692	4.037	5.382	12.11
Southampton	0.43	0.646	0.862	1.939
Southwark	3.956	5.934	7.912	17.803
St Helens	1.936	2.905	3.873	8.714
Stockton-on-Tees	1.926	2.889	3.852	8.667
Stoke-on-Trent	2.016	3.025	4.034	9.075
Sunderland	3.582	5.373	7.164	16.119
Tameside	0.67	1.005	1.340	3.015
Tower Hamlets	5.312	7.968	10.624	23.903
Wakefield	2.22	3.329	4.439	9.989
Walsall	3.56	5.341	7.122	16.024
Waltham Forest	1.276	1.915	2.553	5.745
Wandsworth	0.2	0.300	0.400	0.9
Wansbeck	0.69	1.034	1.379	3.104
Wear Valley	0.854	1.280	1.706	3.839
Westminster	0.748	1.123	1.497	3.369
Wigan	1.362	2.044	2.725	6.131
Wirral	2.538	3.806	5.075	11.419
Wolverhampton	2.964	4.446	5.928	13.339
Totals	200.000	300.000	400.000	900.000

[2] Subject to the approval of the House of Commons.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what were the administrative costs of the South West Regional Development Agency in the past three years. [37293]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The administrative costs for the SW RDA for the past two years were as follows. The figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Year	*Annual Review £000 (accruals outturn)*
1999–2000	8,326
2000–01	8,523

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[1] Subject to the approval of the House of Commons.

Departmental Minutes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the minutes from formal meetings which have taken place since 11 February between the Department's Permanent Secretary and *(a)* the Department's Director of Communications, *(b)* his own special adviser, *(c)* the Prime Minister and *(d)* the Prime Minister's Director of Communications and Strategy regarding (i) the role and conduct and (ii) the resignation of (A) the Department's Director of Communications and (B) his own special adviser; and if he will make a statement. [39228]

Mr. Byers: Under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it is not the practice to disclose details of internal meetings or communications. I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made on Tuesday 26 February to this House and that of Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my Department, made on Monday 25 February, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Resignations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list statements he made to the press about the departure of his Chief Press Officer Mr. Martin Sixsmith and at what time Mr. Sixsmith resigned; [39216]

(2) whether there was a link between the departure of his special adviser and that of his Chief Press Officer. [39217]

Mr. Byers: I refer to the Hon. Member to the statement I made on Tuesday 26 February to this House and that of Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my Department made on Monday 25 February, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he will resign. [39375]

Mr. Byers: No.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the time and date of meetings which have taken place since 11 February between the Department's Permanent Secretary and *(a)* the Department's Director of Communications, *(b)* his special adviser, *(c)* the Prime Minister and *(d)* the Prime Minister's Director of Communications and Strategy regarding (i) the role and conduct and (ii) the resignation of (A) the Department's Director of Communications and (B) his own special adviser. [39227]

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence since 11 February between himself and *(a)* the Department's Director of Communications, *(b)* his own special adviser, *(c)* the Prime Minister and *(d)* the Prime Minister's Director of Communications and Strategy regarding (i) the role and conduct and (ii) the resignation of (A) the Department's Director of Communications and (B) his own special adviser; and if he will make a statement; [39229]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence between himself and his Permanent Secretary since 11 February regarding *(a)* the role and conduct of the Department's Director of Communications, *(b)* the role and conduct of his own special adviser and *(c)* the resignation of (i) the Department's Director of Communications and (ii) his own special adviser; and if he will make a statement. [39230]

Mr. Don. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the time and date of meetings which have taken place since 11 February between himself and *(a)* the Department's Permanent Secretary, *(b)* the Department's Director of Communications, *(c)* his own special adviser, *(d)* the Prime Minister and *(e)* the Prime Minister's Director of Communications and Strategy regarding (i) the role and conduct and (ii) the resignation of (A) the Department's Director of Communications and (B) his own special adviser. [39222]

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the minutes from formal meetings which have taken place since 11 February between himself and *(a)* the Department's Permanent Secretary, *(b)* the Department's Director of Communications, *(c)* his own special adviser, *(d)* the Prime Minister and *(e)* the Prime Minister's Director of Communications and Strategy regarding (i) the role and conduct and (ii) the resignation of (A) the Department's Director of Communications and (B) his own special adviser; and if he will make a statement. [39223]

Mr. Byers: Under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it is not the practice to disclose details of internal meetings or communications. I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made on 26 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 563–65 and that of Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my Department, made on Monday 25 February, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will (1) make a statement on the timetable of events corresponding to the resignation from his Department on 15 February of *(a)* the DTLR Director of Communications and *(b)* his own special adviser. [39226]

(2) state the date and time at which *(a)* he and *(b)* his Department's Permanent Secretary accepted (i) a letter and (ii) verbal notice of resignation from his Department from (A) the Department's Director of Communications and (b) his own special adviser. [39225]

Mr. Byers: I refer the Hon. Member to the statement I made on 26 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 563–65 and that of Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my Department, made on Monday 25 February, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the letters of resignation from this Department from *(a)* the Department's Director of Communications and *(b)* his own special adviser received on or after 15 February. [39221]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the statement Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary for my Department, made on Monday 25 February, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

CPS (Case Numbers)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many cases were handled by each lawyer per year, in each region, since the inception of the CPS; and of these cases how many were cases for the *(a)* magistrates' court and *(b)* Crown court, expressed as a percentage of total cases and as an absolute figure. [35946]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* It is not possible to provide information about the numbers of cases handled by lawyers since the inception of the CPS in 1986 without incurring disproportionate costs.

The tables show absolute and percentage figures of finalised cases for each year since April 1999 when the CPS restructured into 42 Areas. The tables also show the toal number of cases finalised by court type for each financial year, the number of lawyers in post at 30 September (the midpoint of each financial year) as well as the number of cases notionally handled by each lawyer.

CPS Cases by Court Type and by Lawyer

1999–2000

		Cases finalised by Court Type							
	Lawyers @ 30.9.1999	*Crown*	*% of total*	*Per lawyer*	*Magistrates*	*% of total*	*Per lawyer*	*Total*	*Per lawyer*
42 Areas	1,769.4	124,348	7.98	70	1,434,194	92.02	811	1,558,612	881
P01—Avon & Somerset	44.3	3,289	0.21	74	37,025	91.67	836	40,388	912
P02—Bedfordshire	17.0	1,052	0.07	62	11,652	91.27	685	12,766	751
P03—Cambridgeshire	16.1	1,444	0.09	90	17,772	92.06	1,104	19,306	1,199
P04—Cheshire	31.5	2,258	0.14	72	23,297	90.91	739	25,627	813
P06—Cleveland	23.5	1,748	0.11	74	21,255	92.10	905	23,077	983
P07—Cumbria	21.4	983	0.06	46	16,362	94.08	764	17,391	812
P08—Derbyshire	29.6	2,404	0.15	81	29,990	89.41	708	23,475	792
P09—Devon & Cornwall	37.4	2,545	0.16	68	30,369	92.08	812	32,982	882
P10—Dorset	15.3	1,257	0.08	82	13,713	91.10	896	15,052	984
P11—Durham	19.0	1,434	0.09	75	18,888	92.60	994	20,397	1,074
P12—Dyfed-Powys	15.8	848	0.05	54	15,190	94.40	961	16,092	1,018
P13—Essex	36.4	2,936	0.19	81	29,236	90.65	803	32,253	886
P14—Gloucestershire	15.4	975	0.06	63	16,568	94.10	1.074	17,606	1,142
P15—Greater Manchester	117.7	7,600	0.49	65	97,430	92.71	828	105,095	893
P16—Gwent	23.5	1,514	0.10	64	20,370	92.81	867	21,948	934
P17—Hampshire	50.7	4,181	0.27	82	43,333	91.04	854	47,596	938
P18—Hertfordshire	24.8	1,676	0.11	68	18,813	91.52	758	20,557	829
P19—Humberside	26.9	2,140	0.14	79	24,212	91.60	899	26,431	981
P20—Kent	39.7	3,037	0.19	77	35,507	91.94	895	38,621	974
P21—Lancashire	66.8	4,169	0.27	62	60,378	93.45	904	64,609	967
P22—Leicestershire	26.9	2,320	0.15	86	23,497	90.71	872	25,903	962
P23—Lincolnshire	18.9	918	0.06	49	15,674	94.19	830	16,641	881
P24—Merseyside	68.2	4,122	0.26	60	49,422	92.20	724	53,604	786
P25—Metropolitan & City	265.2	18,484	1.19	70	175,372	90.43	661	193,925	731
P26—Norfolk	24.4	1,492	0.10	61	19,607	92.66	802	21,160	886
P27—Northamptonshire	14.4	1,334	0.09	93	14,118	90.82	982	15,545	1,082
P28—Northumbria	62.4	4,194	0.27	67	5,498	92.87	889	59,759	958
P29—North Wales	27.1	1,062	0.07	39	18,584	94.41	685	19,685	726
P30—North Yorkshire	23.0	1,391	0.09	60	19,134	92.95	830	20,585	893
P31—Nottinghamshire	47.2	3,856	0.25	82	31,089	88.76	658	35,027	741
P32—South Wales	59.2	3,919	0.25	66	45,594	92.12	787	59,579	855
P33—South Yorkshire	43.6	4,424	0.28	101	38,181	89.40	875	42,706	979
P34—Staffordshire	36.5	2,407	0.15	66	32,325	92.89	887	34,798	955
P35—Suffolk	17.6	1,298	0.08	74	13,827	90.97	786	15,199	864
P36—Surrey	22.1	1,082	0.07	49	17,850	94.04	809	18,982	860
P37—Sussex	37.4	2,275	0.15	61	28,458	92.41	762	30,794	824
P38—Thames Valley	53.0	2,479	0.16	47	43,403	94.50	819	45,929	866
P39—Warwickshire	12.0	695	0.04	58	9,258	92.48	770	10,011	832
P40—West Mercia	32.6	1,850	0.12	57	26,982	93.40	826	28,889	885
P41—West Midlands	102.2	8,404	0.54	82	83,135	90.74	813	91,621	896
P42—West Yorkshire	86.4	8,109	0.52	94	85,817	91.28	993	94,020	1,088
P43—Wiltshire	16.0	743	0.05	46	14,009	94.67	876	14,798	925

CPS Cases by Court Type and by Lawyer

2000–01

		Cases finalised by Court Type							
	Lawyers @ 30.9.2000	*Crown*	*% of total*	*Per lawyer*	*Magistrates*	*% of total*	*Per lawyer*	*Total*	*Per lawyer*
42 Areas	1,739.8	115,732	7.87	67	1,354,713	92.13	779	1,470,445	845
P01—Avon & Somerset	41.0	2,961	0.20	72	32,032	91.54	781	34,993	854
P02—Bedfordshire	16.0	960	0.07	60	10,787	91.83	674	11,747	734
P03—Cambridgeshire	17.8	1,363	0.09	76	13,073	90.56	734	14,436	810
P04—Cheshire	30.2	3,149	0.15	71	23,089	91.49	764	25,238	835
P06—Cleveland	21.8	1,746	0.12	80	20,107	92.01	922	21,853	1,002
P07—Cumbria	23.0	1,170	0.08	51	13,848	92.21	601	15,018	652
P08—Derbyshire	26.2	2,487	0.17	95	19,459	88.67	744	21,946	839
P09—Devon & Cornwall	36.9	2,193	0.15	59	29,033	92.98	787	31,226	846
P10—Dorset	14.0	1,069	0.07	76	13,959	92.89	998	15,028	1,075
P11—Durham	22.0	1,285	0.09	58	15,778	92.47	716	17,063	774
P12—Dyfed-Powys	19.4	722	0.05	37	13,660	94.98	703	14,382	741
P13—Essex	34.8	2,261	0.15	65	25,625	91.89	736	27,886	801
P14—Gloucestershire	15.4	763	0.05	49	14,342	94.95	930	15,105	980
P15—Greater Manchester	117.5	7,426	0.51	63	93,291	92.63	794	100,717	857
P16—Gwent	22.5	1,266	0.09	56	21,529	94.45	957	22,795	1,013
P17—Hampshire	49.5	3,975	0.27	80	43,277	91.59	875	47,252	955
P18—Hertfordshire	22.8	1,460	0.10	64	19,344	92.98	847	20,804	911
P19—Humberside	28.6	1,877	0.13	66	22,942	92.44	801	24,819	867
P20—Kent	39.8	2,948	0.20	74	32,160	91.60	809	35,108	883
P21—Lancashire	60.8	3,908	0.27	64	57,800	93.67	951	61,708	1,015
P22—Leicestershire	28.0	2,183	0.15	78	22,400	91.12	799	24,583	877
P23—Lincolnshire	18.3	961	0.07	53	15,829	94.28	866	16,790	919
P24—Merseyside	67.6	4,301	0.29	64	48,467	91.85	717	52,768	781
P25—Metropolitan & City	252.6	17,014	1.16	67	162,316	90.51	643	179,330	710
P26—Norfolk	22.8	1,415	0.10	62	18,245	92.80	799	19,660	861
P27—Northamptonshire	16.6	1,089	0.07	66	15,532	93.45	935	16,621	1,000
P28—Northumbria	68.0	3,948	0.27	58	53,527	93.13	788	57,475	846
P29—North Wales	24.3	1,089	0.07	45	17,059	94.00	701	18,148	746
P30—North Yorkshire	23.5	1,351	0.09	57	15,774	92.11	671	17,125	728
P31—Nottinghamshire	44.0	3,242	0.22	74	31,185	90.58	709	34,427	782
P32—South Wales	58.8	3,306	0.22	56	46,641	93.38	793	49,947	849
P33—South Yorkshire	45.7	4,244	0.29	93	36,531	89.59	800	40,775	893
P34—Staffordshire	33.6	2,235	0.15	66	28,810	92.80	856	31,045	923
P35—Suffolk	16.6	1,058	0.07	64	12,692	92.31	764	13,750	827
P36—Surrey	17.6	963	0.07	55	15,265	94.07	866	16,228	921
P37—Sussex	35.6	2,329	0.16	65	27,220	92.12	764	29,549	829
P38—Thames Valley	50.1	2,348	0.16	47	38,010	94.18	759	40,358	806
P39—Warwickshire	12.0	602	0.04	50	8,935	93.69	743	9,537	793
P40—West Mercia	30.8	1,933	0.13	63	27,569	93.45	896	29,502	959
P41—West Midlands	107.9	8,925	0.61	83	82,839	90.27	768	91,764	851
P42—West Yorkshire	89.1	6,565	0.45	74	81,482	92.54	914	88,047	988
P43—Wiltshire	16.0	642	0.04	40	13,250	95.38	828	13,892	868

CPS Cases by Court Type and by Lawyer

2001–02 (to December 2001 only)

		Cases finalised by Court Type							
	Lawyers @ 30.9.2001	*Crown*	*% of total*	*Per lawyer*	*Magistrates*	*% of total*	*Per lawyer*	*Total*	*Per lawyer*
42 Areas	1,817.6	83,417	7.65	46	1,006,595	92.35	554	1,090,012	600
P01—Avon & Somerset	48.4	1,907	0.17	39	22,435	92.17	463	24,342	503
P02—Bedfordshire	16.8	664	0.06	39	8,626	92.85	513	9,290	552
P03—Cambridgeshire	18.8	954	0.09	51	9,086	90.50	483	10,040	533
P04—Cheshire	37.0	1,401	0.13	38	15,697	91.81	424	17,098	462
P06—Cleveland	22.9	1,435	0.13	63	15,683	91.62	684	17,118	747
P07—Cumbria	22.4	821	0.08	37	10,365	92.66	462	11,186	499
P08—Derbyshire	27.7	1,854	0.17	67	14,667	88.78	530	16,521	597
P09—Devon & Cornwall	39.1	1,684	0.15	43	19,291	91.97	493	20,975	536
P10—Dorset	17.0	664	0.06	39	9,414	93.41	554	10,078	594
P11—Durham	24.1	1,177	0.11	49	11,818	90.94	491	12,995	540
P12—Dyfed Powys	21.4	569	0.05	27	9,853	94.54	460	10,422	487
P13—Essex	39.6	1,477	0.14	37	19,306	92.89	487	20,783	524
P14—Gloucestershire	16.2	608	0.06	37	11,057	94.79	681	11,665	719
P15—Greater Manchester	120.6	5,376	0.49	45	68,580	92.73	569	73,956	613
P16—Gwent	28.3	1,016	0.09	36	14,590	93.49	515	15,606	551
P17—Hampshire	48.7	2,623	0.24	54	28,112	91.47	577	30,735	631
P18—Hertfordshire	25.0	1,246	0.11	50	14,633	92.15	584	15,879	634
P19—Humberside	28.8	1,356	0.12	47	16,627	92.46	577	17,983	624
P20—Kent	45.8	1,965	0.18	43	23,563	92.30	514	25,528	557
P21—Lancashire	67.9	2,979	0.27	44	39,455	92.98	581	42,434	625
P22—Leicestershire	28.7	1,560	0.14	54	16,989	91.59	591	18,549	645
P23—Lincolnshire	16.2	610	0.06	38	14,690	96.01	909	15,300	947
P24—Merseyside	68.7	3,344	0.31	49	30,972	90.26	451	34,316	500
P25—Metropolitan & City	247.3	12,923	1.19	52	125,398	90.66	507	138,321	559
P26—Norfolk	24.2	891	0.08	37	13,635	93.87	564	14,526	600
P27—Northamptonshire	17.8	670	0.06	38	11,738	94.60	661	12,408	698

CPS Cases by Court Type and by Lawyer

2001–02 (to December 2001 only)

		Cases finalised by Court Type							
	Lawyers @ 30.9.2001	*Crown*	*% of total*	*Per lawyer*	*Magistrates*	*% of total*	*Per lawyer*	*Total*	*Per lawyer*
P28—Northumbria	69.5	2,842	0.26	41	38,390	93.11	552	41,232	593
P29—North Wales	21.4	810	0.07	38	13,011	94.14	609	13,821	647
P30—North Yorkshire	22.8	758	0.07	33	11,212	93.67	492	11,970	526
P31—Nottinghamshire	47.2	2,259	0.21	48	20,730	90.17	439	22,989	487
P32—South Wales	62.2	2,654	0.24	43	32,414	92.43	521	35,068	563
P33—South Yorkshire	41.7	3,351	0.31	80	26,703	88.85	640	30,054	720
P34—Staffordshire	35.5	1,405	0.13	40	19,907	93.41	561	21,312	600
P35—Suffolk	20.0	691	0.06	34	9,683	93.34	483	10,374	518
P36—Surrey	18.8	841	0.08	45	12,173	93.54	647	13,014	691
P37—Sussex	40.0	1,842	0.17	46	20,134	91.62	504	21,976	550
P38—Thames Valley	54.3	1,682	0.15	31	42,047	96.15	774	43,729	805
P39—Warwickshire	10.0	457	0.04	46	7,232	94.06	721	7,689	767
P40—West Mercia	32.7	1,286	0.12	39	20,764	94.17	634	22,050	673
P41—West Midlands	111.4	6,510	0.60	58	64,898	90.88	582	71,408	641
P42—West Yorkshire	92.0	3,800	0.35	41	60,612	94.10	659	64,412	700
P43—Wiltshire	18.2	455	0.04	25	10,405	95.81	572	10,860	597

Legal Staff (Professional Development)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if there is a mandatory requirement for legal staff to participate in a continuing professional development programme. [35944]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* Yes, lawyers in the CPS are required to undertake continuous professional development (CPD) according to the requirements laid down by their particular professional body, either the Law Society or the Bar Council. The requirement exists by virtue of the individual's professional status, not their employment with the CPS. All solicitors and barristers employed by CPS are provided with adequate opportunities to satisfy the CPD requirements of their professional bodies. Many lawyers annually exceed the requirements for CPD.

CPS is authorised to accredit CPD for in-house courses based on guidelines laid down by the Law Society and the Bar Council.

In addition to the requirements of the professional bodies, it is mandatory for CPS lawyers to attend the following in house courses:

Induction for new lawyers

Direct Communication with Victims

European Court of Human Rights training

Diversity Awareness

Advocacy Skills training

Each year the CPS produces a National Training Plan, this specifies the mandatory training to be undertaken by staff to meet the requirements of new legislation and internal initiatives, this year these include the Proceeds of Crime and Racially Aggravated Crime.

Specialist areas are also supported by mandatory training. CPS lawyers undertake training to prepare them for casework in areas such as Youth Offenders, Child Abuse, and Speaking Up for Justice.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Hyde Park

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many paying concerts and other events were held in Hyde Park in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; [37877]

(2) how much the paying concerts and other events held in Hyde Park raised as a contribution to the running costs of the Royal Parks in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001, net of the costs of repairing damage to the parks caused by the events; [37878]

(3) how many paying concerts and other events are planned for *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004 in Hyde Park; [37879]

(4) how much of the revenue raised by paying concerts and other events in Hyde Park is spent on Hyde Park itself. [37881]

Mr. Caborn: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency and I have asked its Chief Executive, William Weston to reply.

Letter from William Weston to Mr. Mark Field, dated 28 February 2002

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about concerts and other events in the Royal Parks, as this is an operational matter which has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency.

In 1999 ten large events were held in Hyde Park, raising £538,216 towards the Agency's running costs; in 2000 eight large events were held, raising £586,021; and in 2001 fourteen such events raised £1,085,000. These figures are net of the cost of repairing damage to the parks caused by the events.

All income raised by the Agency is taken into consideration when expenditure budgets are allocated to individual parks. Revenue is not allocated specifically to the park or section that raised it.

We are contractually committed to hold thirteen large events in Hyde Park in 2002 and to staging the Prince's Trust concert in 2003. The Prince's Trust concert is the only event planned as yet for future years.

National Lottery

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funds each of the National Lottery Distribution Funds hold which are allocated but not yet distributed. [38136]

Mr. Caborn: There is one National Lottery Distribution Fund (NLDF) and all the money held in it is allocated to the distributing bodies. The table shows the amount held in the NLDF for each distributor, but not drawn down at 31 December 2001—in other words its NLDF balance; and the amount committed by each distributor, but not yet paid out to project operators, at the same date.

Distributing Body	*Amount held in NLDF at 31 December 2001 (£m)*	*Balance of outstanding commitments (£m)*
Arts Council of England	244,418,707	260,629,000
Film Council	58,506,013	57,395,466
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	32,790,612	18,900,264
Scottish Arts Council	45,528,808	33,167,092
Arts Council of Wales	30,786,187	36,891,097
Community Fund	408,038,972	543,131,065
Heritage Lottery Fund	981,827,570	1,031,160,453
Millennium Commission	420,980,083	266,400,000
New Opportunities Fund	748,502,904	789,421,108
Sports Council (England)	415,561,569	633,627,000
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	18,510,607	14,593,783
Scottish Sports Council	74,968,465	50,557,408
UK Sports Council	6,303,404	50,291,164
Sports Council of Wales	39,230,023	28,886,605
Scottish Screen	3,817,547	4,768,403
	3,529,771,471	3,819,819,908

Departmental Buildings

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many buildings her Department operates; how many people work in each of those buildings; what the cost of maintaining each building has been in each of the past seven years; what plans her Department has to move from those buildings in the next two years; and if she will make a statement. [38133]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport occupies and manages four buildings and has done so only since 1999. Maintenance costs of buildings occupied before occupation of present buildings have been handed over to present occupants. The four buildings currently occupied are all in central London and are:

Building	*Occupancy*
Trafalgar Place (SW1)	344
Oceanic House (SW1)	103
Grove House (WC2)	94
Queens Yard (W1)	14

A small number of staff are also located in buildings occupied by other Government Departments as a result of Machinery of Government changes following the 2001 General Election, there being insufficient room in the four buildings named above for them to be absorbed.

Maintenance costs are very similar from year to year except where major plant or building works are required.

	1998 £000	*1999 £000*	*2000 £000*	*2001 £000*
Trafalgar Place	343.3	353.1	372.2	332.7
Oceanic House	0	*92.0	63.5	81.2
Grove House	148.2	147.1	166.5	138.6
Queen's Yard	0	*28.0	131.7	101.5

* occupancy began = part year only.

There are no plans at present to move existing staff from these buildings.

Sport England

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Sport England accounts will be laid before the House. [38142]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England's Lottery accounts were laid before the House by the Comptroller and Auditor General on 25 February and its Exchequer accounts were laid before the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 26 February.

Television Signals

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many homes, per constituency, in each of the last seven years have been unable to receive *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite, *(c)* cable and *(d)* none of those television signals because of their geography; how many have been unable to receive analogue television signals; and if she will make a statement. [38135]

Mr. Caborn: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. For details of current digital television coverage, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on 6 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 502W, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting. Further information on digital terrestrial television coverage, based on individual post codes, is available on the Digital Television Group website: www.dtg.org.uk.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by her Department in each of the last four years. [38927]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport opened a staff restaurant on 2 April 2001. Prior to that time only hospitality for meetings, in the form of hot drinks and biscuits, which combined with a vending contract, was provided at a cost of about £18,000 for each year. The predicted revenue cost of the staff restaurant on completion of 12 months operation is about £62,000 (this includes an element of start-up costs).

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost to public funds in each case is. [39024]

Mr. Caborn: Equipment leasing in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, is limited to photocopiers. The contract was entered into in 2000 for a term of three years at fixed costs of £74,277 per annum inclusive of maintenance.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by her Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39076]

Mr. Caborn: The Department has run no publicity or advertising campaigns in the last four years.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental (special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if she will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37971]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, special advisers in this Department travelled overseas on official business on four occasions; to Venice (Italy), Berlin (Germany) and Apeldoorn and Haarlem (Netherlands); at an average cost of £232 per visit. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Special Urgency Provisions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the department; and if she will make a statement. [38706]

Mr. Caborn: There is no record of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport having any direct involvement in any relevant development.

Broadcasting Costs

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make an assessment of the costs to public service broadcasters of broadcasting channels via *(a)* digital satellite television, *(b)* digital terrestrial television and *(c)* digital cable television. [38954]

Mr. Caborn: The costs of broadcasting television channels on each platform are a matter for the individual broadcasters and transmission companies concerned and are commercially confidential. However, approximate costs of the changes necessary at the transmission sites to deliver Digital Terrestrial Television (provided by the Independent Television Commission) are set out in the consultation document, Digital Television: The Principles for Spectrum Planning, published on 11 December 2001, copies of which are in the libraries of both Houses and on the website: www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk.

Free-to-Air Channels

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which free-to-air channels are available to consumers receiving their television via *(a)* digital satellite, *(b)* digital terrestrial and *(c)* digital cable. [38957]

Mr. Caborn: The free-to-view channels available on both Digital Terrestrial and Digital Satellite are:

BBC1
BBC 2
BBC Choice
BBC 4
BBC News 24
BBC Parliament (Audio Only)
CBBC
Cbeebies
Channel 4
Channel 5
ITN News Channel
S4C (In Wales)
S4C 2 (In Wales)

These channels are offered to cable operators for inclusion in their basic digital cable subscription packages.

Free-to-view digital terrestrial also offers ITV2, (UTV2 in Ireland), Tele G (in Scotland) and a full range of National and Regional channels.

Free-to-view digital satellite also offers more than 20 further channels and over 40 radio services.

Electronic Programme Guides

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the regulations regarding access to the electronic programme guides on *(a)* digital satellite, *(b)* digital terrestrial and *(c)* digital cable. [38955]

Mr. Caborn: Third party access to electronic programme guides (EPGs) is regulated in accordance with relevant provisions in the licences for satellite EPGs (satellite television service licenses) digital terrestrial EPGs (digital additional service licences) and for cable services (local delivery licences).

Each of these licences requires the licensee not to engage in any practice or enter into any arrangement which is prejudicial to fair and effective competition in the provision of the licensed service and services connected with them, and to comply with any direction, code or guideline issued by the ITC for this purpose.

Following consultation with Oftel (which has responsibilities where an EPG is an integral part of a conditional access system) and broadcasters, the ITC published a code in 1997 providing further guidance. Amongst other things, the code requires EPG providers not to discriminate between free-to-air and pay television services, to provide due prominence to public service channels, and to ensure that any agreement with other broadcasters is made on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms.

Oftel also have powers to regulate Conditional Access Systems for fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory access for third parties. This applies to the Sky EPG on the Dsat platform.

Grassroots Sports

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding she has given to grassroots sports in each constituency since 1992; what the most recent annual figure is; and if she will make a statement on her plans for the future of the development of grassroots sports with particular reference to South-East Cornwall constituency. [38333]

Mr. Caborn: I am arranging for the figures for Sport England's Lottery Community Fund and Sportsmatch funding, broken down by constituency, since 1992 and in the last available financial year, to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. It is not possible for Sport England to break down their exchequer funding distribution by constituency, and it is not possible for the Football Foundation to provide a breakdown of its funding by constituency. The Government's plans for the development of sport at all levels are set out in the documents "A Sporting Future For All" and "The Government's Plan for Sport."

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with her Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with her Department in each of the past five years. [38760]

Mr. Caborn: All service contracts let by the Department were subsequently subjected to competitive tender and, in each case, awarded to different companies. No contracts have been re-won during the time that the Department has been in existence.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* her Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years. [38759]

Mr. Caborn: The only contract outside the activities set out, is that for Facilities Management provision awarded to WSP Facilities Management, part of the WSP Group, in October 1999 for a period of five years. The Department has used the central framework contract with Capita for recruitment advisory services.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the 30 largest contacts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38761]

Mr. Caborn: The full list of awarded contracts is as follows:

Company	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Schlumberger* Sema	*	0	0	£1.5 million	£1.5 million
PWC	Nil	Nil	Nil	83,000 (2)	96,000 (1)
KPMG	Nil	23,000 (1)	Nil	Nil	Nil
WSP FM	Nil	Nil	93,000	153,000	153,000
WS Atkins	Nil	55,000 (3)	33,000 (2)	Nil	Nil
Deloitte & Touche	109,000 (2)	207,000 (1)	Nil	Nil	Nil
Capita	Nil	39,000 (3)	Nil	Nil	26,000 **
Pitney Bowes Management Services	Nil	1.4 million over five years	Nil	Nil	Nil
First Security	Nil	1.5 million over five years	Nil	Nil	Nil

* "SchlumbergerSema have been the Department's outsourced IT service provider since 1993. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of fees annually from 1997–98 but the payment to SchlumbergerSema for direct services was of the order of £1.5 million in 2000–01 and will be a similar figure in 2001–02. Expenditure in previous years will not have exceeded that amount.".

** Recruitment services utilising central government framework contract.

Includes Royal Parks Agency

Number of contacts in brackets

Community Buy-outs

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the capital cost of each community buy-out has been since 1994, and if she will list awards to assist in community buy-outs from the new opportunities Fund's Scottish Land Fund that have been awarded since February 2001. [38699]

Mr. Caborn: Since February 2001 the Scottish Land Fund has awarded a total of 41 grants to date totalling £4,661,243. Of these, 17 have been for acquisition purposes totalling £4,084,613.

The following table gives further details of all awards made to date.

Scottish Land Fund Grants to Date

Meeting Date	*Local Authority*	*Applicant*	*Grant Type*	*Amount* £	*Monthly Totals* £
April 2001	Highland	Kinlochleven Land Development Trust	Development	90,000	April
	Highland	Laggan Forest Trust Co Ltd	Development	73,172	163,172
May 2001	Moray	Deskford Community Association	Acquisition	12,000	
	Highland	Fernaig Community Trust	Development	57,796	
	Perth and Kinross	Comrie Millennium Footpath Association	Technical Assistance	4,381	May
	Aberdeenshire	Windyhills Community Group	Technical Assistance	9,415	83,592
July 2001	Argyll and Bute	Ross of Mull Historical Centre	Acquistion	52,907	
	Argyll and Bute	Mull and Iona Community Trust	Acquistion	33,268	
	Eilean Siar	Port of Ness Harbour Ltd	Acquisition	4,168	July
	Moray	Burghead Amenities Project	Acquisition	19,108	109,451
August 2001	Highland	Abriachian Forest Trust	Development	94,000	
	Highland	Durness Development Group	Acquisition	15,670	
	Argyll and Bute	Tiree Rural Development Company	Development	50,000	
	Aberdeenshire	Woodhead & Windyhills Community Group	Acquisition	90,000	
	Highland	Glen Beag Woodland Steering Group	Technical Assistance	300	
	Highland	Balmacara Square Management Committee	Technical Assistance	964	
	Scottish Borders	Gordon Community Woodland Association	Technical Assistance	720	August
	Argyll and Bute	Kilchoman Community Group	Technical Assistance	1,536	253,190
September 2001	Highland	Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	Technical Assistance	3,375	
	Highland	Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	Development	20,310	
	South Ayrshire	Ballantrae Rural Initiative Care in the Community	Acquisition	26,690	September
	Argyll and Bute	Gigha Land Steering Community Group	Technical Assistance	2,974	53,349
October 2001	Highland	Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	Development	62,519	
	Highland	Kells Croft Steering Group	Acquisition	12,475	
	Argyll and Bute	Gigha Land Steering Community Group	Acquisition	3,525,000	October
	Highland	Fernaig Community Trust	Acquisition	11,873	3,611,867
November 2001	Highland	Acharacle Community Company	Acquisition	96,420	
	Renfrewshire	Howwood Community Woodland Group	Acquisition	13,870	
	Argyll and Bute	Iomairt Chille-Choman	Acquisition	30,358	
	Aberdeenshire	Mid Deeside Limited	Technical Assistance	3,665	
	Aberdeenshire	Mid Deeside Limited	Technical Assistance	4,350	
	Stirling	Trossachs Community Trust	Acquisition	20,000	
	Highland	North Sutherland Community Woodland Trust	Technical Assistance	1,491	
	Renfrewshire	Howwood Community Woodland Group	Technical Assistance	485	November
	Highland	Strathnairn Community Woodland Project	Technical Assistance	1,151	171,790
January 2002	Inverness & Nairn	Distillery Wood Association	Technical Assistance	940	
	Tayside	Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust	Technical Assistance	2,910	
	Grampian	Strichen Community Park	Technical Assistance	176	
	Borders	Gordon Community Woodland Association	Acquisition	69,971	
	Orkney	North Ronaldsay Trust	Acquisition	50,835	January
	Argyll & the Islands	Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust	Development	90,000	214,832
Total				4,661,243	

Stadiums

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding has been made available *(a)* from her Department and *(b)* from the National Lottery, for assisting in capital building projects for (i) football stadiums and (ii) rugby league stadiums in (A) 1999, (B) 2000 and (C) 2001. [37188]

Mr. Caborn: The information is as follows:

£

Sport	*Year*	*National Lottery*	*Football Foundation*
Football	1999	[1]120,000,000	11,750,000
	2000	[2]92,000,000	17,855,000
	2001	—	16,274,000
Rugby League	1999	—	—
	2000	—	—
	2001	312,142	—

[1] All of this funding is for the English National Stadium.

[2] This funding is for the Commonwealth Games Venue at Manchester SportCity which will eventually become the home ground for Manchester City FC.

Targeted Lottery Initiative

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will give details of the English areas which will benefit from the targeted Lottery initiative she announced on 27 June 2001; and if she will indicate how these areas were chosen. [39862]

Tessa Jowell: The Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund have selected 51 areas in England to benefit from the initiative. These are Ashfield, Barking & Dagenham, Barnsley, Basildon, Blackpool, Blyth Valley, Bolsover, Bolton, Bournemouth, Brent, Burnley, Darlington, Derby, Doncaster, Dudley, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Enfield, Great Yarmouth, Hyndburn, Kingston upon Hull, Kirklees, Knowsley, Luton, North East Lincolnshire, North Somerset, Oldham, Pendle, Peterborough, Portsmouth, Rochdale, Rotherham, Salford, Sandwell, Sefton, Solihull, St. Helens, Stockton-on-Tees, Swindon, Tameside, Telford and Wrekin, Tendring, Thanet, Trafford, Wakefield, Walsall, Waltham Forest, Wansbeck, Waveney, West Lancashire, Wigan and Wirral.

The criteria I announced for the scheme were that areas should be both deprived and have received less lottery funding than other parts of the country. To select the English Fair Share areas, the two distributors have analysed which of the 100 most deprived local authority districts have received less than average funding from the Community Fund and which have received less than average funding from the other Lottery distributors collectively. Areas that have received less than average funding from either the Community Fund or from the other Distributors collectively will receive direct support from Fair Share.

The Fair Share initiative is one of several targeted initiatives operated by the Lottery distributors. Government will continue to encourage distributors to ensure that parts of the country benefit from Lottery funding.

Art Exports

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the 2000–01 Annual report of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art will be published. [40172]

Dr. Howells: The Reviewing Committee's Annual Report for 2000–01 has been published today and copies have been laid before Parliament.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Enron

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings *(a)* she and *(b)* her senior departmental officials have had with Enron and its subsidiaries in the last two years. [32436]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the *Ministerial Code*, the *Civil Service Code* and *Guidance for Civil Servants: Contact with Lobbyists*. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 102W, on theft and fraud, if she will make a statement on the circumstances of the incident of direct contractor fraud; and what assessment she has made of reasons for the increasing trend of theft and fraud in her Department between 1997-98 and 2000-01. [34281]

Estelle Morris: I reported in my answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 101W, that there had been 44 instances of direct contractor fraud since 1997–98.

They relate to instances of suspected fraud/irregularity referred to the Department's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) for investigation and cover the European Social Fund, Schools, Training and Enterprise Councils, Teacher Pensions and miscellaneous Programme Budgets.

The nature of the problems identified relate primarily to claims for services not properly provided or for inflated costs.

Within my Department we have, over the last few years, run a Fraud and Control Awareness campaign to raise staff awareness as to their responsibilities for reporting and handling suspicions/allegations etc. We are satisfied that those reporting systems now work well, and that, as a result, all concerns are properly reported and investigated.

My Department recognises the importance of having sound control systems in place to combat the threat of fraud. In fact 30 per cent. of the cases investigated were identified as a result of the operation of normal control procedures.

We regularly review the contract management arrangements in place to ensure effective control over public funds and take steps, where necessary, to enhance procedures. For example, since April 2000, in agreement with the European Commission, the Department, through its Government Offices, has introduced new financial monitoring and inspection arrangements with regard to ESF, some of which has resulted in cases being referred to SIU.

In my earlier response, the estimated cost to the Department for 2000–01 is shown as £17.3 metre, which, when shown against the earlier years' figures, suggests a substantial increase. However this figure includes some exceptional items to the value of £14.9 metre.

Education (Stoke)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of the local education authority budget in Stoke-on-Trent has been accounted for by the Standards Fund in each year since 1999-2000. [37269]

Mr. Timms: The information requested for Stoke-on-Trent Local Education Authority is as follows:

1999–2000 4.4 per cent.
1999–2001 6.3 per cent.
1999–2002 8.7 per cent.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 231W, what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which she has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37914]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by my Department, in each of the last four years since May 1997 is as follows:

1997–1998: 20,913 sq feet
1998–1999: 20,913 sq feet
1999–2000: 29,063 sq feet
2000–2001: 35,363 sq feet

The Department's agencies and other public bodies do not own any empty properties.

Special Educational Needs

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to recall the SEN Toolkit issued earlier this year; and if she will revise its guidance on the quantification in SEN statements of *(a)* support and *(b)* equipment in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs. [38097]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are no plans to recall the SEN Toolkit or to revise the information in it on specifying provision in statements of SEN. This information is in accordance with the guidance given on these matters in the SEN Code of Practice and with the law on specifying provision in statements.

The Independent Panel for Special Educational Advice recently made an application to the High Court for a judicial review of the section of the SEN Toolkit on writing statements of SEN on the grounds that it was unlawful. The High Court has refused permission to bring a judicial review on consideration of the papers.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 (a) departmental and (b) non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if she will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37975]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 27 February]*: Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, a Special Adviser in my Department travelled abroad on one occasion at a cost of £4,479. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by Special Advisers is undertaken in accordance with rules set out in the *Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.*

Pupil Attainment

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of those aged 16 years achieved one or more GCSEs at grade G or above, or the equivalent, in each year since 1997. [38806]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number and percentage of 16-year-old pupils achieving one or more GCSEs at grade G or above, or the equivalent, in each year since 1997 are as follows.

Academic Year	*Number of 16-year-olds achieving one or more GCSE/GNVQ at grade G or above*	*Percentage of 16-year-olds achieving one or more GCSE/GNVQ at grade G or above*
1996–97	541,812	92.3
1997–98	537,341	93.4
1998–99	545,947	94.0
1999–2000	548,054	94.4
2000–01	570,379	94.5

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of 16-year-olds have obtained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to G or equivalent, including English and maths in each year since 1997. [38809]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number and percentage of 16-year-olds obtaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to G or equivalent, including English and maths in each year since 1997 are as follows.

Academic Year	*Number of 16-year-olds obtaining 5 or more grades A*–G or equivalent, including English and maths*	*Percentage of 16-year-olds obtaining 5 or more grades A*–G or equivalent, including English and maths*
1996–97	492,226	83.9
1997–98	482,198	83.8
1998–99	498,587	85.8
1999–2000	503,765	86.8
2000–01	524,058	86.9

Teachers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many qualified teachers are employed by the Department and its associated agencies. [39008].

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not keep records of the number of qualified teachers it employs. The DfES does not have any associated agencies.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers have left posts in schools in each of the past five years to take positions with the Department and its associated agencies. [39009].

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not keep records of the number of teachers that have left posts in schools in each of the past five years to take positions with the Department, DfES does not have any associated agencies.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the teacher vacancy rate was in *(a)* nursery/primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in each constituency in England (i) in 1992, (ii) in 1997, (iii) in 2001 and (iv) at the most recent available date. [38338]

Mr. Timms: Data on teacher vacancies by constituency are not collected centrally. The teacher vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post in maintained nursery/primary and secondary schools by local education authority[1] in January 1992, 1997 and 2001 were as follows (2001 is the most recent available year):

	Nursery and primary			*Secondary*		
	1992	*1997*	*2001*	*1992*	*1997*	*2001*
City of London	0.0	7.7	0.0	—	—	—
Camden	1.3	1.3	6.8	1.1	1.3	4.1
Greenwich	0.1	0.6	2.5	0.4	1.8	4.9
Hackney	0.6	3.0	6.6	0.2	0.2	10.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0.9	3.6	3.8	1.7	2.4	7.1
Islington	0.3	0.4	6.1	2.0	3.0	2.8
Kensington and Chelsea	0.0	0.0	6.3	0.0	0.0	6.8
Lambeth	1.3	2.2	4.1	0.2	0.9	2.2
Lewisham	0.0	1.8	3.7	0.6	1.1	4.9
Southwark	0.3	1.9	6.1	2.8	1.1	5.7
Tower Hamlets	3.4	4.2	10.4	1.6	1.4	6.7
Wandsworth	0.1	2.1	2.9	0.9	2.2	4.3
City of Westminster	0.0	3.2	7.4	2.2	0.4	2.2

	Nursery and primary			*Secondary*		
	1992	*1997*	*2001*	*1992*	*1997*	*2001*
Barking and Dagenham	1.1	3.8	1.8	0.0	2.2	1.6
Barnet	2.7	0.8	5.6	0.5	0.5	3.3
Bexley	1.2	0.1	4.2	0.1	0.5	5.3
Brent	0.4	1.5	0.9	0.6	1.1	1.7
Bromley	0.3	0.7	2.7	0.4	0.5	3.0
Croydon	0.0	1.7	2.2	0.3	0.2	4.6
Ealing	1.5	1.4	1.3	0.7	0.9	6.3
Enfield	1.0	0.5	2.7	0.4	0.3	2.7
Haringey	4.3	2.4	2.4	1.6	2.9	2.6
Harrow	0.0	0.5	4.2	0.0	0.2	4.9
Havering	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	1.1	4.3
Hillingdon	3.4	1.2	1.8	1.3	1.0	3.1
Hounslow	0.5	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.8	1.5
Kingston upon Thames	1.0	0.0	2.1	0.2	0.6	2.6
Merton	0.0	0.8	0.3	0.0	0.7	2.8
Newham	4.6	6.5	4.5	2.3	3.0	4.8
Redbridge	1.4	0.2	1.0	0.6	0.2	2.9
Richmond upon Thames	0.6	0.7	2.0	0.9	0.0	4.8
Sutton	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.3	0.3	1.3
Waltham Forest	1.9	3.8	0.0	1.8	0.8	0.9
Birmingham	1.7	0.2	0.8	0.5	0.6	1.0
Coventry	0.8	0.3	0.7	1.0	0.7	1.3
Dudley	2.5	0.5	0.9	0.8	0.1	1.2
Sandwell	0.7	0.6	1.2	1.1	1.0	2.5
Solihull	0.9	0.1	1.0	1.1	0.2	2.3
Walsall	0.7	0.4	0.7	0.6	0.3	0.8
Wolverhampton	0.3	0.5	1.8	0.8	0.4	1.1
Knowsley	0.8	0.1	0.6	0.7	0.5	1.1
Liverpool	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
St. Helens	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.5	0.5	1.0
Sefton	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.5
Wirrall	0.1	0.4	0.6	0.0	0.2	0.6
Bolton	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.6
Bury	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.6
Manchester	0.6	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0
Oldham	0.1	1.2	0.8	0.5	0.8	0.7
Rochdale	1.1	1.0	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.1
Salford	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.5
Stockport	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.1	1.8
Tameside	0.7	0.1	0.1	1.0	0.5	2.6
Trafford	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0
Wigan	0.0	0.7	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.6
Barnsley	0.2	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.0	2.0
Doncaster	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.4
Rotherham	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.1
Sheffield	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.4
Bradford	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Calderdale	0.7	1.5	0.5	0.4	1.0	0.4
Kirklees	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3
Leeds	0.3	0.0	0.6	0.6	0.3	1.1
Wakefield	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.7
Gateshead	0.5	0.8	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	1.5	0.4	1.0	0.4	0.1	0.9
North Tyneside	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
South Tyneside	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sunderland	0.5	0.8	0.8	0.5	0.4	0.8
Isles of Scilly	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	0.0
Former Avon	1.0	—	—	0.5	—	—
Bath and North East Somerset	—	0.5	0.9	—	0.0	0.5
City of Bristol	—	0.6	1.0	—	0.6	1.0
North Somerset	—	1.2	0.5	—	0.3	0.6
South Gloucestershire	—	0.9	0.3	—	0.2	0.4
Total former Avon area	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.7
Former Cleveland	0.3	—	—	0.4	—	—
Hartlepool	—	1.0	0.3	—	0.8	1.1
Middlesbrough	—	0.1	0.7	—	0.6	3.1
Redcar and Cleveland	—	0.8	0.5	—	0.4	2.5
Stockton on Tees	—	0.4	0.9	—	1.3	1.1
Total former Cleveland area	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.8	1.9
Former Humberside	0.6	—	—	0.6	—	—
City of Kingston Upon Hull	—	0.0	0.0	—	0.2	0.9
East Riding of Yorkshire	—	0.0	0.0	—	0.0	0.5
North East Lincolnshire	—	0.0	1.5	—	0.0	1.8
North Lincolnshire	—	0.5	1.2	—	0.5	0.5
Total former Humberside area	0.6	0.1	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.9
Former North Yorkshire	0.1	—	—	0.3	—	—
North Yorkshire		0.0	0.1	—	0.0	0.4
York	—	0.0	0.4	—	0.0	0.5
Total former North Yorkshire area	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.4
Former Bedfordshire	1.6	1.4	—	0.8	0.3	—
Bedfordshire	—	—	2.3	—	—	2.7
Luton	—	—	4.8	—	—	3.8
Total former Bedfordshire area	1.6	1.4	3.4	0.8	0.3	3.0
Former Berkshire	1.8	0.1	—	0.7	0.1	—
Bracknell Forest	—	—	1.2	—	—	3.6
Windsor and Maidenhead	—	—	2.8	—	—	4.0
West Berkshire	—	—	1.7	—	—	0.2
Reading	—	—	3.7	—	—	4.6
Slough	—	—	7.0	—	—	6.2
Wokingham	—	—	1.2	—	—	1.5
Total former Berkshire area	1.8	0.1	3.0	0.7	0.1	3.0
Former Buckinghamshire	0.5	0.6	—	0.7	0.9	—
Buckinghamshire	—	—	1.4	—	—	2.0
Milton Keynes	—	—	1.3	—	—	1.2
Total former Buckinghamshire area	0.5	0.6	1.3	0.7	0.9	1.8
Former Cambridgshire	0.3	0.1	—	0.1	0.2	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	0.1	—	—	0.1
Peterborough	—	—	0.5	—	—	0.6
Total former Cambridgeshire area	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2
Former Cheshire	0.6	0.4	—	0.5	0.2	—
Cheshire	—	—	0.5	—	—	0.4
Halton	—	—	0.0	—	—	1.1

	Nursery and primary			*Secondary*		
	1992	*1997*	*2001*	*1992*	*1997*	*2001*
Warrington	—	—	0.8	—	—	0.5
Total former Cheshire area	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.5
Cornwall	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0
Cumbria	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.1
Former Derbyshire	0.8	0.7	—	0.5	0.3	—
Derbyshire	—	—	1.0	—	—	0.8
Derby	—	—	0.6	—	—	1.3
Total former Derbyshire area	0.8	0.7	0.9	0.5	0.3	0.9
Former Devon	0.9	0.4	—	0.5	0.3	—
Devon	—	—	0.6	—	—	1.5
Plymouth	—	—	0.1	—	—	0.0
Torbay	—	—	0.3	—	—	1.5
Total former Devon area	0.9	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.3	1.0
Former Dorset	0.0	0.2	—	0.0	0.3	—
Dorset	—	—	0.8	—	—	0.5
Poole	—	—	2.9	—	—	0.9
Bournemouth	—	—	0.5	—	—	1.0
Total former Dorset area	0.0	0.2	1.2	0.0	0.3	0.7
Former Durham	0.3	0.2	—	0.4	0.1	—
Durham	—	—	0.6	—	—	1.3
Darlington	—	—	0.3	—	—	2.1
Total former Durham area	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.4	0.1	1.4
Former East Sussex	0.2	0.8	—	0.7	0.4	—
East Sussex	—	—	0.8	—	—	1.9
Brighton and Hove	—	—	1.0	—	—	1.1
Total former East Sussex area	0.2	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.4	1.7
Former Essex	0.2	0.8	—	0.4	0.6	—
Essex	—	—	2.3	—	—	2.4
Southend on Sea	—	—	1.4	—	—	2.8
Thurrock	—	—	7.0	—	—	6.9
Total former Essex area	0.2	0.8	2.7	0.4	0.6	2.7
Gloucestershire	0.5	0.7	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.5
Former Hampshire	0.6	0.8	—	0.4	0.7	—
Hampshire	—	—	2.0	—	—	2.3
Portsmouth	—	—	3.0	—	—	6.0
Southampton	—	—	3.1	—	—	3.8
Total former Hampshire area	0.6	0.8	2.3	0.4	0.7	3.0
Former Hereford and Worcester	0.1	0.0	—	0.0	0.1	—
Herefordshire	—	—	1.2	—	—	2.0
Worcestershire	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.3
Total former Hereford and Worcester area	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.6
Hertfordshire	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.3	0.6
Isle of Wight	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	1.1
Former Kent	0.4	1.2	—	0.7	0.4	—
Kent	—	—	1.7	—	—	1.9
Medway	—	—	2.5	—	—	2.4
Total former Kent area	0.4	1.2	1.8	0.7	0.4	2.0
Former Lancashire	0.8	0.2	—	0.4	0.4	—
Lancashire	—	—	1.0	—	—	0.4
Blackburn with Darwen	—	—	1.4	—	—	2.1
Blackpool	—	—	0.4	—	—	0.7
Total former Lancashire	0.8	0.2	1.0	0.4	0.4	0.6
Former Leicestershire	0.5	0.7	—	0.3	0.3	—
Leicestershire	—	—	0.9	—	—	0.5
Leicester	—	—	2.3	—	—	1.0
Rutland	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Total former Leicestershire area	0.5	0.7	1.4	0.3	0.3	0.6
Lincolnshire	0.0	0.9	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.5
Norfolk	1.2	0.7	1.3	0.6	0.5	1.3
Northamptonshire	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.6
Northumberland	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Former Nottinghamshire	0.2	0.0	—	0.1	0.0	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Nottingham	—	—	1.4	—	—	2.7
Total former Nottinghamshire area	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.6
Oxfordshire	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.3
Former Shropshire	0.0	0.1	—	0.0	0.1	—
Shropshire	—	—	0.1	—	—	0.3
Telford and Wrekin	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.8
Total former Shropshire area	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.5
Somerset	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.2
Former Staffordshire	0.0	0.0	—	0.7	0.6	—
Staffordshire	—	—	0.6	—	—	0.6
Stoke on Trent	—	—	0.4	—	—	1.7
Total former Staffordshire area	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.8
Suffolk	1.3	0.8	2.2	1.4	0.5	1.6
Surrey	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.7	2.1
Warwickshire	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.4	1.8
West Sussex	0.7	1.2	1.4	0.3	0.4	1.7
Former Wiltshire	1.1	0.5	—	0.6	0.4	—
Wiltshire	—	—	0.8	—	—	0.6
Swindon	—	—	0.8	—	—	2.1
Total former Wiltshire area	1.1	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.4	1.0
England	0.6	0.6	1.2	0.5	0.4	1.4

[1] Local education authorities created by local government re-organisation in 1996, 1997 and 1998 are shown under their parent authority. To allow comparisons between years, the vacancy data for new authorities have been aggregated to give rates for the former authority areas.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers there were in the different age bands in each local education authority in January 2001. [39219]

Mr. Timms: The ages of qualified full time teachers in regular service in the maintained schools sector in each LEA in England at 31 March 2000 are as follows. These are the most recent data available, and are provisional.

	Under 25	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*50 to 54*	*55 to 59*	*60 and over*	*Total*
City of London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
Camden	40	230	220	170	120	150	140	60	30	1,150
Greenwich	80	250	30	180	210	350	250	90	20	1,670
Hackney	—	30	60	70	140	190	160	70	20	720
Hammersmith	40	180	130	100	90	120	100	40	10	800
Islington	30	190	210	190	140	160	120	60	10	1,120
Kensington and Chelsea	—	40	70	50	50	50	70	30	10	360
Lambeth	40	180	220	200	180	230	180	50	20	1,290
Lewisham	50	210	240	210	220	300	240	90	10	1,570
Southwark	50	210	200	180	180	230	180	60	20	1,300
Tower Hamlets	60	230	270	280	270	290	240	80	20	1,740
Wandsworth	60	290	240	160	160	230	180	70	20	1,400
Westminster	40	220	180	120	110	110	120	60	20	980
Barking	110	270	200	150	180	210	190	50	10	1,360
Barnet	120	440	360	280	260	340	320	130	40	2,280
Bexley	100	280	210	170	250	310	290	110	20	1,740
Brent	80	250	220	190	240	290	260	120	40	1,680
Bromley	100	350	280	210	260	360	380	120	20	2,100
Croydon	110	360	270	210	270	390	340	150	30	2,120
Ealing	130	400	330	200	230	270	280	110	20	1,960
Enfield	120	450	310	270	330	380	310	110	20	2,310
Haringey	50	240	270	270	240	240	210	100	20	1,640
Harrow	70	220	190	130	170	230	200	90	20	1,320
Havering	100	230	200	180	240	320	240	110	20	1,640
Hillingdon	140	430	270	180	240	290	250	90	10	1,900
Hounslow	100	340	300	190	190	250	230	110	20	1,720
Kingston upon Thames	50	200	110	90	90	160	130	40	10	900
Merton	50	190	140	110	130	170	140	70	10	980
Newham	150	470	350	240	250	290	230	70	10	2,070
Redbridge	140	410	260	200	280	290	270	100	20	1,960
Richmond upon Thames	40	170	130	80	100	170	100	50	10	840
Sutton	60	280	170	110	140	260	220	80	20	1,340
Waltham Forest	50	240	240	230	250	340	240	100	30	1,710
Birmingham	390	1,400	1,160	850	1,190	1,870	1,500	540	70	8,960
Coventry	100	330	250	230	340	610	450	180	30	2,510
Dudley	120	390	280	260	390	550	410	160	20	2,560
Sandwell	120	420	250	240	430	580	380	100	20	2,550
Solihull	110	280	200	160	220	360	290	80	10	1,720
Walsall	80	300	230	230	380	560	420	120	20	2,340
Wolverhampton	80	250	230	190	380	510	340	120	20	2,120
Knowsley	80	230	170	170	180	320	240	70	10	1,470
Liverpool	90	480	420	380	540	1,030	780	240	40	4,000
St. Helens	50	190	180	170	170	360	250	80	10	1,440
Sefton	90	340	280	250	310	520	400	190	20	2,400
Wirral	90	300	290	310	390	650	510	180	20	2,730
Bolton	130	320	330	240	320	470	430	130	20	2,390
Bury	60	190	160	150	190	310	270	70	10	1,400
Manchester	130	460	460	380	380	660	600	200	40	3,300
Oldham	90	310	270	250	290	460	340	110	20	2,120
Rochdale	90	280	190	160	270	410	290	90	10	1,770
Salford	80	270	200	150	210	370	250	80	10	1,620
Stockport	80	300	280	210	280	420	400	150	10	2,140
Tameside	70	280	180	180	210	420	340	120	10	1,810
Trafford	70	250	230	160	200	370	300	120	10	1,720
Wigan	100	310	240	230	450	610	510	160	20	2,620
Barnsley	60	210	140	160	260	370	270	80	10	1,550
Doncaster	110	340	260	200	340	600	530	140	10	2,530
Rotherham	80	270	220	220	330	540	420	140	30	2,230
Sheffield	80	360	330	300	440	840	690	220	20	3,260
Bradford	110	430	450	480	700	1,000	800	190	40	4,190
Calderdale	60	240	200	170	240	350	310	90	10	1,670
Kirklees	110	360	310	330	470	730	570	150	20	3,050
Leeds	230	750	590	590	690	1,190	1,090	320	50	5,[illegible]90
Wakefield	100	370	270	220	380	550	450	140	10	[illegible]90
Gateshead	80	230	180	150	180	370	260	80	10	1,530
Newcastle upon Tyne	90	250	180	210	290	510	370	100	10	2,010
North Tyneside	60	220	140	160	230	370	280	100	10	1,560
South Tyneside	40	150	120	120	200	300	240	120	20	1,290
Sunderland	90	300	250	230	380	560	480	170	20	2,470
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	—	10	—	—	—	20
Bath and North East Somerset	40	220	150	120	160	240	210	70	10	1,210
City of Bristol	130	400	350	280	310	510	440	120	20	2,560

	Under 25	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*50 to 54*	*55 to 59*	*60 and over*	*Total*
North Somerset	50	180	150	130	180	250	240	80	10	1,270
South Gloucestershire	90	300	230	200	250	350	320	110	20	1,850
Hartlepool	40	100	80	60	120	180	150	30	—	780
Middlesbrough	40	160	120	100	190	280	270	70	20	1,240
Redcar and Cleveland	60	180	120	80	170	300	240	80	10	1,230
Stockton on Tees	70	210	150	140	230	330	350	110	10	1,590
City of Kingston Upon Hull	100	220	150	130	300	500	370	110	10	1,900
East Riding of Yorkshire	100	270	210	190	320	540	450	120	10	2,200
North East Lincolnshire	60	150	100	110	180	350	240	70	—	1,260
North Lincolnshire	50	150	100	80	180	330	220	60	10	1,180
North Yorkshire	130	520	410	390	540	780	760	270	30	3,830
York	50	150	160	110	150	230	250	70	10	1,180
Bedfordshire	100	360	280	280	430	660	590	240	30	2,960
Luton	60	200	150	150	200	300	280	100	20	1,470
Buckinghamshire	190	600	350	280	410	720	620	210	30	3,400
Milton Keynes	80	240	190	190	240	340	220	70	10	1,580
Derbyshire	220	590	420	480	740	1,120	1,040	310	30	4,930
City of Derby	80	230	180	200	290	390	330	80	20	1,790
Dorset	110	390	280	250	380	530	460	140	20	2,570
Poole	40	130	100	80	140	200	180	60	—	930
Bournemouth	30	140	90	90	120	230	180	60	10	960
Durham	190	460	370	360	570	950	760	250	40	3,950
Darlington	30	100	80	70	100	200	150	40	10	770
East Sussex	140	430	400	340	470	640	520	150	30	3,120
Brighton and Hove	40	210	230	180	200	290	230	70	10	1,440
Hampshire	460	1,350	910	710	1,000	1,650	1,380	510	60	8,020
Portsmouth	50	200	150	130	170	270	210	90	10	1,270
Southampton	90	250	180	140	180	280	240	80	20	1,460
Leicestershire	160	610	450	390	620	980	820	310	30	4,360
Leicester City	100	330	270	250	350	460	440	130	10	2,340
Rutland	—	30	20	20	30	60	50	20	—	230
Staffordshire	270	870	590	540	950	1,430	1,170	410	30	6,250
Stoke-on-Trent	90	240	170	170	250	450	320	110	10	1,800
Wiltshire	120	470	320	310	370	610	480	160	10	2,840
Swindon	90	220	160	120	160	260	210	100	10	1,340
Bracknell Forest	40	120	70	50	90	130	130	40	10	680
Windsor and Maidenhead	50	140	100	90	110	180	160	80	10	920
West Berkshire	60	240	160	110	160	240	190	80	10	1,250
Reading	60	140	100	70	100	170	140	60	10	830
Slough	60	160	120	70	120	150	150	60	10	900
Wokingham	40	190	110	90	160	230	220	70	20	1,130
Cambridgeshire	180	560	390	320	470	740	630	190	20	3,500
City of Peterborough	100	240	180	120	170	300	230	80	10	1,420
Cheshire	220	770	590	460	730	1,090	960	310	40	5,190
Halton	50	160	140	130	150	230	180	50	10	1,100
Warrington	70	290	180	160	210	320	260	60	10	1,560
Devon	150	520	500	440	620	1,020	840	290	40	4,400
City of Plymouth	60	270	250	260	300	390	350	130	10	2,020
Torbay	40	120	100	80	110	180	180	60	10	870
Essex	490	1,460	940	880	1,340	1,890	1,550	580	80	9,210
Southend	60	180	110	130	170	250	190	70	20	1,170
Thurrock	80	170	110	90	120	190	180	60	10	1,020
Herefordshire	40	150	100	90	190	230	250	80	20	1,150
Worcestershire	160	520	420	350	550	920	730	220	30	3,890
Kent	500	1,450	980	890	1,470	2,100	1,680	630	100	9,800
Medway	70	320	210	190	270	390	360	140	10	1,950
Lancashire	320	1,140	920	890	1,340	1,970	1,760	500	60	8,910
Blackburn and Darwen	60	140	150	160	220	280	250	80	10	1,330
Blackpool	60	160	110	100	130	230	140	50	—	980
Nottinghamshire	180	600	550	500	690	1,260	990	270	30	5,060
City of Nottingham	60	200	180	170	200	330	280	80	10	1,500
Shropshire	60	250	210	200	280	440	340	100	20	1,890
Telford and Wrekin	50	170	130	130	190	260	240	50	10	1,240
Cornwall	70	360	320	340	500	770	670	220	40	3,300
Cumbria	110	450	410	310	560	860	730	190	20	3,640
Gloucestershire	170	600	470	380	490	830	720	210	20	3,880
Hertfordshire	510	1,480	910	710	1,010	1,460	1,400	520	70	8,080
Isle of Wight	30	110	100	90	140	230	200	60	10	960
Lincolnshire	240	700	460	420	590	980	880	290	40	4,600
Norfolk	190	660	480	500	750	1,290	1,140	430	60	5,490
Northamptonshire	260	770	540	510	690	1,070	860	280	30	5,010
Northumberland	80	270	230	220	360	570	480	110	20	2,350
Oxfordshire	170	610	490	400	470	700	700	240	40	3,820

	Under 25	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*50 to 54*	*55 to 59*	*60 and over*	*Total*
Somerset	120	390	280	310	500	710	630	180	20	3,140
Suffolk	220	660	440	400	740	1,090	940	340	50	4,860
Surrey	450	1,400	1,020	580	730	1,140	1,020	420	70	6,830
Warwickshire	190	570	350	300	450	810	690	220	30	3,610
West Sussex	180	790	580	520	730	1,020	840	270	40	4,980
England	16,040	53,260	41,160	35,720	50,030	76,460	63,960	21,460	3,050	361,140

Note: — less than five.

Age details of part-time teachers have not been given because about 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-timers are not recorded on the Teachers' Pension Scheme, from which the data are obtained.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will publish the volume of statistics on teachers. [39220].

Mr. Timms: The 2001 volume of Teachers in England (including teachers pay for England and Wales) was published on Friday, 22 February 2002. A copy has been placed in the library. Further copies can be obtained from The Stationery Office (ISBN 0-11-271127-8) or online at http:/www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/DB/VOL/v0319/index.html.

Faith Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the expressions of interest in the establishment of new faith schools which have been received by her Department in *(a)* the last year and *(b)* the last three months. [38857]

Mr. Timms: Expressions of interest in the establishment of new faith schools which have been received by the Department are:

(a) in the last year—

10 Church of England, 12 Muslim, 3 Christian, 2 Jewish, 1 Greek Orthodox, 1 Russian Orthodox, 1 Hindu, 1 Sikh, 1 Quaker, 1 Cherubim and Seraphim, 1 New Testament Church

(b) In the last three months—

1 Muslim, 1 Christian, 1 Jewish, 1 Russian Orthodox, 1 Hindu, 1 Cherubim and Seraphim, 1 New Testament Church.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many visits she and ministers in her Department have made since 7 June 2001 to *(a)* comprehensive schools without specialist status, *(b)* comprehensive schools with specialist status, *(c)* grammar schools, *(d)* secondary modern or high schools in wholly selective LEA areas and *(e)* independent schools, broken down by each category and each minister. [38858]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following visits, on departmental businesses, have been made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and Ministers in her Department since 7 June 2001.

The Secretary of State made two visits to comprehensive schools without specialist status and three visits to comprehensive schools with specialist status.

The Minister of State for School Standards made 13 visits to comprehensive schools without specialist status, seven visits to schools with specialist status and one visit to an independent school.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Early Years and School Standards made one visit to a comprehensive school without specialist status and one visit to an independent school.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Adult Skills made one visit to a comprehensive school without specialist status.

I have visited four comprehensive schools without specialist status and five comprehensive schools with specialist status.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Children and Family Services

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she will publish the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service's Corporate Plan for 2002 to 2006. [40169]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) has published its Corporate Plan today. Copies of the Corporate Plan have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Further copies of the Corporate Plan may be obtained from CAFCASS.

Enforcement Performance

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps she is taking to improve enforcement performance and if she will make a statement. [40170]

Mr Willis: The Lord Chancellor has today announced challenging targets for Magistrates Courts Committees for 2002–03 for enforcement of financial and non-financial penalties, as follows:

Enforcement of Financial Penalties

An increase of five per cent on the 2000–01 national average payment rate, i.e rising from 63 per cent. to 68 per cent.

Enforcement of community penalty breach warrants 75 per cent. of adult bail and no-bail warrants executed or withdrawn within 28 days of issue, and 75 per cent. of youth bail and no-bail warrants executed or withdrawn within 14 days of issue.

Magistrates Courts Committees will be given nearly £10 million extra from April 2002, ring-fenced for enforcement, to enable them to improve performance. We will expect the amount of fine money recovered to increase as a result of the extra funding and will monitor the position carefully to ensure that performance improves.

We are already taking forward a programme of work to improve enforcement arising from the Department's Post Implementation Review of the Transfer of Warrant Execution project. The Post Implementation Review report will be published on the Department's website on 5 March. We shall be holding a series of conferences for enforcement practitioners in April. These will be followed by the establishment of a Criminal Enforcement Policy Advisory Group, which will be tasked with exploring and evaluating good practice initiatives, revising and updating guidance and taking forward other issues arising from the conferences to improve enforcement.

Copies of the Post Implementation Review report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 5 March.

Disease Control

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the proposed National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency will have *(a)* a role and *(b)* powers in respect of disease control in Scotland; [30687]

(2) who will carry out the functions currently carried out in Scotland by the National Radiological Protection Board following the creation of the National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency. [30689].

Mr. Foulkes: I have been asked to reply. I refer the hon. Member to my answer of today.

Patients Forum

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will know what change in expenditure the creation of patients' forums will require, after taking account of funding for community health councils and PALs; and if he will make a statement. [35495].

Mr. Blears *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* We are working to secure funding to maximise the new system of patient and public involvement, including the introduction of patient forums in every trust, as part of the Government spending review. Resourcing the new structures is a matter we are taking seriously and we expect to receive the outcome of this spending review in the summer 2002.

Health Expenditure

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if *(a)* over-the-counter health remedies bought by private individuals, *(b)* money spent on health by charities and *(c)* money spent on non-NHS nursing homes are included in his Department's figures for total UK health expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product in comparison to EU country figures. [39209].

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Tim Loughton, dated 28 February 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking if (a) over the counter health remedies bought by private individuals, (b) money spent on health by charities and (c) money spent on non-NHS nursing homes are included in figures for total UK health expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product in comparison to EU country figures. I am replying in his absence. (39209).

Comparative figures for total health expenditure in EU countries are published by the OECD in "OECD Health Data 2001", UK figures for this dataset were provided in February 2001 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and do not incorporate improvements made in compilation methods since then. Deviations from the international definitions are fully documented within the dataset.

On 12 February 2002, ONS published estimates of total UK health expenditure for 1997–2000. The methods for estimating some of the components of the total new and relatively untested, so the improved estimates are being released as experimental. ONS has provided the experimental estimates to OECD for inclusion in "OECD Health Data 2002", the release of which is planned for June 2002. These experimental estimates do include expenditure on over-the-counter remedies bought by private individuals, money spent on health by non-profit institutions serving households (mainly charities) and money spent on nursing care in non-NHS nursing homes.

The improvements in methods used bring the total UK health expenditure estimates more into line with the international definition, promulgated by the OCED and supported by the World Health Organisation, the World Bank and the European Commission. Details of the methods have been published in *Economic Trends No 579* (February 2002) and on the National Statistics website.

North Hampshire Hospital

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will deliver to the North Hampshire Hospital the additional funding for cardiac treatment which he pledged when he visited Basingstoke in May. [15175].

Mr. Blears: As pledged in the NHS Plan, investment in heart disease services will be increased by an extra £230 million a year by 2003/04. There will also be an additional £101 million in health authority baseline budgets this year plus extra funds allocated throughout the year. In addition, there will be an extra £120 million of capital funding from the HM Treasury Capital Modernisation Fund to expand capacity and modernise services.

This year additional funding for North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust has been allocated as follows:

£151,000	cardiac care equipment
£101,000	rehabilitation services
£101,000	cardiac management.

Emergency Admissions (Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each NHS trust in Lancashire, what was the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage change in emergency admissions between April and October in (i) 2001 and (ii) 2000. [15471]

Ms Blears: The latest available data for acute trusts are set out in the table:

Finished first episodes	*April–August 2000*	*April–August 2001 provisional*	*Per cent. change*
Blackpool Victoria	10,912	11,330	+3.8
Blackburn	10,327	10,519	+1.9
Burnley	7,912	7,995	+1.0
Chorley	4,149	4,036	−2.7
Morecambe Bay	11,056	11,811	+6.8
Preston	8,955	9,235	+3.1

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics.

Labelling

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with his European Union colleagues regarding strengthening restrictions on country of origin labelling. [12642]

Yvette Cooper: None.

The Food Standards Agency, which is responsible for representing the UK at working level on these matters, is pressing for changes to EU labelling rules to require country of origin labelling on a wider range of foods, particularly meat products. It is also pressing for changes that would prevent misleading labelling by restricting the use of terms like "produce of . . ." to those foods where the main ingredient come from, and production processes occur in, the named place or country.

Health Authority Debt

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities were in debt in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001; and what was the level of debt in each case. [16848]

Mr. Hutton: This information has been placed in the Library. Changes in the accounting and financial arrangements for health authorities mean that the figures for 1996–97 and 2000–01 are not directly comparable.

Sussex Ambulance Service

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the response time is for the Sussex Ambulance Service in the last period for which figures are available; and what *(a)* the national average and *(b)* the Government's target response time is. [17347]

Ms Blears: The Government's target response times require that ambulance services prioritise emergency calls. Immediate life threatening calls are classified as Category A, and other emergency calls are classified as Category B/C. Ambulance services are required to respond to 75 per cent of Category A calls within eight minutes and 50 per cent of Category B/C calls within eight minutes. For rural services, which includes Sussex Ambulance NHS Trust, there should be a response to 95 per cent of emergency calls within 19 minutes, and for urban services within 14 minutes. For urgent patient journeys the ambulance should arrive not more than 15 minutes after the agreed time in 95 per cent. of cases.

Information about the response times to emergency calls and other requests for transport for Sussex Ambulance NHS Trust and all other ambulance trusts are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000-01". A copy is in the Library and available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.ht[illegible].

Acute Beds

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his most recent assessment is of acute hospital bed availability in *(a)* Worcestershire, *(b)* Gloucestershire, *(c)* Herefordshire, *(d)* Warwickshire and *(e)* Birmingham; and if he will make a statement. [23086]

Yvette Cooper: The number of available acute beds at midnight on 29 November 2001 in National Health Service Trusts in the areas listed is given in the table:

Available acute beds at midnight on 29 November 2001

NHS Trust	*Total acute beds*
(a) Worcestershire	
Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	764
Worcestershire Community & Mental Health NHS Trust	101
Gloucestershire	
East Gloucestershire NHS Trust	632
Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust	695
Severn NHS Trust	7
(c) Herefordshire	
Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust	303
(d) Warwickshire	
George Elliot Hospital NHS Trust	362
North Warwickshire NHS Trust	28
South Warwickshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust	30
South Warwickshire General Hospitals NHS Trust	391
(e) Birmingham	
Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Trust	194
Birmingham Heartlands & Solihull NHS Trust	1,168
Birmingham Specialist Community Health NHS Trust	6
Birmingham Women's Healthcare NHS Trust	92
City Hospital NHS Trust	653
Good Hope Hospital NHS Trust	471
Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust	38
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust	1,042

Source: DoH winter bed census.

The number of acute beds in the table includes adult and children's acute beds, critical care beds, specialist beds, special care baby cots, beds in assessment and admission units and beds in observation wards (if available to admit patients to). Some categories of acute beds—such as obstetrics and day care beds—are not included in the Department of Health winter bed census figures quoted but have formerly been included in calculations of acute capacity.

Elective Surgery, Buckingham

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to set up a dedicated fast-track elective surgery centre in the constituency of Buckingham. [23720]

Ms Blears: We announced plans for 26 diagnostic and treatment centres (DTCs) in February 2001. Among these was a proposal for a centre in Milton Keynes.

We are now looking at ways to extend the DTC programme, including in the south-east and, if possible, to bring it forward. We will consider suitable proposals that stand to benefit even more patients.

Public Appointments

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued in respect of non-executive appointments to *(a)* primary care trusts and *(b)* other NHS bodies; and what role primary care trust chairmen have in selecting non-executive members of (i) primary care trusts and (ii) other NHS bodies. [27129]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State determines the criteria according to which all non-executive appointments to National Health Service boards are made. He also determines equal opportunities goals and objectives to ensure that boards are representative of the communities they serve. These provisions apart, the appointment of chairs and non-executives to the boards of NHS trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities is now the responsibility of the NHS Appointments Commission. Guidance on the appointments process was issued by the Commission in October 2001. A copy is in the Library. The guidance provides that the chair of the NHS body involved should serve on (but not chair) the sift and interview panels for non-executive board members. However, the final decision on all appointments is taken by the Appointments Commission.

Children Act

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on which date the extension of section 87 of the Chil[illegible] Act 1989 to include all boarding schools came into force. [27357]

Jacqui Smith: The extension of section 87 (87A) of the Children Act 1989 was in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, section 38 (87B) was substituted for (87A) in the Education Act 1996.

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act received Royal Asset on 3 November 1994. Guidance to local authorities on the affect of the amendment in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act was issued in January 1995 LAC (95)1.

Overseas Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30182]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, at column 707W.

Bed Blocking

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether bed blocking at Birmingham Heartlands Hospital by clients of Birmingham City Council's Social Services Department is delaying operations for Solihull patients. [30208]

Yvette Cooper: Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS Trust has been affected by the well-publicised problems with delayed discharges across the whole of Birmingham for most of last year. I am advised that following the allocation of additional "Cash for Change" funding in November, there has been an improvement. However, there remain approximately 100 patients who are experiencing delayed transfers of care in the trust. Of these, nine are awaiting social services funding compared with 73 in October 2001, while 31 are awaiting completion of assessments by the Social Services Departments. The Director of Social Services is currently pursuing ways to improve this position.

I am informed that both the Trust and Solihull Health Authority are ahead of their waiting list profiles and have robust plans to ensure that their end of year targets are achieved. In addition, elective and day case admissions have been at a consistent level, and until early in the New Year the number of cancellations of surgery being experienced by the Trust were below their average levels. There was a temporary increase in the number of cancelled operations for two weeks in January due to a viral outbreak affecting both patients and staff, but this has now returned to normal levels.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason old age psychiatry beds are not included in the figures on bed blocking collected by the NHS. [36918]

Jacqui Smith: Delayed discharges are collected as an indicator of how well the whole system is working. A number of smaller specialities, including old age psychiatry, are not included, because they have a smaller impact on the overall capacity of the NHS, since the beds involved would not be suitable for most emergency admissions or post-operative care. However, patients in old-age psychiatry beds should be able to receive the right care at the right time, like all other patients. That is why standard 7 of the National Service Framework for Older People sets out to achieve integrated mental health services provided by the NHS and councils to ensure effective diagnosis, treatment and support.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many old age psychiatry beds, and what percentage of the total, were blocked by patients waiting to enter a care home *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in North Yorkshire, in (i) 1997, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2002. [36915]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Medway Primary Care Trust

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has drawn up a shortlist of candidates to fill the post of Chair of Medway Primary Care Trust; when he expects to conduct interviews; and what the expected date of appointment is. [30948]

Ms Blears: The closing date for applications for the post of chair of Medway Primary Care Trust is 15 March. No interview dates have yet been set. However, the National Health Service Appointments Commission anticipate that a decision on the appointment will be made before the end of March.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses for emergency procedures the private sector undertakes; and what help the NHS is able to provide in this regard. [31127]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Information on private sector training of doctors and nurses for emergency procedures is not collected by the National Health Service or the Department of Health. However, the vast majority of doctors and nurses working in the private sector will have been trained in the NHS, where, if the training was undertaken in England, it would include emergency procedures.

Although the independent sector make no direct financial contribution to nurse training, they do provide clinical placements. The availability of quality clinical placements generally is a significant factor in the NHS's capacity to train newly qualified staff. NHS employer-led work force planning takes account of the needs of the independent sector as well as the NHS so that training output is, resources and capacity permitting, aligned to the overall demands of the pool.

When the National Standards Commission takes over the regulation of the private health care sector on 1 April, all providers will have to meet core national minimum standards. This will include a requirement to have on duty at all times a member of staff trained in resuscitation, who has updated training annually. In addition, providers have to meet standards specific to the services they provide. For private hospitals, this includes more detailed and stringent standards covering Advanced Life Support and resuscitation equipment, and the requirement that if the hospital does not have intensive care facilities, it must have an arrangement with another hospital in the vicinity. Whether it is NHS or private, it should have such facilities, for patients to be transferred there in an emergency.

Shropshire Health Authority

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people, expressed as equivalent full-time posts, are employed by Shropshire Health Authority. [34804]

Yvette Cooper: Shropshire Health Authority currently employs 167 staff. This includes those staff contracted to the Health Authority who are currently working within Primary Care Groups.

Primary Care Trusts (Chairmen)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) who draws up the criteria used by the Independent Appointments Commission to appoint the chairmen of primary care trusts; [34483]

(2) what independent references are sought before appointing the chairmen of primary care trusts; [34485]

(3) what independent assessment is made of the accuracy of biographical details supplied by candidates for the chairmanship of primary care trusts. [34486]

Ms Blears: The criteria for all appointments to National Health Service Boards are determined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Two references are sought from all new candidates for appointment and are taken up before an appointment is made. Where candidates are serving NHS board members new references are not sought, but interview panels take into account an appraisal of each candidate's performance in post. No independent assessment is made of the accuracy of curricula vitae provided by candidates. However, all candidates are required to sign a declaration acknowledging the fact that if they are appointed and the information they have provided is subsequently found to be untrue, then their tenure of office may be terminated.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will draw up a timetable for implementation of the recommendation of the CFS/ME Working Group regarding training. [35054]

Yvette Cooper: Responsibility for the content, standards, management and delivery of medical education is shared between regulatory bodies, for example the General Medical Council and the Specialist Training Authority, professional bodies, notably the medical Royal Colleges, universities, the Department of Health and the National Health Service. We expect that these bodies will take account of the latest developments in medicine when developing their syllabuses.

General practitioners are expected to keep their professional skills up-to-date, and learning will always continue even if formal training has ceased.

Working Conditions and Practice

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35888]

Ms Blears: The Department carried out an assessment of the implications of the Working Time Regulations in 1998 and issued advice and guidance to both individual members of staff and line managers. This guidance is regularly reviewed and is readily available to all staff.

Under the Regulations only staff who have voluntarily signed a waiver to the limit on the maximum average length of the working week may work more than an average of 48 hours per week.

There are currently 39 such waivers signed by staff in the Department. This represents less than three-quarters of one per cent. of the total number of staff employed by the Department as at 31 December 2001.

We are determined to improve the work/life balance of staff throughout the Department and measures are in place to address instances of long hours working. We remain committed to reducing the number of employees who are required to work in excess of 48 hours per week to an absolute minimum commensurate with meeting the Department's operational needs, and this is kept under regular review.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Torbay of 3 July 2001 concerning Mrs. James of Rousden Road, Chelston, Torquay. [27599]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent on 22 January 2002.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a substantive reply will be given to Julie Hasting's letter of 26 November 2001, concerning the Royal Commission on Long-term Care. [36841]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent on 21 February.

EU Health Card

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to publicise the introduction of the EU-wide health card; and if he will make a statement. [37492]

Yvette Cooper: In the Communication from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council of Ministers, entitled "Action Plan for skills and mobility" (Document COM(2002)72—copy available in the Library), the Commission announced its intention to present a proposal early in 2003 for the introduction of an European Union-wide health card. We will look at this proposal constructively when received.

Form E111

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the eligibility of the self-employed is to use (Form E111) for treatment abroad. [38458]

Mr. Hutton: Any European Economic Area national resident in the United Kingdom, whether self-employed or not, is entitled to use form E111 for treatment covered by that form in other EEA member states during temporary visits. The only exceptions are workers posted to this country, and resident here, but who remain insured in another EEA member state.

Ambulance Trusts

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidelines have been issued by his Department to ambulance trusts about protecting the confidentiality of patients involved in accidents or emergencies. [38700]

Ms Blears: Guidance on confidentiality, "The Protection and Use of Patient Information", was issued to the National Health Service in March 1996 under cover of Health Service Guidance 96/18. This guidance is applicable to all NHS organisations and covers a wide range of circumstances, including accidents and emergencies.

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether figures recording the number of cancelled operations include *(a)* those operations cancelled before the day of admission and *(b)* the individual cancellations of patients who have their operation cancelled on multiple occasions. [38684]

Mr. Hutton: Figures are collected on a quarterly basis on the number of patients whose operations are cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons on the day patients are due to arrive, or after arrival in hospital, or on the day of their operation. These figures are not broken down to show whether a patient has been cancelled by the hospital more than once.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years, [38744]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years [38745]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Beef Imports

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will provide details of the consignments of beef imported into the UK that have been found to have contravened EU BSE regulations in the last two years. (201)

Ms Blears: A European Union Decision on BSE, effective from 1 October 2000, introduced, among other things, a requirement that all Specified Risk Material (SRM) be removed at the slaughterhouse and disposed of in a safe manner. The importation of meat with SRM attached had been illegal under United Kingdom domestic legislation for several years previously.

Since the EU rules came into effect, there have been 22 instances where consignments of carcase beef imported into the UK from other EU member states have been found with SRM (portions of spinal cord) attached. There has also been one instance where ovine SRM has been found in a half ewe carcase. In each case, the Food Standards Agency has taken up the matter vigorously with the authorities of the member state concerned, and reported the discovery to the European Commission. The 23 instances (22 bovine and 1 ovine) involved 21 different meat plants from seven member states. It is the responsibility of the relevant national authorities to ensure that meat plants in their territory comply with the EU rules. Eight of the plants have had their operating licences suspended as a result.

Details of the 23 instances are set out in the table:

Finds of Specified Risk Material in Imported Meat

Date of discovery	*Place of discovery*	*Finding/action taken by MHS*	*Source*
(1) 17 January 2001	ABP, Newry, County Down	Spinal cord in two of a consignment of 221 forequarters.	Loblein Teterower Fleisch GmbH Landkreis Gustrow, Germany
(2) 17 January 2001	ABP, Newry, County Down	Spinal cord in one of a consignment of 192 forequarters.	Westfleisch Lubbeck, Germany
(3) 29 January 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Spinal cord in one of a consignment of 216 hindquarters.	Oldenburg, Germany
(4) 1 February 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Spinal cord in one of a consignment of 217 hindquarters.	Fleisch-Versand Heinz Gausepohl Bakum, Germany
(5) 2 February 2001	Northern Ireland	Remnants of spinal cord in two of a consignment of 230 fore and hindquarters. Operation of plant suspended indefinitely on 8 February.	Liffey Meats, Ballyjamesduff, Co. Cavan, Republic of Ireland
(6) 1 March 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Several pieces of spinal cord in five of a consignment of 216 fore and hinquarters. Operation of plant suspended on 8 March.	Fleischverkaufsstelk Kalkar, Germany
(7) 1 March 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Several pieces of spinal cord in seven of a consignment of 188 quarters. Operation of plant suspended 6–9 March.	Brada's Vleeschbedrijf BV, Leevwarden, Netherlands
(8) 2 March 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Several pieces of spinal cord in four forequarters of a consignment of 222 hind and forequarters. Operation of plant suspended on 8 March.	Mueller Fleisch GmbH, Birkenfeld, Germany
(9) 5 March 2001	Blackpool Abattoir, Blackpool, Lancs.	8 cm piece of spinal cord in one forequarter out of a consignment of 53 whole carcases. Operation of plant suspended 6–9 March.	Brada's Vleeschbedrijf BV, Leevwarden, Netherlands
(10) 7 March 2001	Matheson Jess Ltd., Dundee, Scotland	Spinal cord in two forequarters of a consignment of 158 heifer carcases.	Giresa Palencia, Spain
(11) 9 March 2001	Great Harwood Food Products, Blackburn	Spinal cord in two of a consignment of 268 forequarters.	Fribin S.A.T. Binepar, Spain
(12) 20 March 2001	Great Harwood Food Products, Blackburn	Unexposed spinal cord in cervical vertebral canal in 41, out of a consignment of 204 forequarters. Operation of plant suspended 22–29 March.	Industria Carni SNC Carema (Torino) Italy
(13) 21 March 2001	Dungannon Meats, Larne, Northern Ireland	Spinal cord found in one forequarter in a consignment of 220 quarters.	Kildare Chilling, Kildare, Republic of Ireland
(14) 30 March 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Spinal cord found in two forequarters in a consignment of 203. Slaughter of cattle temporarily prohibited at plant on 30 March.	Fleischzentrum Wilhelmshaven, Germany
(15) 30 April 2001	St. Merryn Meats (Victoria), Cornwall	Spinal cord found in two forequarters in a consignment of 158. Plant orderd to re-inspect all cuts of meat for spinal cord. Plant to introduce own checks and demonstrate their efficiency to Danish Food & Veterinary Adminstration.	Danish Crown, The Skive, Brarupsgade 6, 7800 Skive, Denmark

Finds of Specified Risk Material in Imported Meat

Date of discovery	*Place of discovery*	*Finding/action taken by MHS*	*Source*
(16) 25 June 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Spinal cord found in two forequarters in a consignment of 230. Operation of plant suspended on 26 June until 2 July when all the conditions laid down by German authorities had been complied with.	Gausepohl Fleisch GmbH, Bakum
(17) 2 August 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Spinal cord found in one quarter in a consignment of 240.	Fair Oaks Clonmel Limited, Upper Irishtown, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, Ireland
(18) 7 August 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Spinal cord found in one quarter in a consignment of 200.	Domburg Vlees bv OUD, Bodegraafseweg 43, 2411 HT Bodegraven, The Netherlands
(19) 21 August 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Spinal cord found in four quarters in a consignment of 236.	Expsl. J. Gosschalk en Zoon BV Oenerweg 2–4 8161 PM Epe, The Netherlands
(20) 24 October 2001	Cumberland Meat Packers Ltd, Coventry	Spinal cord found in one quarter in a consignment of 240.	Kroot Vlees BV Enschotsestraat 28 5013 BD Tilburg The Netherlands NL 008141885BO1
(21) 9 November 2001	Najib & Sons, Foston, Derbyshire	Spinal cord found in one half ewe carcase in a consignment of 127.	Awaiting details EEC 522
(22) 15 November 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Spinal cord found in two quarters in a consignment of 44.	NV EEG Slacthuis Verbist Gentse Heerweg 78 B-8870 Izegem, Belgium
(23) 29 November 2001	Anglo Dutch Meats, Eastbourne, Sussex	Spinal cord found in five quarters in a consignment of 196.	Vleesgroothandel NV Dierickx Baaikensstraat 12, 9240 Zele, Belgium

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 1 March 2002

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36271]

Mr. Leslie: Ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

Central Office of Information

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many advertising contracts are out to tender through the Central Office of Information; and what the value is of such contracts. [37959]

Mr. Leslie: There are currently two advertising contracts out to tender through the COI: "Sexual Health Awareness", for the Department of Health, and the Million Visitor Campaign, for the British Tourist Authority. The respective values of the initial contracts period are £1.5 million and £24 million.

Civil Servants

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what basis civil servants are entitled to one year's salary severance payments. [38448]

Mr. Leslie: Staff can retire or be retired early under several categories of early retirement or severance as set out in sections 11.5 to 11.10 of the Civil Service Management Code (CSMC). The financial terms for early retirement and severance are provided by the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS). Benefits on medical retirement are provided by the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS). Early retirement and severance payments vary between individuals depending on the category of departure, the person's age, length of service, and pay on exit. Early retirement with payment of pension is limited to those over age 50 with at least five years' service; early severance with immediate payment of a lump sum and accrued pension benefits preserved for payment at age 60 applies to those below age 50 or with less than five years' service.

The CSMC is available at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/civilservice/managementcode/index.htm and the rules of the CSCS and the PCSPS at www.civilservice-pensions.gov.uk.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

LNM Holdings

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the policy of the Government is towards an application to the EBRD for support for the takeover of the Nova Hut steelworks in the Czech Republic by LNM Holdings. [39666]

Clare Short: The EBRD exists to help restructure the economies of former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. We support all responsible projects that serve this purpose.

The EBRD board has not been approached with a proposal for a loan to the Nova Hut steelworks. If a proposal is put to the board we will consider it on its merits.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Northern Ireland Court Service

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will undertake to retain court services in North Downs/Ards follow the consultation on the future of accommodation for the Northern Ireland Court Service. [38324]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Northern Ireland Court Service published its Court Accommodation Strategy for public consultation on 7 December 2001. The consultation document indicates that consideration will be given to the closure of courthouses at Bangor and Newtownards and that this would allow for the provision of a new courthouse in the North Downs and Ards area. Decisions on the proposals in the consultation document will be taken following the expiry of the period of public consultation on 29 March 2002.

TREASURY

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how revenue from the climate change levy is *(a)* classified and *(b)* allocated to spending programmes. [38394]

Dawn Primarolo: Receipts from the climate change levy are classified as general taxation revenue. The levy package is revenue-neutral for business on account of measures introduced alongside the levy which reduce other business taxes or direct additional spending towards energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies, from which business can benefit.

First, employers' national insurance contributions have been reduced by 0.3 percentage points. Secondly, a fund worth £50 million per annum to support energy efficiency and renewables has been allocated to Departments as follows (approximate figures):

Amount pa	*Department*	*Purpose*
£26.5 million approx	DEFRA	Energy efficiency—allocated to Carbon Trust
£6 million approx	Devolved administrations	Energy efficiency—allocated to Carbon Trust
£13 million	DTI	Renewables
£4 million	DEFRA	Energy crops

Thirdly, the levy package includes a scheme of enhanced capital allowances to provide further support to businesses investing in designated energy saving technologies. As this is a tax allowance scheme it does not involve the allocation of revenue to a spending programme and the cost of the scheme depends on take up.

Large Corporates Forum

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those firms which attended the large corporates forum on 28 September. [38398]

Dawn Primarolo: Representatives of the following companies attended the large corporates forum on 28 September 2001: General Motors UK, Friends Provident, ICI, British American Tobacco, Dixons, AMP (UK), Orange, HSBC, Rolls Royce, Schroders, Unilever.

Public Services Productivity

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 769W, on public services productivity, what process has been undertaken in preparing the paper; and if he will make a statement. [38310]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Work is proceeding on the paper.

Professional Services

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Office of Government Commerce has made of which companies are the leading suppliers of professional services to Government Departments by (i) value and (ii) number; and if he will make a statement. [38112]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The National Audit Office report Purchasing Professional Services published in April 2001 identified the leading 25 suppliers of professional services to Government Departments and the level of spend with those companies. A copy of the report is in the Library.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the minutes of the large corporates forum on 28 September 2001; and for what reason they were *(a)* first published on and *(b)* then removed from the Inland Revenue website. [38396]

Dawn Primarolo: The minutes of the 28 September 2001 meeting of the large corporates forum are available on the Inland Revenue website. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the House of Commons Library. A draft version was released for publication in error before it had been finalised. This was removed and later replaced by the final version.

Inland Revenue Secondments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Inland Revenue personnel were *(a)* seconded to private businesses in the last 12 months and *(b)* vice versa; and what the purpose of these secondments was. [38397]

Dawn Primarolo: In the 12 months from 1 March 2001 the Inland Revenue has *(a)* made 11 secondments to the private sector and

(b) taken 13 secondments from the private sector.

The purpose of these secondments was to promote the exchange of ideas and experience. Both inward and outward secondments help develop Inland Revenue staff by enabling them to work with different skills—leading to a better understanding of the business environment and a broadening of their experience.

VAT (Domestic Fuel)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the legislative barriers which prevent domestic energy being zero rated; [38811]

(2) if he will make an assessment on hypothecation of money raised on VAT on domestic fuel to a national energy efficiency programme; [38812]

(3) how much revenue has been raised in each of the last three years from VAT on domestic fuel. [38810]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government publish details of VAT receipts each year in their Financial Statement and Budget Report but do not disaggregate receipts by type of good or service.

Under long-standing agreements with the European Union, no member state is permitted to introduce new zero rates or restore a zero rate once it has been withdrawn.

The way in which revenue is raised does not in general determine how it is spent. The Government are committed to energy efficiency for its significant environmental, business and social impacts and have allocated significant resources to fund programmes designed to promote energy efficiency in the domestic sector.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate additional revenues that would arise in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland from a policy of (i) abolishing the upper limit on employees' national insurance contributions, (ii) raising the limit to £50,000, (iii) raising the limit to £100,000 and (iv) charging a rate of (A) 5 per cent., (B) 10 per cent., and (C) 15 per cent. on income between the current upper limit and (X) £50,000, (Y) £100,000 and (Z) £250,000. [39328]

Dawn Primarolo [*holding answer 28 February 2002*]: This information is not readily available for Scotland and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Available estimates for the UK, provided by the Government's Actuary's Department (GAD), are shown in the table.

Estimated full-year effects—UK

	2002–03 (£ billion)
Abolishing the Upper Earnings Limit (UEL) for employees	+3.35
Raising the UEL to £50,000 per year	+2.05
Raising the UEL to £100,000 per year	+3.00
AX 5 per cent. between UEL and £50,000 per year[1]	+1.75
AY 5 per cent. between UEL and £100,000 per year[1]	+2.55
AZ 5 per cent. between UEL and £250,000 per year[1]	+2.75
BX 10 per cent. between UEL and £50,000 per year[1]	+3.50
BY 10 per cent. between UEL and £100,000 per year[1]	+5.10
BZ 10 per cent. between UEL and £250,000 per year[1]	+5.55
CX 15 per cent. between UEL and £250,000 per year[1]	+5.25
CY 15 per cent. between UEL and £250,000 per year[1]	+7.65
CZ 15 per cent. between UEL and £250,000 per year[1]	+8.30

Note 1: Assuming UEL for contracted-out rebates will remain unchanged, with a rate of 5/10/15 per cent. being charged on earnings (whether or not the person is contracted-out) between the UEL and the specified limit.

Corporate Venturing

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was of the tax relief granted in respect of corporate venturing; and what assessment he has made of the economic impact on the tax relief for corporate venturing. [38511]

Dawn Primarolo [*holding answer 28 February 2002*]: The cost of tax relief for corporate venturing is expected to be about £50 million in a full year. The corporate venturing scheme was only introduced on 1 April 2000. It is too early in the life of the scheme for any reliable economic impact assessment to be undertaken.

Pension Rules

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rules apply to a bereaved partner in relation to the payment of *(a)* the state pension an *(b)* SERPS in cases where both partners have contributed fully to national insurance throughout their working lives. [28550]

Mr. McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

The rules governing state pensions for widows and widowers depend on the individual circumstances of the people concerned.

Generally, where both the contributor and the surviving spouse are over state pension age when the contributor dies, and both have full national insurance records, the survivor can combine their own pension with a pension based on their spouse's national insurance record.

However, the maximum amount of basic pension and additional (SERPS) pension cannot exceed the amount of a single person could get based on their own National Insurance record.

The hon. Gentleman may wish to know that:

from 6 April, the introduction of the State Second Pension will provide a better additional pension that SERPS for the low paid, and certain carers and long term disabled. The maximum amount of State Second Pension a surviving spouse can inherit will be 50 per cent.; and

the inherited SERPS regulations, which come into force on 6 October, will gradually begin to reduce the maximum percentage of SERPS a surviving spouse may inherit to up to 50 per cent. The maximum amount a surviving spouse may inherit will depend on the contributor's state pension age, with most protection—up to 90 per cent.—going to the spouses of people whose state pension age falls between 6 October 2002 and 5 October 2003.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the expenditure of her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26978]

Ms Hewitt: Expenditure on press advertising through COI is as follows:

Subject area	*£*
1997–98	
Import Licence Announcements	57,075
Export Licence Announcements	5,749
Languages for Export	21,165
Queen's Awards	66,258
Miscellaneous	157,377
Business Links	1,258,122
IT For All	357,451
Total	1,923,197

Subject area	£
1998–99	
Import Licence Announcements	47,891
Queen's Awards	94,148
Export Licence Announcements	7,208
Firework Safety	49,800
Working Time Regulations	599,995
Business Links	432,585
Trade UK	7,068
Languages for Export	7,013
National Minimum Wage	752,764
Total	1,998,472
1999–2000	
Miners' Compensation	149,940
Metrication	19,311
Information Society Initiative	439,757
Queen's Awards	47,883
Export Website Awareness	16,191
Export USA	2,436
National Minimum Wage	15,476
Import Licence Announcements	57,358
Export Licence Announcements	14,081
Foresight	52,614
Miscellaneous	14,388
Total	829,435
2000–01	
Miscellaneous	4,606
National Minimum Wage	963,552
Import Licence Announcements	45,470
Export Licence Announcements	17,214
Small Business Service	84,647
Distance Selling	16,366
Queen's Awards for Enterprise	43,542
Miners' Compensation	134,674
UK Online for Business	1,233,442
Smart Awards	138,128
Paid Annual Leave	1,179,543
Small Business Service—Business Link	589,878
Total	4,451,062
2001–02 (to date)	
Business Links	313,046
Quality Mark Scheme	464,037
Queen's Award for Enterprise	15,056
National Minimum Wage	310,020
UK Online for Business	288,872
UK Online for Business (Supplement Advertising)	387,257
Business Link Foot and Mouth	130,111
Export Licence Announcements	6,240
Import Licence Announcements	37,556
Total	1,952,195

All figures exclude VAT.

British Trade International, which brings together international trade and investment support previously led by DTI and FCO, has spent £911,530 through COI on press advertising for Trade Partners UK in 2000–01.

Each campaign may use national and regional media. The target audience and information to be conveyed influences the choice of media used. For national campaigns a mix of broadsheets and tabloids is frequently used. For regional advertising, space has been taken in many prominent regional newspapers as well as hundreds of more local papers and the specialist press.

A breakdown of expenditure by title could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Information of this kind on NDPBs is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I have asked each of the Chief Executives of the Agencies to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alison Brimelow to Mr. John Bercow, dated 1 March 2002:

I am replying to this parliamentary question, tabled on 10 January 2001, about expenditure on newspaper advertising each year since 1997.

Patent Office expenditure on newspaper advertising during this period relates mainly to annual recruitment exercises for patent examiners. The total expenditure by year is as follows:

1997–98: £32,604

1998–99: £46,482

1999–2000: £12,880

2000–01: £37,543

A full breakdown by newspaper title is attached.

Newspaper Advertising

	£
1997–98	
Cardiff Advertiser	306.00
Guardian Media Group	4,415.50
Telegraph Group	7,520.00
Western Mail/South Wales Echo	7,868.28
South Wales Argus	5,863.56
Bristol Evening Post/Bath Chronicle/Western Daily Press	2,651.56
Total 1997–98	32,604.56
1998–99	
Birmingham Post	385.00
Cardiff Advertiser	503.00
Guardian Media Group	3,950.00
Professional Engineering	1,250.00
Telegraph Group	19,700.00
Western Mail/South Wales Echo	11,182.81
South Wales Argus	4,044.80
Bristol Evening Post/Bath Chronicle/Western Daily Press	2,651.56
South Wales Evening Post	2,815.80
Total 1998–99	46,482.97
1999–2000	
Cardiff Advertiser	156.00
Guardian Group	3,715.00
Midland Independent Newspapers	246.00
The Times	900.00
Telegraph Group	5,860.00
Western Mail	752.00
South Wales Argus	1,251.18
Total 1999–2000	12,880.18

Newspaper Advertising

	£
2000–01	
Cardiff Advertiser	431.00
Guardian Media Group	2,380.00
Telegraph Group	13,850.00
Western Mail	10,160.12
South Wales Argus	7,035.50
Bristol Evening Post/Bath Chronicle/Western Daily Press	3,686.40
Total 2000–01	37,543.02

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Mr. John Bercow, dated 1 March 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply in relation to the Insolvency Service Agency to your question about expenditure on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1997.

The vast bulk of expenditure by the Insolvency Service on newspaper advertising relates to staff recruitment with the cost of such advertising being aggregated with other recruitment costs. An analysis of expenditure so far this financial year shows that the Service has spent a total of £15,868 on recruitment advertising but it would not be possible to break that figure down by title other than at disproportionate cost. Similarly, an analysis of earlier years to produce such aggregated information could, again, only be produced at disproportionate cost.

In addition to recruitment advertising I can tell you that, in October 2001, the Insolvency Service placed advertisements in The Lawyer and the Solicitor's Journal seeking expressions of interest for the provision of legal services. The cost of that advertising was £1,380 and £260 respectively.

Letter from David Hendon to Mr. John Bercow dated 1 March 2002:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply to your two Questions about expenditure on newspaper advertising, and on opinion polling, focus groups and other forms of market research. The information for the Radiocommunications Agency for the periods in question is as follows:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
				£
Newspaper Advertising	n/a	108,997	84,948	253,058
Opinion polling	0	0	0	0
Focus groups	0	1,500	2,500	2,500
Market research	29,023	0	0	282,719

We do not have readily available figures for our newspaper advertising costs on 1997–98. However I would estimate these to be in line with the two following years.

You also asked for details on surveys we have commissioned. The market research expenditure in 1997–98 concerned a survey of the views of our customers. The expenditure in 2000–01 concerned a survey on external communications, and a series of surveys to determine the value of the radio spectrum.

Leter from John Holden to Mr. John Bercow, dated 1 March 2002:

I have been asked to reply to your recently tabled Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in respect of Companies House Executive Agency. Figures for newspaper advertising for year-to-date 2001/2, for 2000/1 and 1999/2000 are respectively £63k, £126k and £122k. Figures for earlier years could only be segregated at disproportionate cost. However, our response to Parliamentary Question 2000/939 gave aggregate figures for earlier years for newspaper advertising and other promotional campaigns.

Letter from Roger Heathcote to Mr. John Bercow, dated 1 March 2002:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question on 10 January 2002 to Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, concerning what expenditure had been incurred on newspaper advertising, by title, for each year since 1997 in the department and executive agencies. I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service (ETS), which is an executive agency of the DTI.

The ETS have incurred no expenditure on promotional newspaper advertising in the period under examination. Expenditure has been incurred in advertising local job vacancies around Great Britain as well as occasional notices in relation to individual or test tribunal cases, but individual records of such expenditure are not kept.

Letter from Mr. Iain MacGregor to Mr. John Bercow, dated 1 March 2002:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply on behalf of NWML to your question regarding expenditure on newspaper advertising by DTI and its Agencies, for each year since 1997.

The figures for NWML are as follows:

Nil for each of the years

Letter from David Irwin to Mr. John Bercow, dated 1 March 2002:

Further to your Parliamentary Question 2001/2115 about the expenditure on newspaper advertising, I can report as follows:

2000–1: £548,878—excluding VAT

2001–2: £284,393—excluding VAT

The Small Business Service only came into existence at the beginning of April 2000 so previous years are not applicable.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for her Department in each of the last four years. [27901]

Ms Hewitt: *(a)* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 30 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 405-06W.

(b) This information is not held centrally.

Oil Suppliers and Retailers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she and the Office of Fair Trading have held and on what dates since September 2001 with the *(a)* major oil suppliers, *(b)* United

Kingdom Petroleum Industries Association, *(c)* Institute of Petroleum, *(d)* Petrol Retailers Association and *(e)* Association of United Kingdom Oil Independents to discuss mechanisms for the supply of road transport fuels; and if she will make a statement. [35070]

Mr. Wilson: Ministers regularly meet a wide range of representatives from business. However, it is not normal practice to release details of ministerial meetings.

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by her Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (iii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34993]

Ms Hewitt: Information from the Department's systems indicate that contracts let by core DTI to PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers are as follows:

PricewaterhouseCoopers	*No. Contracts*	*Total Value £*
01 April 1999–31 March 2000	9	354,657
01 April 2000–31 March 2001	16	636,623
01 April 2001–04 January 2002	13	870,199

Contracts let by core DTI to Ernst & Young are as follows:

Ernst & Young	*No. Contracts*	*Total Value £*
01 April 1999–31 March 2000	3	407,165
01 April 2000–31 March 2001	58	829,043
01 April 2001–04 January 2002	10	879,679

Contracts let by core DTI to Deloitte & Touche are as follows:

Deloitte & Touche	*No. Contracts*	*Total Value £*
01 April 1999–31 March 2000	6	1,265,252
01 April 2000–31 March 2001	6	1,839,428
01 April 2001–04 January 2002	4	4,489,189

Contracts let by core DTI to KPMG are as follows:

KPMG	*No. Contracts*	*Total Value £*
01 April 1999–31 March 2000	1	11,642
01 April 2000–31 March 2001	4	30,009
01 April 2001–04 January 2002	3	92[illegible]

Information is not held centrally for the earlier years and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

For contracts let to Andersen I would refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 41W, where exceptionally information was given for earlier years.

The Department's Executive Agencies will be responding separately.

Post Office Closures

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices are undergoing a consultation process for considered closure in connection with Postwatch, broken down by county. [35544]

Mr. Alexander: 73 post offices are currently undergoing consultation with Postwatch under the procedures of the Code of Practice for Post Office branch relocation, closure and conversion. The figures on a country basis are:

England	63
Wales	8
Scotland	2
Northern Ireland	0

Figures are not available on a county basis.

I understand from Post Office Ltd that the majority of these consultations concern outlets in rural areas where the subpostmaster has resigned and there are no applicants for the vacancy. The Code of Practice requires seeking alternative ways of continuing provision of post office services.

Pakistan (Imports)

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from representatives of *(a)* industry and *(b)* trade unions about the effect on the UK textile industry of the removal of duty from finished goods imported from Pakistan. [36250]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry received representations from the British Apparel & Textiles Confederation (BATC) and the Knitting Footwear and Allied Trades Union (KFAT) last October, including at a meeting to discuss the effect on the UK textile industry of the removal of duty from finished goods imported from Pakistan. In addition, and following on from correspondence, I met with representatives from the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and BATC on this subject earlier this month.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how she will ensure that the decision to support Pakistan by the removal of duty from imported made up goods will not have a destabilising effect in the far eastern region. [36252]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's view is that the removal of duty on imports of made up goods from Pakistan will not have a destabilising effect on the far eastern region. Imports of most made up goods from Pakistan are currently subject to quantitative restriction by the EU under the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA), limiting the effect of the removal of duty.

Gas Refuelling Points

Mr. Lazarowic: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many public refuelling points in the UK, broken down by area, sell *(a)* liquid petroleum gas and *(b)* natural gas for vehicles. [36386]

Mr. Wilson: The website of the Liquefied Petroleum Gas Association (www.lpga.co.uk) gives a regional breakdown of the number of public refuelling points in the UK. As at 13 February 2002, it is recorded as follows:

England	840
Wales	89
Scotland	89
Northern Ireland	21(1)

(1) The data for Northern Ireland were obtained from the website of the Energy Saving Trust (www.est-powershift.org.uk) as at 7 February 2002. Both websites also give further detail on regional breakdown.

New sites are currently opening at more than one per day. On 14 February I launched a £1 million Boost initiative, as a supplement to the DTLR's PowerShift program, which aims to increase the uptake of LPG vehicles by:

raising consumer awareness through a targeted publicity campaign;

introducing, for the first time, grants for garages to become PowerShift approved converters;

promoting the benefits to rural communities where motoring costs tend to be higher taking rural mid-Wales, East Anglia and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland as focus areas for the initiative; and working with manufacturers to put more production line LPG vehicles in show rooms.

According to the Natural Gas Vehicle Association (NGVA), there are 30 sites for refuelling with natural gas in the UK, 29 in England and 1 in Scotland. According to the NGVA, third party access is possible by arrangement with the suppliers at about 50 per cent. of these sites.

Oil and Gas Directorate Posts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) of 24 January, *Official Report*, column 1064W, what plans she has to increase the proportion of oil and gas directorate posts in Aberdeen; and if she will make it her policy to ensure that by the next election a majority of oil and gas directorate posts are based in Aberdeen. [36446]

Mr. Wilson: Oil and Gas Directorate maintains offices in both London and Aberdeen in order to provide an effective service to its wide range of clients and stakeholders. Decisions on the location of particular posts are based on operational considerations. For example, staff dealing with downstream oil issues and international oil policy are located in London; whilst staff dealing with the Scottish and north-east parts of the oil industry supply chain are located in Aberdeen. The oil and gas responsibility of Trade Partners UK are located in Glasgow.

Universal Banking Services

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made on establishing the proposed Universal Banking Service. [37491]

Mr. Alexander: While there are still issues to be resolved, substantial progress is being made towards delivery of the project as planned.

European Energy Markets

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when *(a)* she, *(b)* her Ministers and *(c)* officials from her Department last met (i) the European Commission, (ii) the Government of France and (iii) the Government of Germany to discuss liberalisation of European energy markets and completion of the single market in energy; and if she will make a statement. [36788]

Mr. Wilson [*holding answer 25 February 2002*]: Ministers and officials are in frequent and regular contact with the Commission, France and Germany to take forward European energy liberalisation objectives.

I last met Loyola de Palacio, Vice President of the Commission, in Norway in February when we discussed this topic.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is next meeting Loyola de Palacio, to discuss this topic on 7 March.

Electronics Manufacturers:

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of average profit margin in the last five years of *(a)* audio-visual equipment manufacturers and *(b)* consumer electronics manufacturers. [38126]

Mr. Wilson: Information on profit margins at industry level is not available.

Mr. Sayeed To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the contribution to gross domestic product of *(a)* audio-visual equipment manufacturers and *(b)* consumer electronics manufacturers. [38127]

Mr. Wilson: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The nearest equivalent to audio-visual equipment manufacture within the Standard Industrial Classification is SIC 32.3 (Manufacture of television and radio receivers, sound or video recording or reproducing apparatus and associated goods). This industry is estimated by ONS to have contributed 0.1 per cent. of economic activity (in terms of Gross Value Added at basic prices) in 1999, the latest year for which data are available.

It is not possible to distinguish between manufacture for the consumer and business markets of many electronics products within the Standard Industrial Classification.

Croes Wind Power Station

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason she decided not to hold a public inquiry into the proposed CEFU Croes wind power station in Cardiganshire; and how many applications of similar size have been put before her. [38386]

Mr. Wilson: As with any application under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, Ministers have to weigh up all aspects of an application consider all representations—both for and against—and come to a conclusion. In the case of the Cefn Croes application it was concluded that there was sufficient information to approve the application in principle without sending it to public inquiry.

There has been one other application for a 60 megawatt windfarm at Humble Hill, Kielder, Northumberland. It was decided on 29 March 2001 that consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 could not be given. Copies of the Press Notice and decision letter were placed in the Libraries of the House.

Exports

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list British exports as a percentage of total exports for each of the nations to whom Britain exports in each year from 1972. [38445]

Mr. Wilson: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Annual figures on UK exports of goods, to each country, are published by HM Customs and Excise in Business Monitor OTSA, Overseas Trade Statistics.

Statistics on exports of goods to major trading partners, for ten years at a time, are also available from the Annual Abstract of Statistics, published by the Office for National Statistics.

Both publications may be obtained from the Libraries of the House.

Employment Tribunals Service

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Employment Tribunals Service is permitted to exercise greater flexibility in the application of the Tribunal rules of Procedure when the respondent is a Government agency. [38784]

Alan Johnson: The Employment Tribunals Service does not exercise greater flexibility in the application of the Tribunal Rules of procedure when the respondent is a Government agency.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Employment Tribunals Service adhered to rules two and three of the rules of procedure of the Employment Tribunals Service in relation to applications lodged with the Birmingham Employment Tribunal on behalf of staff employed at HM Prison, Blackenhurst. [38785]

Alan Johnson: Yes.

Small Businesses

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the contribution small construction companies provide to *(a)* Government departments and *(b)* the economy as a whole. [38687]

Mr Wilson [*holding answer 28 February 2002*]:

(a) Government Departments

Data on the contribution of small construction companies to Government Departments are not held centrally.

(b) the economy as a whole

In 2000 small construction companies were responsible for £36.8 billion of construction (£30.7 billion in 1995 prices). This represents about 2¾ percent. of GDP. Figures for 2001 are yet to be published.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of *(a)* the economic benefits of procuring from smaller firms and *(b)* the improved value for money to be achieved by increasing competition in construction projects (i) within Government Departments and (ii) outside. [38686]

Mr. Wilson [*holding answer 28 February 2002*]: The Government have made no assessment of either

(a) the economic benefits of procuring from smaller firms or

(b) the improved value for money to be achieved by increasing competition in construction projects within Government Departments.

Over the past year the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) has undertaken research to identify the barriers to effective competition in the Government marketplace. Part of this research looked at the issues facing small firms, but not specifically in the construction sector. OGC and the Small Business Service carried out this work jointly. A range of public sector organisations were asked for their views on the impact of their procurement strategy and practice on small firms. The organisations highlighted the potential benefits of dealing with small firms: they can often bring innovation, responsiveness, flexibility and quality of service to Government work. These are all important elements of value for money.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ministerial Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30183]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report* column 707W.

Victim Support

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the recent projects inspired by the victims' charter which have been put into place which give victims the opportunity to explain how crime has affected them. [37070]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There is one such project, namely, the victim personal statement scheme—which is now a national scheme.

A key standard in the 1996 victim's charter was that victims of crime should be given the chance to say how the crime had affected them. Pilot projects to test how this might be done led to the introduction nationally of the new victim personal statement scheme with effect from 1 October 2001.

The scheme provides a chance for victims to say how the crime has affected them, and to include anything else they wish to add. The victim personal statement then becomes part of the case papers, and will be seen by all criminal justice personnel subsequently dealing with the case.

Fuller details of the scheme and accompanying documentation are given in Home Office Circular 35/2001 of 14 August 2001, available on the Home Office website (http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk). The scheme is being evaluated during 2002.

Anti-Terrorist Powers

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people, within his anti-terrorist powers, have been *(a)* held in detention, *(b)* appealed against this and *(c)* used the opportunity of judicial review; and if he will make a statement. [36628]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Nine foreign nationals have so far been detained using powers in Part IV of the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act. Of those detained one has left the United Kingdom voluntarily.

Eight of those originally detained have lodged appeals. The ninth detainee has not lodged an appeal to date.

None of those held have sought leave to move for judicial review.

Prison Visits (Clerics)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on what vetting procedures are carried out on clerics visiting jails in England and Wales to provide support and spiritual advice to prisoners. [37712]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The Prison Service carries out checks to establish a job applicant's or worker's identity, reliability, integrity, eligibility and that there is no apparent threat to security. These arrangements apply to the appointment of ministers of religion.

Tetra Masts

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average annual payment was to landowners for the siting of Tetra masts in the last three years. [37744]

Mr. John Denham: The Home Office does not make payments to landowners for the siting of Terrestrial Trunked Radio System (Tetra) masts. The location of the sites, and agreements with site owners, are the responsibility of Tetra network operators. For the Airwave service this is Airwave mm02, (formerly British Telecom Airwave). Payments for the use of sites are a commercial matter between the network operator and the site owners.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent evaluation has been made of the health risks associated with Tetra masts. [37745]

Mr. Denham: In early 2001, the Home Office commissioned a report from the National Radiological Protection Board on the potential health risks from Terrestrial Trunked Radio System (Tetra) technology.

The report concluded that it was unlikely that the special features of Tetra posed a hazard to health, and made recommendations for further research in the remaining areas of uncertainty. The Home Office has accepted the report and is taking forward all its recommendations in a comprehensive programme of work which is already well underway. This includes a large study commissioned by the Home Office from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory on the possible effects of Tetra signals on cell biology. The initial results of this work are expected by April, 2002.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in each police authority area. [37626]

Mr Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member, for the Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 48W.

Entitlement Card

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with private companies on the feasibility of introducing an entitlement card for UK citizens; and if he will make a statement. [37671]

Angela Eagle: My officials have met with trade associations representing the financial services, retail and computer software and services industries. In the context of discussions with Post Office Ltd, officials have also met representatives of N M Rothschild & Sons who invited the ALCO Partnership to one meeting. No discussions have been held on the feasibility of an entitlement card scheme with individual private companies. However, the Association for Payment Clearing Services (APACS) (Administration) Ltd, which is a non-profit private company owned and financed by the United Kingdom's major financial institutions, was present at the discussions with the financial services industry. Also a number of Information Technology companies were present at the meeting with that industry group, the contents of which was reported to its very wide membership.

Prisoners (Self-Harm)

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* attempted hangings and *(b)* other acts of deliberate self-harm were recorded in prisons in England and Wales in the last two years. [37790]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* There have been 2,986 attempted hangings and 9,700 other acts of self-harm in prisons during the last two years as set out in the table.

Table showing the number of attempted hangings and other acts of deliberate self-harm in prisons in England and Wales in the last two years

Year	*Attempted hanging*	*Other acts of deliberate self-harm*	*Total*
2000	1,395 (27 per cent.)	3,826 (73 per cent.)	5,221
2001	1,591 (21 per cent.)	5,874 (79 per cent.)	7,465

A downward trend in the reduction of self-harm, including attempted hangings, is being sought within the Prison Services holistic three-year safer custody programme. Key elements of the programme include better identification and case management by trained staff of prisoners at risk; the establishment of mental health in-reach teams; and improved physical environments within prisons.

Police Authorities (Research)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were employed in a research capacity in each police authority in each year since the inception of the CPS as a percentage of *(a)* turnover and *(b)* the number of people employed. [37778]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The information requested is not collected. The deployment of resources within a police force is a matter for individual Chief Officers of Police.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Broadspring Wood, (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement concerning the proposed sale of Broadspring wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire by the Highways Agency; [36090]

(2) what steps *(a)* the Highways Agency and *(b)* his Department have taken to stop (i) the dumping of spoil materials, (ii) the creation of bunds and a car park area and (iii) the introduction of pre-fabricated buildings in Broadspring wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire, [36093]

(3) when the Highways Agency learned that the Uxbridge gun club was *(a)* bringing spoil material into Broadspring wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire and *(b)* creating car parking areas and bunds, therein; [36091]

(4) when the decision was taken by the Highways Agency to sell Broadspring wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire, to the Uxbridge gun club. [36092]

Mr. Jamieson: The decision was taken by the Highways Agency to sell Broadspring Wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire to the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club on 16 August 2001 following professional advice and opinion on its status, condition and potential. The Club had operating on the land under Licence since 1 June 2000. There were no concerns raised about their activities.

The Highways Agency learned that the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club were bringing spoil material into Broadspring Wood, Denham Buckinghamshire and were creating car parking areas and bunds in November 2001.

A letter was sent to the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club on 21 November 2001 requesting that no further activity of any sort was carried out on site. A letter was also sent from our solicitors on 23 November 2001 addressed to the solicitor acting for the Rifle Club requesting that the depositing or permitting to be deposited of waste material on the site and access ways leading to it be stopped immediately. A second letter was sent by the Highways Agency on 1 February 2002 pointing out that we were aware that the Rifle Club had changed the use of the land by the inclusion of bunding on the land and using it as a combat area, that this should stop and the Rifle Club should use the land as set out in their licence. The Highways Agency was unaware of the introduction of pre-fabricated buildings in Broadspring Wood until now. The Highways Agency have arranged for their Managing Agent to urgently inspect the land and provide a report.

The sale of this land from the Highways Agency to the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club was agreed in good faith last summer. However, following these most recent events officials in the Highways Agency are conducting a full review of the case.

Tramway Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to encourage the development of a tramway service within the Greater London area. [38201]

Ms Keeble: The Government's Ten Year Plan for Transport envisages at least two tram or guided bus schemes in London. However, this is a matter for the Mayor of London and Transport for London. I understand that Transport for London (TfL) is considering four new "intermediate mode schemes", so called because they are neither bus nor rail but share some characteristics of both. They are: Cross-River Transit; Uxbridge Road Transit; Greenwich Waterfront Transit; and East London Transit.

TfL has made no decision yet on whether to take any of these forward. TfL's Business Plan only provides for one to be taken forward as a tram scheme. TfL will need to review their priorities and take firm decisions on the four proposals in the light of the forthcoming Spending Review settlement.

State Aid Funding

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many applications for state aid funding have been refused in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [38054]

Ms Keeble: Without doing an exhaustive search of Departmental records, I am aware of only one occasion in the last three years on which the European Commission withheld approval for state aid in the field of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions or its predecessor the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (excluding environment functions transferred to DEFRA). This was the state aid relating to the Partnership Investment Programme.

Partnership Investment Programme

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to offer alternative funding to local authorities which had planned to use the Partnership Investment Programme. [38053]

Ms Keeble: The Partnership Investment Programme was only available for use by English Partnerships and has never been available to local authorities.

Following its closure in 1999, significant extra resources were made available to RDAs to help compensate for the loss of PIP: £60 million in 2000–01, rising to £150 million in 2001–02; thereafter, land and property funding would form part of a new single RDA economic development and regeneration budget, with increases of £350 million in 2002–03 and £500 million in 2003–04.

In addition, we have introduced five new land and property regeneration schemes which partially replace PIP. The new schemes will enable RDAs and English Partnerships to support a wide range of land and property regeneration projects, including projects which can be taken forward in partnership with the private sector.

Travel Methods

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of journeys were made by *(a)* public transport, *(b)* bicycle and *(c)* on foot as the main method of travel in (i) St Helens, South, (ii) the North West and (iii) England in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [38271]

Ms Keeble: The latest available data relate to the three-year period 1998–2000. The National Travel Survey, from which estimates are derived, does not allow disaggregation of data below county level. At county level, estimates for bicycle use are based on very small numbers and should be regarded with caution.

The proportion of journeys made by (a) public transport, (b) bicycles and (c) on foot as the main method of travel for residents of (i) Merseyside, (ii) the north-west and (iii) England are given in the table:

1998–2000

	Merseyside	*North West and Merseyside*	*England*
Public Transport	13	10	9
Bicycle	1	1	2
Foot	25	24	26

Departmental Minutes

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library copies of departmental minutes recording conversations between Sir Richard Mottram and Mr Martin Sixsmith. [38449]

Mr. Byers: Under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it is not the practice to disclose details of internal meetings. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made by Sir Richard Mottram, the permanent secretary of my Department, on Monday 25 February, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the departmental minutes for which Sir Richard Mottram was responsible since he became permanent secretary of the Department. [38446]

Mr. Byers: It is not the usual practice to disclose details of internal communications and meetings in accordance with Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Departmental Development

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the department; and if he will make a statement. [38713]

Ms Keeble: The Department does not maintain a record of cases where it has relied on the special urgency provisions set out in Circular 18/84. Development by the Department generally has to go through a tendering procedure; in these circumstances it is unlikely that the Department would have to use the special urgency provisions.

Shoreham Port Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list *(a)* members of the Shoreham Port Authority appointed in the last 30 years, *(b)* their dates of appointment and length of office and *(c)* the nominating bodies where appropriate. [39240]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]*: The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Hackney Carriage Licences

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the criteria local authorities should consider when assessing the application for a Hackney carriage licence. [39488]

Ms Keeble: A hackney carriage must have fewer than nine passenger seats; any further criteria for determining whether a vehicle is suitable for licensing as a hackney carriage are formulated by individual local licensing authorities.

Learner Drivers

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to consult on measures to improve the safety of novice drivers. [40054]

Mr. Jamieson: As stated in the Government's Road Safety Strategy *Tomorrow's Roads—Safer for Everyone*, we want to ensure that new drivers have a broader and more extensive experience of driving conditions before they take the practical driving test. We have therefore published today a consultation document *Introducing a More Structured Approach to Learning to Drive*. This sets out a wide range of options for improving the safety of newly qualified drivers. Comments have been requested by 7 June 2002. All the views received will be considered carefully before any decisions are taken on the way forward.

Copies of the document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Pensioner Bus Passes

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he plans to introduce a nationwide pensioner bus pass. [39690]

Ms Keeble: We have no immediate plans to pursue such a scheme.

Historic Cities

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of urban capacity studies on housing development and the character of historic cities. [39372]

Ms Keeble: Local planning authorities are responsible for undertaking the urban housing capacity studies required by Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 *Housing* (PPG3). We expect these studies to lead to updated development plans that given priority to reusing brownfields for new housing in preference to greenfields. We have research underway to consider the implementation of PPG3 and this will report the progress made by local authorities in carrying out urban housing capacity studies. The research is considering the influence of capacity studies on housing development but will not report specifically on their impact on the character of historic cities.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Environment Council

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on *(a)* matters discussed and *(b)* decisions taken at the European Union Environment Council on 29 to 30 October, indicating on which matters votes were taken and how, in such instances, the United Kingdom voted. [14272]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 94W.

End of Life Vehicle Directive

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she has taken with regard to the European End of Life Vehicle Directive; and if she will make a statement. [31586]

Mr. Meacher: The EC Directive on End of Life Vehicles (ELV) passed into European law in October 2000 and requires member states to transpose the Directive into national legislation by 21 April 2002. The Department for Trade and Industry leads on the implementation of the majority of the Directive, however my Department leads on the implementation of improved treatment facility standards under Article 6 and Annex I of the Directive. An initial Consultation paper was issued last year, and a further paper is expected to be issued shortly.

Refrigerators and Freezers

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library details of information and advice given by her Department to consumers about purchasing refrigerators and freezers from May 2001 to date. [34840]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Copies of the advice leaflet for householders were placed in the Libraries of both houses on publication in December 2001. The leaflet was produced by DEFRA, DTI and the Environment Agency.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many occasions in 2000 and 2001 UKREP were requested to establish the understanding of other EU states on its applicability of EU Regulation 2037/2000 to matters connected with the disposal of refrigerators and freezer insulating materials. [38867]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* My officials and those from EU Member States met regularly during 2000 and 2001 to discuss EC Regulation 2037/20000 at meetings of the Management Committee on the implementation of the Regulation. Officials also contacted colleagues in other Member States informally regarding the issue of implementation. The Department therefore did not request UKREP to take up this matter separately.

Fly Ash

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what procedures are in place to ensure regulation of the disposal of fly ash from UK incinerators; and what the disposal routes for fly ash are from each operating municipal waste incinerator in the United Kingdom. [36393]

Mr. Meacher: Fly ash is incorporated into air pollution control residues which are special waste and subject to the Duty of Care and the Special Wastes Regulations. Currently, all fly ash from municipal solid waste incinerators is sent to sites licensed for special waste.

The Environment Agency is carrying out a thorough investigation into the solid residues from all MWIs. I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives a copy of their report when it is published, and that a copy is placed in the Library of the House.

CO_2 Emissions

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the change has been in CO_2 emissions in the UK in the past three years; and what estimates she has made of change in the next three years. [37384]

Mr. Meacher: UK CO_2 emissions expressed in million tonnes of Carbon (MtC) for the years 1997–2000 were 152.5, 153.2, 150.8 and 152.1 MtC respectively. The 2000 figure is provisional. Projections are made on a five year basis and the projected figure for CO_2 emissions in 2005 is 149.1 MtC.

Warm Front Grants

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what data she has collated on the number of householders in privately rented accommodation who have been unable to obtain warm front grants because they have not been able to obtain the landlord's permission for works to be carried out; and in how many of these cases refusal to grant permission has resulted from an unwillingness on the part of the landlord to participate in a leasing agreement related to the installation of a central heating system. [37739]

Mr. Meacher: Work in private sector landlords' properties is only undertaken once a no rent rise agreement is in place. This requirement was introduced following consultation on the proposed scheme in 1999. Many groups representing tenants and older people expressed concern that some private sector landlords would use the grant-funded improvements to justify an increase in rent. Agreements are time-limited to either one year for insulation measures only or two years where heating measures are installed.

In the period June 2000 to January 2002 some 32,400 private sector landlords agreed to the no rent rise agreement. This represents about 5 per cent. of all applications accepted under the scheme.

In the same period, 8,400 tenants had their applications turned down by the landlord. The precise reasons in each case are not known, but we are now investigating these. While there has been very little concern expressed on this issue, we do continue to keep it under review.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average amount of a Warm Front plus grant has been. [37641]

Mr. Meacher: The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) in England is now marketed as the Warm Front Team. The scheme was launched on 1 June 2000 and provides two levels of financial assistance for the installation of insulation and heating measures dependent upon the needs of the householder and the property type:

HEES—£1,500 for low income households with children under 16, disabled persons or suffering long-term sickness on a qualifying benefit; and

HEES Plus—£2,500 for over-60s on an income-related benefit.

Between June 2000 and January 2002 the average HEES Plus grant was £664.

Waste Disposal

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people were convicted of fly tipping in 2001; and what sentences were imposed. [37722]

Mr. Meacher: Both local authorities and the Environment Agency may prosecute for fly tipping offences. The Environment Agency keeps records of breaches to section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Until December 2001, this did not single out fly tipping offences from other instances of illegally depositing controlled waste on land. This situation changed in December 2001 and records now show whether an incident involves fly tipping. Between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2001 the total number of Environment Agency prosecutions under section 33 of the 1990 Act were 234. Further information is as follows:

Individuals prosecuted: 196

Organisations prosecuted: 38

Range of Fines: £30—£8,000

Custodial Terms: four, ranging from one to six months

Conditional Discharges: 25, ranging from one to two years

Community Service: six, ranging from 80 to 220 hours

Requirement to pay compensation: four instances, with amounts ranging from £237 to £750

No central register is kept of local authorities' prosecutions.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what costs were incurred in setting up the Department's CHP Club; and what its operational costs were in the financial year 2000–01. [37709]

Mr. Meacher: The CHP Club provides a one-stop shop for independent information and guidance for potential and new users on the design, implementation, and operation of CHP schemes. Responsibility for the management of the Government's Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme including the CHP Club will soon be passed to The Carbon Trust. The total cost of setting up and operating the CHP Club in 2000–02 was around £200,000.

Rights of Way Orders

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to consult on proposed rules for inquiries and hearings into rights of way orders coming to her for confirmation. [40646]

Mr. Michael: We are today publishing our proposals for procedure rules for rights of way inquiries and hearings, on which we are inviting views by 31 May 2002. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Parish Councils

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what appeal mechanism exists to change the categorisation of parish councils listed as barely active by the Countryside Agency. [39553]

Mr. Michael: The work being undertaken by the Countryside Agency towards a national indicator of community vibrancy is not a categorisation of parish councils or their effectiveness. The components of the indicator are proxy measures of the opportunities for members of a community to contribute to community activities collected as part of the Agency's Rural Services Survey. An appeals mechanism is therefore not appropriate.

For further details on the community vibrancy indicator and its components, I refer to the hon. Member to my answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 24 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 1033W and to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 652W.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* visits, *(b)* telephone calls and *(c)* items of correspondence her officials or officials from the Countryside Agency have sent to (i) Ellesmere rural, (ii) Grinshill, (iii) Hodnet, (iv) Hordley, (v) Petton and (vi) Whitchurch urban parish councils before categorising them as barely active. [39557]

Mr. Michael: The Countryside Agency used information for its community vibrancy indicator which was gathered as part of its Rural Services Survey. As part of the survey each rural parish was sent a questionnaire form and instructions on how to complete it and the telephone number of the "helpline" for assistance in filling in the questionnaire. If no response was received by early December 2000, two reminders were sent (one in mid December 2000 and one in mid January 2001).

The information was gathered as the first stage of work in progress towards the development of a national indicator. I am now aware of any other contact that either the Department or the Countryside Agency has had with the listed parishes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Drew: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will publish the lists of the payment of legal aid to *(a)* solicitors, *(b)* barristers and *(c)* legal practices on an annual basis. [39436]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to publish such a list. Records of legal aid payments are not held in a suitable format which would facilitate the production of a list of practitioners' earnings.

Prosecutions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Solicitor-General in how many cases referred to the DPP in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years a decision was made not to prosecute; and in how many cases he contacted the *(a)* victims and *(b)* relatives of the victim. [38400]

The Solicitor-General: Information held by the Department of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland indicates that directions for no prosecution issued as follows:

Year	*Persons reported for consideration of prosecution*	*Persons in respect of whom no prosecution was directed*
1999	10,676	3,225 (30 per cent.)
2000	10,504	3,166 (30 per cent.)
2001	10,315	3,110 (30 per cent.)

The Department does not hold information in regard to contact with victims on their relatives in individual cases. The policy of the Department is that it will consider the proper interests of victims and witnesses at every stage of the criminal process.

Prosecutions (Conduct)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what *(a)* internal and *(b)* external reviews have been conducted on the conduct of prosecutions, on what dates and by whom in the last three years. [35950]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* Each prosecuting authority has in place systems that support performance reviews generally, and case specific reviews when appropriate. HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has a rolling programme of inspections covering the performance of all CPS Areas over a two-year period, and it undertakes thematic reviews of areas of prosecution work three or four times a year. With effect from 1 April it will assume responsibility for the inspection of Customs & Excise prosecutions.

There is no central log maintained of individual internal and external reviews of the conduct of the prosecution by prosecuting authorities operating within the jurisdiction of England and Wales. Speedy collection and provision of this information could not be undertaken without disproportionate cost.

Traffic Accidents

Mr. Gray: To ask the Solicitor-General (1) what discussions she has had with the Inspectorate of the Crown Prosecution Service about the number of Crown Court prosecutions for death by dangerous driving. [38532]

(2) when she intends to publish the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate's report on sentencing policy with regard to road traffic accidents. [38533]

The Solicitor-General: HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate is at present in the closing phases of a thematic review of the advice relating to, and the prosecution of, road traffic offences involving fatalities in England and Wales. The purpose of the inspection is to analyse and assess the quality of advice to police, decision-making, case preparation and presentation by the CPS in relation to those cases. It has also examined the extent, adequacy and consistency of communications and assistance provided by the CPS to relatives of the victims and witnesses in the cases. However, it does not extend to sentencing policy which is outside the remit of the Inspectorate.

The Chief Inspector has kept me and the Attorney General informed of the progress of the inspection but we have had no other discussions about prosecutions for death by dangerous driving.

The Chief Inspector expects to publish the report in June.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on her Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps she is taking to reduce this number; and if she will make a statement. [35898]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Under the Working Time Regulations the Department is required to:

inform employees that they cannot be forced to work for more than 48 hours a week on average over a 17-week period and that they can only opt out of the limit by signing a written agreement;

keep opt out records for two years;

check how much time each employee spends working and monitor those close to the working limit;

keep records of night workers and offer regular health assessments; and

check that the Department has complied with the new regulations on night work, time off, rest breaks and paid annual leave.

In line with these responsibilities, staff were informed that there is no obligation to work more than 48 hours per week over a 17-week period but they can volunteer to do so by signing a written agreement. We instructed managers that they must avoid imposing workloads or setting deadlines that oblige their staff to work excessive hours unless it is necessary to meet operational need. In addition, we required local managers to check on staff who may work close to the limit and make arrangements to reduce hours wherever possible.

Copies of all opt out agreements are kept for two years and currently cover two per cent. of the workforce. We also confirmed that employee terms and conditions already covered the requirements in the regulations relating to night work, time off, rest breaks and paid annual leave. The percentage of staff opting out is reviewed regularly to ensure that the number required to work in excess of the limit is kept to the absolute minimum.

Prisoners (Distance Learning)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many prisoners undertook distance learning courses, including Open University courses, in the last 12 months for which figures are available; how many of these courses were paid for *(a)* at their own expense and *(b)* through a charitable trust or person; and if he will make a statement. [37679]

John Healey: Information on the number of prisoners undertaking distance learning courses is not available. The number of prisoners in the first year of an undergraduate course at the Open University in 2000–01 in England and Wales was 144, whilst the number registered for Open University courses at all levels is 398. It is not possible to give an accurate breakdown on the numbers of courses that are self-financed or funded through a charitable trust or person; however, upwards of 950 distance learning courses were funded or part funded by charitable bodies last year.

Maintained Primary Schools

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of pupils were in maintained primary school classes of 31 or more in each year from 1997 for (i) East Sussex Local Education Authority, (ii) the South-East region and (iii) England. [37909]

John Healey: The data requested are shown in the table:

Number and percentage of pupils in one teacher classes of 31 or more in Maintained Primary Schools[1]

Position in January each year

	East Sussex Local Education Authority		*South East Government Office Region*		*England*	
	Number of pupils in classes of 31 or more	*% of pupils in classes of 31 or more*	*Number of pupils in classes of 31 or more*	*% of pupils in classes of 31 or more*	*Number of pupils in classes of 31 or more*	*% of pupils in classes of 31 or more*
2001	12,687	36.0	132,487	21.5	848,961	21.1
2000	13,960	40.1	172,262	27.7	1,071,720	26.5
1999	18,621	50.8	210,761	35.6	1,278,607	31.5
1998	17,511	49.1	219,040	35.1	1,411,366	34.8
1997	23,330	45.7	205,178	33.3	1,344,231	33.4

Source:

Annual Schools' Census.

[1] Includes middle deemed primary schools.

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 555W, on the Social Exclusion Unit, what steps have been taken to train Connexions workers in child and adolescent mental health. [39779]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: It is very important that young people with mental health problems are identified quickly and referred to the specialist services that they need. Connexions personal advisers are not intended to be specialists in the area of mental health but they are being trained to identify behaviours in young people that might indicate the need for support from a specialist. To date over 1,900 Personal Advisers have either completed or are currently undertaking Connexions training.

SCOTLAND

Asylum Centre (Edinburgh)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with ministers and officials of the Scottish Executive about the proposed asylum centre near Edinburgh. [39671]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office has regular contacts with the Minister for Social Justice about asylum seeker issues, including the latest Home Office proposals about the development of new centres.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to meet the Home Secretary to discuss his plans for an asylum seekers' centre near Edinburgh. [39688]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department is in regular contact with Lord Rooker, Home Office Minister for immigration and nationality matters, to discuss a range of issues, including those affecting asylum seekers.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she first learned of plans to build an asylum seekers' centre near Edinburgh; and what her policy is on the construction of the centre. [39673]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department keeps in regular touch with the Home Office on asylum seeker and other relevant policy issues. The former RAF Turnhouse site is one of a number of potential areas for development and will be subject to detailed consultation with relevant interests.

PRIME MINISTER

LNM Holdings

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements are in place to ensure that officials advising him on *(a)* LNM's purchase of Sidex and *(b)* other overseas investments by UK-based companies on which he is considering making representations are (i) not influenced by and (ii) not aware of political donations by persons connected with such companies. [39364]

The Prime Minister: All advice is given in accordance with the Civil Service Code and the Ministerial Code.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister in what way writing to the Romanian Government was calculated to assist LNM Holdings to obtain the contract to purchase Sidex. [39366]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him and the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 610-12W.

Press Officers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those press officers who reported to his officialpress spokesman and have ceased to hold office since May 1977, identifying those who have resigned due to *(a)* reaching retirement age and *(b)* completion of a predetermined term of office. [39365]

The Prime Minister: It is not our policy to comment on individuals.

Business Contacts

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Prime Minister on what occasion he has written to the Czech Government about the possible award of contracts to companies with British connections in the last five years. [39670]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Members for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610-11W.

Hammond Inquiry Review

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister when he intends to publish Sir Anthony Hammond's review of the conclusions of the 2001 Review of the circumstances surrounding an application for naturalisation by Mr. S. P. Hinduja in 1998. [40587]

The Prime Minister: I am publishing Sir Anthony Hammond's review today. I am most grateful to Sir Anthony Hammond for all his work.

Sir Anthony Hammond remains satisfied that nothing improper has occurred in relation to the application for naturalisation by Mr. S. P. Hinduja. He also remains of the view that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) behaved entirely properly throughout.

I have placed a copy of the report in the Libraries of both Houses. Copies are available from the Vote Office.

HEALTH

District and Community Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district and community nurses there are per head of population in each of the health authority areas in England and Wales. [24345]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified community and district nursing staff within each health authority area in England and rate per 100,000 population as at 30 September 2001

headcount

			Of which	
	All Community Nurses	*Number per 100,000 population*	*District Nurses*	*Number per 100,000 population*
Northern & Yorkshire				
Bradford HA	890	180	120	20
Calderdale & Kirklees HA	950	160	120	20
County Durham & Darlington HA	700	120	160	30
East Riding & Hull HA	1,180	210	330	60
Gateshead & Tyneside HA	460	130	80	20
Leeds HA	870	120	100	10
Newcastle & North Tyneside HA	640	140	120	30
North Cumbria HA	390	120	100	30
North Yorkshire HA	820	110	180	20
Northumberland HA	450	150	100	30
Sunderland HA	540	190	80	30
Tees HA	950	170	150	30
Wakefield HA	520	160	70	20
Trent				
Barnsley HA	310	140	40	20
Doncaster HA	540	180	100	30
Leicestershire HA	1,220	130	110	10
Lincolnshire HA	840	130	160	30
North Derbyshire HA	520	140	100	30
North Nottinghamshire HA	800	210	40	10
Nottingham HA	800	130	110	20
Rotherham HA	370	140	60	20
Sheffield HA	630	120	80	20
South Humber HA	360	120	150	50
Southern Derbyshire HA	790	140	300	50
West Midlands				
Birmingham HA	1,520	150	370	40
Coventry HA	440	150	50	20
Dudley HA	340	110	80	30
Herefordshire HA	250	150	50	30
North Staffordshire HA	960	200	140	30
Sandwell HA	370	130	70	30
Shropshire HA	580	130	130	30

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified community and district nursing staff within each health authority area in England and rate per 100,000 population as at 30 September 2001

headcount

			Of which	
	All Community Nurses	*Number per 100,000 population*	*District Nurses*	*Number per 100,000 population*
Solihull HA	220	110	70	40
South Staffordshire HA	900	150	140	20
Walsall HA	450	170	120	40
Warwickshire HA	700	140	200	40
Wolverhampton HA	340	140	120	50
Worcestershire HA	790	150	110	20
North West				
Bury & Rochdale HA	620	160	140	30
East Lancashire HA	890	170	190	40
Liverpool HA	720	160	150	30
Manchester HA	700	160	140	30
Morecambe Bay HA	670	220	80	30
North Cheshire HA	820	260	150	50
North West Lancashire HA	790	170	100	20
Salford & Trafford HA	620	140	120	30
Sefton HA	310	110	70	20
South Cheshire HA	720	110	180	30
South Lancashire HA	460	150	90	30
St Helens & Knowsley HA	430	130	50	10
Stockport HA	400	140	150	50
West Pennine HA	550	120	130	30
Wigan and Bolton HA	900	150	160	30
Wirral HA	550	170	60	20
Eastern				
Bedfordshire HA	740	130	120	20
Cambridgeshire HA	990	140	170	20
Hertfordshire HA	1,710	160	330	30
Norfolk HA	870	110	240	30
North Essex HA	1,130	120	270	30
South Essex HA	880	120	270	40
Suffolk HA	970	140	140	20
London				
Barking & Havering HA	360	90	60	10
Barnet Enfield & Haringey HA	930	110	230	30
Bexley Bromley & Greenwich HA	1,100	150	240	30
Brent & Harrow HA	280	60	60	10
Camden & Islington HA	490	130	30	10
Croydon HA	460	140	100	30
Ealing Hammersmith & Hounslow HA	710	100	170	20
East London & City HA	840	130	120	20
Hillingdon HA	380	150	90	30
Kensington Chelsea & Westminster HA	1,290	300	170	40
Kingston & Richmond HA	270	80	80	20
Lambeth Southwark & Lewisham HA	1,190	160	350	50
Merton Sutton & Wandsworth HA	1,150	180	160	20
Redbridge & Waltham Forest HA	480	110	100	20
South East				
Berkshire HA	1,280	160	310	40
Buckinghamshire HA	1,010	150	180	30
East Kent HA	750	120	280	40
East Surrey HA	300	70	30	10
East Sussex, Brighton & Hove HA	1,300	170	240	30
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & South East Hampshire HA	970	140	120	20
North & Mid Hampshire HA	300	50	90	20
Northamptonshire HA	700	110	190	30
Oxfordshire HA	730	120	190	30
Southampton & South West Hampshire HA	610	110	100	20
West Kent HA	1,070	110	220	20
West Surrey HA	1,070	160	210	30
West Sussex HA	770	100	180	20
South West				
Avon HA	1,220	120	180	20
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly HA	680	140	60	10

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified community and district nursing staff within each health authority area in England and rate per 100,000 population as at 30 September 2001

headcount

		Of which		
	All Community Nurses	*Number per 100,000 population*	*District Nurses*	*Number per 100,000 population*
Dorset HA	840	120	170	20
Gloucestershire HA	840	150	150	30
North & East Devon HA	620	130	190	40
Somerset HA	490	100	110	20
South & West Devon HA	860	140	110	20
Wiltshire HA	580	90	120	20

Notes: Community nurses are qualified nurses working in community psychiatry, community learning difficulties and community services. Practice nurses are not included within the definition.

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten

Figures exclude agency staff

Population estimates for 2000 based on 1991 data

Source:

Department of Health non-medical workforce census

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35704]

Ms Blears: According to our records there have been no such events.

Delayed Discharges

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the variations that exist in delayed discharges between districts served by the same NHS acute hospital trust. [33616]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Any variation in management of delayed discharges from an acute hospital should be managed through the local capacity planning group, which includes representatives of the acute trust, primary care trusts and social services.

Repair and Maintenance

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the outstanding repair and maintenance backlog figures were in each health authority in each of the last two years. [36077]

Mr. Hutton: Figures collected which generally reflect the cost of outstanding repair and maintenance of hospitals is known as the "cost to achieve Estatecode condition B". In relation to a building's physical condition this is the condition whereby the property is considered to be physically sound, operationally safe and exhibits only minor deterioration.

The table shows costs to achieve Estatecode condition B (physical condition) for the year 1999–2000, grouped into each health authority in England, in column 1. Similar costs for the year 2000–01 in column 2 are still in the process of collection and validation. Where figures have been received they have been included, gaps having been filled with extrapolated estimates based on the previous year's return.

Special Health Authorities (SHA), figures are only collected in connection with Special Hospitals and therefore exclude costs relating to all other SHA organisations (e.g. Family Health Services Appeal Authority, Commission for Health Improvement, NHS Information Authority).

Last year's returns (1999–2000) saw the total backlog reduce for the first time since 1994–95. Whilst this year has seen a small increase, backlog maintenance costs are holding relatively firm when taking into consideration that the collection of data from Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) has probably introduced a number of properties whose backlog maintenance costs were not identified in previous returns. The continuation of major capital investment in new buildings, and improvements to existing buildings, should see the level of backlog maintenance costs begin to fall again over the coming years.

Health Authority	*Cost to Achieve Estate Code Condition B 1999–2000 £*	*Cost to Achieve Estate Code Condition B 2000–01 £*
Avon	57,879,000	57,628,261
Barking and Havering	28,934,000	30,681,170
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	46,206,000	37,795,400
Barnsley	2,110,000	4,071,200
Bedfordshire	12,804,000	10,896,116
Berkshire	74,205,000	75,519,900
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	70,395,000	35,365,766
Birmingham	172,926,000	180,511,622
Bradford	26,722,000	21,659,290
Brent and Harrow	29,783,000	33,178,000
Buckinghamshire	30,607,000	18,326,745
Bury and Rochdale	7,539,000	6,541,763
Calderdale and Kirklees	52,980,000	44,382,608
Cambridgeshire	33,866,000	36,816,585
Camden and Islington	79,819,000	78,892,959
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	13,279,000	21,470,477
County Durham	13,538,000	26,840,961
Coventry	74,391,000	72,291,500
Croydon	31,100,000	18,559,930
Doncaster	14,368,000	9,469,900
Dorset	10,203,000	67,739,932
Dudley	28,070,000	27,943,484
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	96,230,000	73,992,837
East Kent	11,517,000	24,042,500
East Lancashire	29,117,000	18,712,286

Health Authority	*Cost to Achieve Estate Code Condition B 1999–2000* £	*Cost to Achieve Estate Code Condition B 2000–01* £
East London and the City	113,466,000	104,846,918
East Riding	59,189,000	59,226,933
East Surrey	4,802,000	1,632,000
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	18,970,000	17,150,000
Gateshead and South Tyneside	7,228,000	7,471,259
Gloucestershire	15,704,000	12,671,520
Herefordshire	7,661,000	887,192
Hertfordshire	80,084,000	61,171,228
Hillingdon	6,030,000	33,536,960
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & South East Hampshire	9,422,000	17,661,800
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	63,276,000	41,970,834
Kingston and Richmond	8,667,000	2,133,609
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	126,844,000	164,393,813
Leeds	81,440,000	112,016,222
Leicestershire	81,519,000	64,954,896
Lincolnshire	32,449,000	29,257,000
Liverpool	27,675,000	35,316,000
Manchester	110,612,000	107,788,162
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	35,151,000	36,304,150
Morecambe Bay	11,700,000	17,267,500
Newcastle and North Tyneside	44,542,000	52,470,731
Norfolk	30,123,000	27,338,522
North and East Devon	8,103,000	13,433,305
North and Mid Hampshire	17,216,000	11,807,472
North Cheshire	3,201,000	3,143,000
North Cumbria	20,268,000	21,159,255
North Derbyshire	5,748,000	4,257,502
North Essex	38,632,000	24,968,083
North Nottinghamshire	13,211,000	17,325,450
North Staffordshire	40,824,000	44,686,500
North West Lancashire	33,003,000	38,845,982
North Yorkshire	23,115,000	26,805,119
Northamptonshire	21,652,000	21,750,184
Northumberland	15,984,000	12,311,689
Nottingham	71,949,000	82,289,904
Oxfordshire	52,084,000	41,178,872
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	63,457,000	5,635,200
Rotherham	4,306,000	3,777,250
Salford and Trafford	17,861,000	18,532,274
Sandwell	7,681,000	6,871,512
Sefton	10,679,000	20,222,200
Sheffield	27,142,000	26,287,325
Shropshire	35,628,000	55,049,705
Solihull	1,656,000	1,569,000
Somerset	10,211,000	13,517,000
South and West Devon	13,210,000	19,035,000
South Cheshire	5,266,000	19,296,792
South Essex	17,333,000	7,375,125
South Humber	5,073,000	3,545,000
South Lancashire	4,855,000	3,094,769
South Staffordshire	10,283,000	3,690,103
Southampton and South West Hampshire	24,627,000	28,236,352
Southern Derbyshire	4,565,000	7,363,376
Special Trusts	9,022,000	1,195,000
St. Helen's and Knowsley	8,095,000	25,142,950
Stockport	16,168,000	36,626,000
Suffolk	31,056,000	27,007,000
Sunderland	11,621,000	11,269,000
Tees	46,361,000	37,740,100
Wakefield	30,028,000	34,121,921
Walsall	7,402,000	9,302,460
Warwickshire	6,093,000	6,095,105
West Kent	78,524,000	39,441,283
West Pennine	10,207,000	8,816,506
West Surrey	21,332,000	59,427,019
West Sussex	50,027,000	41,010,825
Wigan and Bolton	12,343,000	15,774,727
Wiltshire	30,824,000	70,338,810
Wirral	8,877,000	10,546,724
Wolverhampton	18,831,000	16,203,500
Worcestershire	23,655,000	22,694,624
Total	3,074,431,000	3,119,417,304

Dentistry

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* percentage of the NHS budget and *(b)* amount of money invested in NHS dentists, broken down by health authority, in (i) 1979, (ii) 1992, (iii) 1997 and (iv) 2001 or the most recent available date was. [36391]

Ms Blears: Table 1 shows the total gross and net spend on general dental services and the proportion that national gross and net general dental service expenditure represented of national gross and net National Health Service expenditure for the years 1979–80, 1992–93, 1997–98 and 2000–02.

General Dental Services expenditure for 1979–80 is not available at health authority level.

Table 2 gives General Dental Service gross and net fees after deductions of patient charges by Family Health Service Authority in 1992–93.

In April 1996, FHSAs were replaced by health authorities. Table 3 gives General Dental Service gross and net fees by health authority in 1997–98 and 2000–01.

Fee expenditure covers dentists' claims for treating patients and patient registration payments. It excludes some other payments to dentists where breakdown by health authority is not collected centrally, for example reimbursement of practice rates.

Figures for all GDS payments are included in table 1 and this explains why the totals in table 1 are higher than those in tables 2 and 3.

Funding for community and hospital dental services is not collected centrally.

Personal dental services spend has also been omitted as PDS are a relatively recent innovation and data cannot be provided for all the years in question.

Table 1: Gross and net expenditure on general dental services: national totals and as a percentage of total gross and net National Health Service expenditure. Financial years 1979–80, 1992–93, 1997–98 and 2000–01

	1979–80		*1992–93*		*1997–98*		*2000–01*	
	Gross	*Net*	*Gross*	*Net*	*Gross*	*Net*	*Gross*	*Net*
Spend	£336 m	£267 m	£1,306 m	£911 m	£1,348 m	£959 m	£1,555 m	£1,102 m
Proportion	4.3%	3.6%	4.4%	3.3%	3.6%	2.8%	3.2%	2.5%

Table 2: General Dental Service: Gross and net fees paid by Family Health Service Authority in 1992–93 (England)

	1992–93	
FHSA	*Gross fees (£)*	*Net fees (£)*
Avon	25,689,470	16,818,209
Barking & Havering	9,547,621	6,378,739
Barnet	6,828,213	4,932,644
Barnsley	5,314,981	3,821,505
Bedfordshire	12,141,446	8,173,197
Berkshire	18,980,756	12,456,945
Birmingham	26,149,608	19,195,553
Bolton	6,505,716	4,494,973
Bradford	11,960,533	8,300,095
Brent & Harrow	13,187,497	9,760,239
Bromley	5,787,781	4,127,140
Buckinghamshire	15,299,511	10,143,357
Bury	5,089,635	3,620,804
Calderdale	5,641,094	3,773,835
Cambridgeshire	16,110,650	10,323,967
Camden & Islington	11,470,159	8,482,642
Cheshire	25,406,671	16,803,599
City & East London	15,632,632	12,687,312
Cleveland	14,916,635	10,935,077
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	11,962,609	8,277,274
Coventry	7,948,665	5,621,111
Croydon	10,142,496	7,007,275
Cumbria	12,187,230	7,907,774
Derbyshire	21,766,157	14,541,930
Devon	28,542,635	18,986,111
Doncaster	8,045,[illegible]80	5,779,074
Dorset	18,700,697	11,743,782
Dudley	7,374,850	4,775,060
Durham	13,438,473	9,731,117
Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow	18,965,515	13,815,881
East Sussex	20,959,274	13,778,567
Enfield & Haringey	12,010,814	9,081,691
Essex	38,622,162	25,942,200
Gateshead	4,668,650	3,384,106
Gloucestershire	14,450,340	9,146,825
Greenwich & Bexley	11,585,178	8,180,494
Hampshire	41,340,617	26,014,190
Hereford & Worcester	16,674,647	10,790,498
Hertfordshire	29,934,974	19,458,033
Hillingdon	6,962,919	4,439,277
Humberside	20,008,902	13,726,467
Isle of Wight	3,384,187	2,194,837
Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster	9,515,642	7,179,382
Kent	36,954,747	24,850,553
Kingston & Richmond	6,661,616	4,556,391
Kirklees	9,905,001	6,822,425
Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham	21,152,246	15,963,434
Lancashire	35,735,834	24,903,147
Leeds	20,736,896	14,212,809
Leicestershire	21,237,939	14,383,837
Lincolnshire	12,942,160	8,418,869
Liverpool	13,315,109	10,691,778
Manchester	14,874,341	11,605,637
Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth	15,884,061	11,050,940
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	7,045,196	5,120,019
Norfolk	19,856,212	12,985,307
North Tyneside	4,887,665	3,381,003
North Yorkshire	19,128,455	12,079,722
Northamptonshire	13,487,400	8,896,588
Northumberland	6,880,182	4,684,270
Nottinghamshire	25,672,988	17,510,978
Oldham	6,166,102	4,567,231
Oxfordshire	13,267,481	8,705,126
Redbridge & Waltham Forest	12,106,660	8,846,167
Rochdale	5,297,386	3,879,942
Rotherham	5,698,755	4,141,233
Salford	6,502,921	4,958,003
Salop	10,078,928	6,542,769
Sandwell	7,186,188	5,277,666
Sefton	7,971,166	5,539,600
Sheffield	14,369,320	10,015,997
Solihull	4,877,356	3,181,364

Table 2: General Dental Service: Gross and net fees paid by Family Health Service Authority in 1992–93 (England)

FHSA	1992–93 Gross fees (£)	Net fees (£)
Somerset	13,010,423	8,245,151
South Tyneside	3,581,896	2,700,910
St. Helens & Knowsley	8,432,364	6,486,495
Staffordshire	22,641,275	15,159,740
Stockport	8,463,678	5,522,368
Suffolk	17,485,963	11,102,144
Sunderland	6,681,971	5,013,098
Surrey	27,270,661	16,762,260
Tameside	5,833,725	4,246,137
Trafford	6,923,506	4,721,514
Wakefield	8,330,348	5,606,803
Walsall	6,045,629	4,328,271
Warwickshire	11,178,481	7,120,447
West Sussex	20,407,289	12,863,878
Wigan	8,247,193	5,928,956
Wiltshire	12,741,558	8,141,841
Wirral	8,911,593	6,289,215
Wolverhampton	5,546,426	3,880,566
England	1,242,467,909	848,463,391

Table 3: General Dental Service Gross and Net fees paid by Health Authority in 1996–97 and 2000–01 (England)

Health Authority	1997–98 Gross fees (£)	1997–98 Net fees (£)	2000–01 Gross fees (£)	2000–01 Net fees (£)
Avon	26,695,689	18,095,057	30,222,996	20,671,232
Barking and Havering	10,907,046	7,534,452	12,592,961	8,727,047
Barnet	7,178,206	5,628,409	9,594,294	7,577,431
Barnsley	5,896,790	4,121,866	6,726,175	4,579,009
Bedfordshire	12,596,585	8,690,993	14,301,611	9,501,398
Berkshire	17,968,153	12,723,585	19,433,485	13,502,928
Bexley and Greenwich	11,525,223	8,540,095	12,846,047	9,453,967
Birmingham	28,263,508	21,156,469	31,420,372	23,868,614
Bradford	12,070,620	8,466,663	13,551,092	9,339,143
Brent and Harrow	14,113,425	10,660,067	15,912,046	12,041,914
Bromley	6,210,919	4,578,070	6,664,389	4,816,402
Buckinghamshire	13,086,414	9,146,993	14,983,718	10,387,784
Bury and Rochdale	10,759,884	7,721,361	12,065,825	8,543,021
Calderdale and Kirklees	16,823,218	11,334,844	19,233,259	12,938,319
Cambridge	—	—	17,615,204	11,242,615
Cambridge and Huntingdon	9,459,213	5,981,792	—	—
Camden and Islington	12,456,865	9,548,586	14,118,373	10,959,307
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	10,691,652	7,664,884	11,896,859	8,440,704
County Durham	14,194,283	10,142,733	16,750,262	11,707,664
Coventry	7,959,410	5,644,393	9,141,212	6,277,397
Croydon	9,423,754	6,783,659	10,314,150	7,474,945
Doncaster	8,794,538	6,209,241	10,140,965	6,971,065
Dorset	17,605,810	11,147,262	20,399,566	12,702,827
Dudley	7,674,111	5,009,658	8,300,147	5,376,106
Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith	20,291,362	15,076,481	23,125,121	17,346,804
East and North Hertfordshire	15,081,661	9,838,157	16,931,910	11,016,024
East Kent	14,203,534	9,883,322	16,848,636	11,646,832
East Lancashire	13,328,457	9,434,339	13,924,438	9,762,940
East London and The City	16,692,731	14,201,723	20,189,357	17,297,054
East Norfolk	17,098,361	11,504,639	—	—
East Riding	13,410,687	9,471,791	15,347,018	10,743,247
East Surrey	9,891,052	6,245,951	10,631,564	6,686,408
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	20,634,150	13,676,708	23,240,422	15,043,952
Enfield and Haringey	15,636,046	12,182,647	17,726,993	14,054,462
Gateshead and South Tyneside	9,670,056	6,961,626	11,095,972	7,905,166
Gloucestershire	10,800,989	7,818,584	11,873,999	8,632,490
Herefordshire	4,503,566	2,761,070	5,023,409	3,233,832
Hillingdon	7,500,302	4,842,188	8,031,753	5,261,382
Isle of Wight	3,222,949	2,235,953	3,558,463	2,387,895
Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster	9,513,317	7,635,181	11,009,319	9,095,710
Kingston and Richmond	6,820,980	4,700,420	7,427,915	5,284,795
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	21,808,912	17,007,759	24,383,845	18,798,384
Leeds	20,747,627	14,283,916	23,011,757	15,731,791
Leicestershire	23,032,271	15,480,230	26,157,959	17,635,700
Lincolnshire	13,698,632	8,515,283	16,470,226	10,017,768

Table 3: General Dental Service Gross and Net fees paid by Health Authority in 1996–97 and 2000–01 (England)

	1997–98		*2000–01*	
Health Authority	*Gross fees (£)*	*Net fees (£)*	*Gross fees (£)*	*Net fees (£)*
Liverpool	14,602,852	11,820,069	15,511,247	12,363,726
Manchester	14,786,881	11,623,968	16,956,682	13,133,820
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	16,532,188	11,895,894	18,888,512	13,497,410
Morecambe Bay	7,911,473	5,068,765	8,752,528	5,436,838
Newcastle and North Tyneside	13,020,549	9,210,902	14,426,907	10,081,290
Norfolk	—	—	23,084,172	14,752,617
North and East Devon	11,616,943	7,722,632	14,900,019	9,718,826
North and Mid Hampshire	11,987,603	7,276,304	13,811,575	8,291,087
North Cheshire	8,065,267	5,618,048	9,201,269	6,289,200
North Cumbria	6,977,920	4,625,956	8,324,241	5,393,558
North Derbyshire	8,635,375	5,782,520	9,826,608	6,383,702
North Essex	24,836,225	16,175,977	28,996,704	18,378,601
North Nottinghamshire	10,504,869	7,027,738	13,015,532	8,541,020
North Staffordshire	9,168,480	6,372,061	11,164,923	7,503,940
North West Anglia	8,381,662	5,604,647	—	—
North West Lancashire	14,053,803	9,665,063	15,876,971	10,914,906
North Yorkshire	18,855,394	11,909,000	21,934,881	13,677,114
Northamptonshire	15,396,436	9,638,637	16,996,087	10,630,368
Northumberland	7,775,189	5,202,598	8,631,599	5,572,248
Nottingham	19,654,449	14,016,870	22,680,007	15,902,936
Oxfordshire	10,123,670	6,901,639	13,211,776	9,016,236
Portsmouth and SE Hampshire	12,246,552	7,752,539	12,849,206	8,285,179
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	13,850,541	10,416,877	16,227,515	12,169,203
Rotherham	6,195,968	4,418,379	7,121,705	4,937,983
Salford and Trafford	14,374,477	10,298,361	15,982,211	11,394,519
Sandwell	8,259,814	6,275,135	10,120,163	7,697,578
Sefton	8,949,986	6,068,754	8,977,900	5,839,930
Sheffield	15,770,640	10,761,759	17,822,663	11,978,032
Shropshire	8,449,699	5,753,333	9,656,874	6,826,897
Solihull	4,267,878	2,915,640	4,755,801	3,357,235
Somerset	11,877,042	7,555,204	13,977,748	9,021,720
South and West Devon	14,571,028	10,235,971	16,949,424	11,604,801
South Cheshire	18,341,857	12,052,218	19,463,059	12,772,770
South Derbyshire	12,597,026	8,458,837	14,945,383	9,805,330
South Essex	16,588,566	10,969,734	22,038,580	14,438,504
South Humber	7,331,513	5,075,708	8,604,420	5,767,722
South Lancashire	7,020,833	4,868,479	8,621,431	5,861,692
South Staffordshire	12,187,233	8,187,510	13,152,793	8,545,189
Southampton & SW Hampshire	13,810,726	8,802,230	14,460,319	8,988,105
St Helens and Knowsley	9,599,999	7,308,781	9,916,814	7,401,831
Stockport	8,888,024	5,639,365	10,150,394	6,361,797
Suffolk	17,962,735	11,435,899	20,828,480	12,954,879
Sunderland	7,376,516	5,419,213	8,708,249	6,246,887
Tees	17,207,541	12,525,413	19,980,340	14,363,518
Wakefield	8,939,570	5,957,952	10,069,127	6,644,321
Walsall	5,980,212	4,144,685	6,617,252	4,514,604
Warwickshire	10,503,638	6,659,454	12,201,295	7,943,540
West Hertfordshire	14,655,984	9,668,185	17,686,428	11,781,345
West Kent	22,427,972	16,046,432	28,354,258	20,025,401
West Pennine	14,566,823	10,490,795	16,200,383	11,446,708
West Surrey	15,325,610	9,943,013	16,607,638	10,852,501
West Sussex	19,846,120	12,966,918	22,987,385	14,818,360
Wigan and Bolton	17,355,841	12,090,745	18,805,174	13,058,149
Wiltshire	11,400,715	7,621,795	14,992,129	9,805,807
Wirral	10,012,603	7,020,720	11,672,250	8,060,602
Wolverhampton	5,984,369	4,238,194	7,228,158	5,162,669
Worcestershire	13,535,748	8,747,273	14,466,035	9,294,079
England	1,271,091,313	882,239,885	1,453,626,305	1,000,191,852

Drafting Guidelines are attached to the PQ Reference Guide.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a substantive reply will be given to Mrs. T. Harper's letter of 28 November 2001, concerning care homes. [36842]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent on 21 February.

Macmillan Cancer Relief

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with Her Majesty's Treasury on the VAT on building costs paid by Macmillan Cancer Relief. [36914]

Mr. Hutton: Responsibility for the Value Added Tax law rests with by right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the

Exchequer. Officials from the Department have recently accompanied officials from Customs and Excise at an initial meeting with Macmillan.

NHS Estates

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when NHS Estates was disposed of to a partnership company; and if he will place in the Library *(a)* the partnership agreement, *(b)* a list of the unwanted NHS Estates disposed of, *(c)* the partners in the partnership and (d) the names and interests of the partnership company board. [37288]

Mr. Hutton: National Health Service Estates has not yet selected a preferred partner for the disposal of surplus estate.

The transaction is not due to take place until October 2002 at which point further details will be available.

Residential Homes

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial assistance he has made available to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* private and voluntary sector residential homes for the elderly to help them bring those homes up to the standards set by the Government. [37215]

Jacqui Smith: The resources provided for personal social services are increasing by, on average 3.4 per cent. per annum in real terms over the next three years. We expect home owners will cover the costs of meeting the standards through the fees they charge. Local authorities are funded to meet these additional costs. Through the agreement between the statutory and independent social care, health care and housing sectors, "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care", issued in October 2001, we made it clear that service commissioners should not set contract prices for care places mechanistically. We expect them to have regard to providers' costs and efficiencies and planned outcomes for service users.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in his Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36815]

Ms Blears: None.

Nurses

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent nurses are employed in the NHS on non-clinical duties. [37371]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

The 2001 non-medical workforce census includes 5,485 qualified nurses classified as working as managers and within education services. Their roles may include some clinical duties.

There are over 30,000 more nurses working in the National Health Service in 2001 than there were in 1997.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* EU trained nurses and *(b)* those trained elsewhere registered with UKCC in the year to 31 March 1997. [37377]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is in the table.

	Year to 31 March 1997
EC Initial Entrants	1,141
Overseas Initial Entrants	2,633
Total	3,774

Trust Staffing

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff there were in each trust in each year from 1997 to 2000; and what the whole time equivalent figures were. [37380]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library. The full census results, and other data from the NHS hospital and community health services non-medical staff in England: 1991–2001 bulletin can also be consulted on-line at *www.doh.gov.uk/public/nhsworkforce.htm*.

Headline figures shown in the table for both headcount, and whole time equivalent. Please note that Headcount Practice Nurse figures are estimated for 1998 and 1999, and that headline figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.

Headcount

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*Change 1997–2001 (per cent)*	*Change 2000–01 (per cent)*
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting and practice nursing staff total	318,860	323,460	329,640	335,950	350,400	9.9	4.3
Qualified nursing midwifery and health visiting staff	300,470	304,560	310,140	316,750	330,500	9.9	4.3
Practice nurses	18,390	18,890	19,500	19,200	19,800	7.7	3.1

Whole-time equivalent

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Change 1997–2001 (per cent)	Change 2000–01 (per cent)
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting and practice nursing staff total of which	256,090	257,600	261,340	266,990	277,334	8.3	3.9
Qualified nursing midwifery and health visiting staff (HCHS)	246,010	247,240	250,650	256,280	266,171	8.2	3.8
Practice nurses	10,080	10,360	10,690	10,710	11,163	10.7	4.2

Hospices

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 380W, on palliative care, if he will estimate the percentage of the additional £50 million to go to the specialist palliative care costs which will be available to the voluntary sector hospices. [37054]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The level of funding voluntary hospices receive is a matter for local decision based on a strategic view of local palliative care services. We have required all cancer networks to develop costed strategic investment plans for palliative care, which will inform the wider National Health Service planning process through health improvement programmes and service and financial frameworks for 2002–03. The strategic plans they develop will reflect local population needs and are part of the cancer network service delivery plans. This mechanism will help us address the current inequalities in palliative care service provision across both NHS and voluntary providers.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase hospice funding; and if he will make a statement. [38079]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan set out our commitment to increase National Health Service investment in specialist palliative care (including hospices) by £50 million by 2004. This investment is intended to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care and enable the NHS to increase their contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service. We have commissioned NICE to develop evidence-based guidance on palliative care to assist cancer networks, including voluntary hospices, to identify core services.

Residential Care

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost of residential care homes in Lancashire was in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* today. [37840]

Jacqui Smith: The gross expenditure by Lancashire County Council on residential care home placements between 1997–98 and 1999–2000 (the latest year for which data are available) was as follows (figures is £ millions):

Year	Lancashire pre 1 April 1998 boundary	Lancashire post 1 April 1998 boundary	Blackburn with Darwen	Blackpool
1997–98	92.5	—	—	—
1998–99	101.7	77.6	11.2	12.9
1999–2000	110.2	85.7	10.7	13.7

Source: Form RO3.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost of maintenance of residential care home buildings in Lancashire was in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* today. [37839]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the cost of maintaining residential care homes is not held centrally.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases there were of food poisoning in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the UK in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000 and (iv) 2001. [37309]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The table sets out the numbers of notified cases of food poisoning for Coventry and the United Kingdom for 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001. The numbers of notified cases of food poisoning are likely to underestimate considerably the actual incidence of food poisoning.

Notified cases of food poisoning for Coventry and UK 1998–2001

Year	Coventry	United Kingdom
1998	464	105,060
1999	434	96,866
2000	322	98,076
2001*	406*	95,807*

*Provisional figures.

Sources:

England and Wales—Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS).

Scotland—the Information and Statistics Division (ISD) and the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (SCIEH) divisions of the Common Services Agency of the National Health Service in Scotland.

Northern Ireland—Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Northern Ireland (DHSSPS).

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has undertaken into new strains of bacteria that lead to food poisoning. [37619]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The Food Standards Agency has a programme of research the objectives of which are to increase the understanding of how an where pathogenic micro-organisms enter the food chain and to assess how specific food handling and production processes affect the survival, growth and toxin formation of micro-organisms in food. Details of recent research are available in the "Food Standards Agency Research Programme Annual Report 2001" and under "Science" on the Food Standards Agency website (www.food.gov.uk). A copy of the latest report has been placed in the Library.

SHA (York)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations were undertaken with local authorities before the decision was made for the strategic health authority for North and East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire to be established in York. [38332]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* A project team, made up of representatives of the local health economy, set up to establish the strategic health authority for North and East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire, commissioned an independent appraisal into the location of the headquarters of the new health authority. No consultations were undertaken with local authorities during the option appraisal process. However, local authorities were informed that the option appraisal recommended that York Science Park was the preferred location. This recommendation is to be discussed at the next meting of the shadow board of the North and East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire strategic health authority on 20 March 2002. here representations from local authorities will be considered.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to answer Question 15320, tabled on 15 November 2001; [39775]

(2) when he expects to answer Question 15321, tabled on 15 November 2001; [39777]

(3) when he expects to answer Question 12771, tabled on 6 November 2001; [39784]

(4) when he expects to answer Question 12718, tabled on 6 November 2001; [39785]

(5) when he expects to answer Question 15051, tabled on 15 November 2001; [39773]

(6) when he expects to answer Question 12715, tabled on 6 November 2001; [39783]

(7) when he expects to answer Question 16852, tabled on 21 November 2001; [39772]

(8) when he expects to answer Question 12711, tabled on 6 November 2001; [39778]

(9) when he expects to answer Question 12778, tabled on 6 November 2001; [39790]

(10) when he expects to answer Question 15323, tabled on 15 November 2001; [39774]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him on Monday 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 935W–36W (Question 15051), columns 965-66W (Question 15321), column 966W (Question 12778), and columns 966–67W (Question 15320). I will let the hon. Member have a reply to Questions 12711, 12715, 12718, 12771, 15323 and 16852 as soon as possible.

NHS Charges

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase *(a)* charges in the NHS and *(b)* the value of optical vouchers; and if he will make a statement. [40499]

Ms Blears: We shall lay before the House regulations to increase National Health Services charges in England from 1 April 2002. There will be a cash increase in the charge of 10p, (1.64 per cent.) from £6.10 to £6.20 for each quantity of a drug or appliance dispensed.

The cost of prescription prepayment certificates will rise to £32.40 for a 4 month certificate and £89.00 for an annual certificate. These offer savings for those needing more than 5 items in four months or 14 in one year.

Prescription charges are expected to raise some £434 million for the NHS in 2002-2003.

Charges for elastic stockings and tights, wigs and most fabric supports supplied through the Hospital Service will be increased similarly.

The maximum patient charge for a single course of dental treatment begun on or after 1 April 2002 will increase from £360 to £366.

We have restricted the prescription charge increase to the same cash amount as the previous three years and the other increases are in line with this percentage increase.

Optical voucher values will increase overall by 1.95 per cent. to help children, people on low income and certain people with complex sight problems with the cost of spectacles or contact lenses.

NHS Charges and optical voucher values in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for the Devolved Administrations.

Details of the revised charges and optical voucher values have been placed in the Library.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths are attributable to drug misuse in each of the last five years. [38651]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgel to Mr. Kelvin Hopkins, dated 28 February 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning how many deaths were attributable to drug misuse in each of the last five years. I am replying in his absence. (38651)

The figures requested are given in the table below:

Drug misuse-related[1] deaths, England and Wales, 1996–2000[2]

Calendar year	*Number of deaths*
1996	1,247
1997	1,302
1998	1,459
1999	1,568
2000	1,662

Source:

Office for National Statistics, Report. Deaths related to drug poisoning: results for England and Wales, 1993 to 2000. *Health Statistics Quarterly* 13 (2002), 76–82.

Notes:

[1] Defined as deaths where the underlying cause is poisoning, drug abuse or drug dependence and where any of the substances controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971) are involved.

[2] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year.

Life Expectancy, St Helens

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the most recent figures are for life expectancy at birth for *(a)* males and *(b)* females in St Helens South. [38267]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward dated 1 March 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question asking what are the most recent figures for life expectancy at birth or *(a)* males and *(b)* females in St Helens South. (38267)

Figures for life expectancy at birth in parliamentary constituencies are not routinely produced and data are not available to readily allow their calculation.

Figures for life expectancy at birth in the local authority of St Helens, which comprises the parliamentary constituencies of St Helens North and St Helens, South, are as follows:

1998 to 2000 - aggregated years

Males - 73.7 years

Females - 79.0 years.

Benefit Reviews

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Department has made an assessment of the suitability of EMPS carrying out examinations in respect of benefit reviews. [36131]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

All doctors carrying out examinations in respect of benefit claims or reviews must be approved by the Department's Chief Medical Adviser. There are stringent recruitment criteria and in order to gain approval doctors must complete prescribed training and demonstrate a satisfactory level of competence in carrying out assessments. The quality standards of all doctors are regularly monitored by SchlumbergerSema Medical Services. Ongoing approval is subject to satisfactory performance.

Overseas Military Personnel

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which overseas countries military personnel were trained in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and if he will indicate in each case how many personnel were trained. [39517]

Mr. Ingram: During 2000, a total of 3,504 overseas military personnel from 106 countries were trained at UK military establishments. In 2001, 3,731 military personnel were trained from 101 countries. A full breakdown of the numbers trained, by country, is as follows:

Overseas military personnel trained in the UK during 2000 and 2001

Country	*2000 (1 January–31 December)*	*2001 (1 January–31 December)*
Albania	7	15
Algeria	—	2
Antigua & Barbuda	1	—
Argentina	6	13
Australia	84	100
Austria	5	14
Azerbaijan	1	—
Bahamas	2	2
Bahrain	29	30
Bangladesh	2	2
Barbados	2	1
Belgium	82	87
Belize	20	25
Bermuda	14	14
Botswana	5	14
Brazil	20	17
Brunei	152	177
Bulgaria	5	6
Canada	273	322
Chile	4	5
China	13	32
Croatia	4	10
Czech Republic	29	27
Denmark	35	27
Ecuador	1	—
Egypt	6	16
El Salvador	3	1
Estonia	8	6
Fiji	3	2
Finland	6	11
France	67	59
Gambia	1	1
Georgia	7	5
Germany	115	130
Ghana	3	8
Greece	25	49
Guatemala	5	5
Guyana	2	3
Honduras	1	—

Overseas military personnel trained in the UK during 2000 and 2001

Country	*2000 (1 January–31 December)*	*2001 (1 January–31 December)*
Hong Kong	7	4
Hungary	17	28
India	18	15
Ireland	27	56
Israel	43	16
Italy	119	154
Jamaica	22	41
Japan	8	8
Jordan	96	67
Kazakhstan	—	1
Kenya	5	8
Korea (South)	9	10
Kuwait	311	307
Latvia	12	14
Lebanon	5	9
Lithuania	11	8
Luxembourg	—	1
Macedonia	8	14
Malawi	5	6
Malaysia	27	22
Maldives	1	—
Malta	6	2
Mauritius	4	—
Moldova	1	2
Morocco	6	6
Mozambique	—	5
Namibia	1	—
Nepal	14	31
Netherlands	283	253
New Zealand	44	33
Nicaragua	1	—
Nigeria	27	28
Norway	247	205
Oman	186	178
Pakistan	36	49
Papua New Guinea	1	—
Paraguay	2	2
Philippines	6	10
Poland	28	25
Portugal	33	34
Qatar	53	66
Romania	16	19
Russia	5	10
Rwanda	—	2
Saudi Arabia	47	63
Senegal	15	17
Seychelles	1	—
Sierra Leone	3	22
Singapore	131	113
Slovak Republic	16	19
Slovenia	4	8
South Africa	28	19
Spain	17	22
Sri Lanka	70	7
St. Kitts & Nevis	1	—
St. Lucia	1	—
St. Vincent	1	2
Swaziland	1	1
Sweden	24	27
Switzerland	4	11
Syria	—	1
Tajikistan	—	1
Tanzania	6	8
Thailand	29	27
Tonga	1	4
Trinidad & Tobago	2	3
Turkey	50	56
Uganda	2	3
Ukraine	26	39
United Arab Emirates	83	95
United States of America	126	163
Uruguay	8	4
Yemen	2	6
Zimbabwe	6	2
Total Students	3,504	3,731
Total Countries	106	101

Service Law

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Case of Morris *v.* the United Kingdom; and what plans he has to bring forward legislation to make changes to service law in response to the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. [39687]

Mr. Ingram: The European Court of Human Rights delivered its judgment in the case of Morris *v.* the United Kingdom on 26 February. The Court noted that the changes to the court martial system made by the Armed Forces Act 1996 have gone a long way to meeting the concerns expressed in the Findlay case. However, it found that there had been a violation of article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which concerns the right to a fair hearing, as regards some aspects of Mr Morris's trial by court martial in 1997.

The Court was concerned about the potential for undue external influence over certain members of the court martial panel; and about the procedures for involving non-judicial authorities in the review of court martial findings and sentences. We are assessing the implications of the Court's judgment for the future conduct of court martial and whether any changes that may be necessary require the legislation to be amended. Army and Royal Air Force court martials that are imminently scheduled are being postponed, but for the time being trials in the Royal Navy are continuing in view of the nature of the regulations in that Service concerning the position of court martial members.

I shall make an announcement as soon as our assessment of the implications of the judgment has been completed. However, we do not consider that the judgment fundamentally affects the court martial system, which we intend to retain as an effective and fair means of administering discipline and justice in our armed forces.

Royal Navy (Pay Banding)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that the Royal Navy does not impose a two tier system of high and low pay banding based on Pay 2000 JE for the Rating Corp; and if he will make a statement. [38289]

Mr. Ingram: A two tier system of high and low pay ranges was introduced for Royal Navy ratings (and also for soldiers and airmen) with effect from 1 April 2001 as part of Pay 2000, the new pay structure for the Armed Forces. Job Evaluation underpins the allocation of trades to one of the two pay ranges. Pay 2000 was devised in close collaboration with the single services and was the subject of a high profile and extensive communications programme throughout the Armed Forces.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Sheffield will be withdrawn from service. [38951]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans HMS Sheffield will be withdrawn from service towards the end of this decade. In the shorter term she will be reduced to a low readiness state, commensurate with force levels endorsed within the Strategic Defence Review, from November 2002 until September 2004.

HMS Exeter

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if HMS Exeter breached the Harmony guidelines following her deployment last year. [38945]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Exeter has not breached the Harmony guidelines. She has been deployed for a total of 12 months in the past three years and has spend 48 per cent. of her time in her base port of Portsmouth during the last two years. Harmony guidelines state that ships should spend a minimum of 40 per cent. of their time in their base port over a two-year period, and that total deployed time over a three-year period should not exceed 18 months.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of her Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35597]

Mr. Caborn:

(a) 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997

There were 31 national lottery awards to Bristol East totalling £2,068,137.

(b) 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998

There were 39 national lottery awards to Bristol East totalling £1,748,764.

(c) Since 7 May 1998

Forty Four Millennium Award Winners have been identified from Bristol East at a grant commitment of £129,557.

7 May 1998 to 13 February 2002

There were 105 national lottery awards to Bristol East totalling £5,611,239.

Information on the National Lottery is in accordance with the information supplied to the Department by the Lottery Distributors for the National Lottery Awards Database.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider context of the region which may have an effect on the Bristol East constituency. These are:

(a) 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997

English Heritage

5 grants offered for repairs to Grade I and II* listed buildings totalling £124,314

1 grant offered for repairs to a scheduled ancient monument of £81,080

3 grants offered for repairs to Grade II listed buildings in a conservation area totalling £98,723

2 grants offered to Conservation Area Partnership (CAP) Schemes totalling £100,000

(b) 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998

English Heritage

3 grants offered for repairs to Grade I and II* listed buildings totalling £121,130

1 CAP scheme grant offer of £50,000

(c) Since 7 May 1998

English Heritage

4 grants offered for repairs to Grade I and II* listed buildings totalling £460,700

1 Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme grant offer of £70,000

Designated Museums Challenge Fund (DMCF)

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery received the following:

Award	*Claimed*
Year 1 (1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000) £59,475	£59,475
Year 2 (1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001) £80,000	£73,639.45
Year 3 (1 April 2001 to 2002) £120,100	still in progress

The awards were made towards improvements to care, interpretation and access for all designated collections.

DCMS Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund

Since May 1998 DCMS Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund has granted £24,000 towards a British History Project (covering all of Bristol libraries).

Space for Sport and the Arts

Bristol has provisionally been allocated with £1.75 million under the Space for Sport and Arts programme. Subject to the approval of detailed applications, the area will benefit from new/modernised sport and arts facilities based in four primary schools, but open for use by the wider community outside school hours. Building work on the four projects should be completed by Summer 2003.

Creative Partnerships

Bristol has been chosen as one of the first pilots for the Creative Partnerships programme, due to start in April 2002.

Artsmark Schools

There is currently only one Artsmark school in the City of Bristol. Seven have applied for Artsmark status in this year's round of applications.

National Foundation for Youth Music

Bristol is part of a Youth Music Action Zone also encompassing Gloucester. Since its inception the zone has received £512,176. The National Foundation for Youth Music has also made separate grants to projects in Bristol totalling £149,284.

Libraries

Bristol library service has been awarded grants of £598,587 for People's Network ICT infrastructure and £121,040 for librarian ICT training by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). According to Resource, the body responsible for monitoring implementation of the People's Network, all 26 public libraries in Bristol are now connected to the Internet through the People's Network and all offer free internet access to users.

Sport

There are 2 School Sport Co-ordinators in Bristol at Ashton Park School and Portway Community School which have received £315,537 and £289,239 respectively.

Free Television Licences

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 7,600 people aged 75 or over living in the Bristol East constituency.

Contracts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many contracts in each financial year since 1995–96 *(a)* Cap Gemini Ernst and Young, *(b)* PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(c)* KPMG, *(d)* PA Consulting, *(e)* WS Atkins, *(f)* Accenture, *(g)* Deloitte and Touche, *(h)* McKinsey, *(i)* Capita, *(j)* AEA Technology, *(k)* Xansa Group, *(l)* Sema Group, *(m)* CMG Admiral, *(n)* ICL Group and *(o)* Logica were awarded for advising her Department; what fees each firm earned in each year from work for her Department; and if she will make a statement. [38178]

Dr. Howells: Contracts awarded to the named companies were as follows:

Company	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
CAP Gemini	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
PWC	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	83,000 (2)	96,000 (1)
KPMG	32,000 (2)	Nil	Nil	23,000 (1)	Nil	Nil	Nil
PA Consulting	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
WS Atkins	Nil	Nil	Nil	55,000 (3)	33,000 (2)	Nil	Nil
Accentor	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Deloitte & Touche	Nil	109,000 (2)	Nil	207,000 (1)	Nil	Nil	Nil
McKinsey	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Capita	Nil	Nil	Nil	39,000 (3)	Nil	Nil	26,000[2]
AEA Technology	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	23,000 (1)	Nil
Ansa Group	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Sea Group[1]							
C.G. Admiral	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
NAL Group	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Logic	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Notes:

[1] SchlumbergerSema have been the Department's outsourced IT service provider since 1993. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of fees annually from 1995–96 but the payment to SchlumbergerSema for direct services was of the order of £1.5 million in 2000–01 and will be a similar figure in 2001–02. Expenditure in previous years will not have exceeded that amount.

[2] Recruitment advisory services using central government's framework contract.

Includes Royal Parks Agency.

Number of contracts in brackets.

National Lottery

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the role and function of Global Crossing is with regard to *(a)* Camelot and *(b)* the running of the National Lottery; [38166]

(2) what assessment she has made of the implications of the collapse of *(a)* Global Crossing and (b) its subcontractors upon the National Lottery; [38164]

(3) what steps her Department has taken to ensure that the possible collapse of Global Crossing has no impact on the running of the National Lottery; [38165]

(4) what representations she has received from Camelot about the possible collapse of Global Crossing. [38169]

Mr. Caborn: The operation of the National Lottery is a matter for Camelot as the private operator and the National Lottery Commission as the independent regulator. We have received no representations from Camelot about the future of Global Crossing (UK) Telecommunications Ltd. which is a key supplier of communication networks for the National Lottery. Camelot has been in detailed discussions with Global Crossing (UK) Telecommunications Ltd. to assess the level of risk to the National Lottery and set in place contingency arrangements, and has kept the National Lottery Commission informed.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what meetings have been held between Ministers and special advisers and *(a)* Camelot, *(b)* Global Crossing and *(c)* other companies with regard to the possible collapse of Global Crossing; [38167]

(2) on what date discussions between her Department and Global Crossing have been held since 1999; and what has been discussed on each occasion; [38170]

(3) what meetings have been held between *(a)* Minister and *(b)* special advisers and Global Crossing since May 1997. [38168]

Mr. Caborn: We have held no meetings with Global Crossing since May 1997.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth. [38380]

Dr. Howells: My Department has no standing contract with Capita. However, we have used their services recently on three separate occasions. Brief details and the costs involved are as shown:

(i) providing training, candidate assessment exercises and independent chairs for the interview panel in connection with the Department's open recruitment scheme for middle and senior managers (November 2001)—£17k

(ii) providing and marking standard Civil Service written tests for short-listed candidates in connection with the Department's open recruitment scheme or administrative staff (February 2002)—£1k

(iii) providing 7 successful candidates off the national Civil Service Junior Manager recruitment scheme run by Capita (November 2001–February 2002)—£8k.

Regional Museums

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking in response to the findings of the Regional Museums Task Force. [38095]

Dr. Howells: My Department has accepted, in principle, the task force's key recommendations for a new framework for regional museums. We are currently working with Resource to start implementing the recommendations with £10 million per annum which was allocated to Resource in the last spending review.

We will take the task force's recommendations into account in the current spending review, alongside other priorities.

J Samuel White's Yard

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the hammerhead crane at the former J Samuel White's Yard in Cowes. [38207]

Dr. Howells: I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State considers all applications for statutory listing on their individual merits. DCMS officials will write to the hon. Member outlining the listing procedures in greater detail.

Tourism

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she has assessed the effect of the proposed six-term school year on the domestic tourism industry. [38206]

Dr. Howells: The traditional calendar for the school year is increasingly seen as a barrier to the development of more sustainable tourism and to the spreading of the benefits of domestic tourism more evenly throughout the year.

Research has shown that while the total amount of UK trips made by the family tourism market is unlikely to change significantly as a result of a six-term year, an extended and more constant tourism season would be one result. This would lighten the load on tourism hotspots that struggle to cope with the huge numbers at peak times and mean that more attractions and tourism businesses, which currently close at the end of the summer, would be encouraged to stay open for longer.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many tourist visitors there were to each *(a)* region and *(b)* country of the UK for each year since 1995. [38863]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Numbers of tourist visits involving an overnight stay by both overseas and UK residents to each region/country of the UK for 2000 are shown in table 1.

Numbers of tourist visits by overseas residents for 1995–2000 are shown in table 2.

Information on domestic visits for 1995–99 was published by the National Tourist Boards in *The Uk Tourist* and may be obtained from the Library of the House. However these figures for 1995–99 are not comparable with data for 2000 in table 1.

Figures for 2001 are not yet available at sub-UK level.

Table 1—Tourism visits in the UK in 2000

Tourist board region/ Country	*Millions of staying visits* Overseas residents' visits	*Visits by UK residents*	*Total*
London	13.1	18.5	31.6
Northumbria	0.4	5.6	6.0
Cumbria	0.2	5.0	5.2
North West	1.3	14.8	16.1
Yorkshire	0.9	13.1	14.0
Heart of England	2.3	23.4	25.7
East of England	1.8	13.2	15.0
West Country	1.6	18.6	20.2
Southern	2.1	14.7	16.8
South East England	2.1	12.1	14.2
All England[1]	21.5	140.4	161.9
Wales	1.0	10.9	11.9
Scotland	1.7	19.7	21.4
Northern Ireland	0.3	n/a[2]	n/a[2]
UK	23.2	175.4	198.6

Sources:

International Passenger Survey and UK Tourism Survey.

[1] Figures do not sum due to trips that included visits to more than one region/country.

[2] Comparable data not available.

Table 2—Visits to the Uk by Overseas' residents

Tourist board region/Country	*Millions of staying visits* 1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
London	11.9	12.3	12.3	12.3	13.3	13.1
Northumbria	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4
Cumbria	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2
North West	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3
Yorkshire	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9
East Midlands[3]	0.7	0.7	—	—	—	—
Heart of England (old boundary)	1.4	1.4	—	—	—	—
Heart of England	—	—	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.3
East Anglia[3]	1.4	1.4	—	—	—	—
East of England	—	—	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8
West Country	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.6
Southern	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.1

Table 2—Visits to the Uk by Overseas' residents

Tourist board region/Country	*Millions of staying visits* *1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
South East England	2.1	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.1
All England[1]	18.7	19.5	19.6	19.9	21.4	21.5
Wales	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	1.0
Scotland	1.8	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.7
Northern Ireland	n/a[2]	n/a[2]	n/a[2]	n/a[2]	n/a[2]	0.3
UK[1]	19.7	20.9	21.0	21.4	23.3	23.2

Source:

International Passenger Survey, Office for National Statistics.

[1] Figures do not sum due to trips that included visits to more than one region/country.

[2] Comparable data not available.

[3] These regional tourist board areas ceased to exist following the reorganisation in 1996.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total revenue was from tourists in 2000 broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* country. [38836]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 February 2002]*: Tourism revenue comprises expenditure by:

1. Overseas residents during visits to the United Kingdom.
2. UK residents on domestic trips with overnight stays.
3. UK residents in days trips outside of each individuals' usual environment, and
4. Expenditure by overseas visitors which relates to their trip, but which is made abroad and is transferred to UK companies, i.e. fares to UK air carriers.

(a) Revenue from tourist expenditure for 2000 is shown for regions and countries of the UK in the table. Regional data are not available for categories 3 and 4.

Tourism spending in the UK in 2000

£ million

Tourist board region/Country	*Overseas visitors*	*Domestic trips with overnight*	*Domestic tourism leisure day trips*[3]	*Fares to UK air carriers*[3]	*Total*
London	6,900	3,070	n/a	n/a	9,970
Northumbria	170	740	n/a	n/a	910
Cumbria	50	770	n/a	n/a	820
North West	450	1,980	n/a	n/a	2,420
Yorkshire	260	1,690	n/a	n/a	1,950
Heart of England	770	2,790	n/a	n/a	3,560
East of England	680	1,540	n/a	n/a	2,220
West Country	550	3,120	n/a	n/a	3,680
Southern	780	2,050	n/a	n/a	2,830
South East England	700	1,490	n/a	n/a	2,200
All England[1]	11,360	19,890	n/a	n/a	31,250
Wales	270	1,140	n/a	n/a	1,400
Scotland	790	3,700	n/a	n/a	4,490
Northern Ireland	110	n/a[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a[2]
UK[1]	12,670	26,130	32,700	3,300	74,800

Sources:

International Passenger Survey and UK Tourism Survey.

[1] Figures may not sum due to spending not attributable to regions/countries.

[2] Comparable data not available.

[3] Estimated figures.

(b) Data at county level for categories 1 and 2 can be found on the Tourism Boards' statistics website http://www.staruk.org.uk.

Bishopsgate Goods Yard

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will announce her decision on whether to list Bishopsgate Goods Yard. [37869]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce in due course her decision of whether Bishopsgate Goods Yard meets the criteria for inclusion on the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent communication she has had with English Heritage concerning the possible listing of Bishopsgate Goods Yard. [37870]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked English Heritage to provide advice on whether Bishopsgate Goods Yard meets the criteria for inclusion on the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. She has received their advice and will announce her decision in due course.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent instructions she has given to English Heritage about the listing of Bishopsgate Goods Yard. [37871]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has given no instructions to English Heritage. She has received advice from English Heritage on whether

Bishopsgate Goods Yard meet the criteria for inclusion on the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport at what point a decision to list a building becomes effective. [37873]

Dr. Howells: A decision becomes effective at the point an amendment is made to the list; the list is a publicly accessible document.

New Wembley Stadium

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* football matches, *(b)* rugby league matches and *(c)* other sports events she estimates will be played each year if the new Wembley Stadium is built. [38960]

Mr. Caborn: The long-term events profile for the proposed National Stadium at Wembley is a matter for the FA and Wembley National Stadium Limited (WNSL). WNSL have indicated that in 2006 a new Wembley Stadium would host a total of 20 football and rugby league matches.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list non-Governmental organisations operating in the South West Region that receive public funds from her Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39191]

Mr. Caborn: Non-governmental organisations operating in the South West Region do not receive public funds directly from my Department.

Sports Tests

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 184W, whether the research by Professor Peter Sonkson at St. Thomas' Hospital has been continued in the UK since his retirement. [39322]

Mr. Caborn: Research into the use of Human Growth Hormone (hGH) is continuing in the UK. However, the main sources of funding for this work, the International Olympic Committee and the European Commission, have not extended their financial investment beyond the initial funding agreed for this research.

Worldwide, research teams continue work in this field with grants awarded by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). At present WADA is committing US$5 million per year to research in five priority areas which include compounds that aid the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood, such as Erythropoietin (EPO), the factors that regulate and increase growth, such as human growth hormone hGH.

Drug Taking

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent on research into drug taking in sport in each of the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [39323]

Mr. Caborn: UK Sport does not assign a specific budget for research activities into drug taking in the UK and therefore an exact amount is not identifiable. UK Sport's funding for the UK's anti-doping programme has been focused on delivering appropriate testing programmes for sport. However, UK Sport have provided funding for key projects, such as the Nandrolone review that was undertaken in 2000 and the development of the international working group on human growth hormone (hGH).

Independent research projects are also funded by other organisations in the UK and abroad. Examples include a programme of research on Nandrolone commissioned by UK Athletics, which was undertaken by Aberdeen University in 2000. The International Olympic Committee has also funded research at the Cologne Laboratory into Nandrolone.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) is committed to increasing the volume of research dedicated to developing new and improved detection methods for the growing list of performance enhancing substances and methods. WADA currently provides US$5 million per year to further this research in five priority areas:

Compounds that aid oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood, such as EPO;

Endogenous anabolic agents, such as testosterone;

Factors that regulate and increase growth, such as hGH;

Gene technology and performance enhancement; and

Other prohibited substances and methods.

Tennis (Drug Tests)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many drug tests were conducted by *(a)* UK Sport and *(b)* another agency responsible to her during (i) all tennis tournaments with professional players in the United Kingdom and (ii) during the Wimbledon tennis tournament. [39031]

Mr. Caborn: UK Sport is the only Government agency funded to undertake anti-doping work in the UK. Since 1 April 2001 UK Sport has conducted testing at six events at which professional tennis players were present. A total of 65 tests have been collected as part of the Lawn Tennis Association's Anti-Doping Programme.

Testing at Wimbledon tournament is not undertaken by UK Sport, this is done by the International Tennis Federation (ITF). In 2001 the ITF conducted 120 tests during the Wimbledon tournament and 56 in other tennis tournaments in the UK. The testing programme is independently administered and all analysis of samples is carried out at IOC accredited laboratories.

Lottery Funding

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what obligations are placed on athletes receiving lottery funding to *(a)* coach, *(b)* visit schools and (c) promote participation amongst the wider public. [39028]

Mr. Caborn: The Sports Councils do not place any obligations on athletes when receiving lottery funding to coach, visit schools or promote participation amongst the wider public.

Broadcast Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what licences and other permissions are required by broadcasters before they can transmit their channel via *(a)* digital satellite, *(b)* digital terrestrial and *(c)* digital cable. [38958]

Dr. Howells: The Independent Television Commission is responsible for licensing commercial digital television services in the UK. Broadcasters will need a Satellite Television Service Licence for transmission via *(a)* digital satellite; a Digital Programme Service Licence for *(b)* digital terrestrial television; and a Digital Programme Service Licence for *(c)* digital cable television.

Free-to-air Channels

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make an assessment of the costs to consumers of receiving only free-to-air television channels via *(a)* digital satellite television, *(b)* digital terrestrial television and *(c)* digital cable television. [38959]

Dr. Howells: To receive only the free-to-view television channels via *(a)* digital satellite television, consumers will need to pay for either a digital set top box and satellite dish and for the cost of installation, or for an integrated television set (idTV) that can be connected to a satellite dish; *(b)* digital terrestrial television, consumers will need to pay for either a digital set top box and possibly a new aerial, or an idTV that can be connected to an aerial and; *(c)* digital cable television, consumers can receive free-to-view digital services only by subscribing to a package of services. The Digital Television Action Plan includes a specific action to conduct a comprehensive review of progress towards digital switchover, with particular reference to the accessibility, availability and affordability tests announced in September 1999. The review will refine the tests and report on how progress towards meeting them is to be measured. A first report is due by the end of March 2002.

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39337]

Dr. Howells: The following is the information:

Capita

		£
1998–99	Recruitment of Chairman and Members—New Opportunities Fund	14,000
1998–99	Recruitment of Chairman and Trustees—National Endowment for Science & Technology (NESTA)	13,000
1998–99	Recruitment for BBC Appointments	12,000
2001–02	Training for Recruitment Scheme—Middle and Senior Managers	17,000
2001–02	Providing and Marking Standard Civil Service Written Tests	1,000
2001–02	Civil Service Junior Manager Recruitment Scheme	8,000
Total		65,000

Includes Royal Parks (nil return).

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether fair trade products are sold in her Department. [39825]

Dr. Howells: There is little opportunity to sell anything in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, but contractors working with the Department are encouraged to use Fair Trade goods where possible.

Film Industry

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what income has been generated from the film industry in each *(a)* region and *(b)* country in the United Kingdom in each year since 1995. [38837]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The following table shows film production investment to the UK from 1995–2000. Figures are not kept by region or country. Information for 2001 is not yet available.

Production inward investment to the UK, 1995—2000

Year	Foreign productions	£ million	British productions	£ million	Total inward investment
1995	14	216.45	34	94.00	310.45
1996	25	387.10	73	172.20	559.30
1997	20	261.90	84	202.89	464.79
1998	16	214.20	67	174.96	389.16
1999	22	336.37	70	170.31	506.68
2000	28	366.57	52	211.70	578.27

Theatres

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding has been made available *(a)* from her Department and *(b)* from the National Lottery for assisting in renovation work to theatres in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [37189]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* This is a matter for those bodies sponsored by my Department who deal specifically with theatre and/or the built environment—the Arts Council of England, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The following figures supplied by these organisations are for lottery awards for theatre renovation:

	£
1999	13,674,605
2000	4,278,566
2001	23,380,917

Sport England

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will provide an additional £500,000 to Sport England to compensate it for the severance package given to Sport England's former chief executive. [39694]

Tessa Jowell: Sport England recognise that the costs of the departure of their former Chief Executive must be funded from existing resources. There will not be any charge to Lottery Funds.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32820]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO's current retirement age is 60 for all grades of staff. From April this year staff in clerical grades will be able to work until 65 and those in junior and middle management grades until 63 if they so wish. Staff in the Senior Management Structure will be required to retire at 60 as at present. There are currently 1,441 staff in the clerical grades, 3,716 in junior and middle management and 454 in the Senior Management Structure.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his fellow Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36276]

Mr. Straw: FCO ministerial boxes are transported to Ministers' homes by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

Racism

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer on 23 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 886W, on the UN World Conference against Racism, what the results of his consultation on drawing up a National Action Plan on 4 February were; what bodies were represented at the meeting; if he will place the notes of the meeting in the Library; what arrangements have been made for a follow-up meeting; what plans he has to make the WCAR report available to hon. Members; and what plans he has to debate the report and publicise UK support for the Declaration. [38306]

Mr. MacShane: On 4 February, the Home Office held informal consultations with NGOs who had been involved in national consultations on the World Conference Against Racism, including the 1990 Trust, the Runnymede Trust, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, UNA-UK, the Churches Commission for Racial Justice and the Women's National Commission and representatives from the devolved administrations.

The purpose of the meeting was for Home Office officials to seek views on how work on the National Action Plan should be taken forward before putting advice to Ministers. The meeting's main concern was to ensure that a fully representative group of NGOs were consulted on the development and implementation of the plan and discussion focused around which organisations should be included. The Home Office is currently considering these proposals. As this meeting was informal, there are no plans to put a record in the Library of the House. There will be a further meeting of the informal group on 19 March.

The UK World Conference Against Racism report is available to hon. Members on the UN website (http://www.un.org/WCAR/aconf189_12pdf) which is accessible through the House Library.

We will of course inform hon. Members as soon as we have identified and agreed the best way to take forward work on the National Act Plan.

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the UN Economic and Social council report "Discrimination against Women and Girls in Afghanistan"; and if he will adopt its recommendations in respect of UK operations in Afghanistan. [38129]

Mr. Bradshaw: We welcome the report "Discrimination against Women and Girls in Afghanistan" and support its recommendations. We have always said that the restoration of human rights, including women's rights, will be the key to the establishment of stable systems of government in Afghanistan. We expect the Afghan Government to ratify the convention on the elimination of discrimination against women.

We welcome the role that women are playing in the Afghan Interim Authority, both in the Interim Administration and on the Loya Jirga Commission. Whilst the form of any future Afghan Government is for the Afghan people to decide, we expect that women will be involved.

On reconstruction, our projects have always involved women and this will continue in the recovery and rehabilitation process. The involvement of women in projects, and use of expertise on gender issues will help to ensure that the rights of women are promoted—particularly recognising the complexity of gender issues in Afghanistan.

Overseas Territories

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place the final draft of the overseas territories model legislation for implementation of the report to the Counter Terrorism Committee, pursuant to paragraph 6 of Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) of 28 September 2001 and 20 December 2001, in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [38117]

Mr. Bradshaw: Copies of the final draft of the Order In Council which will replicate in several Overseas Territories the terrorist financing provisions of the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 will be placed in the Library as soon as they are available.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress *(a)* the Cayman Islands, *(b)* Bermuda and *(c)* Gibraltar have made in bringing forward legislation to implement the report to the Counter Terrorism Committee, pursuant to paragraph 6 of Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) of 28 September 2001 and 20 December 2001. [38116]

Mr. Bradshaw: Bermuda, Gibraltar and the Cayman Islands have agreed to enact local legislation equivalent to the terrorist financing provisions of the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. The United Kingdom is producing model draft legislation, which we hope the legislature in each territory will be able to approve by June 2002.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what work is in progress on the designation of exclusive economic zones in respect of *(a)* the Falkland Islands, *(b)* St. Georgia, *(c)* St Helena and *(d)* Ascension Island; what deadline is for designation under Article 76 of the UN Law of the Sea Convention 1984; and if he will make a statement. [37751]

Mr. MacShane: Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS) coastal states may declare an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) beyond and adjacent to their territorial sea up to 200 nautical miles from their baselines. Coastal states may declare instead an equivalent zone and exercise more limited jurisdiction in that zone. The Falkland Islands and St. Helena and Dependencies (which include Ascension Island) have declared a 200 nautical mile fisheries zone. South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands have declared a 200 nautical mile maritime zone.

Under Article 76 of UNCLOS coastal states claiming a continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles are required to make a submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). In respect of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Ascension Island and St. Helena any submission should be made as soon as possible, but in any event by 13 May 2009.

The preparatory work to make submissions to the CLCS in respect of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and Ascension Island is under way and it is expected that the submissions will be made before the deadline.

No work is being undertaken to make a submission to the CLCS under Article 76 of UNCLOS in respect of St. Helena because the geomorphology of the seabed around the island does not support a claim to a continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.

Pakistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* Pakistan and *(b)* United States authorities regarding Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh; and if he will make a statement. [38994]

Mr. Bradshaw: Officials at our High Commission in Islamabad have been in touch with the Pakistani authorities on consular aspects of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh's detention. They are also in regular contact with officials at the US Embassy in Islamabad and our embassy in Washington has been in contact with the US State Department.

Western Sahara

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Ministers from his Department have to visit *(a)* Morocco and *(b)* Western Sahara. [38490]

Mr. Bradshaw: FCO Ministers have no current plans to visit either Morocco or Western Sahara. I visited Morocco in September 2001.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions the Government have had with the Spanish Government regarding the Western Sahara dispute. [38487]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government have no formal contact with the Spanish Government regarding the Western Sahara dispute.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions the Government have had with the Government of Morocco regarding the status of the Western Sahara. [38486]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly discuss the issue of the Western Sahara with the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco. I raised the issue during my visit to Morocco in September 2001 and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the subject with Mohammed Benaissa the Moroccan Foreign Minister during his visit to London on 21 February 2002.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact the Government have had with the personal envoy of the UN Secretary-General with regard to his efforts to find a solution to the Western Sahara dispute. [38488]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to support the efforts of James Baker, the Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General in trying to find a just and durable resolution to the Western Sahara dispute. UK Officials in New York are in regular contact with James Baker, most recently on 27 February when he addressed an informal group of United Nations Security Council members on his report on the situation in Western Sahara.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts the British Government are engaged in to encourage the Moroccan Government and the Polisario Front to reach an agreement in the Western Sahara dispute. [38489]

Mr. Bradshaw: Foreign Office Ministers and officials in London and New York have regular contact with their counterparts from other nations and the parties to this dispute to attempt to reach an agreement.

We continue to support the efforts of James Baker, the Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General, in trying to find a mutually acceptable, just and durable resolution to the dispute. We encourage all parties to do the same.

European Union

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department will publish a report, specifying and quantifying the costs and benefits arising from the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union, together with a description of the methodology employed in the analysis; and if he will make a statement. [38404]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has no plans to publish such a report.

Romania

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the arrangements were finalised for the Romanian Government's visit to Britain in November 2001. [39043]

Peter Hain: *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Most arrangements for the visit had been finalised by 2 November 2001.

Laeken declaration

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give his understanding of the definition of the phrase the unification of Europe used in section 1 of the Laeken declaration. [39641]

Peter Hain: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated in his speech at the Warsaw Stock Exchange in October 2000, the Government see Europe as

> "free, independent sovereign nations who choose to pool that sovereignty in pursuit of their own interests and the common good, achieving more together than we can achieve alone."

WORK AND PENSIONS

Maternity Rights

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the weekly rate is of maternity allowance offered to women who are self-employed in small businesses; [26050]

(2) how many self-employed women have taken up full maternity leave and allowances in the last year and in the previous two years. [26052]

Malcolm Wicks: We are improving maternity benefits as part of our drive to help women achieve a better balance between paid work and family life. In August 2000 we abolished the separate lower rate of Maternity Allowance paid to the self-employed. They now receive the same standard rate of Maternity Allowance as employees, which is £62.20 for up to 18 weeks, provided they pay Class 2 National Insurance contributions. At the same time we also extended Maternity Allowance to self-employed women who do not pay Class 2 National Insurance contributions provided they hold a certificate of Small Earnings Exception. These women receive £27 a week for up to 18 weeks. Maternity Leave is available only to employees not the self-employed.

The standard rate of Maternity Allowance will be raised to £75 a week from April 2002. In 2003 the rate will be £100 a week and the payment period will be extended from 18 to 26 weeks.

The information available on the number of self-employed women who have received Maternity Allowance since the improvements in August 2000 is in Table 1.

Table 1

Maternity Allowance awards to women shown as self-employed.

	Self-employed
1 September 2000 to 31 August 2001	9,400

Source:

5 per cent. scan of the computer system. Excludes late notifications to the system, and a small number of cases held clerically.

Notes:

1. Figure includes a small number of cases where the woman has a combination of self-employment and employment during the qualifying period.
2. Figure is rounded to the nearest hundred.

Information was collected on a different basis prior to the improvements made to Maternity Allowance in August 2000. The information available for the previous two years is in Table 2.

Table 2

Maternity Allowance awards where "self-employed" was shown as the reason for non payment of Statutory Maternity Pay.

	Self-employed
5 April 1999 to 1 April 2000	8,000
6 April 1998 to 3 April 1999	9,000

Source:

Figures are from a 1 per cent. sample of claims to Maternity Allowance, and subject to a degree of sampling error.

Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand or per cent.

Employment Initiatives (Cynon Valley)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans there are to extend employment zones, action teams for jobs and JobCentre Plus to the Cynon Valley. [26872]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: An extension of the Action Team for Jobs initiative was announced in the 2001 Budget. This included a new Action Team in Rhondda-Cynon-Taff county borough, which started on 15 October 2001. The team works in the three most employment-deprived wards in the Cynon Valley constituency; Aberaman South, Mountain Ash West and Pen-y-waun.

There are no plans at present to extend Employment Zones to Cynon Valley. We are currently fully evaluating the Zones before deciding how to take the initiative further. The full range of JobCentre help is available to the long-term unemployed in Cynon Valley. This includes new deal 25 Plus, which was extended and enhanced last April to help more long-term unemployed people get jobs and remain in them.

JobCentre Plus is currently being delivered successfully in 56 pathfinder offices. The work-focused interview process is also operating in 39 further sites, including the Aberdare district office. JobCentre Plus will come into existence as a national organisation at the beginning of April 2002.

Benefit and Pension Payments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money has been saved by the social security budget in each of the last four years by the withholding of benefits for those who have been in hospital. [26808]

Mr. McCartney: *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The information requested is in the tables:

Total reduction in Benefits due to 6–52 weeks Hospital Downrating

	£ millions			
Benefit	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Incapacity Benefit	5*	5*	6*	5*
Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)	3	3	3	4
Retirement Pension	22	24	26	28

Total reduction in Benefits due to 52 week Hospital Downrating

	£ millions			
Benefit	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Incapacity Benefit	8*	8*	8*	9*
SDA	24	23	23	21
Retirement Pension	33	32	30	29

Total reduction in Benefits due to withdrawal after 4 weeks

	£ millions			
Benefit	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Attendance Allowance	46	63	76	80
Disability Living Allowance	18	23	27	32
Invalid Care Allowance	3	3	3	3

1. The information has been obtained from a number of administrative sources and a number of assumptions have been made, i.e. numbers marked * are taken from a small number of sample cases and are subject to a relatively high sampling error and should only be used as an indication of the current situation and it has been assumed that figures in a given quarter remain constant throughout the year.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest million.

3. It is not possible to provide accurate total reductions for Income Support, Housing Benefit, or Council Tax Benefit.

4. The figures are given in cash terms.

Disability Benefit Statistics

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many young people aged 0 to 16 live in households in which an adult is in receipt of *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* disability living allowance; and what percentage of these households have an income of less than 60 per cent. of the median household income. [33011]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Such information as is available is presented in the table:

Number of young people aged 16 or under living in households where an adult is in receipt of certain disability benefits, and percentage of these individuals living in households with below 60 per cent. of median income

	Percentage of young people aged 16 or under living with adults in receipt of benefits listed who are also in households with below 60 per cent. of median income		*Total number of young people aged under 16 living with adults in receipt of benefits listed*
Adult in Household in receipt of:	*Before Housing Costs*	*After Housing Costs*	
Incapacity Benefit	44	54	340,000
Disability Living Allowance	25	32	430,000

Notes: 1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland, and 1999–2000 is the latest year for which data is available.

2. Figures relating to the percentage of individuals living in households with below 60 per cent. of median income have been taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series which is derived from the FRS data set. These have been presented on both a Before and After Housing Costs basis to take into account variations in housing costs as is standard HBAI practice. No adjustment has been made to household disposable income as used in HBAI to take into account any additional costs that may be incurred due to the illness or disability in question.

3. The estimates are sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using the multipurpose grossing factors that control for tenure type, Council Tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and variability in non-response. Numbers of people are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and percentages to the nearest whole percent.

4. In this context, an adult has been defined as any individual aged 17 or over.

5. Benefit receipt on the FRS is based on self-assessment and therefore may be subject to mis-reporting. In particular, caseload comparisons between FRS and DWP administrative data would suggest that the FRS under counts receipt of DLA and therefore the figure of 430,000 provided in the table should be treated with caution.

6. Numbers in the two rows should not be added, as there will be some overlap between the two groups. For example, people in receipt of Incapacity Benefit may well receive in addition other benefits relating to their needs, including Disability Living Allowance Care component or Disability Living Allowance Mobility component depending on their care or mobility needs.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1999–2000.

Universal Bank

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent meetings he has had with the clearing banks on the universal bank; and what the outcome was of his discussions. [36056]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of the British Bankers Association (BBA) recently. The BBA agreed to keep my right hon. Friend informed of developments.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with representatives of sub-post offices on the universal bank; and what items were discussed. [36058]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: My hon. Friend the Minister for Competitiveness has regular contact with the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, and my officials have also had meetings with the NFSP.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of account holders that would be required to make the universal bank economically viable. [36051]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our operating assumption is that there will be around 3 million Post Office Card Accounts.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate he has made of the number of benefit recipients who would use accounts through the universal bank; and how that number has been calculated; [36052]

(2) what his estimate is of the number of people receiving benefits who will opt to have those *(a)* paid into accounts with the post office card account and *(b)* paid into accounts with established clearing banks on the introduction of ACT. [36118]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: At the start of the main move to ACT in April 2003, there will be some 13 million benefit recipients paid by order book or giro. Our operating assumption is that about 3 million of these will open a post office card account. The vast majority of benefit recipients, most of whom have a bank account, are expected to use an existing bank or building society account or open a new account.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what sums have been allocated in his Department's budget for the costs of *(a)* setting up the universal bank and *(b)* implementing automated credit transfer of benefits. [36049]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Departmental Expenditure Limits for 2003/04 and subsequent years will be set in the 2002 spending review.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make it his policy that the automated credit transfer of benefits will not be introduced until such time as the universal bank is available in all sub-post offices; [36055]

(2) what estimate he has made of the time that would be required to set up the universal bank in all sub-post offices; [36057]

(3) on what date he estimates that the universal bank will be ready to begin operations; [36117]

(4) in estimating the numbers who might use the universal bank what account he has taken of the effect on post offices in urban areas where there are existing banks should ACT be introduced before the establishment of the universal bank. [36364]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Post Office expects that the universal banking at post offices will be available from 2003, in line with the start of the main move to ACT.

Employment Services

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase the amount of personal advice available to unemployed people. [37081]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The creation of Jobcentre Plus will bring together the former Benefits Agency and Employment Service to provide a stronger focus on work for people of working age. As part of that increased focus, more people, including lone parents and disabled people, will be given the opportunity of meeting a personal adviser to learn about the benefits of employment and the help available to find work.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 418W, on winter fuel allowance, if the Department now has information about the reason why winter fuel allowance payments have been delayed for up to 28 days. [39771]

Mr. McCartney: The overwhelming majority of winter fuel payments are made automatically, based on details already held by this Department. These payments were issued on a rolling programme throughout November and early December 2001 to ensure that payments were received before Christmas.

People who need to make a claim for winter 2001/02 have until 30 March 2002 to do so. Successful claims made prior to 24 September were paid at the same time as the automatic payments. Payments for claims received between 24 September and the March deadline are also made on a rolling basis, and our intention is to make all these payments by June. This payment process allows us to match claims in batches.

This means that there will be some delay between the receipt of claims and making the payments.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if an assessment has been made of whether EMP reports have caused *(a)* ill and *(b)* disabled people to have benefits reduced. [36130]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Decisions on entitlement to benefit are made by Benefits Agency decision makers. Decision makers must take into account all the available evidence when reaching their decision. This evidence may include information from the claimant, a report from a GP, hospital consultant, or other health care professional, and a report based on an assessment by a specially trained Examining Medical Practitioner (EMP). No piece of evidence automatically takes precedence over another, and the benefit entitlement decision is never made on the basis of the EMP's report alone. If a decision maker considers an EMP's report not fit for purpose, the report is returned to SchlumbergerSema Medical Services as rework.

DEFENCE

Overseas Military Personnel

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which overseas countries military personnel were trained in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and if he will indicate in each case how many personnel were trained. [39517]

Mr. Ingram: During 2000, a total of 3,504 overseas military personnel from 106 countries were trained at UK military establishments. In 2001, 3,731 military personnel were trained from 101 countries. A full breakdown of the numbers trained, by country, is as follows:

Overseas military personnel trained in the UK during 2000 and 2001

Country	*1 January to 31 December 2000*	*1 January to 31 December 2001*
Albania	7	15
Algeria	—	2
Antigua and Barbuda	1	—
Argentina	6	13
Australia	84	100
Austria	5	14
Azerbaijan	1	—
Bahamas	[illegible]	2
Bahrain	29	30
Bangladesh	2	2
Barbados	2	1
Belgium	82	87
Belize	20	25
Bermuda	14	14
Botswana	5	14
Brazil	20	17
Brunei	152	177
Bulgaria	5	6
Canada	273	322
Chile	4	5
China	13	32
Croatia	4	10
Czech Republic	29	27
Denmark	35	27
Ecuador	1	—
Egypt	6	16
El Salvador	3	1
Estonia	8	6
Fiji	3	2
Finland	6	11
France	67	59
Gambia	1	1
Georgia	7	5
Germany	115	130
Ghana	3	8
Greece	25	49
Guatemala	5	5
Guyana	2	3
Honduras	1	—
Hong Kong	7	4
Hungary	17	28
India	18	15
Ireland	27	56
Israel	43	16
Italy	119	154
Jamaica	22	41
Japan	8	9
Jordan	96	67
Kazakhstan	—	1
Kenya	5	8
Korea (South)	9	10
Kuwait	311	307
Latvia	12	14
Lebanon	5	9
Lithuania	11	8
Luxembourg	—	1
Macedonia	8	14
Malawi	5	6
Malaysia	27	22
Maldives	1	—
Malta	6	2
Mauritius	4	—
Moldova	1	2
Morocco	6	6
Mozambique	—	5
Namibia	1	—
Nepal	14	31
Netherlands	283	253
New Zealand	44	33
Nicaragua	1	—

Overseas military personnel trained in the UK during 2000 and 2001

Country	*1 January to 31 December 2000*	*1 January to 31 December 2001*
Nigeria	27	28
Norway	247	205
Oman	186	178
Pakistan	36	49
Papua New Guinea	1	—
Paraguay	2	2
Philippines	6	10
Poland	28	25
Portugal	33	34
Qatar	53	66
Romania	16	19
Russia	5	10
Rwanda	—	2
Saudi Arabia	47	63
Senegal	15	17
Seychelles	1	—
Sierra Leone	3	22
Singapore	131	113
Slovak Republic	16	19
Slovenia	4	8
South Africa	28	19
Spain	17	22
Sri Lanka	70	7
St. Kitts and Nevis	1	—
St. Lucia	1	—
St. Vincent	1	2
Swaziland	1	1
Sweden	24	27
Switzerland	4	11
Syria	—	1
Tajikistan	—	1
Tanzania	6	8
Thailand	29	27
Tonga	1	4
Trinidad and Tobago	2	3
Turkey	50	56
Uganda	2	3
Ukraine	26	39
United Arab Emirates	83	95
United States of America	126	163
Uruguay	8	4
Yemen	2	6
Zimbabwe	6	2
Total students	3,504	3,731
Total countries	106	101

Service Law

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Case of Morris *v.* the United Kingdom; and what plans he has to bring forward legislation to make changes to service law in response to the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. [39687]

Mr. Ingram: The European Court of Human Rights delivered its judgment in the case of Morris *v.* the United Kingdom on 26 February. The court noted that the changes to the court martial system made by the Armed Forces Act 1996 have gone a long way to meeting the concerns expressed in the Findlay case. However, it found that there had been a violation of article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which concerns the right to a fair hearing, as regards some aspects of Mr. Morris's trial by court martial in 1997.

The court was concerned about the potential for undue external influence over certain members of the court martial panel; and about the procedures for involving non-judicial authorities in the review of court martial findings and sentences. We are assessing the implications of the court's judgment for the future conduct of courts martial and whether any changes that may be necessary require the legislation to be amended. Army and Royal Air Force courts martial that are imminently scheduled are being postponed, but for the time being trials in the Royal Navy are continuing in view of the nature of the regulations in that service concerning the position of court martial members.

I shall make an announcement as soon as our assessment of the implications of the judgment has been completed. However, we do not consider that the judgment fundamentally affects the court martial system, which we intend to retain as an effective and fair means of administering discipline and justice in our armed forces.

Royal Navy (Pay Banding)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that the Royal Navy does not impose a two tier system of high and low pay banding based on Pay 2000 JE for the Rating Corp; and if he will make a statement. [38289]

Mr. Ingram: A two tier system of high and low pay ranges was introduced for Royal Navy ratings (and also for soldiers and airmen) with effect from 1 April 2001 as part of Pay 2000, the new pay structure for the armed forces. Job Evaluation underpins the allocation of trades to one of the two pay ranges. Pay 2000 was devised in close collaboration with the single services and was the subject of a high profile and extensive communications programme throughout the armed forces.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Sheffield will be withdrawn from service. [38951]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans HMS Sheffield will be withdrawn from service towards the end of this decade. In the shorter term she will be reduced to a low readiness state, commensurate with force levels endorsed within the Strategic Defence Review, from November 2002 until September 2004.

HMS Exeter

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if HMS Exeter breached the Harmony guidelines following her deployments last year. [38945]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Exeter has not breached the Harmony guidelines. She has been deployed for a total of 12 months in the past three years and has spent 48 per cent. of her time in her base port of Portsmouth during the last two years. Harmony guidelines state that ships should spend a minimum of 40 per cent. of their time in their base port over a two-year period, and that total deployed time over a three-year period should not exceed 18 months.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 380

SESSION 2001–2002

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- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

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- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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